

**BIRTH OF A COLONIAL CITY: CALCUTTA**

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**A THESIS SUBMITTED FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF LITERATURE IN HISTORY**

**DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY  
FACULTY OF ARTS**

**JADAVPUR UNIVERSITY  
KOLKATA**

**2019**

**THIS THESIS IS DEDICATED TO THE MYRIAD MEN WHO MADE  
CALCUTTA  
THE GLORY OF THE EAST**

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**Components of the Thesis**

**The Thesis Is Divided Into Four Books:**

**Book I : It Deals With The Urbanization Of Calcutta In The Eighteenth Century**

**Book II : It Deals With The Urbanization Of Calcutta In The Nineteenth Century**

**Book III : It Deals With The Historiography Of Calcutta**

**Book IV : It Deals With Conclusions And Bibliography**

**The thesis is an integrated whole but its components have been discussed separately with separate sheets of contents**

**BOOK - I**

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## PREFACE

Writing on Calcutta is a challenge. In the absence of private papers and family records one has to depend entirely on government documents and official literature to know how the city was formed. Calcutta's history thus has an official mind at the back to give its own version. Mr. H. Beverley, c.s. while writing the first connected history of the rise of Calcutta as a part of his *Census Report* of 1876 advised all future historians to collect materials from domestic archives. When as a sequel to the *Census Report* of 1901 Mr. A. K. Ray wrote his excellent account of Calcutta – *A Short History of Calcutta* – he tried to follow Beverley's advice. But he failed. Knowing that failures very often are pillars of success I undertook an effort to hunt out domestic archives in the city and outside. My efforts, great in terms of my own capacity, were essentially too meagre to show me the light of success. This tryst with destiny I met thirty years ago when I started researching Calcutta's past. I knew from the beginning that my search had to coexist with colonial versions of the city which I could not verify and cross-check with versions of private and domestic experiences I, therefore, raised questions which were essentially indigenous, native to my own thought. This was one way of making archival facts answer my own queries as they have been presented in the book. These queries, if properly answered, I believe, will unearth truth which otherwise hides its face in oblivion. Some of these queries are: Who was the real founder of Calcutta? What geopolitics determined urbanization of the city? Did the riverbank have the adequate human potential that could ensure urbanization on land? How did Calcutta supersede interior towns? How did the city assume its own forms? Could the temple of Kalighat rally as a centre for urbanization? Was Calcutta's soul checkmated in the eighteenth century? These questions set the precincts within which

the book has taken its shape. I have no pretension to provide to readers the final and the perfect version of the story as to how the city grew. My humble presentation in this book performs a single end. It allows facts to speak for themselves so as to make the story free of bias. Facts do often propound truth and truth propagates its own logic. That logic makes the story coherent. With coherence at the core the present book has turned out to be this at the end: a small and humble piece of writing in which city becomes an epitome of time.

**BOOK- I**  
**WHAT IT IS ABOUT**

**Book I of the thesis discusses the rise of three riparian villages, Kalikata-Sutanati-Govindapur, as a clustered city of habitation in lower Bengal in the eighteenth century. So far as urbanization of Calcutta was concerned the first century of British rule over the city had clearly two halves. The first half, from 1698 when the English got the possession of the three villages to 1757 when the watershed battle of Palasi took place the city did not see much of urbanization. In the second half spanning slightly beyond the eighteenth century to the enunciation of the Minutes of Lord Wellesley in 1803 Calcutta was elevated to a position of power. The city's urbanization at the time did not commensurate with its politico-military status so that Calcutta remained to be a city of swamps throughout the eighteenth century. Its real urbanization began in the nineteenth century. That story will be discussed in Book II at the end of story of Book I.**

#### **DECLARATION ON NOMENCLATURE OF CALCUTTA**

**WE PREFER USING THE TERM 'CALCUTTA' IN THIS THESIS INSTEAD OF ITS MODERN VERSION 'KOLKATA' BECAUSE OUR STUDY CONCERNS THE COLONIAL PERIOD OF THE HISTORY OF CALCUTTA WHEN THE TERM 'KOLKATA' WAS NOT IN VOGUE IN OFFICIAL PARLANCE.THE PLACE WAS ORIGINALLY REFERRED TO AS 'KALIKATA' FROM WHICH THE ENGLISH VERSION OF THE TERM 'CALCUTTA' HAS DERIVED ITS ORIGIN. IN ALL CONTEMPORARY OFFICIAL DOCUMENTS TILL RECENT TIMES IT HAS BEEN REFERRED TO AS "CALCUTTA". "THE FIRST MENTION OF CALCUTTA SPELT AND WRITTEN AS IT IS', WRITES P. THANKAPPAN NAIR, "IS TO BE FOUND IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND NOT IN BENGALI" IN A LETTER DATED 1688 WRITTEN FROM BURDWAN. IN CONSISTENCY WITH TRADITION WE PREFER USING THE WORD 'CALCUTTA' IN PLACE OF 'KOLKATA'.**

**[P.THANKAPPAN NAIR, *CALCUTTA IN THE 17<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY* , FIRMA KLM PRIVATE LIMITED , CALCUTTA, 1986, P.24]**

## FOREWORD

Historians differ in their views about the origin of Calcutta. Some say that its origin was pre-British and its evolution was in the process when the British took over. In other words, its origin was entirely indigenous and a colonial growth pattern was imposed on it. This school of thought has a nationalist outlook in its thinking and it grew as a response to the claims of the British imperial school of thought which developed over the last three centuries. It objected to the view much prevalent at the time that 24 August, 1690 the date of Job Charnock's third and final landing on the city should be regarded as the date of foundation of the city and that Job Charnock should be regarded as its founder. Taking note of this objection the Honourable High Court of Judicature, Calcutta, consulted some eminent historians of the city and sought their opinion as to whether it could be said that the city owed its origin to the English and that Job Charnock could be treated as its founder. The historians were unanimous in their opinion that the city was pre-British because its early references predate the coming of the English. According the verdict of the Honourable High Court was specific : that the city had no date of birth and Job Charnock could not be regarded as its founding father.

Keeping this in mind the present book has set as its aim the study of urbanization of Calcutta as an exclusive phenomenon which took place as a process of evolution in course of the last three centuries. This evolution was certainly in consistent with the growth of the Empire itself.

The Calcutta, it should be noted, which later became the capital of an empire took its birth after a war and before a rebellion. The Mughal Empire under Aurangzeb and the English East India Company were locked in a war between 1686 and 1690. It was at the end of the war that Job Charnock set his feet on Sutanati for the third time on 24<sup>th</sup> August 1690. This was the final arrival of the English in Calcutta after which there was no retreat. In 1696 there was the rebellion of Shova Singh in western Bengal. That rebellion was a massive uprising which the Mughal power controlled and eventually crushed with great difficulty. This rebellion taught the English the first lesson as to how to curve the contours of a state in this part of the country. Territory and military might

were the two major ingredients with which a mercantile body could build up their commercial base provided they had the backing of their own form of government and constant supply and guidance from their own home. In this they were amply supported by Madras which acted as the rear area of their advanced outpost in the region around Kalikata-Sutanati-Govindapur. It was from Madras that Robert Clive set his sails in January 1757 and recaptured Calcutta from the Nawab. The open sea-board came to their assistance. In 1632 the Mughal Emperor Shahjahan drove the Portuguese out of the Bengal sea. Once the sea was made clear of pirates and a predominating aggressive power from the West it became an open corridor of transit for the English sailing from Madras. The Mughals had no powerful navy with which they could rule the waves. The result was that the sea provided an open gate for the English either for their advancement into the territory or for their retreat from here. Without the help of a navy and an open sea to their support the English could not have built an empire here.

Calcutta was the outcome of geopolitics that had governed developments in south Bengal in the eighteenth century. A new kind of social change was taking place in this part of the country. This may be called an *inquilab* or a revolution whereby everything turned upside down. Money of the Indians was providing resource to the Europeans and the sword of the Europeans was providing security to the people. This was made clear when during the time of the Maratha invasions people flocked to Calcutta for security. For the first sixty years Calcutta which was slowly growing into a power-base of the English did not grow territorially because the Bengal Nawabs maintained a strict vigilance on the developments of the English in Calcutta. The city acquired territorial dynamism only after the battle of Palasi when the district of twenty-four Parganas was granted to the Company as their zamindari. During the half century since the battle of Palasi the English in Calcutta did six major things. First, they fleeced the Nawabs and appropriated huge money from the Bengal treasury. This was called the 'Plassey Plunder'. Secondly, they built a new fort in the city that kept both the Nawab and their European competitors at bay. Thirdly, they transferred all the major administrative, judicial and financial institutions from Murshidabad to Calcutta thus denying Murshidabad its functional bases of institutional administration. Fourthly, they changed the diplomatic protocol of the country. Previously the Governor or his agent had to

go to Murshidabad to meet the Nawab. Now the protocol was changed. The Nawab or his agent had to come to Calcutta to meet the Governor and later the Governor-General of the British possessions in India. Fifthly, the office of the Governor-General was built into an office where the highest power of the country now came to be installed. Finally, they set up the Supreme Court to appropriate a jurisdiction which originally belonged to the Nawab. When this was the situation the Nawabs gradually surrendered their own marks of sovereignty to the English.

While the geopolitics helped the English to insulate and grow their city as their power base the city itself was undergoing a change from within. From the 1770s and 1780s the internal morphology of the city changed. It started taking slowly the shape of what later came to be known as the City of Palaces. Calcutta was now being steadily installed into power. The territorial revenue of the three provinces of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa was now converted into the sinews of the Company's commerce. While coming to Calcutta in the beginning of 1757 in order to retrieve the city from the Nawab Clive bombarded and destroyed the two cities of Chandernagore and Hughli thus removing from the scene two major competitors of the city of Calcutta. Immediately after the battle of Palasi the English started renovating the internal infrastructure of the city. The English came out of their cramped existence within the fort. Now began a new sprawling life of the English in the city. The white town began to grow very rapidly. From the beginning of the 1790s money was raised through lottery for the growth and development of the city and the boundaries of the city came to be rudimentarily defined in 1794. With this the nucleus of an empire was created. It was in this situation that in 1803 Lord Wellesley declared in his minutes that the British empire in India could no longer be ruled from a shabby city or from the emporium of traders. His intention was that Calcutta was to be ruled from an imperial city. Thus the city of Calcutta came to be recognized as the base of a new empire in India. Calcutta now became an imperial seat of power relegating Delhi to the background.

In understanding this evolution of the city as noted above the present study differs from other approaches to the subject common and prevalent, which till date have considered the growth of Calcutta as one of the most outstanding gifts of British colonialism in India. On the contrary, our emphasis is to show

that Calcutta had grown not out of any deliberate and careful design on the part of the English and not necessarily as an outcome solely of British efforts. It grew as situations demanded mainly in response to eventualities relying entirely on partnership with the natives. This happened in two distinct phases – the first being the one that synchronizes with the first century of the British rule in India. The second phase tends to be the trans-mutiny phase when the urbanization of the city needed to respond to the industrial, military and global needs of the British Empire. In the first phase it was native capital and native partnership which helped the Empire to bring the city into formation. The British capital came in the second phase.

At the beginning of its career the Empire was financially constrained to undertake the task of urbanization so much so that capital was drawn from the indigenous people through lottery. That was the phase when the native capital financed a mini-industrial revolution in the periphery of Calcutta. In the eighteenth century the city grew first as a garrison town centring round a fort, then as a port city and finally at the end as an administrative centre. In totality, the city was, in its final form, an attractive halt for the east-moving Britons where away from their distant homes the British adventurers could find trajectories of their home-life recreated. As the city progressed through the first century of British rule in the nineteenth century it became an imperial city acting on the famous minute of Lord Wellesley in 1803 which for the first time defined the directions and dynamics of urbanization in Calcutta. It underlined the feeling that the British possession in India had assumed the shape of an Empire which must not rest on an imperfect base. Consequent upon this dictum of Lord Wellesley two things happened. First, Calcutta got its basic infrastructure – drains and roads – and grew as what has been called the *City of Palaces*. Secondly, Calcutta became installed in power coordinating on the one hand the growth of the British Empire in India and on the other the trade potentialities of the British Asiatic trade with its global nexus in the continent and beyond. What we see as pre-mutiny urbanization was really a combination of these two elements of growth. Calcutta was eventually urbanized on a very narrow perspective on a limited scale mostly around the white town of the city and completely at the cost of interior towns – Hughli, Chandernagore, Burdwan, Malda, Murshidabad, Dakha, Rajshahi and Chittagong. But in the long run she could not fulfil her promise. Her urbanization had three

components – first, those of a garrison town, then those of a port and finally those of an administrative town – the seat of an empire. As a garrison town it lost its supremacy when Madras emerged as a competent base of power against both the French and Haidar Ali in the south in the middle of the eighteenth century and Bombay became militarily independent enough to fight against the Marathas with occasional help from Calcutta. As a port it began losing its sway when the British Empire developed a ring of ports around Calcutta as a part of its measures to control the sea and the vast terrain of Asiatic trade that had flourished on the collapse of the French and Dutch trade in south Asia. These ports – Penang, Singapore, Chittagong, Madras, Colombo, Bombay and Karachi – were the real competitors of Calcutta and also its cordon. Finally, Calcutta lost its charm as an administrative centre and the seat of power when the capital was transferred from Calcutta to Delhi in 1912. With the turn of the twentieth century Calcutta turned into a tragic figure seething under discontent and looking for retrieving its glamour – this time not as a seat of power but as a seat of revolution.

From all that has been said above it is clear that the book is not on the origin of Calcutta. It is on the growth of a commercial city known to tradition as Kalikata and to the newly arrived mercantile community from the West as Calcutta. The origin of the city is confused and there are no reliable records with which we can construct its antiquities. The result is that up till date Calcutta has not known any authentic and full-fledged biography of its own which can be trusted as the real history of the city. This is true except the two initial attempts at writing a scientific biography of the city, first by Beverley in 1876 followed by A.K. Ray in 1901. Both wrote their books as parts of the census reports of their respective years. Unable to dispel the mist around the origin of the city the present work has taken as its subject the creation of a colonial town that was termed as the second city of the Empire – in rank next to London. Most of its urbanization was the outcome of British needs viewed from imperial interests. Imbued with the spirit to implant in the East the Renaissance culture of the West the English built a city not only on utilitarian basis but also with a sense of manifest pride and exclusiveness so common in the psychology of an island people. The choice of the riverfront for the white city in the south had at its back the racist spirit of segregation from the native people of the north. Originating as a garrison town with a fort in the centre it

eventually reconciled its military parameters with those of a port and an administrative centre so much so that in its ultimate city formation it could install itself to power coordinating the growth of the British Empire in India. In the process it presided over the decline of the regional power centre in Bengal, Murshidabad and the seat of a national power, Delhi. Its rise was majestic.

This story of the city has been the outcome of a thorough research for many years during which the city has revealed its aspects, crowning and significant, which had hitherto remained unknown to any research. To say this is to underline the fact that all its chapters manifest dimensions of new and novel exploration of urban history in a south Asian context. It opens a global vista of an intellectual understanding of what may be called the most outstanding process of modern history, a combination of a city, property and community rolled into one formation, called Calcutta. At heart it has the genre of a township that eventually metamorphosed three village habitations into a magnificent structure called *The City of Palace*. In practice this city eventually became the second city of the British Empire. This Empire gave rise to innumerable towns and cities in the world – Cape town in South Africa, Penang on the north-west and Singapore slightly off on the southern coast of Malay peninsula, Rangoon (Yangon) in Burma, Colombo in Sri Lanka on the Indian Ocean, Kingston in Jamaica in the West Indies, Durban in East Africa, Nairobi in Kenya, Lagos in Nigeria, Sydney, Melbourne, Perth in Australia, Toronto on Canada and Christchurch in New Zealand. These are a few of the myriad cities that came up in four continents, Asia-Africa-America-Australia, in course of the three centuries of the colonial expansion in the world, from the eighteenth to the twentieth century. Among all these cities Calcutta assumed a distinction in being the one from where the British could map up their own Asian empire. How Calcutta was installed into power and how the adjacent cities of the country were dwarfed by her so as to make her own majesty paramount has been the thrust of the book. It is a book on colonial urbanization in south Asian context in which economics, sociology and history have been mixed in a combination of trustworthy determinants of history. The book has parts; parts are divided into chapters and chapters are subdivided into sections. All these form the limbs of a body, the text of the book. This text has an inner integration born of facts which are drawn immensely from different records. The facts presented in the book have been marshalled through interpretations

which work out the cohesion of the entire text on the rise of a city into power and prominence. The tool of interpretation is logic; the instrument of narration is language, simple and lucid attuned to the romance of the past. It is sensitive to the appropriateness of history. An appropriate history is frilled here with imagination so as to keep the story from degenerating into an arid narration of the past. Three things can be said to have been novel in the book : its contents most of which were unknown to historians till date; its in-depth engagement with the subject and finally, its direction toward understanding the destiny of a people in whom the age had left its own manifestation. The book is thus an epitome of an age in which the manufacture of one city became the prime mover of the history of an empire.

## INTRODUCTION

### An Overview of the Colonial Origin of Calcutta

#### *I. Problems of Origin and Premising Questions*

The origin of Calcutta is shrouded in obscurity. It was certainly pre-British and if surmise is allowed in historical research, it may be said that it was also pre-Mughal. For a long time Kolkata had been a throbbing settlement which was essentially a weavers' centre with a vivacious thread-mart unmistakably denoted by the name of its adjacent territory *Sutanati* [variously written as *Chuttanutty*, *Sutanutty*; *Suta* is from Sanskrit *Sutra* meaning thread; in Bengali thread is *Suta* ]. The weavers had settlements that spread from Sutanati to Barahanagar. In India as elsewhere a riverside settlement had always been a populous settlement and Calcutta had never been an exception to this. Riverbanks harbour fisherman-colonies and a part of the early settlers in Kolkata was certainly fishermen. To what extent these men could grow the potentialities of early urbanization is not known. Urbanization is basically a response to challenge and Southern Bengal which for a long time remained to be unprotected because of being in the margin of governance by any powerful ruler and also because of being always devastated by the incursions of the Arakans, Mughls<sup>1</sup> and the Portuguese<sup>2</sup> did not manifest such challenges. Elements of tradition -- hearsay, myth, occasional references in administrative manuals and indigenous literature – make up the spirit in which notions about a settlement in Calcutta thrived and continued. Certainly Kolkata was a *Pithasthan* or pilgrim centre – *Kalikshetra* – which was hallowed by the presence of a *Kali* temple situated at a place called Kalighat. This pilgrim centre was then surrounded by jungles and it was inaccessible because of beasts and dacoits. Moreover the emergence of Kalighat to prominence was a colonial phenomenon and prior to the coming of the English it did not flourish as a routine centre of visits by pilgrims<sup>3</sup>. There has been an attempt to push back the antiquity of Calcutta (*Kalikata*) to the time of the *Puranas*. But beyond conjecture no historical authenticity can be ascribed to it. There has been speculation about the origin of the name of *Kalikata* which was the original

version of the modern name Kolkata. But since all these are wild surmises historical consensus cannot be reached on it.

Basing its opinion on the verdict of a group of experts the Honourable High Court of Calcutta declared that Calcutta had no founder and therefore, has no specific date of birth. This judgement stripped Job Charnock of his links with Calcutta as its originator. 24<sup>th</sup> August, 1690, the date when Charnock set his feet finally for the third time at Sutanati, lost its status as the date of birth of Calcutta. The historians on whose advice the Honourable High Court of Calcutta acted must have been moved by an urge to find the original roots of Kalikata and to remove from the history of Calcutta's antiquity elements of colonial connection. This was one of the major official attempt in independent India to decolonize an important segment of Indian history, namely a nation's memory.

Admitting the necessity to keep oneself free from inhibitions of a colonized mind the present research has distanced itself from conjectural analysis of the antiquity of this great city of India. On the contrary it has addressed itself to the study of a colonial town, Calcutta – the town which was essentially an outcome of the growth of the British Empire in the East. After Magadha<sup>4</sup> in the sixth century B.C. Calcutta became the only town in eastern India which could function as the seat of power of a great south Asian empire. One may argue that Mughal Kalikata provided the nucleus for the colonial town. But that would be a very far-fetched concept because even at the end of the seventeenth century Calcutta manifested no remarkable sign of an early urban take off. Even Job Charnock himself lived in a thatched house<sup>5</sup>. Urbanization depends upon the use of bricks. Stones were not available within a territory at least of fifty miles' radius around Calcutta<sup>6</sup>. Therefore the urbanization of the city seldom depended upon stones. The use of bricks became rampant from the middle of the eighteenth century – the time when because of fire and white ants a search for an alternative of timber<sup>7</sup> as the most fundamental construction material was undertaken. Operating on this knowledge that the origin of Calcutta would be illusive to a researcher the present book has from the beginning set its period of study between the two terminal dates 1698 and 1912 – the first date being the one when the three villages of Sutanati, Kalikata and Govindapur were purchased by the English East India Company and the

second date being the one when capital was transferred from Calcutta to Delhi<sup>8</sup>.

Given this, the axis of the present book is clear. It shuns conjectural approaches to history and refuses to tread in uncertain areas about which confidence cannot be built without knowledge of scientific records. The authenticity of scientific records is determinable through cross-examinations of other records. Therefore, where scientific records are not available this research has not set its vision.

A colonial town, a colonial period and a nearly two-century history of a colonial rule are the specific settings in which the present book tends to organize itself. It looks into Calcutta not as a town that grew out of its own momentum. It believes that Calcutta was manufactured by the British. It concerns, therefore, with the simple question as to how it was constructed through stimuli given by the empire. What has marked the growth of Calcutta – an imperial stateliness? Or what has stunted its growth, the rulers' miserliness? This question will be discussed in the book. With the rise of nationalism the question arose in India – was the British Empire justified in all the experiments and expenses it made during the course of its rule in India? The answer was obviously a broad 'No'. Dadabhai Naoroji<sup>9</sup> showed that Indian poverty had proved the British rule to be a sham. Romesh Chandra Dutta<sup>10</sup> showed that the 'drain' of Indian wealth had destroyed the *raison d'etat* of the existence of the Empire itself. If an empire finds itself falsified in all its justifications of rule it would be naïve to say that the building up a city in Calcutta represented the stateliness of a group of empire-builders who had no intention to stay here as permanent denizens of colonized settlements and who displayed all intentions to christen their historical duties as 'brown men's burdens'.

The focus of the research is thus clear. It looks into the question whether Calcutta suffered a stunted growth because of a lack of adequate political will to build it up into an eastern partner of London. Calcutta was the centre of the British Asiatic trade. But it was never given the status of a trade metropolis. Power, command, directions and decisions were all controlled from London. The imperial soul had never invested its majesty to Calcutta and as a result Calcutta did never open up its intrinsic sources of growth and sustenance. Once the capital was shifted from Calcutta<sup>11</sup> its glitters dimmed and what once

seemed to be an eastern partner of London became a shrivelled city threatened with collapse under malafide pressures of the empire.

## ***II. The Central Point : Tracing the Birth and not the Origins of Calcutta : The Operation of Geopolitics***

The origin of Calcutta as has already been said, is shrouded in obscurity because it is pre-British in all sense of the term. It was certainly as old as the Mughal Empire because its reference is available in the *Ain-i-Akbari*<sup>12</sup> the administrative manual of the Mughal Emperor Akbar. Its mention is also found in the indigenous pre-British Bengali literature. Thus the origin-part of the history of Calcutta is in the realm of conjecture and virtually in obscurity. I have tried to unearth materials with regard to Calcutta's origin. But source materials are too scarce to crown my effort with success. My main effort was, therefore, to find out the imperial will and the imperial engineering that had gone into the construction of an imperial city. What I mean by 'birth' in my book is the emergence of a Gangetic city – Calcutta – which sprang up in record time – say, within the first half of the eighteenth century – in less than six decades' time since the final arrival of Job Charnock in 1690<sup>13</sup>. In my study I found that this Calcutta was a product of an exigency. In its war with the Mughal Empire (1686-1690) the English East India Company needed a strategic place which would be away from the Mughal capital in Bengal at Murshidabad and the Mughal army headquarters at Dhaka and Hugli. The Company also needed a place which would be on the riverside so that a riverine base with an approach to the sea could be used as serving a double purpose – an English trade settlement and a garrison town of the Company. Given this, I engaged myself to look deep into the process of Calcutta's birth and eventually found that its emergence in the eighteenth century was basically as a garrison town. From this it metamorphosed into a port town and then into the administrative seat of power of a vast empire. Calcutta's birth in this sense was a strategic phenomenon. In this it had no novelty in itself because a fort-city or a garrison town recalls the aspects of medieval city formations that centered around castles<sup>14</sup> – both in Europe and in India. What was new in the case of Calcutta was a combination of three important characteristics of town formation. Calcutta as a garrison town lost its essential glamour to its aspects as a trade centre that performed the functions of a watch-centre as well for keeping a

vigilance and maintaining an effective control over the seaborne trade of other European merchants. Also added to this was the newer and other more glittering role of Calcutta as an administrative town<sup>15</sup>. Its growth as the centre of the British empire superseded its two other roles as a garrison town and a trade centre so much so that other Mughal cities in Bengal looked lustreless vis-à-vis its growing prominence. The first few chapters of my study will approach the historical process of the amalgamation of these three peculiar characteristics of the city so that what we discover in Calcutta's birth is the emergence of a composite city on the lower banks of the Ganga.

It should be noted that once the Empire started forming itself Calcutta superseded Madras as the eastern halt of the east-moving Britons. Britons moving to the east was not rare after the end of the Napoleonic Wars.<sup>16</sup> There was blockage at many points in the British economy since the outbreak of the French Revolution leading to the rise of Napoleon and the imposition of the Continental Blockade. Employment avenues were choked and many Britons, vagrants and respectable, moved to the east<sup>17</sup>. The result was that there was the need to build up an eastern city as a replica of London. The initial planning of the city deeply resembled that of London to give the new-comers from England a sense of confidence in an alien land.

Calcutta was kept insulated from the beginning. The fear that the Nawabi spies would infiltrate into the city kept its early administrators awake almost to the point of war-alert.<sup>18</sup> The result was that throughout the first half of the eighteenth century there was incessant conflict between the Nawabi administration in Murshidabad and Hughli and the Company's administration in Kolkata.<sup>19</sup> The Bengal Nawabs did not allow the English in Calcutta to expand their territorial possessions so that till the Battle of Palasi Calcutta's territorial limits remained confined within the three villages of Kalikata, Sutanati and Govindapur. In 1757 after the fall of Sirajuddaullah and the accession of Mir Jafar to the *masnads* of Bengal the English got 24-Parganas as their *Zamindari*<sup>20</sup>. This lifted the brake on English possessions in Calcutta and the city got a chance to build up its entity within a sprawling space spreading as far south as Culpee near the Sundarbans and the sea. In the north there was boundless freedom of expansion because in no time the *Nawabi* administration collapsed and the frontiers of Calcutta seemed to be

dynamically proceeding far in the north towards Barrackpore. But the English were judicious and they kept the territorial area of the city strictly limited within the proximity of the Fort area so much so that the modern Chowringhee area encompassing the vast *maidan* (A sprawling meadow) between the Circular Road and the Esplanade came to form the real city at the time.<sup>21</sup> The real boundaries of the city were drawn in 1794<sup>22</sup> at the fag end of the century.

This is in short the geopolitics out of which Calcutta grew. In the entire process of its geopolitical growth there were three major obstacles which the city had to overcome. The first was the *Nawabi* hostility. The vigilance of the Bengal *Nawabs*<sup>23</sup> set an invisible fence around the English territory in Calcutta. The second obstacle was the Maratha invasion in the 1740s. To ward off this invasion a ditch was dug to the northern part of the city which was later called the Maratha ditch.<sup>24</sup> The soil that was raised out of this digging went to fill the low land in the east and south and the east and out of this filling the present circular road was formed. The third obstacle was the competition of the French at Chandernagore.<sup>25</sup> This obstacle was removed at the beginning of the year 1757. Clive in his journey from Madras towards recovering Calcutta bombarded both Hugli and Chandernagore. Thus the *Nawabi* base that was working as the watch-post to keep vigilance both on the English activities in Calcutta and the movement of the seabound revenue trade was crushed. Likewise the potentiality of the French to develop Chandernagore as a centre of trade and military power was also destroyed. In 1632 during the time of Sahjahan the Portuguese were driven out of the places around Hugli. Now both Hughli and Chandernagore were crushed. No power thus remained in south Bengal to challenge the British might and the British domination of the Bay of Bengal. The entire sea-board between Madras and Calcutta now lay open to the control of the English. One can say that with the battle of Palasi in 1757 the geopolitical issues that shaped Calcutta's emergence into prominence were settled once for all. From 1757 to 1772 when the company decided to *standforth as the Diwan* was the period for the inner consolidation of the strategic aspects of Calcutta as a garrison town. The new fort was built in the sixties and the early seventies of the eighteenth century and once that was done the position of Calcutta as a military base for the expansion of the empire was assured. The Empire could take off now.

The fort not only ensured an empire. It also guarded a port. Calcutta was the outcome of this: a combination of a fort and a port. Guns backed trade. Trade fetched an empire and empire created a city. This was how Calcutta was born.

### ***III. The Cosmopolitan Crowd of the Port City***

Two things happened in the eighteenth century. Calcutta emerged as a port and the country's power-structure that had governed the entire area between Bengal and Delhi collapsed. Dhaka and Murshidabad sank. The tripartite combination of Nawab Mir Qasim of Bengal, Shujauddaullah of Awadh and the Emperor of Delhi, Shah Alam II was defeated at the battle of Buxar in 1764. The result was the Mir Qasim disappeared into obscurity; Shujauddaullah was humbled and the Emperor was pensioned off. The entire Mughal army that so long guarded the eastern flank of the Mughal Empire collapsed. One generation of administrators and warriors were wiped out.<sup>27</sup> This created a vast administrative vacuum in which new men stepped as collaborators of the English. Hastings admitted them into a new fraternity with the Empire.<sup>28</sup> Later on Hastings also curbed Chait Singh of Banaras and the rugged Afghans of Rohilkhand. The Marathas who made themselves supreme in north India and brought the weak Mughal Emperor Shah Alam II under their control also retired after the death of Mahadaji Sindhia in 1794. The result was that the entire Jumna – Ganga basin of north India became so to say a politically free zone for the necessary emergence of this strategic area as the most productive and supportive economic hinterland for Calcutta port. The port had emerged into its status as a substitute of Hugli already in the first half of the eighteenth century. Its flourish came when in the second half of the eighteenth century the entire hinterland of the port became its supportive rear area. After the fall of the *Peshwa* in 1818<sup>29</sup> there remained no opposition to the English either in west or in north India. The result was that a complete political vacuum was created in the heartland of India. It was here that the political thrust for empire-building was initiated by the English. The growth of the Calcutta port took place as ancillary to this formidable process of empire-building in India. The Calcutta port absorbed two things – the market-bound surplus commodities of the hinterland and the potentially surplus employment-searching man-power of the countries along the course of the river. Calcutta thus grew as an amalgam of two powerful trends of city-formations. On the

one hand there was the urge of an island people to build up their possessions in Calcutta as an eastern halt for the out-moving Britons who would find here a unique resemblance with London. On the other hand there was the native mass who tended to exchange their old-world misery for a new-world solvency available in Calcutta. The town morphology at the initial stage was patterned after London with the Esplanade and the Chowringhee *maidan* serving to be the sprawling middle around which palaces, mansions and edifices of the white town could be built. The core of the white town was kept insulated from the beginning to preserve its interior privacy from the interference of the Nawabs. This meant that Calcutta was to be an exclusive settlement where the aristocracy of the empire-builders could be preserved. The second trend was completely different from this exclusiveness of the early Britons in Calcutta. It was its growth towards cosmopolitanism. Calcutta was after all the town that served to be the base of a mercantile community – the people of the English East India Company. Traders needed commodities and production centres. Textile products being the major article of Company's trade in Bengal in no time did it open its doors to the weavers from the native production centres of the country.<sup>30</sup> In the broad aftermath of the Palasi Calcutta witnessed a massive spate of civil construction mainly around the heart of the white town. This needed labour and bands of workers drawn mostly from the peasants of the interior were allowed to flood in. In addition to this the port needed workers to cushion its ever-increasing functions as the most effective commodity-outlet of the hinterland. Sturdy men from the central and northern India flocked in Calcutta. Moreover the Europeans needed the services of the native menials and the compulsions of their life-styles forced them to open the city to the lowly people from places around.<sup>31</sup> Moreover almost every Englishman had a comrade-in-arm – a banian<sup>32</sup> – a skilled and efficient Bengali who supplied him cash at times of need and acted as his secretary and liaison man in all his private and public business. In all sense he was the Englishman's secretary who functioned as the keeper of his master's secrets. Such men – *banians* – had their own agents and attendants who arrived in the city and added to the slowly swelling crowd of the town. Men from various other callings also landed at the city. Those who found their treasures unsafe in the countryside transferred them to the city and shifted with their families to the native quarters of the town. Kidnapping of young girls in the country side was

very rampant during the rule of the Nawabs. To escape from such hazards solvent Hindu families migrated to the city. Out of this the town assumed its cosmopolitan character.

What is significant is that the Company's government in Calcutta had no money to build the infrastructure necessary for the upkeep of a swarming population. As a result, in the vicinity of stately structures there invariably grew a belt of lowly dwellings of the native work-force which often took the shape of slums. Land was needed to provide living space to the people. Trees were felled and forests disappeared in the process. An urban settlement needed bricks and bricks were made by burning clay. Therefore, for the making of bricks fuel was required and trees were cut to supply the need of timbers. This affected the ecological balance of the country. Fields were dug to procure mud for brick kilns. This created gutters and holes which caused great inconvenience to the people.<sup>33</sup>

Calcutta thus from the beginning balanced two antithetical humanity –rich Englishmen and affluent Indians around them and a miserable mankind consisting of somewhat destitute Indians who lived from hand to mouth. The middle tier between the two – a prosperous middle class – was long conspicuous by its absence in Calcutta. Its emergence took place from the end of the first quarter of the nineteenth century.<sup>34</sup>

During the first hundred years of Calcutta's emergence as a colonial town in the eighteenth century it acutely suffered the pangs of a capital-short economy.<sup>35</sup> Whatever revenue could be raised from Calcutta was spent for maintaining the Company's establishment in the city. A trading community on becoming rulers had the propensity to convert territorial revenue into sinews of commerce. This meant that little money was left for Calcutta's growth in the eighteenth century. For the promotion of the city infrastructure fund was raised through lottery in the last decade of the eighteenth and in the first three decades of the nineteenth century. All important city roads were built with the fund thus raised mainly from residents' contributions.

As a matter of fact from the middle of the eighteenth century to the middle of the nineteenth money flowed from the interior to Calcutta. This was because every zamindar in the countryside wanted to possess their own estates in

Calcutta. Banking houses and business communities transferred their allegiance to Calcutta so that in the immediate aftermath of the Palasi Reza Khan lamented that business in Murshidabad was like a drop of water while in Calcutta it was like a river. Our evidences show that all the big zamindars in the districts transferred their capital to Calcutta from the middle of the eighteenth century. The Indians who hovered around the various European companies in Calcutta and places around and acted as the liaison men of the East India Companies of the English, the French and the Dutch amassed money. Jadunath Sarkar says that a capitalist class formed by the Indians grew in Calcutta so that a wealth of native capital found its shelter in the city.<sup>36</sup> One reason behind this was that Calcutta as a cosmopolitan settlement gained the confidence of the Indians. In the 1740s when the Maratha invasions took place the scared population of the neighbouring areas rushed to Calcutta for shelter and protection.<sup>37</sup> The British gun assured them a security which the Nawabi administration was unable to provide. Moreover the people had enough experience of the chaos of the decaying Mughal rule and they preferred the settled order prevailing within the English territory to the chaos outside. The flight of Krishnaballav (alias Krishnadas), son of Raja Rajballav, *diwan* or the finance minister of Dakha to Calcutta with a huge wealth,<sup>38</sup> only showed that the leaders of the Bengal *Subah* had developed a direction towards Calcutta. After the battle of Palasi the Company's administration extracted £ 10,731,683 from a shaky Nawab Mir Jafar. Much of this wealth went into personal appropriation and a bulk of it was used to fill the deficit of money required for the official trade of the Company. A part of the wealth lost in personal appropriation was spent in purchasing lands and constructing garden houses in and around the city. The spirit for promoting Calcutta thus gained ground. A new rallying point was now opened to the people.

For an escape from the functioning chaos which the Nawabi administration at Murshidabad then was, people turned to Calcutta where order had settled as a powerful attribute of the Government. For long the people of Bengal had not experienced the kind of a rule of law that the English had been able to establish here in Calcutta. Thus what Calcutta presented to the people at least in the eighteenth century was a picture of administrative confidence vis-à-vis the Mughal decadences around. One thing that the British might had assured to the people was a safe life within all available parameters of a secured

existence. It will be wrong to think that Calcutta throughout the course of the eighteenth century or at least in the second half of it was free of dangers and afflictions. It was not for it was going through a transitional phase of its life in the eighteenth century. The Mughal rule was slowly heading towards its end yielding place to the British. Between the Battle of Palasi and the appointment of Hastings as the first Governor General of the British Empire in India in 1773 Bengal was steadily being converted into a protectorate.<sup>39</sup> Although there were *Nawabs* on the *Masnads* of Bengal power virtually shifted to a new centre – Calcutta. Governors of Calcutta up to 1772 became masters in an emerging pattern of power that was alien in its character and sudden in its thrust. Truly speaking the thrust became crushing in its impact since the time Clive re-conquered Calcutta at the beginning of 1757.<sup>40</sup> Calcutta was recovered by the application of force and a resisting Nawab suffered a disastrous defeat at the hands of the English. The Nawab was entirely at the mercy of the English and was forced to sign the Treaty of Alinagar (Calcutta) on 9 February, 1757. He had to surrender many marks of his sovereignty under pressure from the English. But what was more fundamental than a written agreement was the fact that a body of the *Nawab's* subjects – some alien traders – functioning not above the status of local *taluqdars* demonstrated their superiority in arms. So long Calcutta was held by the English as a purchased territory subject to the control of the *Nawab*. Now in 1757 they held it as a conquered territory. It was good of the English that the right of conquest was not proclaimed in 1757. Nor was it formally applied in 1764 when at the battle of Buxar the Emperor of Delhi was defeated and had to bend his knees before the English. In any case the status of Calcutta in 1757 had undergone a revolution. From a purchased property it turned into a conquered one. With this the birth of Calcutta as a colonial town was formally over. The phase when Calcutta was manufactured as an imperial town was to being now.

#### ***IV. Calcutta Assumes a New Career***

During the first century of British occupation Calcutta had a checkered story of a rise into prominence. In 1698 it was one among the three purchased villages in south Bengal along the bank of the river. In 1726 the Mayor's Court was set up<sup>41</sup> in Calcutta. This for the first time gave the city a kind of judicial and jurisdictional enclave to the city. Theoretically the Indians were not subject to

the jurisdiction of the court but in all practical sense the court became a centre around which the judicial pretensions of the city grew and eventually it vied with the *de jure* authority of the *Nawab* as the ultimate dispenser of justice. This judicial pretension was reinforced by territorial acquisition in 1757 when because of Clive's victory over the Nawab it became a conquered city under the control of the English. A series of changes then set in. The new fort was raised and power was consolidated. The *diwani* was received in 1765 making possible the union of revenue with trade, territory with power. The combination of revenue and army cushioned this transformation and Calcutta became second to none in the British Empire in the world. A few years later in 1773 it became the seat of an imperial administration with the foundation of two important institutions that eventually determined the character of city – the office of the Governor General and the Supreme Court. The *Sadar Nizamat* and the *Sadar Diwani Adalats*<sup>42</sup> were also transferred from Murshidabad to Calcutta. Calcutta became the core of a new paradigm – empire-building. The office of the Governor General dwarfed the station of the *Nazim* or *Nawab* at Murshidabad – the Mughal viceroy in the east – and eventually laid the basis for putting forward the pretension that the governor general was equal to the Mughal Emperor if not in rank, at least in *de facto* position of power, so that he would not be under any obligation to act as a subordinate vassal of the Emperor.<sup>43</sup> This had relentlessly hurt the status of the Mughal Emperor. As in all times the Emperor's stipend was regulated from Calcutta and Delhi remained under the will of the new rising city of the east.

As these happened some other imperceptible changes took place ensuring Calcutta's rise to prominence and power. Four important Mughal cities – Patna, Hughli, Murshidabad and Dhaka – passed into eclipse.<sup>44</sup> The gravity of the English power shifted from Madras to Calcutta for the time being only to be retrieved later. The port character of the city<sup>45</sup> and the garrison character of the town now merged together in the status of a capital city that became the nucleus of an emerging empire in the east. This was a revolutionary phenomenon. No Indian empire which could properly be called all Indian in character and extent had emerged from the east in the past save the Magadhan Empire<sup>46</sup> in the sixth century B.C. . After long two thousand and five

hundred years the English were the first who basing their power in Calcutta in the east had introduced themselves as real contenders of an all Indian empire in direct confrontation with the Marathas in the west, the Rohillas and the Sikhs in the north and Mysore in the South. The foundation of Calcutta had, therefore, an intrinsic historical importance in it. The English power was entrenched in the city just as the Muslim power was centrally entrenched in Delhi and locally first in Gour and then Dhaka and in Murshidabad. Calcutta became with the English one major centre in the map of conflicting power-distribution in India. Who would inherit the Mughal state? That was the greatest political question that had haunted all pretenders to power in India in the eighteenth century. Calcutta's potentiality provided the English to be a pretender in this. The momentum to act for pretension was also a gift of the city – in the best of as also in the worst of its times.

Politically Calcutta in the eighteenth century emerged as this : a base from which the English could commission their pretension into a large all India effort to inherit the Mughal state.<sup>47</sup> This political character of the city also matched the character of its planning as an urban centre. The English wanted to model the town as a replica of London so that it could serve as a halt to the east-moving Britons in the eighteenth century. In effect Calcutta did not shed off the characteristics of a congested Mughal town either of contemporary age or of any earlier time. The morphology of Calcutta certainly assumed the apparent getup of an English town but at heart it remained steeped in the pattern of a tradition bound Mughal urban settlement. It was in this queer combination of an Anglo-Mughal urbanity that Calcutta throughout the course of colonial history found itself being shaped. Within the structure of a paradox a new phenomenon arose. The indigenous people, the native Hindu Bengali race, promoted their own renaissance in the city. Calcutta thus became a centre of a new cultural upsurge. The people indigenous to the soil built up their own pattern of culture which was essentially Indian in spirit revitalized only by the touch of the West. From the core of this new culture a new Calcutta emerged. It was this Calcutta – the Calcutta of Indians – which was made a base of nationalism. This nationalism was logically the outcome of the Bengal renaissance inspired by European nationalism in the nineteenth century. Socially and politically it was the outcome of a civil society that took

shape under the inspiration of the university age that came into being in the middle of the nineteenth century.

Spiritually shaped by its own renaissance Calcutta at the end was only this: a city with a soul unmatched with the spirit of the British Empire. How this unmatched city was born is part of the substance of this book. Everywhere in the book we have stuck to the expression 'Calcutta' instead of its modern name 'Kolkata'. This is because we have discussed the city neither in its pre-colonial nor in its post-colonial perspectives. Our thrust has always been on the growth of a city patterned by the Empire. The Empire had imposed its will on the city. The city balanced its own will antithetically to that of the Empire. This dialectic of the growth of the city has not been traced in its proper perspectives till now. We do it only to show that a city manufactured by the Empire had its own tryst with destiny. The Empire gave it its own momentum. Its mood was its own. This mood was the only lasting phenomenon in the city, all other parameters being transitory. Her promises of an urban growth were not fulfilled in the long run.

### ***V. The Regime of Governance***

In the eighteenth century the main motive behind town planning in Calcutta was security. The creation of the new fort in the 1760s (which ended in 1773) underlined the compulsive direction towards which Calcutta could grow. In course of three decades from the fall of Mir Qasim, the Bengal Nawab, in 1764 to the defeat of Tipu Sultan in 1799 in the south the English in Calcutta had dwarfed the neighbouring powers, contained the Emperor, outdistanced their trade competitors and triumphed over their local sources of fear. Being entrenched in territory and with command over revenue of three eastern provinces in India they now ceased to be mere merchants. Mastering the regional finance of the declining Mughal Empire they now lorded over a wide territory as an absolute satrap whose main concern was now governance necessary for both trade and consolidation. The nineteenth century thus dawned in Calcutta with a new regime charged with governance. Three associate things surfaced as parts of governance: finance as economics of governance, infrastructure as policies of governance and health ensuring life as missions of governance. All these were outcomes of a dire necessity. But they made in substance what may be called in short the municipal governance of

the city. The Charter Act of 1793 gave the municipal governance its statutory basis for the city for the first time and with it the first modern municipal administration dawned in colonial India. After a trial for a few years, people's representation seemed to be necessary. In 1838 Raja Radhakanta Deb and Dwarkanath Tagore were appointed Justices of Peace. The native assistance in municipal governance was thus formalized. Promotion of infrastructure and incorporation of native assistance thus came hand in hand showing new orientation of the city. The Lottery Committee came into existence in 1817 twenty four years after the city was first initiated into lottery. Its tenure was over in 1836. With it the period of intense activity for urban uplift was over. Roads were constructed; ditches were filled; city squares were formed; parks were created; ponds and water bodies were managed. In a word Calcutta was dressed for a new take-off. Incorporation of native assistance came at this stage. It was invoked with the turn of new situation – that is after the initial phase of city's urbanization was over. A new era was being promulgated now with the appointment of the committee for fever and hospital – called in short the Fever Hospital Committee – as a successor to the Lottery Committee. This was indeed a transitional moment in the history of the city. From urban constructions emphasis now shifted to urban health. Hospitals now dominated city plans – names floated in official literature such as Native Hospital, Fever Hospital, Police Hospital, General Hospital and finally Medical College. Existing and proposed institutions of health thus crowded planning manuals of the time. Some of these hospitals were going on concerns taking positions along with asylums meant for the lunatics and lepers. The medical topography of the city was being worked with new zeal. Crossing over the phases of security and infrastructure the city now entered a new phase where the primary concern of the government was health. The lottery phase of urban growth in Calcutta ushered in within the semi urban space of Calcutta the first signs of globalization of European architecture and urbanism. The thirties of the nineteenth century – the Fever Hospital Committee phase – similarly saw the implementation of the globalized versions of medical ethics and other functional aspects of science of healing that had come into vogue in the West. With new reforms in the offing more cooperation from the natives seemed to be a necessity and wealthy and influential men in the society were invited to take seats in various committees that were formed to promote the sanitary

configuration and health of the city. Drawing the Indians in Western reforms was not an easy task and the thirties of the nineteenth century saw a tussle between the British effort at persuasion and the Indian stamina to hold back.

The Fever Hospital Committee seemed to be concerned with the real uplift of life in the city but no plan in this seemed to be beyond meeting eventualities which could be called an outcome of sustainable state-planning. Miasma, filth, drain, cleanliness, habitation, removal of thatched huts and even fire-proneness of the city were constant parts of deliberations or even reports of the Lottery Committee and the Fever Hospital Committee but state level determination to impose decisions to change was absent. The public will with which Wellesley had steered the city into a career of urban modernism seemed to be lacking in all subsequent efforts once the Lottery Committee had ceased to exist. One reason for this was that the state had never achieved the economic solvency under the influence of which condition it could plan for long term economic investment in the city as the state in England had done. The result was that all plans in city development for three decades after the winding of the Lottery Committee were patch works being parts of a ramshackle philosophy of public welfare. The continuous embellishment of the white city certainly led Calcutta to glitter as an imperial seat of power but, as Pradip Sinha says, it also led to “further accentuation of the physical differences of the European and Indian parts” of the city.<sup>48</sup> It should be noted that the most intensive effort to town-planning was made during the period of the Lottery Committee and the Committee’s “work of Calcutta”, in Pradip Sinha’s words, was “the most systematic work in the 19<sup>th</sup> century”.<sup>49</sup> In any case one may note that from the time of Wellesley’s minute in 1803 to the winding up of the Lottery Committee in 1836 the will of the state to introduce reforms in urban morphology was most effective. The fall of Tipu Sultan in 1799 brought about a new flush of pride for British victory and under Wellesley the pride was twisted into a new diplomatic pattern of control under the name ‘Subsidiary Alliance’. The spirit of the state was now absorbed in the glitters of a new vision of an empire. Old Calcutta was not in keeping with this spirit of the state. Calcutta had to be changed and the change was ushered in the three decades following the drafting of Wellesley’s minutes. The pride which the rule of Warren Hastings had caused to instill in British dominations in India created in the aftermath a situation in which the change in the city’s status could be

suggested. This was done by the drawing of the boundary of Calcutta and the first raising of finance for the urbanization of the city in 1793. From 1818 a period of peace for thirty years graced the British rule in India. It was in this phase that the first major attempts were made to urbanize the city and propel it to the direction where it could assume its new role as the seat of power. The result was that 'admirable professional considerations' were brought into force for all planning programmes of the time.<sup>50</sup> Two things happened as a result of the activities of the Lottery Committee. Prices of lands escalated<sup>51</sup> and European influx into the city increased. Lottery Committee observations were categorical to this end.<sup>52</sup> While the white town was gradually being filled by new waves of white immigrants the black town was steadily passing under the control of rich Indians. One thing the Lottery Committee did was to create a long north-south axis along the present linear thoroughfares of Wellington Square – College Street – Cornwallis Street – Shyambazar (largely made up of ancient Shovabazar).<sup>53</sup> In the wide mass of territory between the riverfront and this central axis of the city large properties were purchased by opulent Indians so that as time went on it became difficult for the government to acquire land for the creation of new roads and for the expansion of lanes and by-lanes that had given the city a look of a congested countryside transplanted into a new urban set-up. In any case the Lottery Committee did a yeoman's service to the city which no previous government could do. A concept of improvement it had instilled into the minds of the Indians. This is where the British Empire fulfilled its role as a modernizer and distinguished itself from any of the earlier empires of the past. The awareness of improvement occasionally reflected in contemporary journals. A passage in *Jnanannesan* as late as 1837 tried to draw public attention to the changes around.<sup>54</sup> It said that diseases had been beaten and three reasons were at the root of it. The town had been improved by the Lottery Committee. An immense progress had been made in Medical science and a change had been contemplated in people's food habit. It was clear that by the end of 1830s a large part of jungles in and around Calcutta had been cleared and the British Empire set into motion aspects of sanitized living which were absent in medieval Indian town planning. As noted above, four parameters were thus visible in making sanitized living a possibility. First, the town was made free of jungles and was properly dressed up. Its roads and drains were created, water bodies were taken care of, parks for relaxation

outside cramped households were in the process of being built and thatched mud huts were replaced by tiled roofs, wooden structures and finally by brick constructions. A dressed town made urban living an enjoyable experience. Secondly, medical science was improved and hospitals were created. Health care became a part of urban living. Efforts to beat miasma were undertaken during the auspices of the Hospital Committee. Thirdly, the food habit and the diet system of the people were influenced and finally, an effective policing of the whole order was imposed from the top, much to the relief of some and disgust of many who preferred living in a traditional world. The Indian world around Calcutta had been in a state of change in the first thirties of the nineteenth century. This was the singular achievement of the Lottery Committee.

It is not very clear as to why the Lottery Committee was snapped. Certainly the money market was getting stringent and may be that people's contribution through lottery in making the city worthy of living was showing signs of decline.

Agency Houses began to collapse and there was a run on the money market. The Company's government was drawn increasingly into conflict with its own subjects who were now raising protests either for increase in taxations or for more compensation for lands acquired in the name of improvement of the town. The Lottery Committee had truly exhausted its functions. All the preliminaries of town planning had been served and there was no concern for public health. One may say that the first phase of planned uplift of Calcutta was over with the Lottery Committee. The second phase according to A.K. Ray began "with the establishment of the Corporation of the Justices in 1871, under Act VI of that year".<sup>55</sup> Between 1836 when the tenure of the Lottery Committee was over and 1871 when the second phase of town uplift began a period of thirty-five years intervened during which emphasis had shifted from town planning to more strategic things for the Empire. By the beginning of the 1840s the role of native capital in promoting trade, industry and banking had come to an end. The fall of the Union Bank in 1848 had ruined the fiscal aristocracy of the city. Within one decade British capital started flowing into Bengal. The age of steamship was ushered in. Coal-fields had been discovered in Bengal. The age of the railways, telegraph and university were in the

horizon. With all these imperial economics were changing and with that also changed the metropolitan mind of the people. Calcutta was left to progress with the century – not very much in tune with the forces of the age but in its own way.

## Notes

1. Throughout the course of the first half of the eighteenth century the south-eastern part of Bengal was under the threat of Magh incursions. It was a legacy from the seventeenth century. Three sets of people led deep incursions into Bengal in the seventeenth century and carried men and women as slaves to be sold to the Europeans either at the coasts of Madras or Orissa or in the neighbourhood of Calcutta. Occasionally slaves were clandestinely sold in Calcutta also. These marauders and lifters of men and women were the Arakans (the half civilized tribes of the Chittagong hills and the Burmese of the fringe territories of Burma called Arakan which was then under the rule of a Burmese king), Maghs (the seafaring rugged people from Chatgaon or Chittagong) and Firingis (the Portuguese). Jadunath Sarkar writes :

“The deep channel parting from a bend of the Ganges some distance east of Tamluk and running eastwards to Dacca and Chatgaon was called by the English merchants in that age as the *Rogue’s River*, because ‘the Arakanese used to come out thence to rob and sailed up the river Ganges.’ ”- Jadunath Sarkar, *History of Bengal, Vol.II*, Dakha University Publication, 1948, second impression 1972, Dakha, p. 378. The statement quoted by Sarkar above was from Streynsham Master’s Diary, i. 321, map in i.507.

“The Arakan pirates, both Magh and Feringi used constantly to plunder Bengal. They carried off the Hindus and Muslims they could seize, pierced the palms of their hands, passed thin strips of cane through the holes, and threw the men huddled together under the decks of their ships. Every morning they flung down some uncooked rice to the captives from above, as people fling grain to fowl – They sold their captives to the Dutch, English and French merchants at the ports of Deccan. Sometimes they brought their captives to Tamluk and Balasore for sale at high prices. . . Only the Feringis sold their prisoners, but the Maghs employed all whom they could carry off in agriculture and other occupations or as domestic servants and concubines.” – cited by Sarkar, *op.cit.*, pp 378-79. Sarkar adds: “It was Shaista Khan’s task to put an end to this terror”. – *op.cit.* p. 379. For further details see A.K. Ray, *A Short History of Calcutta Town and Suburbs Census of India, 1901, Vol. VII, Part I, 1902*, R.DDHI-India edn. Calcutta 1982, p. 259.

2. The Portuguese were known in contemporary literature as the ‘*feringis*’ and the ‘*harmads*’. How the Arakanese, the Portuguese and the Maghs were extirpated from Chittagong, the base of their activities and mobilization, has been beautifully described by Sarkar, *op.cit.*, pp 377-381.

3. For details see Ranjit Sen, *A Stagnating City Calcutta in the Eighteenth Century*, Institute of Historical Studies, Calcutta, 2000, Ch. VI, entitled "A Pilgrim Centre: Kalighat"
4. Magadha in the sixth century B.C. embraced territories around modern Patna and Gaya. It "could boast of powerful chieftains even in the days of the Vedic *Rishis* and the epic poets"—writes the historian H.C. Raychaudhury in R.C. Majumdar, H.C. Roychaudhuri and K.K. Datta ed. *An Advanced History of India*, Macmillan, London, p. 55. The pre-Aryan people that lived here were called the Kikatas 'who were noted for their wealth of kine. . .' In the sixth and fifth century B.C. the throne of Magadha was occupied by the rulers of *Saisunaga* dynasty. According to the Buddhist writers this dynasty was split into two the earlier one was called by them as *Haryanksa*. The most important ruler of the *Haryanka* line was Bimbisara.
5. Straw houses persisted in the city even in the second half of the nineteenth century. It was because of this straw huts Calcutta became a fire-prone area. See A.K. Ray *op.cit.* p. 161. Even in the white town straw huts could be seen hiding behind mansions and palatial buildings. In general such mud and thatched houses came under control from 1837. The Act XII of that year enjoined people to provide an outer roof with incombustible material.
6. Stones in Calcutta were normally brought from Rajmahal.
7. Timber necessary for hardy constructions were brought from the foothills of the Himalayas. It came by the Ganges via Munghyr. See Rev. J. Long, *Selections from the Unpublished Records of Government from 1748-1767 inclusive*, Calcutta 1869, Second edn. Edited by Mahadevprasad Saha, Firma K L Mukhopadhyay, Calcutta 1973, No. 808, p 544.
8. Calcutta remained the capital of British India from 1773 to 1911. From the first day of 1912 capital was transferred to Delhi.
9. Dadabhai Naoroji was a Parsi businessman and one of the founders of the Indian National Congress. He was elected to the House of Commons to speak for Indian interests in the 1890s. His famous book was *Poverty and Un-British Rule*, London, 1901.
10. Romesh Chandra Dutt was a Bengali litterateur of the highest calibre. He was an ICS officer who resigned his job "to pursue", writes B.R. Tomlinson, "his attacks on the revenue administration of Bengal, focused on the distortions to the Indian economy brought about by British rule, and by the impoverishment of the mass of the population through the colonial 'drain of wealth' from India to Britain over the course of the nineteenth century". – B.R. Tomlinson, *The Cambridge History of India* III.3 *The Economy of Modern India 1860-1970*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, First South Asian Paperback Edition, 1998, p.12. R.C. Dutt's famous book in which his 'drain' theory was unleashed is *The Economic History of India in the Victorian Age*, London, 1906. His *Economic History* consists of two volumes.

Dutt's argument was that we produce surplus and it went to benefit England. We raised clouds, he said, but it rained elsewhere.

11. The shifting of capital, it is generally believed, was because of the rise of nationalism in Bengal. Calcutta was the hub of nationalist culture and was giving leadership to both the moderate and the rising radical wings of the Indian National Congress. It should be noted that after the government's failure to keep up the partition of Bengal in the face of massive agitation by the people of the land the whole show of government had become a sham. Calcutta had emerged as a different city much away from what the British wanted it to be. Calcutta did not participate in the revolt of 1857 but in the immediate aftermath of the revolt it became the centre of a new radical culture which did not seem compatible with the nature and philosophy of the British rule. The coming of the revolutionary terror from 1906 onwards and the use of bomb as an instrument for the radical uplift of revolution created a new atmosphere in which Calcutta lost its *raison d'état* to remain as the capital of the British Empire.

12. In a recent writing the pre-British source of reference to Calcutta has been recorded as follows: "The three villages of Sutanuti, Kalikata and Gobindapur figure in the maps of Vanderbrooke (1600), Valentine (1656), Thomas Bowrey (1687) and George Herron (1690). The name Kalikata found mention in *Manasamangal* of Bipradas (1595) and in the rent-roll's of Akbar, the Mughal emperor. The colonial city, which certainly was the product of the English settlers, grew out of its own environs". – Subhas Ranjan Chakraborty, "Kolkata" in Ranjan Chakraborty ed. *Dictionary of Historical Places Bengal, 1757-1947*, Primus Books Delhi, 2013, p. 365.

13 See A.K. Ray, *op.cit*, pp. 32-37.

14 The urbanization which Europe experienced in the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries was in many ways influenced by the need for security. Lewis Mumford observes: "Five centuries of violence, paralysis, and uncertainty had created in the European heart a profound desire for security when every chance might prove a mischance, when every moment might be one's last moment, the need for protection rose above every other concern, and to find a safe haven was about the most one asked from life." – *The Culture of Cities*, p. 14 Because of this need for security in most cases the cities in the West were castle-centric.

15 Calcutta's real role as an administrative town began in 1773 when Warren Hastings became the Governor General and Calcutta became the major seat of administration for the three British Presidencies in India.

16 On 9<sup>th</sup> March, 1792 the Girondists, who were the war party in France during the time of the French Revolution, formed a ministry, and on 20<sup>th</sup> April France declared war against Austria. This triggered a war in Europe. In July, Prussia joined Austria by declaring war against France. Britain joined later. This war situation did not stop altogether all through the

revolution and continued even when Napoleon became the Emperor of France. In May 1804 he 'adopted the rank of *Emperor* of the French' and thereafter used the title 'Napoleon'. In May 1803 Britain declared war on France and European wars continued intermittently till Napoleon's defeat at the battle of Waterloo on 18 June, 1815.

17. Amal Tripathi in his *Trade and Finance in the Bengal Presidency* wrote that the highest influx of the east-moving Britons in Bengal took place in the year 1822-23.

18. "In 1733 some persons who were 'lurking about the town' of Calcutta were suspected to be spies and robbers. The zamindar was ordered to 'turn them out of the town and if they returned again they were to be whipped out'. In 1734 the innkeepers of Calcutta were asked not to entertain any strangers in their taverns without giving timely notice to the Company. The innkeepers failing to comply with this order would themselves be 'sent directly to Europe'." – Sukumar Bhattacharya, *The East India Company and the Economy of Bengal From 1704-1740*, Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyay, Calcutta, 1969, p. 172. Such vigilance was very frequent in Calcutta in the first half of the eighteenth century.

19. For detail see Sukumar Bhattacharya, *op.cit.*, ch. II.

20. For details of this aspect of the English position in Calcutta see chs. I and II under the titles "Conquest and Sovereignty" and "The Company becomes 'zamindar'" in W.K. Firminger, *Historical Introduction To The Bengal Portion Of The Fifth Report*, (1917), Reprint, *Indian Studies Past and Present*, Calcutta, 1962.

21. See chapters viii and ix under the titles "Town and Suburbs" and "Population and Revenue" in A.K. Ray, *A Short History of Calcutta Town and Suburbs : Census of India, 1901*, Vol. VII, Part I (1902), RDDHI-INDIA, Calcutta, 1982.

22. "By the Proclamation of 1794, the boundary of the town was fixed to be the inner side of the Mahratta Ditch." A.K. Ray, *op.cit.* p. 110 also see Appendix I, pp 116-119.

23. The vigilance of the Bengal *Nawabs* was maintained till the time of Siraj Uddaulah. This vigilance broke down when there was sabotage from within. For the attitudes of the Bengal *Nawabs* toward the English and other foreign Companies see (i) Sukumar Bhattacharya, *op.cit.*, Ch. II, (ii) K.K. Datta, *Alivardi and His Times*, The World Press private Ltd., Calcutta, 1963, Ch. V, (iii) Brijen K. Gupta, *Sirajuddaulah and the East India Company, 1756-1757 : Background To The Foundation Of The British Empire in India*, Photomechanical Reprint, Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1966, Ch. III.

24 "Between 1742 and 1753 the development of the town constituted chiefly in the rapid increase of native Indian houses, both cutcha and pukka – mostly cutcha, in the outlying parts of the European town within the Mahratta Ditch." – A.K. Ray, *op.cit.* p.99 The Maratha ditch was thus the boundary of the town of Calcutta.

25. Chandernagore (Chandannagore) is situated 30 kilometers north of Calcutta. See Ranjan Chakrabarti ed., *op.cit.* pp. 133-135.

26. Once the Portuguese were driven out of Hughli the entire seaboard of the Bay remained exposed to the English navy operating from Madras. Their command over the seaboard helped the English to maintain their sway in Calcutta. The removal of the Portuguese also helped the country in another way. The slave trade was reduced. Kidnapping of human beings, particularly of women, by the Portuguese, Mags and Arakans had become a menace in the country. Once the fear of being kidnapped was removed a brake was lifted from the economy of the country. For about one hundred years the economy of Bengal enjoyed stability so far its man-power potential was concerned. In 1740s when the Maratha invasions began to take place the country's economy once again suffered a jolt. There was a mass exodus from the western part of Bengal to its eastern part. The population of Calcutta increased because it was a safe sanctuary for suffering mankind.

27. For further details see Ranjit Sen, *New Elite and New Collaboration A Study of Social Transformation in Bengal in the Eighteenth Century*, Papyrus, Calcutta, 1985 Ch. I, pp. 18-19 and Abdul Majed Khan, *The Transition in Bengal 1756-1775 A Study of Sayid Muhammad Reza Khan*, Cambridge University Press, 1966, pp 104-05. About the vacuum on the English side because of the death of English officers after the wars with Mir Qasim, Majed Khan writes: "So many losses left too few men even to run the commercial offices properly, especially as those remaining were often junior and inexperienced, heavily dependent on their banians." (p.105)

28. "In his dual government Clive envisaged a model of broad Anglo-Mughal partnership under a shrinking canopy of Timurid sovereignty. With this sovereignty waning in a situation that saddled the English in supremacy, such partnership lost its *raisond'etre*. Hastings understood this and he invited the Indians in subsidiary collaboration with the English, thus, superseding the pattern of Indo-British alignment highlighted by Clive. Clive, the author of all British successes in the south was co-opted into partnership by the power elite of Bengal. After 1765 that elite had dwindled into insignificance. Now it was for the English to co-opt partners. Towards that end, Hastings estimated the worth of friendship with lower men and lesser beings with whom he had many years of intercourse." – Ranjit Sen, *New Elite and New Collaboration*, Papyrus, Calcutta, 1985, p. 17.

29. The last Peshwa Baji Rao II surrendered to Sir John Malcolm on June 3, 1818. He was defeated in two battles – at Koregaon on January 1, 1818 and at Ashti on 20 February, 1818. After his defeat, writes K.K. Datta "The Peshwaship, which served as the symbol of national unity among the Marathas even in the worst days, was abolished; Baji Rao II was allowed to spend his last days at Bithur near Cawnpore on a pension of eight lacs a year; his dominions were placed under British control; and 'British influence and authority spread over the land with magical celerity' ". R.C. majumdar et.al., *An Advanced History of India*, third edn.,

Macmillan, London. 1967, p. 702. Percival Spear writes: "It is incorrect to say that the Maratha confederacy was crushed (in 1818), because it had been in dissolution since 1802 and largely by its own act. What really happened in 1818 was the substitution of British authority in central India for no authority at all, and the expansion of paramountcy over the ancient Rajput states." Percival Spear ed. *The Oxford History of India By The late Vincent A. Smith*, Oxford At The Clarendon Press, (1958), reprinted 1961, p. 572.

30. A letter from the Court of Directors, Dated January 31, 1755, paragraph 54 says :

"It has appeared to us as very extraordinary that so exceeding populous a place as Calcutta is, and no doubt inhabited by great numbers of weavers, should be of so little immediate benefit to us; the merchants have employed those useful people, and have hither too run away with the advantage which we might with equal ease have obtained. But thanks to the conduct of those merchants which have drove you to expedients which might other ways have been thought of; you now find manysorts of goods are fabricated within our bounds, cheap and of good qualities, and may be had at the first hand as it is evidently for our interest therefore to encourage not only all the weavers now in our bounds, but likewise to draw as many others as possible from all countries to reside under our protection, we shall depend on your utmost efforts to accomplish the same; and shall hope the time is not far off wherein we shall find a great share of your investment made under your own eyes" – Mahadevprasad Saha ed., *The Revd. J. Long, op.cit.* No. 170, p. 79 under the title "Weavers to be encouraged to settle in Calcutta."

31. The English officers in Calcutta developed the lifestyles of a Nabob. Their domestic households were packed with servants of various kinds together with their business assistants. All of them lived around their residential dwellings so that behind and around the splendid edifices on the Chowringhee and the riverside areas mud and thatched houses raised their heads. The Calcutta Committee proceedings of April 27, 1767 contained the following note :

"Mr. Russell, as Collector general begs leave to represent to the Board that of late years the street by the river side to the northward of the Custom House has been greatly encroached upon by a number of golahs, little straw huts and boutiques that have been indiscriminately reared.

He would further propose that no golahs whatever should be suffered to remain to the southward of this spot, which will relieve the inhabitants from the apprehensions of fire, and of their houses being entirely undermined by rats.

The straw huts, everywhere dispersed throughout the white town, is (are) another grievance, and an innovation of very late, which he would also recommend to the consideration of the Board". – Long, *Selections*, No. 945, p. 659.

32. Every European who was engaged in private trade had his own native business assistants and partners. They were called *banians*. It was a general practice that at the

outset of their career young English officers opened their trade with funds provided by rich Indian traders who had amassed money by trading with the European Companies. These Indians lent their money to the English officers and the latter in return provided them with protection, official support and political influence. Thus being under the umbrella of men of political authority these Indians acted as secretaries, accountants, market-surveyors, record-keepers, trustees and primary agents in all practical transactions of business of the Europeans in general and the English in particular. The three volumes of N.K. Sinha's *Economic History of Bengal* are replete with references to *banians*. It was the money of the *banians* which financed whatever little industry Bengal had till the middle of the nineteenth century. For this reference may be made to Sabyasachi Bhattacharya's article in *Cambridge Economic History of India*, Vol. II, ed. By Dharma Kumar, (pp 270-295), See Sinha, *op.cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 24, 25, 27, 30, 31, 70, 75, 76, 78, 81, 82, 83, 124, 148, 178, 192, 220, 221, 225, 279. In Bengal *banians* were not all from the *bania* class. Upper Class Hindu Bengalis, even Brahmins, acted as *banians*. N.K. Sinha defines the term *banian* as one derived 'from *bania* or merchant, a term used to designate the Indian who manages the concerns of the Europeans.' – Sinha, *op.cit.*, Vol. II, p. 233. See Somendra Chandra Nandy, *Life and Times of Kantoo Baboo, The Banian of Warren Hastings*, Allied Publishers, 1978.

33. Mud huts and thatched cottages required earth, wood and bamboos for their construction. Since such huts were increasing in the city because of infiltration of lowly men pulled from the peasant societies of the countryside to provide labour for civil constructions soil digging had become a routine phenomenon in the city and around in the eighteenth century.

34. The middle class in Bengal emerged from three elements. First, the *banians* and traders who amassed money in course of the eighteenth century settled themselves in the city of Calcutta and the neighbouring towns to provide the basis of a money elite. Secondly, the Permanent Settlement created a landlord class that had a tendency to reside in Calcutta so that a class of absentee landlords appropriating the wealth of the interior created the base of a new propertied elite in the society. The third element was an educated mankind produced by the Hindu College and the new education that was coming into shape in the first quarter of the nineteenth century. For the economic origin of the Bengali middle class see N.K. Sinha, *op.cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 222-229.

35. It is a paradox that in spite of concentration of capital in Calcutta throughout the course of the eighteenth century capital seemed to be in short in the city. This shortage of capital was manifested in public activities of the government, and not in private enterprises. Both the Court of Directors and the city administrators showed a spend-thrift and miserly mindset in addressing themselves to any public work during the first one century of the British rule in Bengal. There was a real dearth of money in the interior. This was because the last dreg of social surplus was squeezed out from the

cultivating people in the form of rent and from the *zamindars* in the form of revenue without any equivalent return. From 1765 the English East India Company ceased to import bullion from England as the entire territorial revenue of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa was at their disposal. The *Sarrafs*, the country banking houses, which acted as credit institutions for rural Bengal, were relegated to the background and the house of the Jagat Seths, the biggest banking house of the country and bankers to the state, were made non-functionary. The result was that while in the city of Calcutta there were *banians* and other trader-collaborators to ensure supply of fund there was no house in the interior to provide credit necessary for the economy to be going. All big zamindars siphoned their wealth to Calcutta and this growing metropolis did not benefit the country hinterland in any major way. In spite of this capital concentration in the city there was little fund to promote its urbanization as a public enterprise. A relief to this stringency came only when the lottery system was enunciated in the nineties of the eighteenth century.

36. Jadunath Sarkar, *History of Bengal*, Vol.II, Dhaka University, 1948 p. 418.

37. This was the first major influx of population into the city and the first major event through which Calcutta proved itself to be a sanctuary for the people. This was also the first important situation in which people learnt how superior the British arms were to that of the *Nawab*. The latter had no money to build up the defence of the state. Sir Jadunath Sarkar writes (*op.cit.* p. 461): "In his financial distress Alivardi put pressure upon the European Companies trading in Bengal. He complained that the English 'carried on the trade of the whole world; they formerly used to have but four or five ships, but now brought 40 or 50 sails which belong not to the Company'. *He expected the rich merchants and refugees in Calcutta to assist him with a large contribution for meeting his army bill.* The English at last settled his claim by paying 3½ lakhs of rupees, besides Rs. 43,500 for his courtiers. The French at Chandernagore paid Rs. 45,000." [Italics ours] About Calcutta's rise as a sanctuary of distressed people K.K. Datta writes: ". . . the ready offer of shelter by the English to some of the ravaged and runaway inhabitants of the plundered areas of Bengal within the bounds of the Company's settlement in Calcutta, engendered in the minds of these people a feeling of sympathy for, and faith in, the English Company. The English were able to raise a volunteer army, and a certain amount of subscriptions, from the native, the Armenian, and the Portuguese inhabitants of Calcutta, to defend that city against threatened encroachments of the Marathas. This shows that the people reposed some amount of confidence in the support of the English." – *Alivardi and His Times*, p. 94.

38. For the Krishnadas affair see Brijen Gupta, *op.cit.*, pp. 48-50.

39. To know how Bengal became a protectorate see Ranjit Sen, *Metamorphosis of the Bengal Polity (1700-1793)*, Rabindra Bharati University, Calcutta, 1987, Chs. I-III.

40. For details as to how power was slowly clamped on the *Nizamat* in Bengal see the following books: (i) Ranjit Sen, *Metamorphosis of the Bengal Polity*, (ii) Brijen Gupta, *op.cit.*, (iii) Benoy Krishna Roy, *The Career and Achievements of Maharaja Nanda Kumar, Dewan of Bengal (1705-1755)*, Calcutta, 1969, (iv) Atul Chandra Roy, *The Career of Mir Jafar Khan (1757-65 A.D.)* Calcutta, (v) K.M. Mohsin, *A Bengal District in Transition: Murshidabad 1765-93*, Dacca, 1973, (vi) N. Majumdar, *Justice and Police in Bengal, 1775-1793: A Study of the Nizamat in Decline*, Calcutta, 1960, (vii) Abdul Majed Khan, *The Transition in Bengal 1756-1775; A Study of Saiyid Muhammad Reza Khan*, Cambridge University press, 1969.

41. The Mayor's Court has been discussed at length in W.K. Firminger, *op.cit.*, Ch.V, titled 'The Mayor's Court'

42. The *Sadar Diwani* and the *Sadar Nizamat Adalats* were superior courts. One was 'a court of appeal in civil cases'. And the other was for 'revising and confirming sentences'. See R.C. Majumdar et.al. *An Advanced History of India*, p. 788.

43. The transforming status of the Emperor vis-à-vis the Governor General has been discussed by Percival Spear in *A History of Delhi Under the Later Mughals*, Delhi, 1988, pp. 39-71.

44. The fall of Patna was indicated by the fall of population in the city in the nineteenth century. The fall has been recorded in the census report thus :

Census of 1872	population of Patna was 1,58,900
Census of 1881	population of Patna was 1,70,654
Census of 1891	population of Patna was 1,65,192
Census of 1901	population of Patna was 1,34,785

"The reasons for the decline in population are obvious. The frequent famines (1866-67, 1873-74) and epidemics coupled with inadequate relief measures and medical aid were responsible for the waning population. Further, no major economic opportunities emerged to attract new people." – Surendra Gopal, *Patna in 19<sup>th</sup> Century a Socio-Cultural Profile*, Naya Prokash, Calcutta, 1982, p. 18.

Patna began to slide into eclipse since the second half of the eighteenth century. It started when Mir Qasim with the help of Vansittart removed Clive's protégé at Patna, Ramnarayan and possessed the resources and treasures of Bihar. Then he shifted his capital to Monghyr thus forcing Patna into a zone of shadow. He spent the resources of Bihar in his wars with the English. In 1759 Ali Gahar (later Emperor Shah Alam II) laid a siege to Patna. He hoped to strengthen his claims to Delhi by acquiring Bihar and Bengal. Ram Narayan successfully defended the city till such time as Clive could send his army. This event opened the eyes of the English who henceforth built up Patna and Bihar as buffers against the turmoil of the west. The

fall of the major cities of eastern India indicated a process of de-urbanization. But de-urbanization affected the great cities like Dakha, Murshidabad, Burdwan, Patna etc. and not the smaller ones like Bhagalpur, Monghyr, Khirpai etc. See Dharma Kumar ed. *The Cambridge Economic History of India, Vol.2: c. 1757-c. 1970*, Orient Longman, (1982), 1984, pp. 277-279.

45. For the development of Calcutta as a port see A.K. Ray, *op.cit.* Ch. XIII

46. Vide note 4 of the sixteen *mahajanapadas* in the sixth century B.C. four kingdoms emerged powerful. They were Avanti, Vatsa, Kosala and Magadha. Out of these Magadha which embraced the districts of Patna and Gaya emerged triumphant.

47. The successor states of the Mughal Empire, those of Oudh, Bengal and Hyderabad and also the Sikh empire in the north-west and the kingdom of Mysore in the south had inherited much of the Mughal Empire in their own forms. But the real contest was between the English emerging both from the east and the south and the Marathas from the west. The French effort to curve an empire from the south and those of the Afghans under Ahmad Shah Abdali from the north-west seemed to be abortive. The Marathas and the Afghans exhausted themselves through their mutual fights as the French had collapsed because of their conflicts with the English unsupported either by their authorities at home or by any local support like immense control of revenue which the British had in Bengal. The Mughal Empire in providing the *diwani* of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa to the English had selected its own successor within the frame of Mughal constitution. As the British Empire succeeded the Mughal Empire from being within the ranks of a talukdar (of the three villages of Sutanati, Govindapur and Kalikata in 1698) and the zamindar (of the Twenty-Four Parganas in 1757) one might say that the Mughal Empire saved itself from being subverted by any non-Mughal power by force. The English could build their constitutional position from being absorbed in the administrative partnership of the Mughal elite.

48. Pradip Sinha, *Calcutta in Urban History*, Firma KLM Private Ltd., Calcutta, 1978, p. 29

49. *Ibid.*

50. *Ibid.*

51. *Proceedings of the Lottery Committee* (henceforth referred to as *PLC*), July 20, 1820

52. The Officers of the Lottery Committee individually and also collectively noted this development. Early planners' concerns and speculations were manifested in their observations. Here are some examples:

"I have already stated that the value of ground in Calcutta generally rises in proportion to its contiguity to a great thoroughfare and that upon this circumstance

rested the possibility of effecting the improvement I proposed." *PLC*, February 3, 1820

"Adverting to the increasing European population of this Town we cannot doubt but the greatest part would be purchased in its improved state for the erection of Dwelling Houses at rates which would more than repay previous expenditure" *PLC*, May 4, 1820. See also letter to John Trotter, Esq., Secretary to the Lottery Committee, April 20, 1820

53. Bordering on the ancient trade route of Chitpur, a pilgrim thoroughfare leading first to the then Sarvamangala Devi temple and then far beyond it to Haliashahar, the entire territory between modern Shyambazar and Bagbazar seemed to be very strategic. On the one hand it connected the old Nawabi military station at Dum Dum (subsidiary to the *faujdar* of Jessore) and the ancient trade route to *Kapasias* (region around Dhaka where *Karpas* or cotton was grown) and on the other it provided passage to the newly developed British military stronghold at Barrackpore. Therefore, improving links between this part of the city with the white town where the fort was situated was to the interest of the British rulers in Calcutta.

54. "Lottery Committee O Byadhi O Taar Protikaar" (Lottery Committee and Disease and its Remedy), *Jnanannesan*, October 21, 1837 reprinted in Suresh Chandra Moitra ed. *Selections from Jnanannesan*, Prajna, 1979, Calcutta, p. 59 (Bengali section)

55. A.K. Ray, *op.cit.*, p. 221

**SCANNING THE CONTEXT**

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## CHAPTER I

MAPPING THE PATTERN OF URBANIZATION IN HISTORY  
THE CALCUTTA CHAPTER**I. *An Unsure Identity***

Urban history, it is said, is unsure of its identity.<sup>1</sup> Its forms, methodology and discipline as well as its concepts and procedures have not yet been developed. It had borrowed freely from external sources, geography, topography, demography, economics, sociology and many other such subjects. The result of this is that although we have chroniclers of towns we seldom have historians of urbanization. In the west urban history took its shape as a discipline only around or after the World War II when it became a formidable component for the growing American nationhood.<sup>2</sup> India is an agglomeration of villages and more than 70 per cent of its population lives in the country-side.<sup>3</sup> Hence the writing of urban history has taken a back-seat in comparison to agrarian history writings. From time immemorial India's history has accommodated within its fold a queer paradox. It is abound with the story of foundations of towns but towns here could never shake off relics of villages from their core. As a result towns in India had always been only developed villages with some callings of life other than agriculture and rural crafts. The total disjuncture from rusticity could rarely become a stable phenomenon in India. Its effects had been serious. The concept of town as sovereign in itself with no organic attachment with villages except those of the basic subsistence relations had thus never grown in India. It was a singular misfortune for India that her earliest civilization, the Harappan civilization, having originated as a potential centre of urban growth, eventually relapsed into an infinite monotony of an agricultural one. The sort of urbanization which Europe experienced in the high middle ages when towns at the crest of a commercial revival after the tenth and eleventh centuries raised their heads as break-away unit from feudal manorial system was unthinkable in Indian context. Thus when Europeans came to India they concerned themselves not with towns which were absent in their broad experience but with village communities, rural land tenures, revenue from agriculture and agrarian relations. In this context urban history did not grow effectively in India. Long before the Europeans came to India the people of this country had their own ways of writing history.

That was mostly narrative history that revolved around rulers. Cities had no great role to play as subjects of history.<sup>4</sup>

Indifference to urban history was in fact a global phenomenon. Attention to towns grew in Europe only when consequences of the Industrial Revolution were felt very acutely in the continent. Marx's *The Communist Manifesto* for the first time ushered in the epoch-making theory that because of the rise of the bourgeoisie towns and cities overwhelmed villages. But understanding of urban history stopped at that only. Interests in the history of towns remained lulled for some times and were revived many years later when F.W. Maitland published his work *Township and Borough* in 1898. Following his lead Henry Pirenne in the 1920s published his work on medieval towns.<sup>5</sup> Then there was a many years' wait before a landmark work on urban history could be produced. In 1963 was published Asha Briggs *Victorian Cities*. Even then institutional formalization of urban history writing did not gain momentum. Such formalization took rest of the twentieth century to crystallize itself.<sup>6</sup>

In India urban history had never been a popular theme of writing for historians. The British historians who wrote on India were mostly panegyrists of British exploits in the east. To them the history of India was coterminous with the history of the emergence and expansion of an empire which was replete with wars and the exploits of the Governors General or the history of civilizing missions from the west that involved stories of wars against oriental misrule through a steady process of reform and regeneration. For many British historians writing for India an imperial undertone seemed to be unavoidable. Their works prepared the minds of future British civil servants in India and, therefore, quite naturally and also a little surreptitiously they imparted the message of the empire. This was the compulsive logic under which many British historians found themselves commissioned to write. Under such circumstances political and administrative history got precedence over economic and social history where the city could serve as the most convenient unit of analysis. From the beginning the Imperial government in India was concerned mainly with two things, the problem of governance and the means of governance i.e. revenue. When the nationalists emerged a new set of problems called for definition – famine, poverty, deindustrialization, drain of wealth, rural indebtedness, the railways versus canals and irrigation and finally degeneration of Indian life. Industrialization and urbanization are concurrent events and the absence of the one automatically obliterates the importance of the other. When the above problems filled the nationalist discourse it was logical that urban history would have no place in Indian historiography.

## **II. *Uncongenial for Colonial Historiography***

Thus urban history could not find a congenial soil in the colonial historiography of India. Could a pre-industrial urban history be possible in this situation? The

answer would be broadly 'no'. Such a discipline did not grow in the free societies of the west.<sup>7</sup> How could it flourish in the inhibited colonial settings where incentives for change manifested little? W.H. Moreland many years ago laid his hands on the subject and wrote a masterful account of India towards the end of the sixteenth century.<sup>8</sup> With the judgment of a true investigator Moreland scanned the economic forces that prevailed in India at the time of Akbar's death. He discussed the condition of important cities of the time but none of his discourses did form the principal focus for urban history. His intention was to show what India was like at the end of the best of the Mughal rule so that it could be compared to the condition of the Indians under the rule of the British in modern times. The result was that in spite of being a primary study of the economic condition of the Indian society in pre-colonial era it failed to become the starting point of a productive form of urban history in India.

In this situation writing on Calcutta is not only to be an effort to restore Calcutta to history, but perhaps, more importantly, also to restore history to Calcutta. A town history for Calcutta became an administrative necessity when the census operations started in India. Thus Mr. H. Beverley, c.s. wrote a history of the city as a part of his Census Report of 1876. In later years A.K. Ray followed suit writing a detailed history of Calcutta as a necessary part of the Census Report of 1901.<sup>9</sup> "It is a pioneer venture in Calcutta study." This is how the book has been rated by historians.<sup>10</sup> But unfortunately the work was never followed by another of its kind. The growth of Calcutta was a phenomenon in urban history and its complexities were seldom analysed.<sup>11</sup> From the coming of A.K. Ray's book down till the end of the colonial era in India Calcutta remained in quest for a sound historian.<sup>12</sup> In course of the rest of the twentieth century a school of urban history did not grow in Bengal or India at large. Seven decades passed since A.K. Ray's history in the Census Report of 1901 before new ventures could be made toward understanding Calcutta.<sup>13</sup> Nearly another two decades more had to go by when a well-documented study of Calcutta's morphology manifested itself.<sup>14</sup>

#### Notes :

1. "As a historical discipline, urban history has always been peculiarly unsure of its own identity. H.J. Dyos, the father of British urban history, described it as a 'portmanteau subject', 'a field of knowledge' rather than a discipline as traditionally defined. Much of the history of towns and cities is written outside the confines of the academy, merging into the genres of 'local history' or topography. Although it would claim a greater degree of historical rigor than such writings, urban history has never established its own identifiable theories

and methodologies, being instead a promiscuous borrower of concepts and procedures from other fields of history and from disciplines of the social sciences” – Martin Hewitt, “Urban History” in Kelly Boyd ed. *Historians and Historical Writings*. Vol. 2(M-Z), Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers, London(Chicago), 1999, p. 1246.

2. “The sense of urban history as a discipline emerged first in the United States in the years around World War II, prompted by the works of Arthur Meir Schlesinger and Richard C. Wade which integrated the city into Turner’s frontier thesis, and thus made cities central to the development of American nationhood” – *Ibid*.

3. India’s estimated population in July 2007 was 1,129,866,154 (one hundred and twelve crores, ninety eight lakhs, sixty-six thousand, one hundred and fifty four). Of this more than 70 per cent of the population live in 5,50,000 (five lakhs and fifty thousand) villages. The remainder lives in 200 towns and cities. India covers 2.4 per cent of the world’s land area but supports more than 15 per cent of its population.

4. “The peoples of south Asia who came under the British colonial rule from the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century had various traditions of history writing. Most accessible from the point of view of the conquerors were the narrative histories written in Persian that chronicled the reigns of Mughal emperors or other rulers. Eighteenth century British scholars eagerly translated such works and indeed commissioned a by no means uncritical history of the transition to British rule in eastern India by Ghulam Hussain Khan, published in translation in 1789 as *View of Modern Times* (modern reprints available). British people also began to write histories to chronicle their own doings in India, Robert Orme’s *History of the Military Transactions of the British Nation in Indostan (1763-78)* being the first of such books.” – Peter Marshall, “India since 1750” in Kelly Boid ed., *op.cit.*, Vol.I (A-L), p.580.

5. Henri Pirenne authored a book titled *Medieval Cities : Their Origins and the Revival of Trade* (1927). This book was based on some lectures he delivered in the United States in 1922. His main contention in the book was that in course of two centuries, from the tenth to the twelfth, Europe recovered control of the Mediterranean from the Muslims. This helped them to open up sea routes to the Orient. This in its turn resulted in the formation of a merchant cum middle class who steadily built up their characteristic abode, the city. From this Pirenne moved to his logical next step. He argued that out of this revolutionary development capitalism originated in Europe and cities became the birth place of capitalism in the continent. Out of capitalism grew democracy, the basis of Europe’s modern way of life. Pirenne’s theory of a commercial renaissance in towns in the 11<sup>th</sup> century had since remained to be the hallmark of standard interpretation of Europe’s rejuvenation and eventual emergence into the modern world.

6. “Even then, institutional formalization occurred only hesitatingly. In North America, an *Urban History Newsletter* was published from the 1950s, eventually superseded in 1974 by the *Journal of Urban History*. But it was not until the establishment of the Urban History Association in 1988 that urban historians could claim an associational base. In Europe it was not until the mid 1970s that the first urban history journals were established, and not until the early 1990s that the European Association of Urban Historians was formed; in Britain, it took 20 years to convert the *Urban History Newsletter* into a semi-annual journal, *Urban History*, and in the mid- 1990s there was still no formal urban history association. Outside

these two continents, although it has been possible to trace an increasing amount of urban history research, little or no progress towards the institutionalization of the discipline has taken place.”

7. “However, as political and purely economic approaches were challenged in the 20<sup>th</sup> century by broader social perspectives, the pre-occupations (and limited sources-bases) of pre-industrial urban history came to be seen as increasingly restricted, despite Pirenne’s attempt to develop a more socio-economic framework for the study of medieval cities. From the 1950s through to the 1980s pre-industrial towns were marginal to urban historians. Only in the 1980s, often through the creation of a new generation of networks of urban historians, such as the Early Modern Towns Group in Britain, were there signs of a lessening of this imbalance.” – Kelly Boyd ed. *Op.cit.* Vol.II. p. 1247.

8. W.H. Moreland, *India at the Death of Akbar An Economic Study*, London, 1920.

9. “The first connected history of the rise and growth of Calcutta was written by Mr. H. Beverley, c.s., as a part of his Census Report for 1876. In paragraph 109, page 36, of that report, he recommended the future historian of the town to draw for his materials upon the domestic archives of the leading Native families in the town, besides official records and the notices of the Eastern travellers. When, therefore, at the instance of the Census Commissioner of India, I was asked last November, by the Deputy Chairman of the Calcutta Corporation, to undertake the task of writing a short history of Calcutta, in connection with the Census Report for 1901, I applied to a great many native Indian families for assistance, besides soliciting the help of Government for the loan of old books, papers and periodicals dealing with ancient Calcutta.” – A.K. Ray, *A Short History of Calcutta : Towns and Suburbs, Census of India, 1901, Vol.VII, Part I*, (published in 1902, Rddhi edition 1982), Preface.

10. Nisith R.Ray’s ‘Introduction’ in A.K. Ray, *op.cit.*, (Rddhi edn.), p.vii.

11. “No other city in India has perhaps evoked more curiosity and yielded more harvest in historical literature than Calcutta. The story of the city has been told over long years. But, on the whole, barring a few exceptions, the process is generally repetitive. They tell the story of how Charnock ‘a block of rough British manhood’ bodily, as if, lifted a city from out of a marshy unhealthy place on the river, how the Settlement grew to be the centre of a mighty empire and a city of palaces, how successive British rulers adorned the city with splendid edifices, on the models imported from their homeland, how the city grew to be the busiest trade emporium, east of Suez, how streets and squares were laid, and above all, how it grew to be the nerve-centre of cultural activities. Behind the entire façade built by the British writers, and following them the Indian authors, there lurks, dim and distant, the shadow of the Indian town in Calcutta and its inhabitants. Not only authors, but artists too, treated the Indian town as out of bounds. The picture which thus emerge is largely that of a colonial city par excellence – exotic and even bizarre.” – *Ibid*, pp. vii-viii.

12. Bombay was more fortunate in this regard. She could meet her historian in 1920 the year when S.M. Edwards published his book *The Rise of Bombay: A Retrospect*.

13. In 1977 was published S.N. Mukherji's book *Calcutta Myths and History* (Subarnarekha, Calcutta) and in 1978 Pradip Sinha's book *Calcutta In Urban History* (Firma KLM Private Ltd., Calcutta)

14. In 1994 was published Soumitra Sreemani's work *Anatomy Of a Colonial Town Calcutta 1756-1794* (Firma KLM Private Ltd., Calcutta)

## CHAPTER 2

A COMPARATIVE UNDERSTANDING OF THE THREE COLONIAL CITIES  
MADRAS, CALCUTTA AND BOMBAY***I. Born in Turmoil***

Calcutta was born in turmoil. It was born in the midst of a war. The English East India Company was engaged in a war with the Mughals which lasted from 1686 to 1690. It was in course of this war that Job Charnock, popularly known as the founder of the city, arrived at Sutanati, a village which eventually formed the nucleus of future Calcutta. Hardly was the war over when a revolt broke out against the Mughals in western Bengal. This was the revolt of Shova Sinha and Rahim Khan which took place in 1696. The English purchased the three villages, Kalikata, Govindapur and Sutanati in 1698. This was when the revolt was just suppressed but its embers were still there. The rebels in western Bengal carved out a state for themselves although it was a short-lived one. This was an eye-opener for the English. They learnt that in India of the time the logic of might provided the most significant source of right. After the revolt the Company was invited by the Mughal Government in Bengal to return to this country. They returned but this time with an advantage. They secured the right to purchase property. They purchased the three villages at a nominal sum of Rs. 1,300 only. Thus within eight years since the termination of their war with the Mughals the English purchased their property in Bengal. The site of Madras was purchased by the Company in 1639. Thus the founding of colonial Madras took place nearly sixty years before the founding of Calcutta.<sup>1</sup> The logic of the foundation of Calcutta and Madras was nearly the same – trade and security. The turmoil of a revolt in Bengal taught the English the lesson that they needed their own foothold in order to escape the blast of state vicissitudes like a war or a revolt. Their trade in Bengal did not assume any great proportion about this time. Therefore acquisition of land in Bengal was not a compulsive urge in their trade aspirations. They were invited by the Mughal provincial government here and they responded with hesitation. But once they did they extracted an advantage from the Mughal government. The western flank of the Mughal government was shattered and the economy of the interior collapsed totally. The war and a revolt left their sequel. A new kind of money-short economy was created. Since the European Companies brought bullion with them the Mughal government wanted to ensure their return at any cost. The price they paid for this was to allow the Company to purchase property in Bengal. Thus the colonial town of Calcutta emerged only as a property of the

English. They began to call this property their 'estate'.<sup>2</sup> Madras and Bombay also began their career as a property of the English. The logic of their growth was the same – security and trade exploration.

The foundation of a property around Madras was a necessity for the English. "Business at Masulipatam and Armagaon was hampered by the exactions of local officials, and experience showed that the piece goods required for export to Bantam and Persia were to be had at cheaper rates farther south".<sup>3</sup> Thus in order to escape the exactions of local officials the English sought an escape into a new territory close to the area from where they could procure their supply of piece goods. In Bengal they were urged not by a motive of escape but by a motive of exploring new fields for commercial expansion. The acquisition of property in Bengal was an adventure. In Madras it was a necessity. "The chief at Armagaon, Francis Day, therefore secured from a local Hindu chief the grant of a strip of land just north of the friendly, decaying, Portuguese settlement of San Thome. The grant was afterwards confirmed by the raja of Chandragiri, the representative of the old sovereigns of Vijayanagar; by it the English were permitted to erect fortifications and the revenues were divided between them and the Nayak. Thus England acquired her first proprietary holding on India soil, and the foundation of the Presidency of Madras was laid. A fort was quickly built (to the dismay of the thrifty directors at home) and named Fort St. George. This gave to Madras its official designation as the Presidency of Fort St. George. In 1647 the district fell into the hands of Golkonda, but happily the English were on good terms with the general, Mir Jumla, and secured his confirmation of their position"<sup>4</sup> The right to construct fort was a unique right which the English were denied in Calcutta till the middle of the eighteenth century. The Bengal *Nawabs* were so sensitive to the construction of a fort by the English on any part of the territory ruled by them that they did not hesitate to put the whole issue to the arbitrament of force in the middle of the eighteenth century. Thus throughout the course of eighteenth century the British mind was bent on securing the same privilege as they enjoyed at Madras namely the right to fortify their own settlement. The result was that the construction of the town was not their immediate objective any time in the first half of the eighteenth century. They settled down to town planning only in the second half of the eighteenth century when the right to fortification and the right to mint coins did not keep them preoccupied. In their immediate pursuits security was an overwhelming end. They always wanted to keep their settlement in Calcutta insulated and free of the spies of the *Nawab*. Beyond this preoccupation they had other incentives. "The destruction in the 1660's of Portuguese and Arakanese pirates, who had infested the head of the Bay of Bengal, by Shayasta Khan opened a new area of

trade to the Dutch and the English. Bengal offered new products such as silk and saltpetre, and trade in these rapidly grew.”<sup>5</sup> The eighteenth century was a century of warfare in India and Europe. Saltpetre was therefore in great demand. The Bengal silk was also a prime commodity in demand in European market. Once the Portuguese were removed from Bengal the entire sea board lay open to British and Dutch adventurers. Now the combination matched British aspirations. The Portuguese were gone and there was none to tap the resources of saltpetre and silk so profusely available in eastern India. In this trade vacuum the English stepped in. “In 1688, however, Sir Josiah Child’s foolish war with Aurangzeb ended in the expulsion of the English. When the Nawab Ibrahim Khan invited them back, they chose not Hughli, the Mughal centre of commerce, but a mud-flat with a deep-water anchorage, the site of Calcutta. As at Madras the choice was dictated by the need for security. There the delta of the evil-smelling Cooum, here extensive swamps, provided protection. So Job Charnock, turbulent, masterful, but ‘always a faithful man to the Company’, doggedly set to work to build and fortify the settlement of Calcutta. In 1696 was built Fort William – so named after King William III – and the Presidency of Fort William or Bengal was established”<sup>6</sup> The vacuum created by the removal of the Portuguese offered space for expansion of the English trade. Trade and arms moved together. Calcutta was purchased in 1698 and the rudiments of the fort were started two years before that. Madras and Calcutta thus shared the same nature in their birth as a garrison town. They were basically fort-settlements garrisoned for the protection of trade.

## ***II. Career Begins as a Property***

Like Madras and Calcutta Bombay also began its career as a property of the English. Originally a possession of the Portuguese it was gifted to the British Crown as a part of the dowry of Catharine of Braganza, Queen of Charles II. “The cession was made by the Portuguese in order to secure English support against the Dutch. A few years later the king, who had failed to appreciate the value of the acquisition, granted the island to the East India Company in return for the trifling sum of ten pounds a year.”<sup>7</sup> It is thus clear that neither the Portuguese nor the British Crown could anticipate the future greatness of Bombay. Operating in south Asia the British mind was riveted on Madras, Calcutta and Chittagong. In Bengal their main attraction was Chittagong and not Calcutta. Throughout the course of the first half of the eighteenth century several times they tried to get hold of Chittagong but they failed. Chittagong had a natural port and was away from Murshidabad, the seat of the administration of the Bengal Nawabs. Moreover from Chittagong they could maintain a watch on the movement of the Dutch operating on the waters of

south east Asia. Calcutta was within the reach of the Murshidabad government and was closely watched but the faujdar of Hughli. Bombay suffered the same disadvantage as Calcutta being within the vicinity of the Mughal seat of administration at Surat. But then Bombay had an unrestricted passage to the sea which Calcutta did not have. The future greatness of Bombay was never anticipated by the Portuguese. Likewise it remained unappreciated by any agency of supreme governance of the British Crown. This was because many people in Europe and elsewhere at that time had a 'misty notion' that the "Island of Bombay with the towns and castles therein . . . are within a very little distance from Brazil".<sup>8</sup> Only the Portuguese Viceroy of Goa, DeMello de Castro, shed tears when Bombay was transferred to the British. In a final letter to the King of Portugal he wrote in January 1665 : "I confess at the feet of your Majesty, that only the obedience I owe your Majesty, as a vassal, could have forced me to this deed (i.e., the cession of the island), because I foresee the great troubles that from this neighbourhood will result to the Portuguese; and that India will be lost on the same day in which English nation is settled in Bombay."<sup>9</sup> Commenting on this Edwardes wrote : "There is something pathetic in this last appeal of the Viceroy, who fully recognised the possibilities of world-greatness which underlay 'the inconsiderableness of the Place of Bombaim' and knew by instinct that his race could never be the dominant power in western India, if once 'the poor little island', as Pepysquerulously termed it, were handed over to the men of England."<sup>10</sup>

### ***III. Removal of the Portuguese: A Boon.***

The removal of the Portuguese from the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal eventually helped the rise of both Bombay and Calcutta. The Dutch had never been the competitor of the English either in western India or in Bengal. Hence the passing away of the Portuguese control over the high seas meant that henceforth the movement of English vessels in the coastal water would be free and unhindered. In the eastern side on the seaboard between Bengal and Madras the English Company could easily build up their link systems. The fact that in the beginning of 1757 Clive could sail from Madras in his mission to rescue Calcutta from the control of the Bengal *Nawab* only shows what benefit the English could gain from the expulsion of the Portuguese from the Bengal scene in 1632. In the west the English gained another advantage which they did not enjoy in the east. The Calcutta possession of the English was under a strict watch from the Bengal *Nawabs* so much so that between 1698 when Calcutta was purchased and 1757 when the battle of Palasi was fought the Company's government was not allowed to add even a small strip of territory to their original possession in Calcutta. This was in spite of the fact that the

Delhi Emperor had granted them by a farman in 1717 fifty five villages around Calcutta. Bombay was free from this Mughal vigilance. The Portuguese had been able to crush the Arab trade dominance in the western seas and in doing that they kept Bombay much removed from a major zone of global Muslim predominance. C.R. Boxer writes : “the Portuguese were able to deprive the Muslim traders of the Indian Ocean of a large share of the trade in Indian textiles and piece-goods, Persian and Arabian horses, gold and ivory from East Africa, as well as from spices from Indonesia, Ceylon, and Malabar. Moreover they extended their carrying trade into the China Sea, where Arab merchants had not penetrated since medieval times, save in insignificant numbers. Voyages between the principal ports in these areas (Macau-Nagasaki; Malacca-Siam; Ormuz-Goa, for example) were much shorter and easier than the long haul round the Cape of Good Hope. Money and goods invested in such ‘ventures’ brought in quicker and safer returns than did cargoes shipped to Europe. The comparative value of gold and silver in India, China and Japan varied in fluctuating ratio which enabled the Portuguese at Goa and Macau to make a handsome profit by acting as bullion-brokers trading in these precious metals.”<sup>11</sup> Within this network of Asian and global trade Bombay was fitted in. Neither Madras nor Calcutta was from the beginning so much a part of the global maritime enterprise in the east. Much of the English enterprise in Calcutta was absorbed in the process of adjustment with the *Nawabs* of Bengal. Madras from the beginning tried to curb out a space for itself in south Indian politics. Thus in the eighteenth century it turned out to be a rear area for the English steeped in territorial and political ambitions in Bengal and in the Carnatic. This robbed both of them of the growth potential Bombay had. In Goa and Bombay and other Portuguese centres of the east the demographic policy of the Portuguese created new techniques of man-power mobilization. “The national militia of Portugal was no basis for the army in India. And while the population of Portugal was actually declining, and while another great Portuguese empire was being opened up in Brazil, forces for India could only be maintained by recruitment in India. Some troops with officers of noble blood did come out in the annual fleets, but in the main reliance was placed in those who had settled in the Indies and married there. Albuquerque, recognizing the strength which such settlers represented, had encouraged mixed marriage. The stubborn resistance of so many settlements to the Dutch, who early became masters at sea, testifies to the valour of the *casados* and their slaves”.<sup>12</sup> As a result of all these a cosmopolitan society was already in the offing in western India. This demographic setting helped Bombay in its later growth. The population of mixed descent was called Indo-Portuguese who Edwards called “a people of Mixed European and Asiatic descent”,

generally speaking, “a degenerate and debased race, ‘the hybrid product of the Union of Portuguese with the native women of low-class, possessing the good qualities of neither’ ”<sup>13</sup> After the cession these men were enlisted as soldiers and subsequently they formed “the original nucleus of the Bombay Army”. Calcutta never had this manpower reserve which Bombay had and in the absence of this reserve Calcutta had to suffer in 1756 when *Nawab* Sirajuddaullah invaded Calcutta and captured it.

### ***III. Challenges of Competition: Calcutta and Madras.***

In Bombay the English were somewhat free from the competition of any western power. In Calcutta and Madras they were not. In both these countries they were challenged either by the Dutch or by the French. Calcutta’s emergence as an English city was made possible by two things. At the beginning of 1757 Chandernagore, the French settlement in Bengal, was destroyed by Clive. In no time Murshidabad and Hugli sank and Calcutta absorbed the glory lost by these two cities. Hugli was a Shia colony and Murshidabad was dominated by the Sunni Muslims. With the going down of these two centres of Muslim culture the emergence of a cosmopolitan Calcutta became possible. The second event which helped the growth of Calcutta in the eighteenth century was its conquest by Clive in the beginning of 1757. It changed the status of Calcutta. It was now a conquered city. It did not give the English *de jure* sovereignty but their mastery was now free from encumbrance. Henceforth the political will of the English could be applied in all matters promoting the city. It was this political will which blossomed into its full majesty under Lord Wellesley who decided that the British empire in India ought not to be ruled from an emporium of commodities for trade but from a city of imperial dignity. This provided the pace for urbanization in Calcutta which was broadly a phenomenon of the nineteenth century.

The British choice to settle at Madras was dictated by their desire to avoid competition from the Dutch. At a very early stage of their coming to the east they tried to settle somewhere in the territories of south east Asia. But their ventures in this direction was baffled by the Dutch. “The English Company had discovered”, writes N.S. Ramaswami, “that south-east Asia was not a good market for its manufactures. Captain James Lancaster of the first voyage had sold iron, tin and lead in south-east Asia and brought spices. But his woollen goods found no purchasers in 1808 the English factors at Bantam wrote to London that there was a big market for Indian calico cloth. A trading centre in India, therefore, became necessary”.<sup>14</sup> Thus repulsed from south-east Asia the

English sought their permanent station in south Asia. Madras or as it was called Madraspatam in those days, was not their first choice. "It was decided that the third [English] voyage [to the east], on its way to Bantam, explore trade possibilities at Aden and Surat. The English faced much hostility from the Portuguese at Surat, but Jehangir permitted them, in 1608, to build a factory there. However, it was not until four years later that they could do so. Their cause was helped by a resounding naval victory that Captain Best, though heavily outnumbered, gained over the Portuguese off Swaly. This was the first blow Portuguese naval supremacy suffered. The Mughals considered naval warfare beneath their dignity and had, in consequence, to put up with Portuguese hectoring at the sea. Sailors of another nation were found who could rout those who had hitherto been invincible".<sup>15</sup> In the west the English factories had been set up at Surat, Agra, Ahmedabad and Broach. This was in 1619 when Tomas Roe returned to England. On the east coast they were still looking for areas where they could properly settle down. They set up a factory at Masulipatam, the greatest trading centre in the south in September, 1611. Yet situations were fluid for them. They were haunted by the competitions from the Dutch. "The Dutch were increasingly becoming aggressive in south-east Asia. The massacre at Amboyna, which rankled in English minds for generations, occurred in 1623. Ten Englishmen and nine Japanese were arrested on the charge of attempting to seize the Dutch fort and murder the Governor, tortured and executed with great barbarity. Amboyna marked the virtual expulsion of the English from south-east Asia. They had only India to look to".<sup>16</sup> The English were moving around. They moved to Petapoli, Armagaon, Pulicat and areas on the Nellore coast. But nowhere could they settle down. Ultimately they found Madras and Calcutta, situated on a linear axis on the seaboard, as places where they could build up their settlements in the east. From here, these two harbour settlements, they could now administer their twin drives, one for territory and the other for maritime supremacy and commerce.

## Notes

1. For details see Ranjit Sen *A Stagnating City: Calcutta in the Eighteenth Century*, Institute of Historical Studies, Kolkata, 2000, pp 2-4
2. For details of this point see Ranjit Sen, *Metamorphosis of the Bengal Polity, 1700-1793*, Ch. 1 & 2
3. J.B. Harrison, *Oxford History of India*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn., 1961 reprint, p. 333
4. *Ibid.* J.B. Harrison, *op.cit.*, pp. 333-334

5. J.B. Harrison, *op.cit.* p. 334
6. *Ibid.*
7. *Ibid.*
8. S.M. Edwardes, *The Rise of Bombay: A Retrospect*, Bombay, 1902 pp. 90-91
9. *Ibid*, S. M. Edwardes, *op.cit.*, p.91
10. *Ibid.*
11. C.R. Boxer, in *Portugal and Brazil*, ed. H.V. Livermore, p. 223
12. J.B. Harrison, *op.cit.*, p. 330.
13. Edwardes, *op.cit.*, p. 97
14. N.S. Ramaswami, *The Founding of Madras*, Orient Longman, 1977, p. 13
15. Ramaswami, *op.cit.*, p. 13
16. *Ibid.*

CHAPTER 3  
 REVOLUTION ON THE RIVERBANK  
 A STUDY OF THE CREATION OF A MANKIND NECESSARY FOR URBANIZATION

**1. The River**

The Ganga has witnessed innumerable revolutions on its banks. Sparks of small revolutions combined to create conditions of big revolutions. The expulsion of the Portuguese from the bank of the Ganga in 1632 was necessary for the effective foundation of the Mughal rule in Bengal and then also for the growth of the British Empire in India with its seat of power in Calcutta. Likewise the breaking up of the French power in Chandernagore in 1757 through English bombardment was a pre-requisite for the creation of Bengal as a protectorate of the English, the nucleus of the future Empire. Between 1632 and 1757 Hugli was sacked thrice (in 1632, 1686 & 1757) and that made the foundation and the consequent emergence of Calcutta as an important colonial town possible. Meanwhile the Mughal Empire in the north broke down and in the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century a line of almost independent *Nawabs* set up their autonomous rule in Bengal. The flow of up-country and central Asian administrators to Bengal ceased. This facilitated the rise of indigenous people and their infiltration into the administration. The Mughal Empire in Bengal set up a new bureaucracy of local origin. Meanwhile there was a very powerful drive to maximize revenue.<sup>1</sup> This arose out of the need both to explore and guard the interior. A new landed aristocracy was created in the process. A new bureaucracy and a new aristocracy thus emerged long before the battle of Palasi took place. After the Palasi new experiments were attempted at by the English. In the process they retained the aristocracy and discarded the bureaucracy. Hastings went into new collaborations – this time with base men.<sup>2</sup> A new service elite was created. Dhaka and Murshidabad sank. The old power elite of the Mughals also sank with them. Now emerged a new money elite a typical representative of which was Raja Nabakrishna. Political revolutions and social revolutions went hand in hand and the result was the creation of a nucleus around which the modern Bengali race could grow.

This was a total revolution in which the Ganga played a very important role. The river provided a line of military mobilization for whosoever had the need of it. It affected an axis for commerce without which Bengal's participation in Asiatic trade would have been difficult. It was an escape route for the Portuguese in 1632 and for the English in 1686 and 1756. But by the eighteenth century it became clear that the incoming power from the west would stay in Bengal and that it had nautical superiority necessary for the management of the sea. The Mughals in Bengal were certainly weak on the

river and the sea. They built a structure of vast land-army but they failed to take the sea and the rivers into confidence. Thus when they tried to drive the Portuguese out of Hugli they brought heavy cannon from Dhaka. The Portuguese in their turn could not hold on to their posts in Hugli because their reinforcements from Goa could not reach them in time. But then the question arises : why did the Mughals fail to establish a proper connection with the river? This may be due to the fact that the Mughals were obsessed with the concept of land invincibility – a lesson they imbibed from the military experiences of Muslim rulers of the past and also of rulers in west Asia. There might be other reasons. The Ganga changed its course very often and they were uncertain about their naval headquarters.<sup>3</sup>

“The river’s fluctuations”, a commentator observes, “remain unpredictable over any short length of the delta. The History of Rajmahal illustrates Ganga’s power over the people of the littoral. In medieval times, the Muslim rulers moved their capital to Rajmahal. In the seventeenth century it was filled with people and every kind of merchandise. Its port was jammed with vessels.<sup>4</sup> Toward the end of the century, the river shifted its course three miles eastward, where upon the government and merchants abandoned it for Dhaka, almost two hundred miles away.<sup>5</sup> During the next century, the Ganges resumed its earlier course, and Rajmahal sprang to life once more. Again, in 1863, the channel shifted further east, and the city became ‘a mere aggregate of huts surrounded by ruins’.<sup>6</sup> In 1880, the river returned to its old bed and the city regained its prosperity.”<sup>7</sup> There is no reason to believe that the English negotiated the river very well. Steven G. Darian writes : “Throughout the nineteenth century, British efforts to maintain a steamer channel from Calcutta north beyond Rajmahal met with repeated failure”<sup>8</sup> Darian’s observations is supported by a surveyor’s report of 1835. It says: “The extraordinary deviations annually occurring in the course of the Ganges, affecting as they did all the streams that flowed from it, rendered it impossible to lay down any fixed rule of guidance or plan of operations by which the navigation of Nadiya rivers could be permanently maintained”.<sup>9</sup> Even at the beginning of the nineteenth century incredible changes were taking place in the course of the Ganga. Writing in 1803 H.T. Colebrook observed : “there are few places where a town, or village, can be established in the Ganges with any certainty of long retaining the advantage of such a situation”<sup>10</sup> Colebrook further reports : “In one part of the channel . . . where I expected to have met with the first shallows, I found from twenty to sixty feet in the very place where there had been a ford but two years before”<sup>11</sup> Then in less than two years’ time further changes took place : “A considerable portion of the main channel, which . . . had contained nearly the whole stream of the Ganges, was

at the time I saw it so completely filled with sands that I hardly knew myself to be in the same part of the river. The sands, in some parts, rose several feet above the level of the stream, and the people had already begun to cultivate . . . rice, in the very spot where the deepest water had formerly been".<sup>12</sup>

L.S. O'Malley who served as a district officer at the turn of the last century vouchsafed the unpredictability of the Ganga's course. He reported that during rainy season the river assumed a devastating form. It could then wash away an acre of land in half an hour.<sup>13</sup> The volume of water rises and sweeps away its banks. On the authority of O'Malley Darian writes: "As to mock its image as an eternal river, some of the islands in the Ganges, become inhabited, cleared, and cultivated; the population increases, large villages start up, the land revenue is collected for ten or twelve years, and then the whole fabric will disappear within one rainy season".<sup>14</sup>

## ***II. The Renaissance***

This was then the river by the side of which the Bengali speaking people grew up in course of the last one millennium. In 1201<sup>15</sup> Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khilji captured Nadia. In 1757 Clive defeated Siraj at the battle of Plassey. During this long period of 556 years Bengal passed through various stages of political development under the rule of the West Asian, East African and Central Asian sultans. During these years Bengal was exposed to inner Asia and her cultural links were established with the core of the Muslim world. Yet this was the age that has been regarded as medieval in Bengal's history. Jadunath Sarkar commented: "On 23<sup>rd</sup> June, 1757, the middle ages of India ended and her modern age began"<sup>16</sup> Therefore, to him the battle of Palasi marked a watershed in Bengal's history. It marked the moment that ushered in a new age. He wrote in a very memorable passage his own feeling about this moment of change : "When the sun dipped into the Ganges behind the blood-red field of Plassey, on that fateful evening of June, did it symbolize the curtain dropping on the last scene of a tragic drama? Was that day followed by 'a night of eternal gloom for India', as the poet of Plassey imagined Mohan Lal foreboding from the ranks of the losers ? Today the historian, looking backward over the two centuries that have passed since then, knows that it was the beginning, slow and unperceived, of a glorious dawn, the like of which the history of the world has not seen elsewhere."<sup>17</sup>

This dawn was the consummation of a process that had been working down the ages which Sir Jadunath summed as the 'Middle Ages' of Bengal. The historian was not unaware of this. He wrote : "Has not Bengal, unknown to herself, been working through the ages to reach this consummation? Her

storied past . . . shows how the diverse limbs of the country and warring tribes and sects of the people were fused into one by the silent working of time and a common political life till at the end of the Muslim period a Bengali people had become a reality. But not yet a Bengali *nation*, for the pre-requisites of a nation were then wanting. Two centuries of British rule and the neighbouring example of British society have now ground down large sections of the Bengali people to that uniformity of life and thought which alone can create a nation. It is for the future to perfect this good work”<sup>18</sup>

Thus the achievement of the Middle Ages is the creation of an articulated existence of the Bengali people. The historian was visualizing a journey from the articulation of a people to the formation of a nation. To this end he wrote: “In June, 1757, we crossed the frontier and entered into a great new world to which a strange destiny had led Bengal. Today in October 1947 we stand on the threshold of the temple of Freedom just opened to us. May the course of the years 1757 to 1947 have prepared us for the Supreme stage of our political evolution and helped to mould us truly into a nation. May our future be the fulfilment of our past history” .<sup>19</sup>

Sarkar’s view was thus clear. What sank in 1757, he thought, was not Bengal’s independence but simply Bengal’s Middle Ages. This means that the British age that seems to have started that year must be thought of not in the immediate perspective of foreign occupation but in a broad and long term historical perspective as a process of growth. Throughout the last one thousand years the Bengali people had been growing and in the process of its growth it experienced foreign invasions, underwent foreign rule and yet maintained their own distinct existence by observing all their abiding ethos. The art historian Percy Brown once said that “the country, originally possessed by the invaders, now possessed them”<sup>20</sup> Bengal was conquered by the Turks, the Arabs, the Afghans, the Habshis but at the end she conquered them all in her own turn. In this story of conquest and reconquest the Ganga played a part. Most of the capitals of kingdoms in Bengal perhaps barring one, Dacca – were situated on the Ganga. Ghulam Hussain Salim<sup>21</sup> says that Sulaiman Karrani found that Gaur’s climate was unhealthy. It was unsuitable for large and growing populations. Hence he transferred the capital to a nearby place called Tanda (the Afghan Capital) which was 15 miles south east of Malda towns.<sup>22</sup> Tanda, Gaur, Monghyr (a temporary capital during the time of Nawab Bir Qasim), Murshidabad, Calcutta were all situated on the bank of the Ganga. The nucleus of empire building and kingdom-formations in Bengal mostly began on the banks of the Ganga. The Indo-Turkish rule in Bengal was based at Nadia, the Mughal rule first at Tanda and then at the moment of rejuvenation at

Murshidabad and the British at the outset in Calcutta.<sup>23</sup> It is because of this that the historian uses the dipping of the sun at the Ganga as a symbol for the passing away of the middle ages.

The Middle Ages in Bengal's history long before its symbolic sinking into the Ganga sent signals of the forthcoming Renaissance in Bengal's history. These signals were transmitted from the time of the Mughal conquest of Bengal. The historian writes : "Mughal conquest opened for Bengal a new era of peace and progress".<sup>24</sup> This peace was the precursor of the English renaissance. The historian adds further : "The renaissance which we owe to English rule early in the 19<sup>th</sup> century had a precursor, -- a faint glimmer of dawn, no doubt, - two hundred and fifty years earlier. 'These were the fruits, the truly glorious fruits, of Mughal peace' "<sup>25</sup>

### ***III. Apprenticeship in Governance***

Thus the renaissance in Bengal was a process of more than four hundred years. How did this renaissance come about? It came through an administrative grinding and religions awakening. "Todor Mal's organization of the State revenue service had forced the Hindu clerks and account-keepers to learn the Persian language, in which all records of this department had henceforth to be written. In Bengal Todor Mal's elaborate land system (*zbat*) was never applied; but ambitious local Hindus and Muslims (of both of whom the mother tongue was Bengali) were now forced to learn the Persian language in order to get some share in the vastly extended secretarial work of the Mughal provincial administration. In Bengal, the State revenue was collected through middlemen or zamindars in the lump (and not as in upper India from the cultivators directly) : hence the accounts were kept in Bengali (the sole language of the peasantry and of the army of local revenue underlings), and therefore, before the Mughal conquest very few Bengalis had any occasion to learn Persian. Under Mughal rule the higher posts in the revenue, accounts and secretariat departments were reserved for Muslims and Hindus from upper India, such as Khatri from the Punjab and Agra and Lals from the U.P. It was only when Murshid Quli Khan established a local dynasty in Bengal that these high posts passed into the hands of Bengalis, many of whom were Hindus well versed in Persian composition. Unlike the independent Sultans of Bengal, the constantly changing subahdars of the Mughal times had no occasion to learn Bengali, and hence the agents (*Vakils*) of the local zamindars at their Courts had to be masters of Persian. Gradually (and notably in the 18<sup>th</sup> century) Persian culture infiltrated from the Subahdar's Court to that of the great Hindu Rajas – such as

those of Nadia and Burdwan. This is best illustrated by the varied learning of Bharat Chandra Ray Gunakar, the Court poet of Nadia”<sup>26</sup>

In the seventeenth century thus the up-country *khattris* and *baniyas* came to Bengal. The eighteenth century was the period of the rise of the Hindu Bengalis. This rise of the Bengalis truly speaking began from the late seventeenth century. The Mughal Empire in Bengal was consolidating itself. After Shova Singh’s revolt in 1696 this consolidation became all the more necessary. The Portuguese had become ineffective in Bengal politics but the age had ushered in new activities for the French, British and the Dutch. Revenue was to be overhauled. The *faujdaris* had to be harnessed. The revolt of Shova Singh<sup>27</sup> could become devastating because there was no *faujdar*<sup>28</sup> to maintain the security of western Bengal. The *faujdar* of Jessore had to mobilize his forces to suppress the revolt. Later on Bengal was divided into innumerable *faujdaris* or military districts. Thus in the eighteenth century there were *faujdaris* at Midnapur, Malda, Hughli, Chitpur, Sylhet, Chittagong, Jessore, Rajmahal<sup>29</sup> and so on. The flotilla was to be revamped and zamindaris had to be readjusted. In the age of the Sultanate the demand for administrative personnel was not so great. “But the Mughal provincial administration was so much more developed than that of the foregoing Sultans and ramified into so many branches with the advance of civilization, that an adequate number of hands could not be imported from upper India, and a large number of Bengalis had to be employed in its middle ranks, and these had to master the Persian language as a qualification for office. Thus Persian literature and a special school of Sufi poetry spread in Bengali Hindu society no less than in Muslim”<sup>30</sup>

#### ***IV. From Trade to Land via Corridor of Power: Creation of the Seat for a New Capital***

This was how a community came to grow on the bank of the Ganga. From the sixteenth century to the nineteenth this community consisting of the people of the Bengali speaking race showed a particular trend of growth. This was a trend from trade to land through the media of power. Towards end of the sixteenth century the Bengalis lost their sea-faring initiatives – their maritime trade ventures to the upcountry people<sup>31</sup> – the people from Rajasthan who gradually formed the most influential capitalist class in the whole of eastern India, particularly in the Bengal *Subah*. The Jagat Seths, the state bankers in the days of the *Nawabi* administration came from this class. Throughout the seventeenth till the middle of the eighteenth century the *sarrafs*<sup>32</sup> who supplied credit to the agrarian world of Bengal came from this stock of

mankind in Bengal. As the Bengalis lost their command over external trade of the country to the people of Rajasthan, they developed their skill in different other directions – first as an effective bureaucracy under the Mughals, then as power brokers in the age of the formation of the British Empire in eastern India starting with the pre-Palasi conspiracy, acting further as native capitalists represented by the *banians*, growing eventually as entrepreneurs under the leadership of men like Ramdulal De and Dwarkanath Tagore, recoiling after the fall of the Union Bank in 1848 as landlords and real estate owners and finally emerging as nationalist agitators at the end of the nineteenth century. In this evolution they helped the city of Calcutta grow as a full-fledged urban settlement comparable only to London.

From the foundation of the Hindu College in 1817 to the upsurge of 1857 there intervened a peace of three decades during which two developments had concurrently occurred on the river banks – an educated Bengali literati grew and native capital selected Calcutta as its seat of accumulation. The second event became the subject of a celebrated book *Kalikata Kamalalaya* by Bhabani Charan Bandopadhyaya. Published in 1823 this book celebrated the rise of Calcutta as a seat of capital formation in the days of the early advent of capitalism in India. The Bengali community that had been assuming shape on the bank of the river turned out to be the early suppliers of capital to the first generation of Englishmen who were busy articulating the configuration of the Empire. N.K. Sinha writes : “So long as the agency houses did not develop, the banians acted as agents and middlemen for the East India Company’s servants and British free merchants”<sup>33</sup> S. Bhattacharya says that they continued to be the suppliers of capital till the middle of the nineteenth century.<sup>34</sup>

The point to be noted here is that a community was steadily growing on the bank of the river that adjusted itself with the twists and turns of the river on the one hand and on the other adapted with its whole spirit with the revolutions of the state and time.

### ***V.A Competent Capitalist Class Diverted from Industry to Land A New Urbanism of Property and Wealth***

Without the growth of this community the rise of Calcutta would not have taken place. Cornwallis was aware that a very competent class of capitalists had grown on the banks of the Ganga who might finance the industrial revolution that was taking place at Fort Gloster Budge Budge. Thus a new competitor of the Industrial Revolution of England was in the offing at the bank

of the river Ganga that could have posed a barrier to the influx of capitalism in India. To prevent this growth he introduced the Permanent Settlement in 1793 thus converting the Mughal zamindars into prototypes of British landlords. He himself confessed : “There is every ground to expect that the large capitals possessed by the natives which they have no means of employing when the public debt is discharged will be applied to the purchase of landed property as soon as the tenure is declared to be secured”<sup>35</sup> Commenting on this N.K. Sinha writes : “He (Cornwallis) gradually closed all other avenues to this class of capitalists who naturally turned their attention to land. This was the ‘new productive principle’ which he brought into operation.”<sup>36</sup>

The Permanent Settlement was thus used as a supportive base for the foundation and growth of Calcutta. Once zamindari became a very profitable unit of property wealthy persons of the Bengali community rushed into invest their prosperity in land. In the first twenty five years of the Permanent Settlement innumerable zamindaris broke down because of large revenue pressures from the state. Their splinters were put on sale so that a very big land market emerged in eastern India in course of the nineteenth century. Splinters of truncated zamindaris became new attractions for Bengali capitalists and as zamindaris proliferated there was a rush among all successful zaminders and merchants in the interior and the city to purchase real estate properties in the city of Calcutta.<sup>37</sup>

This was how a new city grew on new property orientations set by the state. Land legislations and capital deployment thus became two complementary parameters of city formation. The early fishermen and weavers who were the original inhabitants of the city had little potentiality to match themselves with the change of time. The Seths, the Basaks and the Malliks who had once provided the mercantile leadership to the community now gave way to Ram Dulal De on the one hand and Raja Nabakrishna on the other – men who had represented the crest of the Bengali community at the beginning of its colonial ascendancy. In *Kalikata Kamalalay* a visitor from rural Bengal interrogates his urban host as to the new *achara* – the new way of life – the Hindus were practising in the city. The traditional Hindu code of conduct, he argued, had become a matter of indifference in the city. “How is it, he (the rustic visitor) wonders, echoing rumours circulating in the outback, that they all dress like foreigners in Calcutta, eat meals prepared for them by Muslim cooks, drink brandy on ritual occasions, ignore shastric literature published in Bangla, and read nothing other than what is available in English and Persian.”<sup>38</sup>

The Bengali society living in the villages looked with a sense of awe at the changes the urban Bengali society had gone through. The townsman’s

response to the queries of the village guest was a fatuous attempt at self-defence :

“The resident townsman tries to allay these fears as best as he can. Villagers have been misinformed about life in the city, he suggests. Yes; there are some Hindus who have been affected by those new ways, he admits, but by and large the older tradition is still in fact amongst the higher castes”.<sup>39</sup>

The clash of culture was thus manifestly clear. The city of Calcutta was building up a world of new culture where it was said, *Kamaladevi*, the goddess of wealth resided. A temporality had emerged which was commensurate with the ideology of a new urban uplift of the city. Ranajit Guha comments :

“In reassuring his interlocutor thus, he (the townsman) was no doubt voicing the opinion of the conservative elements amongst the city elite, of whom the author was himself a leading representative. But the fact that such reassurance was at all called for is important. It speaks of changing times, indeed of changes indexed in popular perception, with the advent of a new temporality rivalling one that was habitual and sanctified by custom.”<sup>40</sup>

## ***VI. Birth of a Collaborating Humanity***

Man, mind and the city were thus moving as the three clustered parts of one process that was ushering in an urbanity in the eastern bank of the Ganga. Calcutta was not only a city emerging out of the complex of three villages, the human mind of this transforming habitation also changed from the inhibitions of customary social life bred in the bounds of Bengal’s rusticity. From the middle of the eighteenth century mud huts and thatched cottages were giving place to brick-built houses. The change was slow but perceptible. The officers of the company were switching over to Garden houses at far-flung areas of the city. The process started immediately after the battle of Palasi. That was also the time when the Company’s personnel were trying to get rid of their cramped living in a fort-centric existence and were moving much beyond the rampart of the fort called Esplanade to explore new habitations along the Chowringhee. The city was opening its space to absorb a bigger flow of humanity from the countryside. With populations shifting from the villages to the city here in Calcutta business burgeoned to allure more and more men from outside – this time not only from interior villages but also from distant places in the west in continuous stretch along the river. This helped the city to become cosmopolitan. The population of the city thus presented a peculiar admixture – on the one hand it was cosmopolitan because white men along

with Indians of various places and diverse callings got merged in a confluence while on the other men from various strata of life varying from zamindars and rich merchants to destitute workers and domestic menials added to the heterogeneity of the city crowd.

This was the crowd fit to provide the human base for a city to take off. The city regulators in this crowd were the *banians* whose economic solvency placed them at the core of an upcoming mankind that had suffered a metamorphosis. The Bengali race which the city found in its midst at the time of its inception was not a poor humanity. Zamindars, rich merchants, *banians* had settled here with their supportive agency personnel. They formed the upper crust of the society which acted as cushions to all efforts toward urbanization. The colonial city also had at its formative phase a lower human base consisting of domestic menials, construction workers (termed as *coolies* in the records), fishermen, weavers whom the Company's administration had settled in the city and so on. They provided the work force which the city had immensely utilized for its own uplift. These men eventually were kept in native ghettos and slums where they lived as humanity marooned within the structures of affluence around. With all these the composition of the city habitation was changing slowly toward a heterogeneity and cosmopolitanism without which the metropolitan character of the city would not have manifested. It took nearly one hundred years since the battle of Palasi to streamline this population as a composite humanity to be in the service of the city. In the *Kalikata Kamalalaya* the urban entity of the population was still a little shaky vis-à-vis the interrogation coming from the amazed mind of a villager. By the middle of the nineteenth century this phase of shaky confidence was over and the city could switch over to new ethos of life. Ranajit Guha says that the language of *kalikata Kamalalaya* showed elements of "a judgemental, reticent prose still not fully involved in the life of a colonial city at its formative phase. With the phase decisively over by the middle of the century, Calcutta was to celebrate its coming of age in writing adequate to the surge of its urban ethos. Far from holding back, it would spill over into the streets, join the crowds, and defy the over-Sanskritized sensibilities of the literati by adopting the mode of every day speech as its vehicle."<sup>41</sup>

The text which brought the city ethos into literary prominence was *Hutom Pyanchar Naksha* published in 1861<sup>42</sup> – 38 years after *Kalikata Kamalalaya* saw its light. In course of these thirty eight years a revolution had taken place. Persian had been replaced by English as the official language in the country. The language of the colonial masters had now become the vehicle of the new regime. It was both an instrument of dominance and an agency of

persuasion'<sup>43</sup> and was used very successfully to transform a people emerging from their village shelters into the openness of a city life. A powerful international medium of expression English language was transforming a localized people into a mass exposed to global culture fit in their mentality to receive the incoming parameters of capitalism from the west. This was a revolution in true sense of the term. Capitalism from the West came on the crest of imperialism and vice versa and imperialism created its own culture through the medium of its own language.

“As the language of the rulers”, Ranajit Guha writes, “it (English) stood for all that set them conspicuously apart from the mass of their subjects, who spoke only in the local tongues. Yet, at the same time, as the principal medium of an officially sponsored education (which had, by then, come to mean English style education, according to Bankimchandra Chatterjee), it was the means used by the Raj to induce a very small, but affluent and socially powerful, minority amongst the colonized to favour collaboration”<sup>44</sup>

What is significant is that in the first century of British rule in India the people at the riverside transformed itself into a mature humanity so as to adapt its capacity and functions to the role of collaborating promoters of the new age. When a city comes up it requires its human foundation without which it cannot grow. In case of Calcutta the growth of its human potential was indeed a revolution manifesting in stages and perfecting itself with every experience of change.

### ***VII. Trade, Market and Artisan Economy***

In a recent writing the indigenous origin of Calcutta has been traced in some appreciable detail but nowhere in the essay a reference has been made to a riverside humanity which had the potentiality for urban uplift and growth.<sup>45</sup> A wide region in south Bengal, it has been asserted, had been growing with potentiality of markets originating out of long distance riverine and overseas trade. The growth of this trade-based market regions, our author says, had been a phenomenon taking shape between the fifteenth and the eighteenth century. This was the time when the internal and foreign trade of Bengal was being linked to the wider vistas of the expanding Asian trade. Bengal's greatest export commodity of the time was cotton goods and articles of textile. Centring around the Bay of Bengal the coastal and the oceanic trade created conditions for market-based towns in the region. These towns were truly speaking outgrowth of some villages where an artisan economy had begun to predominate over agriculture. Kalikata, Sutanati and Govindapur were three such villages where weavers and their textile yields created momentum for

urban growth.<sup>46</sup> Trade, market and artisan economy have thus been considered as propelling factors behind the rudiments of urban growth that some parts of southern Bengal had been experiencing between the fifteenth and the eighteenth century. This might have created a mercantile humanity who had stakes in trade deployment. Such a mankind has not been credited with attachment to internal governance so much so that in the long run it could emerge as a power-elite transforming eventually into a money elite as it did in the eighteenth century and finally into a collaborating humanity coordinating and cooperating with a new historical paradigm namely empire building. This transformation of a river-side took place when the sleepy world of the traditional interior crashed at the approach of ships, navy, crew of merchants and rush of bullion from the west that had exposed the agrarian economy of Bengal to the winds of global maritime and mercantile changes. Uttara Chakraborty, our author, tried to trace the antiquity of the Calcutta region to a shadowy past – to the time of the Greek treatise *Periplus of the Erythrean Sea*, to the writings of Ptolemy and to Dhoyi's Sanskrit text *Pavanadutam*. With a great stretch of imagination the expression 'Ganga' used by Ptolemy as a port, Chandraketurgarh (Berachampa) thirty five kilometres to the north of present Kolkata and *Badudya* (modern Baduria near Basirhat in the North 24 Parganas) referred to in *Manasavijaya* by Bipradas Pipilai have been clubbed in one running narrative story to indicate the indigenous past of Calcutta and its surrounding region. References to settlements in ancient texts do not provide us with substantial historical evidence about the potentiality of the urban origin of a region. True, lower Bengal being the site of the confluence of the Ganga with the ocean saw the growth of many settlements where trade thrived as potentially functioning factor of growth. In any case with the changes in the course of the river the rise and decline of settlements had been a common feature in the changing history of riverine Bengal. But in no settlement in the past history has witnessed, at any given time, the rise of a community that could act as the human base for an empire. This happened in the region consisting of the three villages of Kalikata, Sutanuti and Gobindapur with territories adjacent and around.

The growth of a community with human potentials necessary for urban growth is a work of history processed through time. The growth of the Bengali community in and around Calcutta was an outcome of history unfolding over the last five or six centuries and culminating into the creation of a people that could perform in a double role as a functioning elite in governance and a collaborating partner in the process of empire-building. The emergence of the Bengalis as a humanity attached to governance was an outcome of the Muslim

rule in Bengal. From the time of Murshid Quli Khan the Bengalis started manning the bureaucracy and consequently they emerged as a power elite sharing governance in the corridor of power. The power elite was essentially groomed as a service elite which being inducted into partnership with the rulers eventually turned into a power elite. As time went on the Mughal rule in Bengal degenerated into a functioning chaos so that the military aristocracy that had always found itself stationed at the core of the Mughal governing system turned out to be a broken reed on which it was difficult to rely. The Indo-Islamic partnership which was so uniquely orchestrated during the rule of the Sultans and the early Mughals came to be distorted and disorganized under the later *Nawabs*.

Hindu Bengalis that had so long manned the administration were now suddenly called upon to balance a precarious Nizamat<sup>47</sup> with the demands of change. Pressing hard on the land and land-revenue system of the country that had already gone to disarray the forces of change had ruined both agriculture and finance of the country.<sup>48</sup> Out of this crisis of governance a Bengali mankind had emerged as the only stable element of human force on which the transformation of the age could find its new foundation. From the time of the Sultans to the time of Murshid Quli Khan's *Mal Zamini* system (1722) this human force had steadily adapted itself to the ethos of governance and the etiquette of the rulers. Away from the military way of life in which the Muslim rulers were so adept, the Hindu Bengalis had developed their own context to grow as a Civilian population uninterrupted in their position as partners to rulers. Some years ago I wrote : "Adapting for centuries to the culture of their masters the Bengalis had learn the art of adaptation very well. Martial vigour was never a curriculum in this art of adaptation. Warfare had never been in their ways. Techniques of battle they had never learnt. The result was catastrophic"<sup>49</sup> In 1905 when Bengal was partitioned the partnership between the state and the society came to an end. The humanity that had evolved over centuries from the community of fisherman to a very powerful makers of a civil society collapsed into an ineffectual house of nationalist agitators. Within a decade capital was shifted from Calcutta to Delhi. The city which was destined to parallel London began to decay.

Notes:

1) For details see Ranjit Sen, (i) *Economics of Revenue Maximization in Bengal 1757-1793*, Nalanda Publication Pvt. Ltd., Calcutta, 1988, and (ii) *Property, Aristocracy and the Raj*, Maha Bodhi Book Agency, Kolkata, 2010, and also see Jadunath Sarker, ed. *History of Bengal*, Vol. II, Dacca, 1948.

- 2) For fuller exposition of the point see Ranjit Sen, *New Elite and New Collaboration, A Study in Social Transformation in Bengal in the Eighteenth Century*, Papyrus, Calcutta, 1985.
- 3) See K. Bagchi, *The Ganges Delta* (Calcutta, 1944), pp. 39-40; Steven G. Darian, *The Ganges in Myth and History* (The University Press of Hawaii, Honolulu, 1978) pp. 135-136, Radhakamal Mukherjee, *The Changing Fate of Bengal* (Calcutta, 1938) pp. 79-80; S.C. Majumdar, *Rivers of the Bengal Delta* (Calcutta 1941) p. 123-124.
- 4) Sebastian manrique, *The Travels of Sebastian Manrique* (London, 1926-27) Vol. 2, p. 135.
- 5) Jean Tavernier, *Travels in India* (London, 1925), Vol. I, p. 102.
- 6) Elisee Reclus, *The Earth and Its Inhabitants*, Vol. 3: *India and China* (London 1884), p. 226.
- 7) Steven G. Darian, *op.cit.*, pp. 136-137.
8. Darian, *op.cit.*, p. 137.
- 9) Hunter, *A Statistical Account of Bengal* (London, 1875), vol. 2, p. 27.
- 10) H.T. Colebrook, "On the Course of the Ganges through Bengal", *Asiatick Researches* 8 (1803): 2 quoted in Darian, *op.cit.* p. 137.
- 11) *Ibid*, p. 21.
- 12) *Ibid*, 20, quoted in Darian, *op.cit.*, p. 137.
- 13) Darian, *op.cit.*, p. 137.
- 14) Darian, *op.cit.*, pp. 137-138. Darian quotes from Observation by Captain Sherwill recorded in L.S.S. O'Malley, *Bengal District Gazetteers : Murshidabad* (Calcuta, 1914) p. 6.
- 15) This date has been given by Dr. Kalika Ranjan Qanungo in Jadunath Sarkar ed. *History of Bengal*, Dacca, second impression, 1972 of the first 1948 edn., pp. 4 & 32, Richard M. Eaton (in his *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier, 1204 – 1760*, OUP, Delhi, 1997, p. 23) gives the date as 1204.
- 16) J.N. Sarkar, *op.cit.*, p. 497.
- 17) *Ibid*.
- 18) J.N. Sarkar, *op.cit.*, pp. 498-99
- 19) *Ibid*
- 20) Percy Brown, *Indian Architecture, Islamic Period*, 5 ed., Bombay, D.B. Taraporevala, 1968, p. 38 quoted in Richard M. Eaton *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier 1204-1760*, Delhi, OUP, 1997, p. 70.
- 21) In his *Riyazu-s-Salatin : A History of Bengal*, tr. By Abdus Salam, 1903, Reprint, Delhi : Idarah-i-Adabiyat-I Delhi, 1975, p. 152.
- 22) See J.N. Sarkar, *op.cit.*, pp. 181-182 & Eaton *op.cit.*, pp. 142.

- 23) The history of Bengal capitals has not been written till date. See Utpal Chakraborty, *Vilupta Rajdhani* (Thw Lost Capital), Amar Bharati, 8-C, Tamer Lane Kalkata 9, 1978.
- 24) Jadunath Sarkar, *op.cit.*, p. 188.
- 25) Jadunath Sarkar, *op.cit.*, p. 189 Akbar defeated Daud Karrani in 1575.
- 26) Jadunath Sarkar, *op.cit.*, p. 223.
- 27) For the revolt of Shova Singh see Jadunath Sarkar ed. *History of Bengal*, Vol.II, *Muslim Period 1200-1757*, University of Dacca (1948), Second Impression, July, 1972, pp. 391-396. How this revolt helped the rise of Calcutta has been discussed in Ranjit Sen, *A Stagnating City Calcutta in the Eighteenth Century*. Institute of Historical Studies, Calcutta 2000, pp. 2-4, 8, 11, 48-50, 56, 89-90.
- 28) For *faujdar*s in Bengal see Ranjit Sen, *Metamorphosis of the Bengal Polity, 1700-1793*, Rabindra Bharati University, 1987, pp. 162-165.
- 29) For Rajmahal see Richard Eaton, *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier, 1204-1760*, pp. 138,148,149,150,167,171.
- 30) J.N. Sarkar, *op.cit.*, pp. 223-24.
- 31) Blair B. Kling, discussed this point in "Economic Foundations of the Bengal Renaissance" in Rachel Van M. Baumer, Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd. New Delhi, pp. 26-42.
- 32) For Sarrafs in Bengal see Ranjit Sen, *Metamorphosis*, 209-235.
- 33) N.K. Sinha, *The Economic History of Bengal*, Vol. I, p. 101.
- 34) S. Bhattacharya in Ch. III, section 2, sub-section I in Dharma Kumar ed. *Cambridge Economic History of India*, Vol. 2, c. 1757-c. 1970, Orient Longman in association with Cambridge University Press (1982) 1984 Reprint.
- 35) Cited in N.K. Sinha, *Economic History*, Vol. I, p. 5.
- 36) *Ibid.*
- 37) This point has been thoroughly discussed in Pradip Sinha in his *Calcutta in Urban History* Firma KLM Private Ltd., Calcutta, 1978, pp. 140-159. There he has given in detail the real estate properties of opulent Bengalis of the time.
- 38) This is how Ranajit Guha paraphrases the queries of the rural interrogator in his book *The Small Voice of History : Collected Essays*, ed. & with an introduction by Partha Chatterjee, Permanent Black, Ranikhet, 2009, pp. 411-12.
- 39) Ranajit Guha, *op.cit.* pp. 412.
- 40) *Ibid.*
- 41) Ranajit Guha, *op.cit.* pp. 412-413.

42) *Hutom Pyanchar Naksha*, written by Kaliprasanna Sinha, has been translated by Swarup Roy under the title *The Observant Owl*, Delhi, Black Kite, 2008.

43) Ranajit Guha, *op.cit.* p. 413.

44) *Ibid.*

45) Uttara Chakraborty, 'Gram Govindapur, Kalikata, Sutanati : Shahar Kolkatar Upakhyamala' (village Govindapur, Kalikata, Sutanati : Anecdotes of City Calcutta) in Saumitra Sreemani ed. *Kalikata Kolkata*, Bangiya Itihas Samiti, Kalkata, 2015, pp. 88-106.

46) Uttara Chakraborty, *op.cit.* pp. 91-92. For understanding the general model of commerce-based towns see Om Prakash, *European Commercial Enterprise in Pre-colonial India*, Cambridge University Press. 2000, pp. 8, 12-13, 18, 21, 22; C.A. Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazars*, Oxford University Press, pp. 55-56.

47) The Mughal provincial administration was divided into two parts – *Nizamat* and *diwani*. The *Nizamat* had two departments – the criminal justice and army. *Dewani* was made of civil justice and land and land-revenue departments. Thus the *Nazim* or the *Nawab* had army but no money. The *Diwan* had money but no army. Hence neither of them could revolt against Delhi. This system of checks and balance was maintained under the Mughal provincial administration.

48) For changes in the Bengal land and land revenue system see Narendra Krishna Sinha, *Economic History of Bengal*, Vol. II, Calcutta, 1968; F.D. Ascoli, *Early Revenue History of Bengal and the Fifth Report*, Oxford, 1917; B.H. Baden-Powell, *The Land System of British India*, 3 vols. Oxford, 1892; Rai M.N. Gupta Bahadur, *Land System of Bengal*. University of Calcutta, 1943.

49) Ranjit Sen, "Anatomy of a Pensive Moment : 1905" in *The Quarterly Review of Historical Studies*, Vol. XLIII, October 2003 to March 2004, Nos 3 & 4.

## CHAPTER 4 GEOPOLITICS OF EARLY URBANIZATION IN CALCUTTA 1698-1757

### *I. Understanding the Nature of Geopolitics*

The selection of Calcutta<sup>1</sup> as a site for the settlement of the English East India Company in Bengal toward the end of the seventeenth century and its urbanization as the imperial city of the east in the eighteenth were determined by geopolitics.<sup>2</sup> The Company's authority from the beginning wanted Calcutta to grow in three major aspects. First, Calcutta was to grow not in its intrinsic capacity as a port town because its potentiality as a port had not been explored then. It was to grow as a garrison town<sup>3</sup> which would provide security to the English factories and trade engagements around and function as an outpost for Madras, the major British centre of power in India and the fort settlement from where a direct and uninterrupted seaboard connection with Calcutta could be maintained. Secondly it was to grow as an English estate insulated from Nawabi interference from Hughli, the greatest of the *faujdari* power centres in western Bengal situated on the other side of the river which also acted as the greatest Nawabi custom house overseeing the sea-bound commerce in southern and western Bengal.<sup>4</sup> A garrison town and an insulated estate with territory and power Calcutta later developed for itself the necessary parameters of a port.<sup>5</sup> This is how the configurations of an imperial town and the future capital of an empire, grew. Thirdly, Calcutta was to grow as a replica of London so as to serve as the effective eastern halt for the east-moving Britons. To this last aspect almost all the governors-general in India up to the revolt of 1857 directed their attention.

The geopolitics of Calcutta's urbanization was determined by two things: the situation around Calcutta<sup>6</sup> of the *faujdaries* of Chitpur,<sup>7</sup> Hughli<sup>8</sup>, Murshidabad<sup>9</sup>, Malda,<sup>10</sup> Balasore<sup>11</sup> and Rajmahal<sup>12</sup> on the one hand and the close vigilance imposed by the Nawabs of Bengal on the activities of the English Company in this part of the country on the other.<sup>13</sup> The Nawabs maintained two watch-posts on Calcutta – one was the *faujdari* at Chitpur adjacent to Calcutta on land on the same bank of the river as Calcutta was situated and the other at Hughli on the west bank of the river just at a site almost opposite of Calcutta easily communicable by river. The result was that the English in Calcutta was almost quarantined. All their attempts to acquire land around Calcutta was

thwarted by the Nawabs and Calcutta could not grow territorially for nearly sixty years since the first acquisition of the three villages of Kalikata, Sutanati and Govindapur in 1698<sup>14</sup>. The English urge to build up their Calcutta possessions as an acquired land-estate failed. An estate was necessary for stationing a garrison and in an age of turmoil a garrison was a pre-requisite for consolidating their commercial position vis-à-vis other European companies and the interference from the *Nizamat*, which was the most dreadful thing to the English. They started building their fort very early in their career in Bengal<sup>15</sup> but that was also interrupted by the opposition of all Nawabs from Murshid Quli Khan to Sirajuddallah. The Bengal Nawabs were determined to impose their prohibitions on the military and territorial ambitions of the Company whereas the latter was adamant not to succumb to the restrictive wills of the Nawabs that would paralyze their potentials for military and territorial growth. The geopolitics of urbanization grew out of these two antithetical forces of the time.

The Nawabs of Bengal were always under the suspicion that under the pretext of urbanizing Calcutta the English Company would promote their fortification. In 1720 a friction arose between the Government and the Company on the score of urbanizing the city. The *faujdar* of Hughli brought to the notice of the Nawab that the English had secretly undertaken some constructions in Calcutta. "The real ground of this complaint", went the English version of the case, "is nothing more than a handsome road we were designing to make on the southernmost part of our bounds, on a direct line so as to keep the country open and clear for levelling of which we were obliged to make a small ditch for the earth which they out of disgust or ill nature have termed an entrenchment though nothing more than what a horse may leap over, this being a general benefit for the free passage of the air through the whole town would have been made at the expense of our merchants etc. inhabitants". The Nawab's fear was that, reports an English consultation, "we were building outworks and casting up trenches round our towns".<sup>16</sup> Under order from the government the Company's administration had to stop the work and fill up the trenches which were dug up. Instead of digging trenches the Company now adopted separate defence measures. It built barracks made of bamboos and straw and this was done, they wrote, to keep 'out guards to secure our inhabitants' and also to 'show the government we are fixed in our defence'<sup>17</sup> This was where the geopolitics had come to play to retard Calcutta's urbanization. The English were in no mood to submit tamely to the caprices of the Nawabs and the latter were in no mood to allow their over-mighty foreign subjects to overshadow their sovereignty.<sup>18</sup> Between these two irascible moods there was no compromise.

In order to diversify their business the Company's administration in the second and third decades of the eighteenth century were trying to open new factories in the interior or to renovate the old ones, particularly at places like Dhaka, Malda, Lakhipur [Lakshmipur] and so on. This caused a drain on the Company's exchequer. The more the Company geared its activities the more was the fear of the Nawabs that the Company was clandestinely extending its enclaves in the country. From this arose the tendency on the part of the Nawabs to squeeze the English so that a part of the profit they reaped from their expanding business might be extracted as a price of the protection they received from the Government.

## ***II. Under Stress of Geopolitics Town-planning Secondary***

The whole attention of the Company's administration in Calcutta was, therefore, riveted not on town planning as a deliberate measure for urbanizing the city but on measures necessary for meeting eventualities. The Company addressed itself to twin aims – commerce and defence so much so that the internal promotion of the city as a place of human habitation suffered. A town-planning required a solvency on the part of the town administration which the Company's Government in Calcutta did not have at this time. The bullion market in Bengal was then controlled by the Jagat Setts and the Company was dependent on the house of these *sarrafs* for the supply of bullion they required for minting money. Moreover the *Setts* were the custodians of the royal mints. The Company was trying to gain an access to the mints outside the control of the *Setts*. This they failed to achieve. Thus in 1724 when the Nawab demanded a huge sum of money from the Company the latter informed the *faujdar* of Hughli that they would pay Rupees 40,000 to the Nawab provided he allowed them a free use of the mint and a permission, to build their house at Hughli and settle their factory at Malda.<sup>19</sup> These were all strategic bargains in the geopolitics of the time. Mint, bullion, factory and commercial houses – all thus became entangled as stakes in issues of governance on the one hand and power, politics and business rolled into one on the other.

The Company's insistence on strategic installations and other security measures including the building of a fort and digging trenches was prompted by three major experiences. The first experience was one of belligerence – the war between the Mughals and the English Company which took place between the years 1686 and 1690. The vicissitudes of the war drove home the lesson that the English were no match for the Mughals in land war. Therefore, they needed to take the sea into confidence and build up a command over the river that provided passage to the sea. The English were still unstable in Calcutta and they needed their connection with the rear command at Fort St. David at

Madras to remain unsnapped. Calcutta having been situated nearly at the mouth of the sea it required building its own capacity to thwart any offensive from Hughli which might take place in the event of a breakdown of relations with the Government. This urge to create in Calcutta an advanced strategic base for Madras left no room for the Calcutta Council to go for a planned undertaking of urbanization of the town.

The second experience which came as an eye-opener to the English was the revolt of Shova Singh in 1696-98. This revolt took place over a vast area of west Bengal including Midnapur, Burdwan and adjoining places. At that time the Nawabi defence in west Bengal was weak. Only one single *faujdar* from Jessore looked over the entire security of the area. Taking advantage of this weakness of the government, Shova Singh, a local zamindar of Midnapur, threw off the Nawabi yoke and carved a small but an independent kingdom for himself. This lesson of might being the logic for justifying action was never forgotten by the English and ever since they acquired their foothold in the Calcutta territories they tried head and soul for promoting their might which, they knew, alone could ensure survival in an age of turmoil. In the early years of its career Calcutta's fate thus became inextricably tied up with this mood of strategic policymaking at the cost of its infrastructural development.

The third experience grew out of a relation of endemic bitterness between the government of the Nawabs on the one hand and the administration of the Company on the other. The Nawabs complained of the routine abuse of *dastaks*<sup>20</sup> by the merchants of the Company while the latter complained about the routine harassment of the Company's agents on flimsy grounds born mostly of greed and suspicion. On one occasion the Council threatened the Nawab that if their men "are plundered in Patna, we will take satisfaction in Hugly."<sup>21</sup> This was the immediate aftermath of the death of Aurangzeb when signs of chaos were visible all round. The Company was under the fear that there would be 'a revolution in the country and confusion in their business.' In April and May the panic ran high. The Calcutta "council ordered all their factors to come back to Calcutta with as much of their effects as possible. All investments by out-factories were stopped. They arranged for the purchase of five thousand mounds of rice and of one thousand mounds of wheat to provide for the garrison. Sixty native soldiers were recruited to guard the town and factory at Calcutta."<sup>22</sup>

The security of the English settlement in Calcutta did not bring any peace to the English. Their interior settlements had not taken shape. In Calcutta the settlement had double functions to discharge. On the one hand it was to act as a forward outpost for Madras while on the other it was to function as the

headquarters for its networks in the interior. Such networks were necessary for their penetration into the hinterlands of the port that was steadily coming into being in Calcutta. Rice, cotton piece-goods, salt, saltpetre, *Chunum* (lime) and timber were to be brought from the sources of their production. At times the interior stations were also used as centres for necessary man-power recruitments – weavers in particular – for the English factory in Calcutta and also for developing the infrastructure of the city itself. That was the time when the English factories at Dhaka, Kasimbazar, Hugli, Malda, Murshidabad, Lakhipur [Lakshmipur], Rajmahal etc. had not gone into their full-fledged operations so that they were still being geared up from their headquarters in Calcutta as its resource-procuring centres at the interior. They also acted as interior watch stations necessary to keep a watch on the activities of the *faujdar*s in the districts. The Nawabi interference was a dreadful experience for the English in the early decades of their settlement in Calcutta.<sup>23</sup> In spite of its occasional and apparent gestures of benevolence the Nawabi Government did not refrain from exercising very harsh sovereign measures on the Company. The invariable tendency had always been to extract money from the foreign traders in order to save the *Nizam*at from an endemic financial crisis. This mentality to fleece traders was partly due to the financial greed of the Nawabs and partly due to their unwillingness to trust a Company that had a few years ago gone into a war with the imperial authority in India and had tolerated clandestine private trade of its employees. The reciprocal fear of each other's activities had been the most abiding factor in shaping the relation between the Company and the country government throughout the first half of the eighteenth century. Fearful of the English might and their intentions the Nawabs seemed to be cautious in allowing the English to proceed deep into the countryside. As a result the English were disturbed that their district stations were not in the shape they were expected to be. Calcutta could flourish only on a growing feed-back from these distant stations where investment would be made for commodity procurements for Calcutta. In 1727, a little before Murshid Quli Khan's death, the Calcutta Council advised the Chief of the Kasimbazar factory to wean over the Nawab with a handsome money tribute so as to get his permission to resettle their factories at Dhaka, Malda and Hughli.<sup>24</sup> In the event of his not complying with the English request it was decided to stop all their business in Bengal.<sup>25</sup> The Nawabs were constantly under the apprehension that the English were defrauding revenue due to the government and hence the practice developed to squeeze out money from the English by imprisoning their agents and putting a stop to their business in the districts. This Nawabi hostility kept the English in a state of alert so much so that through out the first half of the eighteenth century the

authorities in Calcutta found little time to pay attention to the question of promoting the urban uplift of their settlement in the three villages of Suatanati, Govindpur and Kalikata. The task before the Company was great. They had to give shape to formless habitations that grew here and there either as village markets around Sutanati or as hubs of very lowly destitute people like fishermen. This was not the place where a great many rich men apart from the Seths and the Basaks, would like to settle. They had to keep the settlement free of the spies of the Nawabs and keep it insulated from criminals and vagrant Europeans who very often broke the moral fabric of the city life. The security and the upkeep of the settlement were also to be maintained at a level where it could stabilize its role as the core chapter of the British Asiatic trade of Bengal. Thus in the first half of the eighteenth century the English Company in Calcutta had very powerful geopolitical callings which superseded the urge to grow a ramshackle settlement in properly defined urban configurations.

### ***III. Strong Political Will for Urbanization Absent***

Under stress urbanization needed a strong political will to promote itself and that was absent in the first half of the eighteenth century. Till such time as the Battle of Palasi the English mind was upright in satisfying two very strategic needs of the Company – an expansion of territory to create more space on a sprawling and integrated landmass<sup>26</sup> and the acquisition of a ‘consolidated farman ensuring free movement of their trade over the whole country.’<sup>27</sup> As early as 1708 Thomas Pitt, President and Governor of the Fort St. George in a letter to Ziauddin Khan, Lord High Steward of Shah Alam’s Household “urged the necessity of having one document which would remove the impediments in the way of the trade of the Company and ensure for it better facilities.”<sup>28</sup> Pitt articulated the demands which the English wanted to satisfy and none of these demands showed any aspiration for growing the village settlements in and around Calcutta into an effective urban centre. He demanded mint-rights near at home so that the Company’s money supply could improve and ensure the necessary sinews of trade in Calcutta.<sup>29</sup> This defined the basic targets to which the Company directed its efforts from the beginning of their land acquisition in Calcutta. Acquisition of territory, a permission to increase the fortification of the city, a right to commission their stations in the interior and access to mints<sup>30</sup> at their own place – these were all strategic considerations that overshadowed any desire for the urban improvement of the city. In the first half of the eighteenth century the Nawabi administration displayed all signs of an erratic government. The Nawabs’ leniency at the top<sup>31</sup> had always proved to be a feeble gesture for accommodation because at the subordinate levels

hungry officers tightened squeeze on slightest pretexts. To fight this pressure back the Company always had to remain militarily prepared so that all its surplus income from land was drained in extravagant defence measures. Diplomatic overtures from the side of the Company were not absent and they always contained a pack of lucrative fiscal gift to the Nawabs without which they would not move. A tug-of-war between the Nawab's men and the Company's agents on the value and weight of the gift was a regular phenomenon that always kept the Calcutta Council in a state of unmitigated worries.

These were, therefore, the tensions that marked the years of the colonial foundation of the city. Strategic planning was on the forefront. Taking advantage of the chaos the English constructed two regular bastions in the fort. They acted on an empirical logic – “the emperor being dead, and now being the properest time to strengthen our fort, whilst there is an interregnum and no one likely to take notice of what we are doing”.<sup>32</sup> Clandestine efforts of fortification had been a persistent practice with the Company's government in Calcutta up to the year 1756. That year Nawab Sirajuddaullah, in his youthful vigour and impetuosity, tried to stop this practice once for all by invading the city and inflicting a crushing defeat on the English. But the whole action eventually turned out to be a rash adventure without any follow-up measure to consolidate the achievement. In no time Clive came from Madras at the head of a powerful navy, bombarded both Chandernagore<sup>33</sup> and Hugli<sup>34</sup> and smashed the French and Mughal bases on the river so that Calcutta's military supremacy at the mouth of the Bay became ensured for all time to come. Calcutta was recovered from the control of the Nawab and the English henceforth held it not only as their purchased estate as before but also as their recovered power base with its unproclaimed status of a conquered city. The Nawab was forced to sign a derogatory agreement with the English in Calcutta surrendering many a mark of his *de facto* sovereignty to the English. Henceforth none of the important dignitaries of the Calcutta Council or their agents was found to be at the beck and call of the Nawabs at murshidabad. On the contrary the agents of the Nawab shuttled to and fro between Calcutta and Mursidabad to serve the mandates of the English and their governors in Calcutta. The centre of gravity in the geopolitics of the region had shifted from Murshidabad to Calcutta. The age was now ushered in for the proper foundation of a colonial city in Calcutta.

#### ***IV. Calcutta Grows as a Garrison Town***

From 1698 to 1757 Calcutta grew mostly as a garrison town<sup>35</sup> and its fort-centricity was the most characteristic feature of its urbanization. The English were constantly haunted by the fear that the spies of the Nawab would infiltrate into the city in order to keep a watch over the internal development of the city itself. Afflicted by a psychology of scare throughout the course of the first half of the eighteenth century the English in Calcutta had always kept themselves in a state of war-preparedness so that their power to retaliate might not suffer in a time of crisis.<sup>36</sup> Living in and around the fort within a radius of one or two miles the English built up the nucleus of a colonial town not over a sprawling habitation but in a circumscribed area around the modern Chowranghee and Esplanade where the replica of their home city of London was sought to be created. The territory to the south of modern Circular Road was covered with jungles so that the native population could find their living space only to the north of the city itself. Between this nucleus of the forthcoming English town in Calcutta and the settlement of the natives in the north there was a short middle buffer where a mixed population of Muslims, Armenians, Hindus and the Christian converts lived. Creation of this middle buffer was the greatest human shield against any attack of the Nawab from the north. A powerful stronghold of the Nawab was situated at Jessore where a *faujdar* was installed right from the beginning of the Mughal rule in eastern India. From Jessore the land-route to Calcutta ensured a straight and uninterrupted journey through Dumduma [modern Dumdum] and this middle habitation acted as the most strategic human buffer against a prospective onslaught from the Nawab.

This is how the morphology of Calcutta in the early years of its foundation was patterned. Colonial town-growth was essentially shaped only through responses to strategic challenges of the situation. The main concern of the company during the first six decades of the foundation of the city of Calcutta was to build their stamina and strength to retaliate in case of an attack by the country government. What seemed to be the greatest casualty in this situation was normalcy. It was only after the grant of *Diwani* in 1765 that political situations became stable in Bengal. A *de jure* Mughal *subah* became a *de facto* protectorate of the English. The process of this transition was certainly not conducive to growth. Bengal had to wait for another two decades before the planners' dream to grow Calcutta as an imperial city could start realizing itself.

## Notes

1. Calcutta, then a village called Kalikata, was selected with two other sites, Sutanati and Govindapur, villages respectively to the north and south of this central location of the English settlement which eventually absorbed the territory and configurations of habitations and market places of the two villages around to grow in later years as the greatest British metropolitan city in the east.

2. Geopolitics means the use of politics between two or more aspirants of power who aim at controlling territory, harbours, resources and manpower for its or their own aggrandisement on specific calculations of geographical-economic inputs directed toward political ends. When eco-geo factors govern the politics for space we call it geopolitics. "The term was coined by Rudolf Kjellen, a Swedish political scientist, at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Kjellen was inspired by the German geographer Friedrich Ratzel, who published his book *Politische Geographie (political geography)* in 1897, popularized in English by American diplomat Robert Strausz-Hupe, a faculty member of the University of Pennsylvania. Halford Mackinder greatly pioneered the field also, though he did not coin the term of geopolitics." – Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopaedia.

3. It is strange that the urbanization of Calcutta did not rally around a pilgrim spot, Kalighat or *Kalikshetra*. Examples of urbanization around religious centres are not rare in India. But this did not happen in Calcutta. It is equally strange that Calcutta's station as the central administrative centre of the Company and as the capital of an empire did not give it any major Philip toward urbanization. The preoccupation of the Company's government with measures to promote natives as brown men with English tastes, their zeal for social and educational reforms, their continuous efforts to weed out elements of non-acceptance of British rule in the country manifested through innumerable revolts and mutinies, their concern for the health upkeep of their army and finally their involvements in imperial wars did not provide them the necessary fiscal incentive and the tranquillity of a peace-time recess necessary for the promotion of the city as an effective urban centre. This was not only the fate of Calcutta but almost all the major colonial cities in India shared the same fate.

4. "In 1698 the English East India Company received the *talukdari (zamindari* by English version) of the three towns of Sutanati, Govindapur and Calcutta. In 1699 these three places came to be considered by the English as 'a place where the Moors have nothing to do with all'. This sentiment was given a tangible expression in a more incautious phrase 'our dominion in Bengal'. In 1708-09 they called the Calcutta town as a 'settlement of Great Britain in Calcutta'. If the idea was ever worked out that behind the activities of a commercial Company there was the acknowledgement of a vast nation and a country, it lay here. In later years Clive only took this sentiment to its logical end when he wrote to the crumbling *Nawab* of Bengal that the King of England was in no way inferior to the Mughal *Padshah*. Even the Court of Directors asserted that the position of the Company with regard to the Calcutta towns was that of the 'Lord proprietors of the land'." - Ranjit Sen, *Metamorphosis of the Bengal Polity (1700-1739)*, Rabindra Bharati University, Calcutta, 1987, p.40. In the first three chapters of this book this point has been analysed in details. The titles of these chapters are "In Search of Territorial Roots and Military Power", "From Aspiration to Achievement" and "Supremacy Acquired : Sovereignty Anticipated". Also see

C.R. Wilson, *Old Fort William in Bengal*, Calcutta, 1906, Vol. I, p.40. and M Huq, *The East India Company's Land Policy And Commerce In Bengal 1698-1784*, Dacca, 1964, p26.

5. It is wrongly assumed in some quarters that the growth of the Calcutta towns (the three villages noted above came to be collectively known as the Calcutta towns) was associated with the growth of the port itself. In 1690 when Job Charnock, the English agent of the East India Company, chose this spot he had little idea of the potentialities of a small village to grow into a port in future. Calcutta as a village was situated 126 nautical miles away from the sea. It presented difficult navigational problems right from the beginning. There were some undetected sand bars and sharp bends in the river which ships had to negotiate. The Calcutta port really grew when the vast hinterland of the port comprising the present states of West Bengal, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Uttar Pradesh, and the neighbouring countries of Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan with their rich industrial, agricultural and mineral resources came directly under British rule or under its sway in the nineteenth century. The transition of Calcutta into a modern port really began in the second half of the nineteenth century.

6. Calcutta is situated at  $22^{\circ} 82'$  north latitude and  $88^{\circ} 20'$  east longitude, at an altitude 17 feet from sea level, 120 miles from the Bay of Bengal.

7. Chitpur is situated at  $22^{\circ} 34' 11''$  north latitude and  $88^{\circ} 22' 11''$  east longitude. *Faujdari* was a military district of the Nawabs.

8. Hugli is 35 km north of Calcutta. It is situated at  $22^{\circ} 53' 44''$  north latitude and  $88^{\circ} 24' 9''$  east longitude.

9. Murshidabad is about 60 miles north of Calcutta. It is situated at  $24^{\circ} 50' 20''$  north latitude and  $23^{\circ} 43' 30''$  south latitude and  $88^{\circ} 46' 0''$  east longitude and  $87^{\circ} 49' 17''$  west longitude. It is also situated at the southern bank of Bhagirathi, a tributary of the river Ganga. Its former name was Mukshusabad. From some times in the first quarter of the eighteenth century when Murshid Quli Kahn shifted his capital from Dhaka to this place it assumed the name of Murshidabad. Murshid Quli Khan became the Nawab of Bengal around the year 1716 or 1717 and the transfer of capital was effected perhaps after that. According to Ghulam Hussain, the author of *Riyaz-us-Salatin* a merchant named Mukshus Khan was the first man to improve the present site of Murshidabad. In *Ain-i-Akbari* he has been referred to as a nobleman during the last decade of the sixteenth century.

10. Malda was situated at  $42^{\circ} 14' 12''$  north latitude and  $43^{\circ} 47' 49''$  east longitude. Its distance from Calcutta is 170.67 miles (274.65 km)

11. The *faujdar*s of these places very often extracted huge money from the foreign companies, particularly from the English because they were doing a very brisk business in the country. Thus in 1723 the *faujdar* of Hugli demanded Rs. 40,000 from the English while the *faujdar* of Balasore demanded a handsome present for the Emperor. – Abdul Karim, *op.cit.*, p.180. Balasore is situated at  $21^{\circ} 18'$  north latitude and  $86^{\circ} 54'$  east longitude. Its distance from Calcutta is 144.8 miles (233.1 km); by sea 125 nautical miles. Its elevation from the sea is 16 meters or 52 feet.

12. Rajmahal was situated at  $25^{\circ} 3' 0''$  north latitude and  $87^{\circ} 50' 0''$  east longitude. Its distance from Calcutta is 161 km.

13. This vigilance point has been discussed in detail in the following books : (i) S. Bhattacharya, *East India Company and the Economy of Bengal 1704-1740* [London, 1954] Second edition, Calcutta, 1969; the major part of the book deals with this (ii) Ranjit Sen, *Metamorphosis of the Bengal Polity*, Ch.II; (iii) Ranjit Sen *Calcutta In The Eighteenth Century*, Vol. I, Ch. I under the title "Did Calcutta Grow Territorially?" (iv) Brijen Gupta, *Sirajuddaullah And the East India Company 1756-57*, Leiden, 1966, pp.9,35-40,89; (v) Abdul Karim, *Murshid Quli Khan and His Times*, Dacca, 1963.

14. "For about sixty years since 1698 when the *talukdari* of Kalikata-Sutanati-Govindapur was purchased by the Company the growth of Calcutta was almost at a standstill. The aim of the Company was to purchase *talukdari* rights over the adjoining areas so that they could build up a substantially integrated mass of territorial possession around the nucleus of their power. Eventually they succeeded in obtaining the right to purchase 38 villages around their seat of power in Calcutta but owing to the hostility of the Bengal *nawabs* that right could not be implemented in full. In later years when English assistance was invoked against Siraj-uddaullah, the price that was demanded of the members of the Bengal power-elite was the cession of these thirty-eight villages and if Hill is to be believed Scrafton wrote in relation : 'Omair Chand has a very good scheme to purchase as a full equivalent for the 38 villages'. The grant of the *zamindari of the 24 Parganas was in the offing*. In 1757 the Company's *talukdari* of Kalikata-Sutanati-Govindapur came to be merged with the Company's *zamindari* of the 24-parganasi. After about sixty years of standstill the Company's possession began to move" - Ranjit Sen, *A Stagnating City Calcutta in the Eighteenth Century*, Institute of Historical Studies, Calcutta, 2000 pp. 155-56. For further study on the point see (i) "The Company becomes the *Zamindar*" in Firminger's *Introduction to the Fifth Report*, available in *Indian Studies Past and Present*, Ch. IV; (ii) J. Bruce, *Annals of the Honourable East India Company etc.* Vol. III, p. 278; (iii) Moreland *The Agrarian System of Moslem India*, 1929, pp. 19-20; (iv) A.K. Ray, *A Short History of Calcutta*, (1912), pp. 47-48, 55-57 Rddhi edition .

15. The E.I. Company built two forts in Calcutta on the bank of the river Hugli. The old fort was started by Sir Charles Eyre and was finished by his successor John Beard. Sir Eyre built the South East Bastion of the fort while the North East Bastion was built by his successor. The N.E. Bastion was completed in 1701. In 1702 was constructed the Company's factory inside it. The construction of the fort was completed in 1706. The building had two stories with projected wings. It also had a small guard room inside it. It is alleged that this room during the time of Sirajuddallah's raid of Calcutta in 1756 became the Black Hole. This fort was damaged by the Nawab's army when the English vacated it in 1756. This necessitated the construction of a new fort. Clive started this new fort in 1758 after the battle of Palasi. It was completed in 1781. Its estimated cost was approximately 2 million pounds. It had a green belt 3 km. long and 1 km. wide in front of it. This was where the army was drilled. The old fort was also repaired in time with a huge cost. From 1766 onwards it began to be used as a customs house of the Company.

16. Quoted in Abdul Karim, *op.cit.* p 176

17. These reports from the English Consultations have been quoted by Abdul Karim, *op.cit.*, p. 177

18. Sukumar Bhattacharya and Abdul Karim narrates innumerable incidents which show the estrangement between the English Company and the Government on account of English

activities in Calcutta. On a little opportunity the Company would arrogate to themselves what the Nawabs thought were the marks of sovereignty whereas at the slightest pretext the Nawabs would apply pressure tactics to fleece the English in Calcutta. Situations drifted so far that at one point of time when the Company's broker was imprisoned, this being the normal practice at that time, the Calcutta Council taking this to be "an insult that must be attended with the worst of consequences should we tamely bear it", ordered their *vakil* to "declare that if our broker was not speedily released we should seek our own satisfaction." The Nawab's reply to this was that 'though he [the *vakil*] was a servant to the English yet he was a subject and tenant of the kings. . ." - Karim, *op.cit.* p.178.

19. Karim, *op.cit.* p. 180

20. The abuse of *dastaki* was reported and found valid as early as 1705. In March 1705 the Calcutta Council made elaborate rules to prevent the abuse of *dastak*. See Abdul Karim, *op.cit.*, pp. 121-124.

21. *Ibid.* This happened on 3 June, 1707 i.e. immediately after the death of Aurangzeb when everything was drifting in chaos.

22. Abdul Karim, *op.cit.*, p. 125.

23. Sukumar Bhattacharya and Abdul Karim discuss this point in details in their books (*op.cit.*) While Bhattacharya approaches the whole question of the English relations with the Nawabs from a dispassionate angle Abdul Karim seems to be a little sympathetic towards the Nawabs.

24. Sukumar Bhattacharya (*op.cit.* p.29) writes : "The Calcutta Council accordingly empowered Edward Stephenson, chief of the Council at Kasimbazar, to offer the Nawab fifteen or twenty thousand rupees in consideration that the Nawab would be pleased to allow them 'to re-settle the factory at malda, build the house at Dacca and finish the house at Hughli'. The English were unwilling to spend money unless they had some benefit in return."

25. "The Council in Calcutta declared that instead of 'tamely and easily complying with every unjust and unreasonable demand' they would rather put a stop to their investment and all other business" – *Ibid.*

26. The *farman* of 1717 allowed the Company to purchase thirty eight more villages from their respective owners but the permission was subject to the approval of the *Diwan* of the *Subah*. This rider in the permission was cautiously camouflaged by the words "then permission given by the *diwan* of the *subah*." This, writes Abdul Karim, "made the privilege conditional upon the *diwan's* approval". – Abdul Karim, *op.cit.*, p. 169.

27. Sukumar Bhattacharya, *op.cit.*, p. 18. The English urge for a consolidated *farman* had its own justification. Bhattacharya writes: "The fortified settlements at Bombay, Madras and Calcutta had already added to their physical strength. A consolidated *farman* issued by the Emperor ensuring their commercial privileges would clothe them with legal and moral justification to assert their rights, whenever they were violated by the provincial authorities." – *Ibid.*

28. S. Bhattacharya, *op.cit.* p. 18.

29. He wrote :

“As we want the Phirmaund [farman] to be general, I must let you know how matters stand in Bengal and Suratt. In Bengal we have the King’s Phirmaund and Prince’s Nishan with several Nabob’s Perwannas for being custom free in the Kingdom of Bengal, Behar and Orixia upon paying three thousand rupees per annum at Hugly into the King’s treasury, and for our settlement at Calcutta, where we desire His Majesty would be pleased to grant us leave to erect a Mint and to coin Rupees and Mores [ *mohors* or gold coins] with Royal Stamp according to true matt and weight of those coined in his Royal Mint at Rajmall [Rajmahal] which conveniency would very much contribute to the increase of that trade” – Sukumar Bhattacharya, *op.cit.*, p.18

30. The English wanted to mint their coins at Murshidabad but their attempts were foiled by the Jagat Seths who controlled the royal mints during the reign of Murshid Quli Khan. For Jagat Seth’s role in the banking system of the Nawabs see J.H. Little [ed. by N.K. Sinha], *The House of the Jagat Seth*, Calcutta, 1967. It was previously published in the *Bengal Past and Present*, vols. xx-xxii.

31. Salimullah in *Tarikhi-Bangla* (translated by Gladwin, 1788, p.81) says that Murshid Quli Khan was “sensible that the prosperity of Bengal and the increase of the revenues depended upon its advantageous commerce, particularly that carried by the ships from Europe.” But while as a Nawab he “showed great indulgence to merchants of every description, he was jealous of the growing power of the Europeans in Bengal”.

32. Abdul Karim, *op.cit.*, pp. 125-26.

33. Jadunath Sarkar wrote : “the English lost no time. Their land and sea forces moved up against Chandernagore. On 12<sup>th</sup> March, Clive encamped two miles from that town, and on the 14<sup>th</sup> attacked and drove in their outposts”

Chandernagore was really in no defensible condition, though its Director(chief) Mons. Reanult had done all that was in his power, in his utter want of money, men, and trained officers. His garrison was hopelessly inadequate against a European enemy. He had only 247 soldiers (including 45 French prisoners and sick), 120 sailors, 70 half-castes and private Europeans, 100 civilians, 167 sepoy, and 100 topasses or half-caste gunner, -- forming a total of 794 fighting men of all classes”. – Jadunath Sarkar ed., *History of Bengal, Vol. II*, Dacca University Publication (1948), Second Impression, 1972, pp. 483-84.

34. Hugli was invaded as a part of a declared war. Brijen Gupta writes: “On December 30<sup>th</sup> [1756], Budge Budge was taken, and on January 2, 1757, Calcutta was recaptured. The next day Drake and his councillors were restored to authority at Fort William”. On January 3<sup>rd</sup> a manifesto of war was drawn against the Mughal authority in Bengal. It read: “We do hereby on the behalf of the said East India Company and as their representatives in Bengal, in consideration of the several acts of hostility and violence already premised, declare open war against the aforesaid Sirajuddaulla. . . and against the subjects of the said *subah* [Nawab], their cities, towns, shipping and effects, according to the maxims and rules of all nations, until ample restitution be made [to] the East India Company, their servants, tenants, and inhabitants residing under their protection, for all damages and losses sustained by them. . . and until full satisfaction be made the said East India Company for the

charges by them incurred in equipping a large army and marine force to procure a reestablishment of their factories and towns. . ." Brijen K. Gupta, *Sirajuddaullah and the East India Company, 1756-1757 Background to the Foundation of British Power in India*, leiden, E.J.Brill, 1966, p. 92.

35. The rebellion of Sobha Singh in 1696 which rocked the whole of western Bengal secured for the company the permission to fortify Calcutta. For details about the birth of a garrison Town see chapt. 1, "The Birth of a Garrison Town" in Ranjit Sen, *A Stagnating City*, pp. 1-14.

36. A case in point was the conflict between the English and the Nawab at the beginning of 1727. Toward the end of 1726 thy Nawab confined the English *vakil* [agent] in Murshidabad on a charge that Rs. 44,000.00 was due from the English on account of the Calcutta 'towns'. Immediately the Company retaliated. They stopped all Mughal vessels that were to pass by the fort and issued orders for the enlistment of additional forces from among the "Europeans, Portuguese and others as quickly as possible". Situations were so tense that the English refrained from sending their treasures to Kasimbazar and the Nawab thought whether it was wise on the part of the Jagat Seth to send his treasures to Hugli at a time "when the English were plundering boats and ships on the river." – Sukumar Bhattacharya, *op.cit.*, pp. 26-28.

**SCANNING EARLY FORMATIONS**

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**CHAPTER 5**  
**WHO WAS THE REAL FOUNDER OF CALCUTTA ?**  
**BETWEEN TWO PERSPECTIVES**

***I. Was Calcutta Pre-British ?***

***Was Calcutta a Creation of the British ?***

Paradoxically enough the answer to both the questions is broadly 'yes'. Why 'yes' we shall answer stage by stage taking the first question first and the second question second.

Calcutta was pre-British not in the sense that as a town it rose before the advent of the British or its ancestry can be traced to any urban form of pre-British origin. It was pre-British in the sense that it was a part of a region that was going through a metamorphic change since the sixteenth century and was evolving slowly with Hugli at its centre as the successor of the trade-complex of Satgaon. The axis of commerce in south Bengal was changing; trade-settlements were taking a new shape and the habitation pattern was undergoing a vast change. Calcutta, Sutanati and Govindapur along with all other stations in the neighbourhood of Hugli were important points of deflection from Satgaon and they were gaining prominence. Patna, Balasore, Kasimbazar, Uluberia, Chinsura and Hugli – a wide region in the eastern and south eastern course of the Ganga was assuming a new importance with the change of time. The days of Tamralipti were over. Satgaon was on the decline and all trade directions were now moving toward lower Bengal centring in the region around Hugli.

The Portuguese who established their command over the Bay had a knowledge of this change. With their help Maharaja Pratapaditya 'during his transient struggles for independence'<sup>1</sup> built up some forts in this emerging region of south Bengal, mostly around Calcutta stretching over a vast territory from the river Matla at the Sundarbans to Chitpur in modern Calcutta.<sup>2</sup> Thus Calcutta was identified as a strategic place long before Job Charnock set his foot here. Before the English insisted that they should be allowed to build a fort for themselves it was Maharaja Pratapaditya who had cordoned the area with a chain of forts. "These small, mud forts, however useless and insignificant by modern standards", writes A.K. Ray, "were greatly prized in those days for

their strategic value, the river being navigable only by small sloops and boats. Being an island and surrounded by water and within an easy reach of the forts, and being moreover, covered with jungle except on the river bank, Calcutta was at that time a site not to be despised. Even at the dawn of the seventeenth century it had very considerable advantages over other neighbouring riparian towns and villages.”<sup>3</sup>

Calcutta was thus slowly surfacing into the core of a trade area. It was not becoming prominent as a part of pilgrimage zone centring on Kalighat but was considered as a station noticeable on the trade route of sea-merchants. Bipradas Piplai’s *Manasha Mangal* tells us that its hero in course of his journey down the river saw south of Tribeni a series of settlements on both sides of the river starting from Kumarhatta, Halishar, Hughli, Betor, Rishra, Konnagar, Sukchar, Kamarhati, Ariadaha, Ghusuri, Chitpur and Calcutta. Next to Chitpur Calcutta was prominent but not as prominent as Betor before it. This last named place was famous for being the site of an ancient temple of goddess ‘Betai Chandi’ where merchants came to pay homage to the goddess and where they stopped as a temporary halt for their shopping and rest before they would set out on their onward journey. Two things we notice here. First, Betor derived as much prominence from being the site of the temple of ‘Betai Chandi’ as from being a halt station and trade-centre itself. Calcutta’s prominence up till then was not because of being adjacent to the temple of Kalighat but because of its position as a prospective station in an emerging trade zone. It is vital to note that in the whole region there were three temples noteworthy for being pilgrim spots - ‘Betaia Chandi’ temple at Betor, ‘Sarvamangala Devi’ temple at Chitpur and ‘Kali temple’ at Kalighat. Apart from these Halishahar was a holy place linked to Kalighat through a mud-road either running through Chitpur or adjacent to it.

Thus from Tribeni downwards a holy zone of goddess-ridden culture was growing up slowly from the sixteenth century and the whole region was promoted by sea-faring merchants who suffering always from the anxieties of uncertain future tended to propitiate goddesses by worship. It was in this goddess-ridden culture zone that Dakshineswar eventually grew up as a base for mother-worship in the second half of the nineteenth century with Ramakrishna Paramahansa at its centre. The ancient Kalikshetra was situated

in the southern part of his holy worship zone of lower Bengal giving thus this holy zone a mythical ancestry which no pragmatic wisdom could contend.<sup>4</sup> This is one reason as to why Kalighat could not acquire the status which Betor had achieved before. Kalighat was at the southern end of an emerging trade zone whereas Betor was very much within the periphery of a trade-radiation centred at Satgaon. A.K.Ray says, "It was to Satgaon, what Jedda was to Mecca."<sup>5</sup> When Satgaon fell and it ceased to function as the nerve centre for all upcoming and sea-going traders of lower Bengal Hugli emerged as a substitute entrepot for Satgaon. Opposite Hugli there was the pilgrim-line stretched from Kalighat to Halisahar via Chitpur. Calcutta was in the highest ground on the eastern part of the river that found itself comfortably positioned on this pilgrim-line of the east. When Job Charnock arrived at the Sutanati-Kalikata territory of the river bank he had a full knowledge of this. A shifting river-trade and a promising pilgrim zone had a combined prospect for growth around south Bengal. Calcutta mirrored this growth and Charnock's screening eyes did not miss it.

The change of the river course had accounted to a great extent for the creation of a new trade zone in the south. From the sixteenth century 'the great Ganges river system' in Bengal changed its course.<sup>6</sup> Abandoning its main course through western and southern Bengal the bulk of the water of the river linked up with the Padma, the main channel of water in eastern Bengal, and flooded the subsidiary courses there. Long before this had happened a more fundamental change began to take place on the formation of the delta itself. In its original course the Ganga had emptied itself to the sea at a place somewhere around Murshidabad. But the flow of the river was not powerful enough to flush the debris and the silt it carried into the sea. This whole mass thus remained deposited at its mouth forming and enlarging the delta and pushing the confluence of the river with the sea further to the south.<sup>7</sup> This sedimentation not only caused the delta to rise but also changed the distribution of its watermass.<sup>8</sup> "When such sedimentation caused riverbeds to attain levels higher than the surrounding countryside", writes Eaton, "water spilled out of their former beds and moved into adjoining channels. In this way the main course of the Ganges, which had formerly flowed down what is now the Bhagirathi-Hooghly channel in West Bengal, was replaced in turn by the

Bhairab, the Mathabhanga, the Garai-Madhumati, the Arialkhan, and finally the present day Padma-Meghna system”

Thus the change of the river course in Bengal and the formation of the Bengal delta were two concurrent phenomena which created the context of new changes for south and eastern Bengal in subsequent centuries. As the delta was forming steadily the river courses changed correspondingly. The bulk of the water of the river Ganga changed its direction to the east<sup>9</sup> “In 1574”, Eaton writes, “Abu’l-Fazl remarked that the Ganges River had divided into two branches at the Afghan capital of Tanda: one branch flowing south to Satgaon and the other flowing east towards Sonargaon and Chittagong. In the seventeenth century the former branch continued to decay as progressively more of its water was captured by the Channels flowing to the east, to the point where by 1666 this branch had become altogether unnavigable.”<sup>10</sup>

This un-navigability of the western course of the river eventually led to the fall of the Satgaon. Calcutta’s rise was favoured by this. A.K.Ray has given us a real insight into the development.

“At this very moment”, he writes, “nature came to its [Calcutta’s] help. The Nadia rivers began to silt up and a big ‘char’ formed at Halisahar opposite to Tribeni, near Satgaon. This gradually reduced the Jamuna to a narrow nullah. The Saraswati, which was the channel of communication between Satgaon, the great emporium of trade, the chief seat of Government, and other parts, began also to shrink away. A largely increased volume of water came thus to be forced down the Bhagirathi, which deepened and widened it in its lower reaches. The Adiganga and all the khals, jhils and rivulets on the eastern bank of the Bhagirathi that were connected with the river shared the fate of the Jamuna, the Saraswati and the Nadia rivers. They gradually shrank away into tiny little nullahs. The result was the formation of a large amount of alluvial land fit for residence and cultivation.”

Calcutta and its neighbourhood emerged out of the benefits of this new formation. The English in the seventeenth century oscillated between Hughli and Chittagong. But none of these two stations were congenial for the English. Hugli was the headquarters of a Mughal *faujdar*. Chittagong was the playground of the Mags, the Arakans and the Portuguese. With the transfer of

capital from Dhaka to Murshidabad the political and economic gravity shifted from its hinterland which from the fifteenth and sixteenth century was growing as a rice and cotton producing area (called *Kapasia*) centred on Dhaka. The English were moving to Bengal from the west – from Orissa – and not from the east and their direction was toward Chittagong – the original station of their choice. From Chittagong they could move into south-east Asia where the Dutch were curving their zone of influence. At one point of time they even planned to capture Chittagong by force. Later the realization dawned on them that with Madras as the rear area a station in western part of Bengal would be a better position from where they could effectively maintain their control of the sea-board. Such a station would be effective if it was at the mouth of the river. Calcutta and its neighbouring areas adequately and admirably suited to these purposes of the geopolitics of the area.

The point to be noted is that the delta formation in southern Bengal, the changes in the courses of the river and the closing of the animation of Western Bengal all became synchronizing phenomena in the centuries immediately preceding the emergence of Calcutta in the eighteenth century. Yet superseding decay new changes were coming up long before the eighteenth century was ushered in. Because of the drying up of the river system of Nadia, Bhagirathi became the main carrier of the water coming from the Ganga. A.K.Ray observes that this was a blessing for the lower region of the delta. Calcutta was situated in the bank of the Bhagirathi and it was benefited by whatever advantages the Bhagirathi offered it. Recognizing the navigability of the Bhagirathi European adventurers thrust in from the sea. Marks of a new civilization opened up here. New settlements, clearance of jungles, migration of population and brisk business activities – all were crowding in the transitional moments of history of south Bengal. Calcutta and its neighbourhood were one compact area where the spirit of this new change seemed to have been thriving. It was not that the trading companies of the west did not have the knowledge of this. They made their settlements around Hugli prior to the English settled themselves in Calcutta. The Portuguese were perhaps the first among the people of the west to scout the area and it was with their help that Pratapaditya cordoned the area with a series of small forts. Habitations grew and population migration became a regular phenomenon.

“Migration of fishermen and cultivators from the upper riparian regions into these new formations”, writes A.K.Ray, “rapidly followed by that of higher castes, took place as a matter of course. The time was most opportune. Pratapaditya’s independent little kingdom had just been dismembered. A large number of people that had been in his service were thrown out of employ. These included a number of Portuguese (and, it is also said, a few Armenians) who had settled down and built Christian churches in 1559 A.D. They all looked out for ‘fresh fields and pastures new.’ ”<sup>11</sup>

The neighbourhood of Calcutta was thus growing. Kalikata, Sutanati and Govindapur basked in the radiation of this growth and promoters and improving landlords were active in making the land inhabited by people of wealth, industry and dignity.

“And we can imagine”, A.K.Ray adds, “Lakshmikanta Majumder, whose influence with them [the migrating men] during Pratapaditya’s rule must have been great, bringing them away and settling them in the new formations, all of which appertained to his jagir. A number of Brahmins from Halisahar, Neemta, Tribeni and Yasohara known to have come and settled down with their servants in and around Calcutta at this time”.<sup>12</sup>

Immigration to a new habitat was in the logic of things particularly when trade seemed to be booming in the region. The trade boom was the result of an improved navigability of Bhagirathi. All water channels had been shut to trade because of their senility and Bhagirathi was the only course left to trade.

“The improved navigability of the Bhagirathi, and the increasing difficulty of carrying laden boats up and down the Saraswati for purposes of trade with Satgaon, diverted the entire trade of the ‘famous port of Satgaon’, as it was still called from the Saraswati into the Bhagirathi . . . it was here that the Portuguese *galiasses* used to lie at anchor between 1530 and 1569 A.D. It was to control its trade that Rodda, the Portuguese captain of Pratapaditya’s fleet, had caused a fort to be built at Tanna, within sight of it. Since 1540, however, the Portuguese trade was being gradually transferred from Betor to Hooghly, where 59 years later they obtained permission of the Emperor, to build a fort and a Church.”<sup>13</sup>

A region thus developed in course of three to four centuries prior to the emergence of Calcutta as a centre of trade and power in the eighteenth century. Long before the English eyes riveted on this tiny little ground on the bank of the Hugli it had become a witness to the breakdown of the old-world commerce and the collapse of the river-network of trade that centred around Satgaon. In the vortex of change Calcutta became a noticeable locality which traders could spot and use as their station of temporary halt where they could replenish their resources. It was in this sense that Calcutta was pre-British. Its high ground, its strategic location, and its settlement prospects made it an upcoming neighbourhood around Hughli where an enterprising humanity could find its own nest. It was in this alluring milieu of a growing settlement that the English set their feet at the end of the seventeenth century.

## ***II. Was Calcutta Out and Out Colonial ?***

So long as this knowledge was not discovered we were attuned to the traditional belief that Calcutta was the creations of the English. It was founded by Job Charnock and the day of its foundation was 24 August, 1690. The Honourable High Court of Calcutta under the advice of a body of historians passed an epoch-making judgement that Calcutta was pre-British. It has no founder and has no date of birth. Calcutta in the sixteenth century was referred to in Bipradas Piplai's *Manasamangal* and Abul Fazl's *Ain-i-Akbari*. But the Calcutta these texts refer to was a village and not a town or a city. When the English purchased the villages of Sutanati, Kalikata and Govindapur these three places were merely villages. Then how and when was Calcutta urbanized? One thing was certain that it was not a Mughal creation. Nor was it a creation of the indigenous people. Can we then surmise that it was the Armenians who laid the early foundation of Calcutta ? We have no support of evidence to answer this question in the affirmative. Armenians were certainly there in Sutanati and places surrounding it long before the English arrived here. The *Sutanati Hat* which in the eighteenth century was converted into Burra Bazar was a flourishing business centre which was under the control of the Setts, Basaks and Malliks who in course of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century lost their predominance in the *Burra Bazaar* to the Marwaris. As the rich Bengali traders – the Setts, Basaks and Malliks – came

from outside their first effort was to build up their own settlement and their own habitation around the places near Sutanati. Town-building was certainly not within the scheme of things in their new settlement. Traders founding town was not in the Bengal tradition of urbanization. As a result neither the Marwaris nor the rich Bengali merchants were credited with town-building. How was then Calcutta built ? Was it manufactured just the way, as Fisher says, Prussia was manufactured ? Or was it a creation of nature itself? There was indeed geopolitics behind the shaping of Calcutta as a city. But this geopolitics was not the same as the one which shaped the formation of Murshidabad. Dhaka was entirely a gift of nature; so was Chittagong. In this sense Calcutta was not an outcome of the sort of factors which shaped the formations of these two important cities of contemporary east Bengal. Calcutta was Mughal only outwardly. For a long time it was, in all practical sense masterless. That is why during the war between the English and the Mughals between 1686 and 1690 Charnock had the courage to land at Sutanati. The rebellion of Sova Singh had adequately proved that the Mughal rule in Bengal that had its headquarters in Dakha was unable to control western part of Bengal. The nearest *faujdari* in Bengal about that time was in Jessore and from Jessore it was difficult to impose a military control over western part of Bengal. The result was that for a long time Calcutta and its surrounding region in southern Bengal was practically free of definite Mughal control. This control became possible only when the capital of Bengal was shifted to Murshidabad in central Bengal. By that time the English East India Company had found itself entrenched in Calcutta.

Given this, the question arises as to how Calcutta grew and under whose auspices? Here we shall try to answer this question. We shall compare the origin of Dhaka, Murshidabad and Kolkata and will see as to how the process of Mughal town formation differed from that of the British. It should be noted that neither Murshidabad nor Dakha was sea-facing nor were they ports. None of these cities had a back-up rear-area as Calcutta had in Madras. The Calcutta-Madras axis controlled the vast sea-board which even Chittagong could not do. In the contemporary geopolitics this axis had a great role to play. For example it was not possible for the Mughals to control Calcutta even from Murshidabad. Sirajuddaullah failed to do it. Whereas the English ships easily sailed over the sea-board and conquered Calcutta in the early months of 1757.

One reason why Dhaka failed vis-à-vis Murshidabad was that with the shift of *diwani* to that city Dhaka became a capital-short city starved of bullion. The same thing happened when after the grant of *diwani* the gravity of the Bengal economics shifted to Calcutta. Money flowed where the office of the *diwan* was stationed. Thus after Murshid Quli Khan's detachment from the Nawab at Dhaka the latter city became financially lustreless. Calcutta captured the financial glow of Murshidabad when in 1772 and in subsequent years Warren Hastings transferred the entire finance department to Calcutta.

The dynamics of the foundation of the city of Calcutta lies here. It will be idle to battle on the question as to who were the real founders of Calcutta – the British, the Armenians or the indigenous people of the land, the Seths and the Basaks. The founders of the city were impersonal forces – the economics of the situation. The English at the outset had no town planning. They wanted a fortified settlement from where they could conduct their Asiatic trade. Coming after a war with the Mughals (1686-1690) and also in the wake of a rebellion (Shova Singh's rebellion 1696) the British possession of the three villages of Kalikata, Sutanati and Govindapur took the shape of a rough and ready settlement that would serve the dual purpose of a trade centre and a habitation of the English traders and sailors, the factors of the Company and their white servants. The unrest of 1696-97 convinced them that they needed a fort that would provide protection to their trade from zamindari onslaughts. Later on when they faced interference from the Nawabi administration from Murshidabad they wanted to reorganize their fortress as a defence against the aggressions of the Bengal Nawabs.

This is how the fort became the centre of the English settlement in south Bengal. This made Calcutta a fort-centric garrison town. When Murshid Quli Khan shifted his *diwani* headquarters to Murshidabad he did not have defense requirements to be installed in that city. The result was that it could not grow as a garrison town. Thus Calcutta and Murshidabad had a difference in their own status. Calcutta was a traders' city from the beginning which in later years was protected by a fort and a garrison. Murshidabad was simply an administrative city that housed the financial institutions of the government. The status Dhaka enjoyed was entirely different. It was the capital of the eastern part of the Mughal empire right from the beginning. It was where the

Nawab was stationed. It was the headquarters of the *nizamat* – the apex authority of the executive government and criminal administration of the country. When in 1765 *diwani* was granted to the English East India Company the highest office of financial administration in the state came to be located in Calcutta. Nineteen years later when the Supreme Court was founded in Calcutta by the Act of 1773 the *nizamat* authority of Dhaka was appropriated by Calcutta. Calcutta was already centred around a fort so much so that all three institutions of the state, the ministry of finance, the apex court for criminal administration and the army came to be installed in Calcutta. Under the Mughal constitution the *Diwan* controlled finance and had no authority over army. The *Nazim* or the Nawab had control over army and had no authority over finance. The result was that neither the *Nawab* nor the *Diwan* could revolt against Delhi. One maintained a check on the other. This was the Mughal system of checks and balance that was exercised on the provincial administration. After 1765 this system of check was removed from provincial administration and with it a brake was lifted from Calcutta. The functions of the Company as the *Diwan* was now free from all restrictions. The Regulating Act of 1773 was important in the growth of Calcutta. “The Act created the new post of Governor-General of Fort William in Bengal, and a council of four. The Governor-General was given a superintending authority over the other two presidencies and thus Calcutta became the effective capital of British India”.<sup>14</sup> Here was thus a lift in the status of Calcutta. Neither Murshidabad nor Dhaka could ever exercise any authority and claim any jurisdiction over any territory outside Bengal, Bihar and Orissa – the territory which formed one administrative unit under the title *SubehBangla*. But now by the Regulating Act the jurisdiction of Calcutta was extended to the sea coast of both the west and the south. With the extension of the administrative jurisdiction also came the apex judicial authority of the city – another gift from the act of 1773. “In addition (by this Act) the Crown was empowered to set up a Supreme Court of Justice in Calcutta, consisting of a justice and three judges”.<sup>15</sup> with the setting up of the Supreme Court Calcutta acquired an exclusive existence for itself. It appropriated to itself the right to judge the offences of its own residents irrespective of the jurisdiction of the courts of the *nizamat*. Any resident of Calcutta who committed a crime in the territory of the Nawab outside the boundaries of Calcutta could claim exemption from the Mughal criminal

procedures on the ground that he resided in Calcutta.<sup>16</sup> This extra-territorial authority eventually gave Calcutta an exclusive jurisdictional supremacy which no other town in Bengal could claim. This was sustained by diplomatic battles and at the back by a superior military might.

Calcutta shared with Dakha the fame to be a sanctuary of men in distress. When Nadia fell before the advance of Muhammad Khalji, son of Bakhtiyar Khalji, in 1199 or 1202 the old Brahmanical prince Lakshmana Sena 'retired to the neighbourhood of Dacca, where his descendants continued to rule as local chiefs for several generations'.<sup>17</sup> In 1660 Prince Shuja chased by Aurangzeb and his general Mir Jumla fled to Dakha and from there eventually to Arakan where he was killed. Many years later Calcutta enacted the role of Dakha as a shelter of the fugitives. In the middle of the eighteenth century Krishna Ballav, son of Raja Raj Ballav, *Diwan* of Dhaka, reversed the trend of men moving from the west to the east for shelter and himself moved as a fugitive from Dakha seeking asylum in Calcutta. Slightly more than a decade earlier when Maratha invasions swept over western Bengal a wave of panic-stricken populace around Calcutta rolled on into the city while a bulk of less fortunate men moved to eastern part of Bengal for protection and shelter. In acting as shelters for running away fugitives both Calcutta and Dakha became centres of political attention which gave them added weights in contemporary politics. It is significant to note that with the coming of the Muslim rule in Bengal the trend toward eastward movement began. Islam Khan Chisti transferred the capital of *Subah Banglah* from Rajmahal to Dhaka in 1610. In 1717 when Murshid Quli Khan became the *Nawab* of Bengal Murshidabad substituted Dhaka as the capital of the *Subah*. Thus slightly more than a century Dhaka remained to be the capital of the Mughal province of Bengal. Murshidabad maintained its station as the capital till 1773 when Warren Hastings became the Governor-General of the Fort William in Bengal. Thereafter began the transfer of all important official and administrative institutions of Murshidabad to Calcutta and the process was complete by the time Cornwallis dismissed Md. Reza Khan from the position of *naib nazim*, assumed to himself all powers and functions of the deputy Nawab and brought the *Sadar Nizamat Adalat* to Calcutta thus making the *nizamat* altogether defunct. The glory of Murshidabad as the capital of the province was in effect for slightly more than six decades. From the transfer of capital from Rajmahal in the early seventeenth century to the

establishment of the capital in Calcutta in the late eighteenth century there was a period of less than two hundred years when the capital of the province kept on changing from one place to another. Dakha and Murshidabad emerged as a result of a deliberate choice on the part of their rulers. Calcutta grew out of a process of evolution. Beneath the evolution there were exigencies which occasionally burst more as a result of the failure of the Nawabi administration in Bengal than as an outcome of a deliberate effort resembling the foundation of capital in Dhaka and Murshidabad. Somehow or other the geopolitics of Bengal was whirling and the Muslim rule was unsteady vis-à-vis the coming of the foreigners who had dominated the seaboard, established their mastery over trade and built up territorial enclaves in the country. Vis-à-vis Dhaka Murshidabad had no pretension to become sovereign and independent but vis-à-vis Murshidabad Calcutta had pretensions lofty and vast which were sustained by all means available at the disposal of traders – representation, reconciliation and the use of force. Therefore, the emergence of Calcutta enshrined a process of fulfilling pretensions hatched not in moods of indifference but in moods justified by traders' spirit of defending at one point and aggrandizing at other their own interests vis-à-vis the impingement of the Nawabi rule in Bengal.

From the time of the foundation of capital in Calcutta the inner organic units of administration were geared up to take responsibility of bigger administrative functions. The judicial departments were separated from the executive government and modern administrative machineries were brought into force. This helped the process of substitution and eventual subversion of the administrative entity of the old capital. This was done very quickly and very effectively so that in no time Calcutta became the substitute rallying point of an emerging territorial power. The Company was functioning as the *diwan* of the Mughal Empire in Calcutta just the way Murshid Quli Khan had functioned as the *diwan* of the Bengal Subah in Murshidabad prior to the founding of the city as a capital. It was principally because of the efforts of the *diwan* that the two cities of Murshidabad and Calcutta became capital cities in the east. Dhaka was different. It became a capital city because of the deliberate decision of the Sultan to transfer capital from Rajmahal to Dakha. Jadunath Sarkar who charted the course of events of the period wrote: "The transfer of the capital was not the outcome of a preconceived plan on the part of Islam Khan, but

rather the result of exigencies of circumstances. Dacca grew into political and military importance owing mainly to its strategic position. As a result of the prolonged stay of the Bengal viceroy Man Singh (1602-1604) here, a town sprang up round the old imperial outpost of Dacca, serving as the nucleus of the future capital. Man Singh seems to have strengthened the fortifications of Dacca, so that it soon came to be regarded as one of the four fortresses of the Bengal *subah*. The same military and political exigencies attracted Islam Khan as well to Dacca, and his continued residence there finally determined its status. From a military settlement, Dacca became the seat of the civil government, and ultimately emerged as the official capital of the Bengal *subah*, and it also became a busy centre of trade and industries.”<sup>18</sup>

Here in the above description we find the seventeenth century model of urban growth in Bengal. “From a military settlement” to a “seat of a civil government” – this process of transformation was as much marked in the case of Dhaka as it was in Calcutta. Dhaka grew in the seventeenth century and Calcutta in the eighteenth but their experiences of growth had a shared model in which Dhaka anticipated Calcutta. Dhaka satisfied the entire needs of the empire-builders when the Mughal empire was spreading to the east. Calcutta satisfied the needs of empire-builders when the territorial empire of the British was bent on an expanding to the west. Murshidabad’s growth did not properly follow the Dhaka-Calcutta growth model. There the civil government had no need of a fort which was so strongly felt in Dhaka and Calcutta. From 1698 when the three villages were purchased by the East India Company in south Bengal till the 1760s when the present Fort William was erected, the main urge of the Company’s administration in Calcutta was to build a fort so as to protect their commerce. About a hundred years ago in the beginning of the seventeenth century Islam Khan was moved by the same urge to protect his new base of an east-moving power and undertook the construction of a fort. This fort centrality of urban growth was one heritage of town-building in Bengal which Dhaka handed over to Calcutta.

“Islam Khan himself”, writes J.N.Sarkar, “contributed much to the development of Dacca. A new fort was built, inside which a new palace was constructed, no vestige of which now exists, and new roads were laid down, all skirting the river which is at present known as the Buriganga. The defences of the city were

improved by means of two forts made on either side of the point where the river Dulai bifurcated (one branch joining the Lakhiya at Demra and the other at Khizrpur) described by the author of the *Baharistan* as the forts of Beg Murad Khan, and also by means of artificial canals the course of some of which may still be traced.”<sup>19</sup>

Thus as in Dhaka so in Calcutta the fort-centricity of the city was urged by the defence-requirements of the town. The English in Calcutta did not consciously adopt the Dhaka model. They had their own model available in the castle centric growth of European towns. In the west castles were built on hill-tops where as in Bengal forts were constructed by the side of a river with canals surrounding them.<sup>20</sup> When the English built their settlement on the bank of the river there was a creek running adjacent to the site of the old fort moving towards east.<sup>21</sup> Calcutta was thus as much a product of the fort as Dhaka was and its port grew under the shadow of the fort so much so that in later years the fort and the port together built up the supremacy of Calcutta. The fort and its army presented as the force behind the territory-hunting imperial mind of the English. Since the empire was the achievement and acquisition of a mercantile company, its merchant mentality was satisfied by the aggressive proclivity of the port that cast its commercial and utilitarian charm on a vast hinterland outside. Calcutta grew out of the momentum derived from a fort-port complex which itself was enormously self-propelling so that the urban growth in Calcutta went of its own heedless to conscious planning or its absence till such time as Wellesley’s coming to Calcutta. After 1757 the English were certainly the masters of the city but they were not the ones who put their conscious mind in the development of the city. They were not the creators of the city. They were its makers taking much effort to make it an eastern replica of their own city – London.

### ***III. Armenian Calcutta turns British***

Calcutta was thus not a creation of the English. But as a city it certainly was manufactured by them.<sup>22</sup> It was simply a small village when Job Charnock set his foot here and it was as a village only that it got mention in all earlier references.<sup>23</sup> When the English came here, Calcutta, the hamlet which lay between Govindapur and Sutanuti<sup>24</sup> was as ordinary as any other nearby village – Sutanuti, Govindpur, Salkia, Chitpur etc. Since the beginning of the

sixteenth century with the coming of the Portuguese in the Hughli river the importance of the eastern bank steadily gained momentum. Some Basaks and Seth families came and settled at Govindpur.<sup>25</sup> The Govindpur-Sutanuti area ever since gained importance as trading centres.

In 1698 when the English East India Company purchased the three villages of Sutanuti, Dihi Calcutta and Govindpur, these places were termed as maujas in Mughal land records.<sup>26</sup> In 1596 it got entry in the *Ain-i-Akbari* as a small rent-paying village.<sup>27</sup> Thus prior to the coming of the English Calcutta had no importance.

The real importance of Calcutta began when the English consolidated their rule in the three villages of Sutanuti, Kalikata and Govindapur. From the beginning the English had made a conscious effort to organize Calcutta as an area which might flourish in contrast to both Hugli and Murshidabad and might bear the stamp of the estate which was essentially English. To this end Calcutta was made to grow over nearly six decades i.e. from 1698 to 1757. At first Calcutta was organized as a garrison town and the principal centre of trade for the English in eastern India; then it was developed as a centre of administration and finally it was developed as a seat of power. Thus there were three aspects of the growth of Calcutta the first two of which were coextensive and coincident to each other. The effort to build Calcutta as a seat of power only came to take shape after 1772.

It is this part of British achievement in building urban sites which prompted and eventually promoted the colonial belief that Calcutta was founded by the British. To say that Job Charnock was the father of the city of Calcutta is to deny the imperial dynamics which eventually led to the growth of Calcutta. Charnock's arrival here opened the dynamics of Calcutta's growth that remained pent up for long. The excerpt quoted below show how irresistibly the dynamics of colonialism was at work behind the promotion of Calcutta as a city.

“The history of modern Calcutta began on the day Job Charnock stepped down from his boat at a landing place on the river Hooghly. With the English factory in Calcutta as the nucleus, trade and commerce began to expand fast and population multiplied. To facilitate trade and commerce

and to serve a growing population the need for a city administration came to be acutely felt for the construction and maintenance of roads and drains, for building houses conforming to recognized standards of public health and hygiene, for supply water, etc. With the British victory at Palassey the importance of Calcutta was further enhanced, and the people of Calcutta came under more and more tax burdens. Setting up of a municipal machinery for tax collection became an imperative. It was felt that without the active association of the native population with the municipal machinery, raising of the taxes might not be a success. In order, therefore, to reap a higher revenue the British rulers set about the task of democratizing the municipal machinery. In the beginning native response was lukewarm in as much as the local people were as yet unfamiliar with and unused to the methods and modes of self-government. Some years later, however, the situation was radically transformed and the native population became vociferously claimant for greater participation in municipal affairs. The attitude of the British rulers, too underwent a corresponding change, and from the time of Calcutta's Chief Magistrate David M. Farlan's initial experiment in 1833 till the passing of the Calcutta Municipal Act of 1863, the policy of the British over the question of democratization was one of alternate advances and retreats.<sup>28</sup>

From the above observation it is clear that the English did not consciously promote the growth of the city. The inexorable logic of imperialism was operating behind the growth of the town. In this one may say that the English were the unconscious tools of history in exercising themselves for the promotion of this place. There is also another point in this. When we speak of the role of the English in the uplift of Calcutta we forget that the English could not have exercised at all if the Armenians had not helped them.<sup>29</sup> Professor C.R. Wilson wrote in 1895 that during the previous year he discovered the earliest Christian tomb in Calcutta available in the Calcutta Armenian Churchyard. Dated 1630 this tomb gave him some basic enlightenment about the origin of the city of Calcutta. He writes :

“It is gratifying to learn that the efforts which have recently been made by various enquiries and in various ways to push back the history of

Calcutta to the remoter part, before the formation of the English settlement under Job Charnock, have not been altogether without fruit. By slow degrees evidences are being accumulated which tend to connect Calcutta with earlier traders and prove that even before the building of Fort William the place was not without importance. Among such evidences one of the most striking is the discovery which has recently been made by Mr. M.J.Seth, an enthusiastic Armenian scholar, who at the instance of Government has translated a larger number of the classical Armenian inscriptions in the churchyard of St. Nazareth, Calcutta. The earliest inscription runs as follows:

This is the tomb of Rezebeebah, the wife of the late charitable Sookias, who departed from this world to life eternal on the 21<sup>st</sup> day of Nakha in the year 15 i.e. on the 21<sup>st</sup> July, 1630.

What a world of questions is suggested by this newly-found record? Why was this source of information never utilized before, who was the 'Charitable Sookias' and how did his family come to be living in Calcutta sixty years before the advent of the English? Was there already an Armenian Settlement here? *Are the Armenians after all the Founders of the City?*

Upon these considerations our early records do not cast much light, but they supply other equally important information about the Armenians in Calcutta. If they do not enable us to decide whether there was an Armenian colony settled here before 1630, they show that it was through the Armenians that the English colony secured a footing in the country. *If Job Charnock be the founder of Calcutta, the author of its privileges and early security is the great Armenian merchant, Khojah Isreal Sarhad*"<sup>30</sup> [ Italics ours]

The enlightenment coming from the pen of such a great historian as Wilson seems to be significant. It at least settles the point that there was a very flourishing Armenian community living in Calcutta long before Job Charnock set his foot on the soil of this city. The Armenians were important as traders and in the politics of Bengal over many years since the time of the revolt of Sobha Singh they played the role of political brokers. But in spite of all their

importance in politics and trade they could not promote a village into a city. Under them Calcutta was never made a rallying point of politics or a centre of trade as large as Calcutta turned out to be under the English. Calcutta's real take-off in politics and trade was ushered in during the time of the English.

Yet the role of the Armenians in installing the English in Calcutta cannot be minimized. It was the Armenian, Khojah Sarhad – “Cojah Surhand” of the English records – who had mediated between the English and Mughals during the years of crisis at the closing of the seventeenth century when Shova Singh unfurled the banner of revolt. It was the same Sarhad who played the role of go-between between the English and the Mughals during the period of expectation when the Surman Embassy met the Emperor at Delhi. Of this Khojah Sarhad Wilson writes : “He was apparently more successful as a Political Agent than as a merchant”<sup>31</sup> Between 1696 when the revolt of Shova Singh took place and 1698 when Calcutta, Sutanati and Govindapur were acquired by the English the Khojah was the principal door through which the English could maintain their contact with the Mughal authority. An official English record of 5<sup>th</sup> June 1714 said : “It is absolutely necessary that some person who is perfect master of the Persian language and understands our affairs very well, and that may be useful for us, be sent to Delhi along so qualified in both these respects as Cojah Surhand. He is therefore, the fittest man to send.”<sup>32</sup>

Given the political acumen of Sarhad the question that arises is this : why did the English feel the necessity of utilizing the diplomatic talent of Sarhad ? The answer to this question may be given in the following lines:

“ . . . after Job Charnock had settled in Calcutta in 1690 it was deemed necessary to build a Factory with its usual adjunct a Fort for the protection of their emporium and the valuable goods to be stored therein, and for such extensive building, large tracts of lands were necessary, but how were they to acquire the lands without the permission of the hostile Moghul Government which viewed the growth and the expansion of the Company's trade with suspicion. It may be mentioned that the Armenians were the most favoured subjects of the Delhi government at that time and had been held in high esteem by the Mughal Emperors from the days of Akbar downwards for their loyalty

and integrity. The English were not slow in recognizing the worth of the Armenian in Bengal, whose valued friendship they eagerly sought for the furtherance of their cause in the country. There resided at that time an eminent Armenian merchant at Hooghly, Khojah Isreal Sarhad by name, a nephew of the illustrious Khojah Phanoos Kalandar of Surat with whom he had been to England in 1688”.

“The English being aware of the abilities of the Armenian merchant, approached Khojah Isreal Sarhad and requested him to proceed to the Camp of the Mogul Emperor, Azim-ush-Shan, the grandson of the Emperor Aurangzeb, who had come down from Delhi to quell the rebellion of Subha Singh of Bengal towards the end of the year 1697”<sup>33</sup>

Therefore, it was the Anglo-Armenian partnership which led to the making of Calcutta in the early years of the eighteenth century. The real security and promotion of Calcutta began only after 1715 when the Surman Embassy went to Delhi to meet the Emperor and more correctly after 1717 when the Embassy derived a rich crop of privileges for the English in Bengal from the Mughal government in Delhi. Stewart in his *History of Bengal* clearly wrote that “the inhabitants of Calcutta enjoyed, after the return of the Embassy, a degree of freedom and security unknown to other subjects of the Mugul Empire, and that city increased yearly in wealth, beauty and riches.” From 1698 to 1715 was a period when Calcutta was really founded. The entire foundation was made possible by the collaboration of the Armenians.

The role of the English in Calcutta clearly shows that from the beginning they had a definite stake in organising the security of the city. Truly speaking the security which the English provided to Calcutta was one very important factor in the transformation of Calcutta from a village into a city. From Shova Singh’s rebellion in 1696 to the invasion of Siraj-ud-daullah in 1756 through the years of Maratha invasion between 1742 to 1748 Calcutta owed its protection, recovery from chaos and reinstatement to order to the English might. At the time of Shova Singh’s rebellion the English were not in possession of Sutanati, Govindapur and Calcutta. Yet the English used their arms to protect Calcutta vis-à-vis the rebels. “The part played by the English at Calcutta in those events”, say Wilson and Carey, “was subordinate, but not unimportant”. The role of the English have been detailed out by these historians :

“On the 23<sup>rd</sup> December 1696, finding that the rebels, who occupied the opposite bank of the river, were growing ‘abusive’, they ordered the Diamond to ride at anchor off Sutanuti Point and keep them from crossing the stream. They also sent the *Thomas* to the governor of the Thana fort to lie off it as a guardship. On receiving full instructions round their factory, and in January 1697, reported that they were employed in fortifying themselves, but wanted proper guns for the points, and desired the people at Madras to send at least ten guns for the present use. At the beginning of April a neighbouring rajah secretly deposited the gun of forty-eight thousand rupees with the agent for safe custody, and a week or two afterwards the late governor of Hughli honoured Calcutta with a visit. In May, learning that the rebels were all dispersed, they got rid of the band of fifty native gunners which they had raised, but continued building their fort, and substituted a structure of brick and mud for the old thatched house which used to contain Company’s stores and provisions.”<sup>34</sup>

From the above observation it is clear that the English had given status to Calcutta. The “governor of Hugli honoured Calcutta with a visit” only when the English had showed to the Mughals that Calcutta was worthy of recognition by the Mughal rulers. Immediately after this the English accompanied with Khojah Sarhad met Prince Azim-us-Shan and after a little negotiation in July, 1698 “ for the sum of sixteen thousand rupees, the English procured letters patent from the Prince allowing them to purchase from the existing holders the right of renting the three villages of Calcutta, Sutanuti, and Govindpur. The grant, after some delay in order that it might be counter signed by the Treasurer, was carried into execution, and the security of Calcutta which began with the permission to build a fort, was now completely assured . . .”<sup>35</sup>

This, one may say, was the real beginning of Calcutta.

When the English first arrived in Calcutta it was almost an area of wilderness. Everything was unsettled and unorganized. Out of a general situation of chaos they brought order in and around the area. When one says that Calcutta was founded by the English one does not mean that it was set up by the English just the way ancient rulers used to set up cities to perpetuate their names. For the English founding the city meant that it was made habitable by them and its

status was raised before the eyes of the Mughals rulers. Calcutta certainly had no dignity of its own when the English first arrived here. Its dignity was achieved. The English struggled very hard to achieve this dignity and all their later struggles were certainly not for the sake of the area but for the people who lived there. This was all for their settlement. The English wanted an area that would be insulated from the influence of the Mughals. All their struggles were for an insulated settlement and fortunately for Calcutta it fitted in the English map of insulated settlement here in Bengal.

What the condition of Calcutta and its neighbourhood were like at the time of the arrival of the English may be recounted from the annals of historians :

“when the English first came to Calcutta their position was precarious and ill-defined. The land in the neighbourhood being to a large extent wild and uncultivated, there was little or nothing to prevent any body of men that chose from seizing a piece of unoccupied ground and squatting on it. In this way the Setts and Bysacks had, more than a hundred years before, founded Govindpur, and the English, coming to Calcutta with the good-will and probably, at the suggestion of these very Setts and Bysacks, had nothing more to do than to take as much waste land they needed, clear it, and build houses and offices. They trusted that the natural strength of the position would protect them, and that the acquiescence of the government leave them undisturbed in their new home”<sup>36</sup>

From this condition Calcutta grew and it grew under the auspices of the English. The grant of the letters patent by the Mughal Prince gave the English a station in the Mughal body politic. Truly speaking Calcutta owes its origin and growth to this change in the status of the English and historians write :

“The letters patent granted by Prince ‘Azimu-sh-Shan in 1698 changed all this. The English Company gained a definite status in the eyes of the Indian Governors. It became the Collector of the three towns, Sutanuti, Calcutta, and Govindpur. As such it was empowered to levy internal duties and customs on articles of trade passing through its districts and impose petty taxes and cesses on the cultivators, as such it managed the lands and exercised jurisdiction over the inhabitants. The exact relations

of a Collector to the supreme government are a matter of dispute. Ordinarily, we are told, the collector realized the public revenue arising from the land under him, and, after deducting a commission of ten per cent and various other small charges, transmitted the sum to the Imperial Treasury. In the case of the Company this sum was fixed. In short, the Council at Calcutta paid the Mogul an annual rent of twelve hundred rupees, more or less, and was free to tax and govern the place almost as it pleased”<sup>37</sup>

Thus for the first time in history Calcutta got a ruler for its own. Formerly it did not occur prominently in the priority considerations of the Nawabs. The result was that Calcutta did not rise above the status of a very prominent village on the bank of the river Hugli. In the revenue parlance of the time Calcutta was not more than a *mouja*. For the first time the English appointed an officer whose explicit function was to collect the revenue of the village<sup>38</sup> and the Calcutta Council acted as its government thus presiding over the phase which saw the transition of a village to a town. This town was not to be what the Mughals used to call, a *qasba*. Its orientation was different. It has within its midst the seat of a government and for many years the legal jurisdiction of the government did not extend beyond the boundaries of this town. Many years later it was observed “The legal jurisdiction . . . which the Company derive from the charter and acts of parliament, as they now stand, extends or is allowed to extend, only to the town or settlement of Calcutta, and some subordinate factories”.<sup>39</sup> True that at the beginning the English in Calcutta held power “in subordinate to the Mohgals, or Nabobs”<sup>40</sup> But as time went on this power became absolute and was thought of as independent of any other power separate from the Company and superior to it. The Company’s Government in Calcutta became all powerful. Bolts wrote: “ “No warrant or subpoena from the Mayor’s court is permitted to be served on persons, even at the subordinate factories, except with the express leave of the Governor, and in such case this permission is looked upon as a favour”<sup>41</sup>

The power and jurisdiction of the Governor and his government superseded in practice that of the Nawab and when Bolts wrote his book in 1772 he had no hesitation to write about the supremacy of the Company. “But the jurisdiction now assumed and exercised by the Company and their substitutes is, in fact,

entirely unlimited, and without check or control throughout all the provinces called the NABOB'S, of which they collect the revenues"<sup>42</sup>

The importance of Calcutta under the English was this. It gave the English the base from where their majesty was practically built. It was the base of the new government parallel to the Nawab's. Under the Nawab Calcutta was a village, a trade-centre or at best an emerging spot of flourishing community of which the Setts and the Basaks were a part. But now Calcutta was a base of power. Calcutta was urbanized because it was a base of a political and mercantile power. This position of Calcutta was essentially a gift of the English. The English were aware of this and hence their concern for the defence of the city which on all occasions were unique. Bolts wrote:

"The gallant behavior of the inhabitants, free merchants and free mariners, when Calcutta was lost in 1756, and retaken in 1757, may be mentioned as a proof of what we advance. But still a stranger instance of the same kind was given in the year 1759, against the Dutch, when it has not been for the spirited and active behavior of the inhabitants, the Company's military force would not have been able to cope with their enemies. Again upon the rupture with Cossim Ally Khawn, in the year 1763, the European inhabitants of Calcutta were formed into four companies of militia, and properly disciplined for the defense of the settlement, while all the regular troops were sent to a distance against the enemy."<sup>43</sup>

Apart from defence the English gave Calcutta one more thing. This was religious toleration:

"In Calcutta all religions are freely tolerated but the Presbyterian, and that they brow-beat. The pagans carry their idols in procession through the town, the Roman Catholics have their church to lodge their idols in, and the Mohammedan is not discountenanced, but there are no polemics, except what are between our high Churchmen and our low, or between the Governor's party and other private merchants on points of trade"<sup>44</sup>

Thus the cosmopolitan outlook necessary for the growth of a town was first propounded by the English. This outlook helped assembly of people in Calcutta

and contributed towards stimulating the internal unity and cohesion of the population-mix that had not yet taken the shape of a well-defined community here in Calcutta.

From the protection the English offered to the town of Calcutta grew the concept that Calcutta was a creation of the English. Even the Muslim rulers believed that prior to the coming the English Calcutta was nothing but a village and its revenue went to the service of the Kali temple which stood there.<sup>45</sup> In the middle ages Calcutta existed as a village but its importance either as a city or as a pilgrim-centre was not properly felt. At least during the time of Sri Chaitanya Calcutta was not very significant. Even those who are very enthusiastic to prove that Calcutta was a place of ancient reputation have to beat retreat here:

“It is contended by some learned Vaishnavas, that in the Chitayana Charitamirita (Life of Chaitayana), no mention is made of the great Reformer of Bengal having visited Kalighata. Born in 1485 A.D. he flourished in the early part of a sixteenth century. During his peregrination he came as far as Varahanagara, but he never thought of seeing the Kali of Kalighata. As the founder of Vaishnavism, his religious instincts might have repelled the idea of Sakta worship, but it is not unnatural to suppose that if Kalighata for the sake of his beloved mother Sachi, who belonged to the sect of Saktas and worshipped Kali. But this fact cannot be adduced as an argument against the existence of Kalighata at the time. Chaitanya’s travels being spiritual tours for conversion, he was led to go to places where he expected to gain his object, and not merely as a random pilgrim, to place reputed for their holiness only. There may be thousand other reasons to account for his not visiting Kali, or for the non-mention of the goddess in the Chaitanya Charitamrita.”<sup>46</sup>

Even if we accept the view that Calcutta was an important centre of pilgrimage it does not mean that Calcutta’s urbanization was in any way connected with its being a holy place. Seven miles south-east of Calcutta there is a place called Behala. It was the place where Devi Behula was worshipped.<sup>47</sup> This place was under the Savarna Chaudhuri family and in point of importance as a *pitha* [pilgrim-centre] it is compared to Nalhati or the place where Devi *Yasaresvari*

was placed i.e. Jessore. But this place did not grow as an important area where a town could flourish. The point to be noted here is this that for a long time Calcutta was under the sway of a very remarkable zamindar of eighteenth century Bengal namely Maharaja Krishna Chandra of Nadia. As late as the end of the nineteenth century he was referred to as “the Zamindar of Pargana Calcutta & c”<sup>48</sup> What did he do to stimulate the growth of Calcutta? Almost nothing :

“It is stated in the Life of Krishna Chandra that he was the constant companion of Aliverdi Khan (Muhabat Jang), and that during his trips on the river he used to read and explain the Mahabharata to him. It is also said that he succeeded in obtaining from the Nawab a remission of arrears of revenue due from him to the amount of fifty-two lakhs or so, by cleverly taking, on one of these river trips, the Nawab’s party on shore on the northern side of Calcutta, where there were settlements, and leading the Nawab on towards the south, where, in the distant thickets and woods, the roar of the tiger was heard, and wild elephants were seen, pointing to him the nature of his Zamindari, and the obvious reasons of his having been a defaulter. Such a favourite of the Nawab could not but have obtained from his concessions in favour of the Kali shrine”<sup>49</sup>

From the above observation it is clear that Calcutta under the native zamindars did not grow very much. Nor did it grow effectively as a religious place. Some believe that the importance of Kalighat grew only in the eighteenth century when the English had set Calcutta on the orbit of urbanization. Thus the urbanization of Calcutta helped Kalighat grow. This meant that the growth of Kalighat as a pilgrim centre was a later phenomenon and cannot be adduced as a factor helping the growth of Calcutta as an urban centre.<sup>50</sup> Tradition says that the image of Kali as worshipped in Kalighat was first worshipped by

“A Sevayet Sannyasi, one of the Dasanamis, who had become a follower of the tenets of Yogi Chaurangi and Jangal Gur [Giri] by name . . .”<sup>51</sup> The reason why Jangal Gur Chaurangi selected this site on the confines of Govindpur for the establishment of his Tirtha is apparent. Although situated in a belt of jungle, infested as it was at the time, with all kinds of wild beast, he saw that he and his goddess would be within the search of

human aid. He looked to the then few inhabitants of Govindpur for his maintenance and that of this goddess".<sup>52</sup>

This meant that the prospect of habitation in Calcutta-Govindapur area prior to the coming of the English was extremely bleak. The temple of Kali, a pilgrim centre, from very ancient times, did not succeed in organizing habitation around it. Its pull factors were weak and population did not veer around it. In this condition the possibility of Calcutta taking to urbanization with Kalighat as its rallying point does not seem to be a reasonable proposition. The true urbanization of Calcutta began in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century and the credit of commissioning the three villages to urbanization goes really to the rule of the English East India Company in Bengal.<sup>53</sup>

#### Notes :

1. A.K.Ray, *A Short History of Calcutta*, p. 29
2. Relying on Harprasad Sastri's *Pratapaditya*, A.K.Ray identifies the places where the forts were built to be as follows; the first fort at Mutlah [banks of the river Matla in modern Canning], the second at Raigarh [Garden Reach], the third at Behala, the fourth at Tanna [Thana slightly away from Garden Reach], the fifth at Sulkea [Salkia in modern Howrah district], the sixth at Chitpur [in modern Kolkata] and the seventh at Atpur [near Mulajor] – *ibid.*
3. A.K.Ray, *op.cit.*, pp. 29-30
4. "Kalikshetra, the land of the legend, 'extending from Dakshineswar on the north to Bahula on the south' was according to Hindu tradition, valuable enough in the time of King Vallala of Gaur to have constituted a royal gift to a Brhamin family" – A.K.Ray, *op.cit.*, p. 17
5. A.K.Ray, *op.cit.*, p. 18
6. This was a subject of discussion in the first four decades of the twentieth century and has been ably analysed in the following works : R.K. Mukherjee, *The Changing Face of Bengal : A Study of Riverine Economy*, Calcutta, University of Calcutta, 1938, pp. 3-10 and S.C. Majumdar, *Rivers of the Bengal Delta*, Calcutta, University of Calcutta, 1942, pp. 65-72.
7. For detail see Richard M. Eaton, *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier 1204-1760*, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1997, Ch. 8, pp. 194-198.

8. This point has been discussed in W.H. Arden Wood, "Rivers and Man in the Indus-Ganges Alluvial Plain", *Scottish Geographical Magazine* 40, No. 1, 1924, pp. 9-10 and C. Strickland, *Deltaic Formation, with Special Reference to the Hydrographic Processes of the Ganges and the Brahmaputra*, Calcutta Longmans, Green, 1940, p. 104.

9. While detailing out the changes in the courses of the river Kanangopal Bagchi writes: "When the distributaries in the west were active, those in the east were perhaps in their infancy, and as the rivers to the east were adolecing, those in the west became senile. The active stage of delta formation thus migrated south-eastwards in time and space, leaving the rivers in the old delta, now represented by Murshidabad, Nadia and Jessore with the Goalundo Sub-Division of Faridpur, to languish or decay." – Bagchi, *Ganges Delta*, Calcutta, University of Calcutta, 1944, p. 58. For further information read N.D. Bhattacharya, "Changing Course of the Padma and Human Settlements", *National Geographic Journal of India*, No. 1 and 2, March-June 1978, pp. 63-65.

10. Eaton, *op.cit.*, p. 198

11. A.K. Ray, *op.cit.*, p.30

12 *Ibid.*

13. A.K.Ray, *op.cit.*, pp. 30-31.

14. Percival Spear ed. *The Oxford History of India* by the Late Vincent A.Smith Third. Edn. Part III, Oxford at the Clarendon Press, (1958) Reprint 1961, p. 504.

15. *Ibid.*

16. The conflict between the *Nawabi* government and the English in Calcutta on jurisdiction over criminals began during the rule of Murshid Quli Khan and it reached its climax at the time of Sirajuddaullah when Krisnaballav [alias Krishnadas, son of Raja Raybalav of Dhaka] escaped from Dhaka with a huge treasure to Calcutta and the English refused to hand him over to the *Nawab*.

17. J.B. Harrison in Percival Spear ed. *op.cit.*, p. 236

18. J.N.Sarkar *History of Bengal*, Vol. II, p. 283.

19. J.N. Sarkar, *op.cit.*, pp. 283-84.

20. The fort centricity of Calcutta has been discussed in Pradip Sinha, *Calcutta in Urban History*, Firma KLM Private Ltd., Calcutta, 1978, Ch. 1 & 2.

21. The Creek Row, a long lane in central Calcutta, still carries the old memory of the creek.

22. It is said that Charnock landed here on 24<sup>th</sup> August, 1690. Some suggest that it was the famous Baithak-Khana tree 'whose shade captivated the venerable Charnock' and he landed

here for rest. His contemporaries frequently assumed that a more unsuitable site for landing and for a great city could not have been found. Subsequent developments and modern opinion vindicated the judgment.

23. “. . . literary references to Calcutta and Kalighat is found as early as 1495 A.D. , in a poem written by the Bengali, Bipradas” -- W.W. Goode, *Municipal Calcutta Its Institutions In their Origin And Growth*, Edinburgh, 1916, p. 3.

24. *Ibid.*

25. “With the advent of the Portuguese at the beginning of the sixteenth century, the light of history falls across the Hughli. At Betor, by the site of the modern Sibpur, the foreigners carried on a brisk trade, while five Bengali families [four Byzacks and one family of Setts] broke, as their family archives show, new ground on the east bank of the Hughli, with the settlement of Govindpur, South of the modern Chowringhee” – *Ibid.*

26. The territory over which the Company assumed control was about 5077 bighas, or 1692 acres in area, comprising roughly the land between the river and the Salt Lakes, from Govindpur to Sutanuti. These limits of course included a much larger area than 5077 bighas” – Goode, *op.cit.*, p. 4.

27. The entry was under the title ‘Kalikata’

28. Keshab Chaudhuri, *Calcutta : Story of its Government*, 1973, p.3.

29. Professor C.R. Wilson published in *Englishman* dated 31<sup>st</sup> January, 1895 an article under the title “Armenian Founders of Calcutta”. This article is the pioneer in proving that Calcutta was not built by the English. What they did to promote the well-being of the city was done not without the help of the Armenians. This article of Prof. Wilson is not available now a days because *Englishman* which was published from Calcutta had long become defunct. Reference to and excerpts from Wilson’s article are available in Mesrovb Jacob Seth, *Armenians in India : From the Earliest Times to the Present Day, a Work of Original Research* (first published 1937), Reprint, Calcutta, 1983, Ch. XXXII, p. 419.

30. Quoted in Mesrovb Jacob Seth. *op.cit.*, pp. 419-420.

31. Quoted in Mesrovb Jacob Seth, *op.cit.* p. 420.

32. Quoted *Ibid.*

33. Mesrovb Jacob Seth, *op.cit.* pp. 422-23. William Bolts in his *Consideration on India Affairs*, published in London, in 1772, wrote (p.61) : “Being sensible likewise of the precarious tenures of their establishments in Bengal and elsewhere, in the year 1715 the Company sent a deputation of two gentlemen, named John Surman and the other a very considerable Armenian merchant, named Coge[Khojah] Serhaud to solicit redress for past and security against future oppressions; for an extension of their old, and for many new

privileges, and particularly for a small spot of ground to be allowed them wherever they settled a Factory.”

34. C.R. Wilson and W.H. Carey, *Glimpses of the Olden Times: India Under East India Company*, Calcutta, 1968, pp. 110-111.

35. *Ibid* p. 111

36. *Ibid*, p. 112

37. *Ibid*, p. 113

38. “In consequence of this change [acquisition of Calcutta by the E.I. Company] in the position of the Company, a new member was added to the council to represent it in its new capacity. Henceforth a special officer, known as the Collector, was appointed to gather in the revenue of the three towns and to keep them in order. In 1700 Relph Sheldon became the first Collector of Calcutta, and from him through many inheritor . . . the line of the Calcutta Collectors run in unbroken succession down to the present day.” *Ibid*.

39. William Bolts, “*Consideration on India Affairs particularly respecting the Present State of Bengal and its Dependences*” Second edition, London, MDCCLXXII, p. 89.

40. *Ibid*.

41. *Ibid*.

42. *Ibid*.

43. William Bolts, *op.cit.* p. 145.

44. This is the statement of Captain Hamilton and quoted by C.R. Wilson & Carey, *op.cit.*, p. 125. Captain Hamilton’s account was published around 1727.

45. Nawab Muhabbat Khan who is said to have authored *Akhbar-i-muhabbat* “A General History of India from the Time of the Ghaznives to the Accession of Muhammad Akbar, at the close of the year 1806” gave the history of the foundation of Calcutta by Mr. Charnock and in that connection he said : “Calcutta formerly was only a village, the revenue of which was assigned for the expenses of the temple of Kali Devi, which stands there” . . . Elliot’s *History of India*, & c. Vol. VIII, p. 378.

46. “Kalighat and Calcutta” by Gourdas Basak in *Calcutta Review* No. CLXXXIV, Vol. XCII, January, 1891, p. 309 note.

47. *Ibid*. p. 309

48. *Ibid*. p. 310

49. *Ibid*. note.

50. "Bharat Chandra, the famous Bengali poet of the last century, who wrote his *Annada Mangala*, & c, in Saka 1674 (A.D. 1752), of course, mentions in his *Pitha-Mala, Kalighata*, as originating from the fall there of the four toes of Sati's right foot, and speaks of the presiding goddess as Kali, and of Nakulesa, as Bhairava. This proves that in the days of the Sakta Maharaja Krishna Chandra of Nadiya [Nuddea of English records], who was the Zamindar of 'Pargana Calcutta, & c', and whose poet laureate Bharat Chandra was, the current Kalighat legend had acquired a maturity, and that under some of the tolerant Nawabs of Bengal, but *chiefly under British protection*, even in the early days of the English period, Kalighata had reached the climax of its celebrity" [Italics ours] – *Ibid*, p. 310.

"Mythically, Kalighat, may of course, claim priority over Calcutta, but historically their comparative antiquity is uncertain" – *Ibid*, p. 311.

51. *Ibid*, p. 311.

52. *Ibid*, p. 312. In later years when the Chaurangi temple of Kali was demolished because Govindpur was taken for the building of a new fort there the image of the goddess was shifted to Kalighata. "It is said that in 1809, the Savarna Chaudhuris of Behala erected for her the present temple" – *Ibid*, p. 312 note.

53. Dr. Pratap Chandra Chunder, "Calcutta the Controversial City", *The Quarterly Review of Historical Studies*, Vol. XXXVII April-September, 1997, Nos. 1 & 2 pp. 44-53. This is the Professor Nisith Ranjan Roy Memorial Lecture, 1997-1998 delivered at the Institute of Historical Studies on 10 January 1998.

## CHAPTER 6 : HOW CALCUTTA SUPERSEDED INTERIOR TOWNS

There was no dearth of towns in *Subeh Bangla*. Dakha, Murshidabad, Chittagong, Hugli, Chandernagore, Malda, Burdwan and many other small and medium towns made up the galaxy of urban settlements in the province. In spite of this Calcutta was the only city that was properly urbanized and no other town could share the fortune of Calcutta. No city of Bengal in the colonial period matched the growth of the urban settlement of Calcutta. Was it because of colonial indifference to interior settlements or because of the compulsive logic of certain economic forces that did not allow habitations to take the shape of urbanized centres of growth ? To this question we address ourselves in this chapter.

### ***A Challenged Interior***

A general cause of the retarded growth of the interior was that like de-industrialization the country went through a process of de-urbanization in the colonial age. Under the general impact of the process almost all the towns of Bengal – Dakha, Murshidabad, Chittagong, Burdwan, Hugli, Malda, Chandernagore – suffered. <sup>1</sup> The character of urbanization is normally determined by the strength of population living in towns. It is well known that between 1800 and 1872 the urban population of the traditional cities in India did not increase. The urban settlements of Bengal were parts of this shrinking demographic landscape. Only Calcutta, Bombay and Madras and some smaller towns of the interior had shown signs of the increase of population. Among the towns which suffered in terms of population important were Dhaka, Murshidabad, Burdwan, Lucknow, Tanjore and some other traditional settlements. Some small towns grew up about this time. Notable among them were Ara, Bhagalpur, Chhapra, Munghyr, Srirampur, Cuttack and some other towns of the same status.

Calcutta rose but Dakha and Murshidabad fell. With their fall the growth of Burdwan, Malda, Hugli and Chittagong was arrested. The hinterland of Chittagong centred around Dakha. As business was directed toward Calcutta Chittagong was turned into a peripheral port. Dakha had long passed under the shadow of Murshidabad. With losing animation it was no longer able to feed the growth of Chittagong. Malda was an adjunct of Dakha and Hugli was a

satellite of Murshidabad and therefore with Dakha and Murshidabad they collapsed. Burdwan, a river-fed deltaic area, grew as a perennial centre of agriculture and showed little potential to fix itself up as a permanent centre in the bigger trade-network of the country. According to Walter Hamilton the total population of Dhaka in 1815 was 1,50,000. In fifteen years' time it suffered a catastrophic fall so that in 1830 the Magistrate of Dhaka could barely fix it at 66,989. In 1872, the year of the first census, it was stated to be 68,595<sup>2</sup> which meant that in four decades the increase of the population of Dakha was marginal. Between 1830 and 1872 Dakha thus stagnated. About the same time or a little earlier Burdwan and some other towns of Bengal were in the grip of stagnation. W.H. Bayley listed them as Burdwan (54000), Chandernagore (41000), Chinsura (19000), Chandrakona (18000) and Serampur (11000).<sup>3</sup> Commenting on this S. Bhattacharya observes : "The first two in order of size experienced a population decline of the order of about 40 per cent by 1872 Census; the smaller towns, excepting Khirpai, increased in size."<sup>4</sup>

It is thus clear that from the beginning Burdwan and some other towns in Bengal lagged behind in the race for urbanization. This lagging-behind started since the middle of the eighteenth century when the rule of the Bengal Nawabs was slowly giving way to the coming of the British protectorate in Bengal. About half a century before that in 1696-97 the *Radh* region of Bengal i.e. the wide area consisting of Midnapur, Burdwan, Birbhum, Bankura was devastated by the rebellion of Shova Singh. The rebels defeated and killed the Raja of Burdwan in a pitched battle and massacred all members of his family. Only Jagatram, the son of the Raja fled to Dakha and saved his life. The English at Sutanuty, the Dutch at Chinsura, and the French at Chandernagore applied to the Nawab for the permission to build their own fortress for protection and the Nawab acceded to it.

This is the only instance in the annals of Mughal Bengal where the foreigners were given separate right to build their own system of protection outside the security provided by the *Nawab*. It was this privilege on which the English had based all their subsequent efforts to build a fort in Calcutta. All Nawabs resisted these efforts for in this was implied that a body of merchants had appropriated for themselves the authority to create an exclusive military

defence for themselves. Ultimately, however, all efforts at resistance were in vain. The English proved themselves irresistible and it was in this irresistibility of a body of merchants taking the postures of a band of armed soldiers that Calcutta eventually owed its prominence as a place secured for habitation. Neither the French nor the Dutch could do this. None was as determined as the English to hold on persistently their privilege of protecting their own trade with their own might. This sent to every corner of the interior the message of the invincibility of the English might. None of the country lords could dare build up this charisma of a defiant authority based on the invincibility of one's own arms. When Calcutta was thus defining its position in terms of an individuality marked with arrogance other cities of Bengal remained steeped in subservience unaware of their own potentialities to shape their own destinies.

### ***Journey From A Garrison Town***

This was how Calcutta began its journey as a garrison town in the eighteenth century. Its other attributes, namely those of a trading city, a port town, an administrative centre, were real and functional marks of which gradually clustered around its principal character namely that of a garrison town. No other city in the interior had the potentiality of this. Calcutta was really in an extraordinary situation. It was then an administrative town for a mercantile settlement. It was a budding port for an all India business world bursting into shape. It had in its rear a sprawling hinterland over the vast Indo-Ganga basin that had powerful trade links with the north-west and Afghanistan. In no time it would become the capital of an emerging empire in south Asia. A trade settlement, a garrison town, a port, an administrative centre and finally a capital – the phases of Calcutta's urbanization were marked and they were exactly this. No other town in the interior could go through this process of evolution. As a port Chittagong could have been the rival of Calcutta; Murshidabad could have been Calcutta's contestant as an administrative centre; Dhaka and Murshidabad both could be the challenger as a capital. But none could be a unit with a quadruple character, namely those of a trade settlement, a garrison town, a port and finally an administrative centre cum capital. Some of the interior towns of the *subah* – Burdwan, Malda, Hugli, Rajmahal, Munghyr – did not have these promises. Calcutta grew not only as a

triumph of a site over situations<sup>5</sup> but also as a beneficiary of multiple other developments that made its ecological shortcomings a matter of indifference.

The English were comfortably settled in Calcutta when in 1760 Midnapur, Burdwan and Chittagong were handed over to them. They did not need these districts to expand the territorial limits of Calcutta because even in later years Calcutta did not grow by absorbing any part of these territories. Calcutta's hunger for territory was satiated immediately after the battle of Palasi when because of a promise inherent in the pre-Palasi conspiracy the English Company got expansive territory adjacent to Calcutta running as far as Kulpi near the sea. Moreover the whole of the 24 Parganas, the district in which this territory was situated was granted as a zamindari to the Company. The Company needed these territories because Midnapur and Burdwan were granaries of Bengal. Chittagong was an outlet to the sea alternative to Calcutta that could act as an English watchtower over the flourishing overseas trade in south east Asia. The English knew that the Portuguese could build up their mastery over the Bay of Bengal because they had their base in Chittagong. The English had never considered Midnapur or Burdwan as a part of their base territory so that the glow of Calcutta did not penetrate into the interior of these districts. Chittagong was a far-flung territory and when in later years Burma was annexed the English attention came to be riveted on Rangoon. Chittagong then, sandwiched between Rangoon and Calcutta, lost much of its glamour. The revolt of the Raja of Burdwan in the beginning of the 1760s and the uprisings of the small zamindars of Midnapur, particularly those of the Jungle Mahal at the advent of the Company's rule in Bengal had created great anxieties for the English in Calcutta and as such they had no mind to build the interior as a supportive extension of the urbanized centre of Calcutta. Up till the enunciation of the Permanent Settlement in 1793 the countryside and the district towns of Bengal were treated as revenue-yielding territories from where rice, timber, *chunam* (lime), salt, saltpetre, indigo could be procured. District towns and their adjacent areas were centres for textile productions housed in vast and sprawling rural and semi-urban cottage industries. In the eighteenth century their market network in almost all cases led not to Chittagong for an outlet and not even to Dhaka and Murshidabad for effective distribution but to Calcutta where the port and the *burrabazar* had created a powerful market pull for commodities of the interior. The English from the

beginning had jaundiced eye for Burdwan. In the 1760s they wanted to dispossess the Raja of Burdwan because the latter had joined hands with the Raja of Birbhum and had staged a revolt against the English. He drew his fighting manpower from a mass of robbers and mercenary 'peons' who were basically the rural toughs whose basic station was in agriculture. This mobilization of robbers had introduced a new element into the body-politic of the country. Robbers in Calcutta and in the districts in the second half of the eighteenth century had become the greatest force of notoriety that did not allow the Company's rule to become stable. At one point they were plubderers and at other they were the most formidable form of social reistance to the economic and political changeover from the Mughal to the Company's rule in Bengal. They built up a very effective response to the tyranny the Company's government had introduced in the countryside. One may say that through them one may find the point where the terror of the state met the response of the people.<sup>6</sup>

### ***Banditry And Retarded Urbanization***

The bandit aspect of the story has to be detailed out a little further in order to understand why some of the important centres of the interior like Midnapur, Burdwan did not become urbanized as was desired. From the middle of the eighteenth century to the middle of the nineteenth banditry in Calcutta and its immediate neighbourhood districts had increased beyond control. The roads that connected Calcutta with its interior towns and suburbs were infested with dacoits so much to that business with Calcutta had become difficult. For example the entire area between Midnapur and Calcutta had become unsafe for travellers who were not protected with arms. There were inter-districts rings of bandits who functioned with interchangeable groups and in changing positions often functioning on cross-district arrangements. In lower Bengal there were three major centres from where dacoits conducted their operations – Calcutta, Midnapur and Burdwan. When the Raja of Burdwan rose against the Company's administration in the 1760s in conjunction with the Raja of Birbhum<sup>7</sup> he had recruited a vast number of dacoits from his zamindari and almost an equal number of 'peons' from the floating cultivators and rural vagabonds who formed the unstable population of the countryside. J.C.K. Peterson informs us that in the district of Burdwan there were in the second

half of the eighteenth century at least 200 dacoits functioning under the local Raj.<sup>8</sup> Suranjan Das in a recent study of dacoits has shown how an inter-district ring of dacoits operating in Calcutta and its neighbourhood in the middle of the nineteenth century performed astounding events of dacoity around. On one occasion dacoits of Calcutta clubbed with dacoits from nearby districts and travelled as far as Kanthi (Contai) in Midnapur and plundered the house of the zamindar of the same place. Before doing this one dacoit moving in the guise of a *sannyasi* was entertained in good faith in the hospitality of the Raja and it was he who scouted the loopholes of the entire defence system of the Raja's palace and his household and passed all information to his colleagues in Calcutta and elsewhere.<sup>9</sup> These acts of daring robbery had unsettled the basic ambience necessary for urbanization in Bengal.

Burdwan was a typical case of retarded urbanization that contrasted the glamour of efflorescent Calcutta in the first half of the nineteenth century. On the one hand there was the Raja's uprising in conjunction with the Raja of Birbhum and on the other there was the prevalence of dacoity as one of the most disturbing elements in the social life of the province. There was a third factor that baffled prospects of urbanization in the district in the eighteenth century. It was insolvency which was a marked feature of the zamindari in the middle of the eighteenth century. The Maratha invasions in the 1740s had devastated the western flank of Bengal – Midnapur, Bankura, Birbhum and Burdwan – the entire *Radh* region of the Bengal *suba*. Throughout the course of the second half of the eighteenth century the Burdwan zamindari was a defaulting zamindari and the Company's government had very strained relations with the zamindar of the estate. Sick of insolvency he always pleaded his inability to pay of the revenue demand of the Company. This insolvency was the functional state of affairs in Burdwan throughout the course of the second half of the eighteenth century. The recovery of the district began in the early years of the nineteenth century. The *Fifth Report* of 1812 spoke of "the enlarged compact and fertile zamindary of Burdwan, which is like a garden in wilderness". This was a sign of recovery which did not pass unnoticed with the Company's authorities in England. But it also showed that as late as 1812 Burdwan was shaping more as a traditional, rural, agricultural suburb than as a prospering urbanizing centre of development in the neighbourhood of Calcutta. This happened when from the end of the eighteenth century Calcutta

was gathering momentum for urbanization. Under the auspices of the Lottery Committee money was being churned up for the urbanizing welfare of the city. There was no conscious process of urbanization in the interior where pockets of habitation clustered around rural handicrafts and where markets manifested their trade networks in their tradition-bound functional set-ups. Coming out of the disasters of the eighteenth century it was necessary for Burdwan, Malda, Murshidabad, Hugli, Dakha, Chittagong or any other town in Bengal to be more economically vibrant so that out of their own momentum they could shape themselves as centres of urbanization. This was not possible because of two reasons. First the *nawabi* regime was gone; the old order had collapsed; the silk and cotton textile industry had showed signs of contraction; the indigenous banking led by the *sharafs* which had so long provided fiscal lubrication to the agricultural economy of the country-side was disbanded; the office of the *qanungos* that had for centuries functioned as the most effective record-keeping office of the provincial administration of the Mughals had dwindled into insignificance; the Company's government had monopolized trade on some important items of life like salt, betel-nuts etc. and had allowed private British merchants and Company's officials alike to lay hands on rice trade, money-lending, land-speculation and other available means of investment; the inevitable result of all these was that the interior trade was bottle-necked. When the economy of the interior thus showed trends of regressive transformation the second process of catastrophe set in. There was a unilateral flow of capital from the country-side to the growing metropolis of Calcutta. From the middle of the eighteenth century all leading zamindars of Bengal began to dispatch their wealth to Calcutta and save money there. The process started when Krishnaballav, the son of Raja Raj Ballav, the finance minister of Siraj-ud-daullah's government, fled to Calcutta with a huge treasure secretly screened from the revenue of the government. As Calcutta began to grow as the capital of an emerging empire the moneyed men of Calcutta and interior began to purchase land-property in the city. In the nineteenth century there was a real-estate boom in Calcutta so that financiers were allured to promote bazars, gunges, habitation, settlements and buildings which housed a swelling population in the city. Nowhere in the interior was there any incentive for town-growth and the entire growth-initiative appropriated by the government became applied as a functional trend unique for the city alone. In

this situation no city in the districts could acquire the necessary input for town-growth and the interior became a lustreless expanse of territory with an economy of no outlet. This shut-down of the interior was the basis on which Calcutta rose as a metropolis.

### ***Growth Momentum Occasional***

Some towns in Bengal enjoyed occasional and rare moments of growth. Thus Dakha and Chittagong enjoyed an artificially created moment for their growth when Bengal was partitioned in 1905. Dhaka then became the capital of a new province of East Bengal and Assam and Chittagong sprang into a new life as a port providing an outlet for the whole trade of Assam and East Bengal to the sea. This was, however, a transitory event. In 1911 the partition was annulled and the corpus of enterprise, business, capital and employment that had flared up in the direction to Dhaka and Chittagong collapsed. The effort to promote Calcutta as a port and trade-centre had begun in the seventeenth century. It was in that century that the Bengali merchants lost their lead in the riverine and coastal trade to the Marwaris and up-country businessmen who eventually wrested the control of the *Burrabazar* on the eastern bank of the river from the Seths, Basaks and Malliks and established their sway on trade-networks of Sutanati-Kalkata complex of the south Bengal trade zone. In later years when the English founded their settlement in Calcutta the port became the sheet anchor of its growth with the fort and its garrison acting as the rear base of support of its entire networks on the river and the sea. In later years all governors general from Warren Hastings to William Bentinck acted for the promotion of both the port and the town of Calcutta. The rulers never wanted that Calcutta should be dwarfed by the rivalry of any district town and hence the state-patronage for the promotion of town was never bestowed on any urban settlement in the districts. At moments some settlements in the districts derived opportunities from their own economic momentum to grow as a town. Hitherto the government patronage was not adequate to allow them to fulfil their promises of growth. Such opportunities came for Burdwan when coal and iron ores were discovered in the district in the nineteenth century. The Railways had connected Burdwan with other trade centres and also with the metropolis of Calcutta. Flickers of urbanization were visible in Raniganj and Asansole and it was expected that Burdwan would grow. But neither Burdwan

nor any of these two settlements assumed the shape of a developed township that could serve as models of urbanization outside the periphery of Calcutta. With the coming of Calcutta into prominence in the eighteenth century Chittagong went into an eclipse. In later years with the annexation of Upper Burma a new blow was inflicted on Chittagong. Rangoon was developed as the port from where rice and teak could be exported outside to places where the British Empire required them. The process was similar to that by which Karachi was promoted as the export-outlet for wheat from the regions of north and north-west of India. This passage of resources of the interior through sea outlets was not possible from Rajmahal, Malda, Burdwan, Dhaka, Rajshahi or from any other place of Bengal. Chittagong and Hugli had the potentials to act as such outlets. But Hugli was dwarfed by Calcutta and Chittagong was sandwiched between Rangoon on the one hand and Calcutta on the other. With the fall of Dhaka Chittagong lost its glamour and the shift of the gravity of trade, culture and administration to the west deprived the eastern part of Bengal of its chances to present itself as an effective hinterland of any outlet integral to its own trade zone. Throughout the second half of the seventeenth and the early years of the eighteenth century the English in south Asia showed deep concern for Chittagong and on occasions when their foothold in Calcutta territories was not acquired they had a plan to capture Chittagong by force. This interest dimmed slowly as they consolidated their position in Calcutta. For about hundred years from the middle of the eighteenth century the Bengal towns fell into utter neglect. The result was that Malda, like Patna paled as a closed and falling city without any chance of recovery. It lost its control over the Ganga as its trade artery. Burdwan was essentially an agricultural territory with remote chances for urbanization. Its fate was sealed as the agricultural hinterland for the town and port of Calcutta. Toward the end of the nineteenth century Amritsar became a centre of carpet industry and trade. Although that was a temporary phenomenon it gave this pilgrim centre a new boost toward building up its own economic momentum. Burdwan was not like Patna, a place situated on the bank of a navigable river that had flowed as one of the major trade routes of India from the ancient times. It had never been what Lucknow was – a seat of a regional ruling power that had a strong heritage drawn from the Mughal Empire. It could not be likened to Allahabad as well which became a centre of later administration.<sup>10</sup> It had never been a pilgrim centre as

Amritsar, Benaras, Mathura and Gaya happened to be. Most of the Bengal towns were like Burdwan devoid through neglect of the basic animation for urbanization. All these towns noted above sank in the colonial period although they had the requisite potentiality and heritage for town growth. There was a massive spate of de-urbanization in colonial India and many traditional cities of India, small but important, suffered. Almost all the Bengal towns shared with them the same fate. Bombay, Madras, Calcutta and a few small towns like Ahmedabad absorbed all initiatives of town growth. Some Bengal towns, Hugli, Burdwan, Midnapur, Chandernagore etc. were within the immediate orbit of Calcutta so that they were overshadowed by the pretensions of an imperial city. It was not that they did not have the potentialities for growth. But the growth model available in the rise of Ahmedabad, Madurai and Kanpur did not suit the Bengal towns. Ahmedabad was the centre of trade for cotton and cotton textile goods. But most of the people there were engaged in employment in industry. Thus Ahmedabad became a centre of growth based on the admixture of trade and industry. None of the Bengal towns outside the complex of Calcutta and its periphery could blend trade and industry into a live source of economic momentum. Kanpur became the centre of leather, wool and cotton textile industry. A city in the south, Madurai, flourished because it functioned as the centre of oilseeds, cotton and crops. Originating from local roots the trade and industries of these regions helped each other in their own flowering. In Bengal the tyranny of the East India Company's administration in the eighteenth century destroyed the general conditions of the economy<sup>11</sup> in which an urban settlement could flourish. Dakha was a cotton-producing area and was known as *Kapasias* (from *Karpas* which means cotton). It had an industrial base which was destroyed in course of the first hundred years of the British rule in Bengal. This loss was irreparable.

### ***Population A Factor of Urbanization***

The growth of urban settlements very often depends upon the influx of population from outside, mostly from the country-side. This happens when there is a famine and the rural population has no supportive entitlement with which they can stave off disasters. In Bengal no famine of great magnitude took place between 1770 and 1943<sup>12</sup>. As a result migrations of population from country-sides did not take place in the routine course of things. In 1868

because of a famine in Rajasthan population in Agra and Delhi increased. The granaries of western Bengal were sufficient enough to feed the people of the area. From the national statistics we learn that during the last two decades of the nineteenth century – during 1872-1881 and 1891-1901 – population migration from villages to towns was at its height. These two decades were marked by great famines of the century. Calcutta experienced a population surge in the middle of the eighteenth century when the Maratha menace drove the population of the country-sides into the fold of Calcutta. In the nineteenth century the swell of the Calcutta population was caused by the influx of a huge labour force from the west which thronged around the jute factories along the river belt. Calcutta had little experience of the rise of population due to famine in the country-sides. One point was, however, sure of Calcutta. The city had its own attraction but that attraction had never been such as to enable it to poach Bengal's interior population. There was a fear in the country-sides that health-wise Calcutta was not very congenial a place to live in. Coming to Calcutta was an adventure for the rural folk and they had very little desire to detach themselves from their homes and hearths in their native villages. Land-transports being weak and roads being undeveloped there was little incentive for rural population to move into towns for more secure and comfortable settlements. Roads were infested with dacoits and as such journey was an organized effort rarely indulged in by people of the interior. In this situation towns of the districts in Bengal were deprived of a steady and perennial supply of population from the country-side. This explains why many of the district towns in Bengal after having suffered a population-loss because of the various vicissitudes of life failed to recover their demographic position by drawing a supply from nearby villages. Population-deficit was one major factor as to why small urban settlements of Bengal which had otherwise traditions of town-growth failed to develop themselves as self-promoting cities in the colonial period.

Winds of change in global trade had rarely fanned Bengal towns. In the 1860s when the Lancashire cotton famine struck the world the demand of Indian cotton rose high in foreign markets. The entire cotton from north and central India was drawn for export. This export passed through Mirzapur down the Ganga<sup>13</sup> and Mirzapur began to grow. But this growth was transitory. Very

soon railway lines were built along the Ganga and the river traffic began to suffer. With this Mirzapur began to decay.

The story of the rise and decay of Indian towns described above presents us with a pattern. The Bengal towns resembled them only in their decay. The basic incentive behind Calcutta's rise came from its port and the benefits this port yielded to the city. No city of Bengal was equal to Calcutta as the site of a port. None had the command Calcutta had over domestic and overseas business. Calcutta had connections with the north Indian business world through the river. Its access to the trade universe outside was through the sea. The river gave it a vast hinterland. The sea gave it its necessary aperture for export. The entire western part of Bengal known as the *Radhbhumi* contained some of the agriculturally surplus districts of Bengal<sup>14</sup> and provided Calcutta with a hinterland. Malda which was situated far away from the sea could not be an outlet for the export trade of the north. Chittagong was at an enormous distance from the cash crop zone of north-central India and had no river link with that vast hinterland. Thus sheer geographical incompatibility between the hinterland and these two river and sea bases of interior Bengal did not allow them to come into any rivalry with Calcutta. In later years when Burma was annexed to the Empire Rangoon sprang into life as a port through which timber and rice exports from Burma were channelized. As Rangoon came up Chittagong was sandwiched between Rangoon and Calcutta and its prospects became bleak. That port gradually passed into neglect.

The British Empire had created a kind of metropolitan economy in and around Calcutta that functioned as an appendage to the yet bigger economy of England and the world at large. No Bengal town in the nineteenth and the twentieth century had the competence to provide the necessary bridge between these two economies of the world. The inner world of Bengal was basically agricultural and the ambience of agriculture hung like a settled mist even in the nineteenth century on the *Radh* region<sup>15</sup> of western Bengal, on the Surma- Barak<sup>16</sup> valley of north-eastern Bengal and on the regions washed by the water of Meghna-Padma-Buriganga in eastern Bengal. The production and trade systems of these regions did not move much beyond the stage available in the pre-Palashi days. Before the advent of coal, iron and jute industries in Bengal there was no catalyst in Bengal's economy which could change the

stable core of Bengal's agricultural districts. No revolutionary impulse had ever touched the inner complacency of agriculture so that urbanization did not come in the natural way of things. So long as indigo was the main crop for cultivation a vast interior territory of Bengal – Nadia, Jessore, Khulna, Pabna and 24 Parganas – remained to be the supply zone of the metropolitan economy of Calcutta. Thus a wide region functioned as the satellite of Calcutta under the canopy of a governing economy of the Empire.

Individually Calcutta and the interior towns in a group acted as complementary to each other. Calcutta had no economic sovereignty; so had not the district towns. Calcutta was a satellite to the bigger metropolitan economy of the Empire. The district towns were satellite to Calcutta's economy. When coal was found in Burdwan the entire district became the supplier of coal to the needs of the Empire. On the top of this Burdwan coal was inferior in nature so that the availability of coal did not raise the status of the entire district.

### ***Was There Any Propelling Force For South Bengal Cities?***

History had given many north Indian cities a propelling force. They shared the heritage of a specific model termed by the Cambridge economic historian as the '*administrative-court cities of the eighteenth century type*'.<sup>17</sup> In Bengal, truly speaking, only Dhaka and Murshidabad could claim the status of a court-city. For a little while Mir Kashim shifted his capital to Monghyr. But he did not make Malda, Burdwan, Rajmahal etc. his station. This was because he wanted to stay at a distance from the English in Calcutta. In the 1760s Burdwan was anti-English on the one hand and on the other was very weak in revenue collection. The Company's government operating from Calcutta wanted to dispossess the zamindar there. Mir Kashim was opposed to this and the zamindar was retained in his position.<sup>18</sup> In the second half of the eighteenth century Burdwan, living on the mercy of the Nawab, failed to build up its own effective entity as an able and competent site for development. Even in situations of emergency which arose during Mir Kashim's war with the English Burdwan could not present itself as an alternative to Murshidabad. Mir Kashim knew that the trade axis of the English had moved through Burdwan, Malda, Rangpur and Dinajpur. Therefore, his pragmatic wisdom took him to further west – to Monghyr. The result was that when the Nawabi rule began to wane no city in the interior inclusive of Burdwan could build up its stamina to

become a competitor of Calcutta. The major stations of production and habitation in the districts in the eighteenth century were parts of the old world existence not very much touched by the rays of a transforming era. In the 1760s Burdwan was a revenue-deficit area and its zamindar was locked in a relation of conflict with the Company. The Company's administration wanted to dispossess the Raja but could not do so because of Mir Kasim's opposition. Burdwan in the second half of the eighteenth century was then this – a capital short economy ineffectual because of being weak as a zamindari, unable from all considerations to become an alternative to Murshidabad even in a situation of emergency during war. The result was that when the Nawabi administration was on the wane neither Burdwan nor any other district town of Bengal could present itself as equal in power to Calcutta. There were a good number of towns in Bengal which were situated on the river bank. But none had a command over trade as much as Calcutta had and none enjoyed a protection of arms similar to what the Calcutta garrisons could provide. Hugli, Malda, Dhaka, Khulna, Rajshahi, Chittagong – all had commanding trade positions because of their situations on the river and the sea but none had a thriving hinterland which could be comparable to that of Calcutta which consisted of the whole of the Gangetic basin of north India. Even in the first quarter of the eighteenth century Malda, Rajmahal and Hugli proved to be quite effective centres of Nawabi administration. During the reign of Murshid Quli Khan the English tried to develop their factory in Malda into a fortress. Murshid Quli Khan opposed it and under his advice the *faujdar*s of Hugli, Malda and Rajmahal became active against the English. This had stopped the English efforts to build some kind of an enclave within the territory of the Nawab. The strength which Malda and Hugli could demonstrate was not to be found in Burdwan. Situated between Hugli and Malda, the two effective *faujdar*ies of the *Nizamat*, Burdwan could not build up its own military glamour. Hugli, Burdwan, Nadia and Twenty-four Parganas were in the immediate neighbourhood of Calcutta and were thus very much in the zone of interference of the Company's administration. The glory of Calcutta radiated and eventually dwarfed the importance of the interior towns of these four districts.

While Murshidabad fell Berhampore<sup>19</sup> emerged. But this new city was a satellite of Calcutta. After the battle of Palasi the English felt a necessity to

keep a watch on the activities of the Nawabs at Murshidabad. In 1767 a cantonment was established at Berhampore. “The cantonment”, a commentator observes, “was established to serve two-fold purpose. Firstly to safeguard British commercial interest at Kasimbazar, then a thriving commercial centre, and secondly, to keep a strict vigil over the Nawab Nazims at Murshidabad. The city of Berhampore developed around this cantonment.”<sup>20</sup>

The cantonment provided security to Berhampore and in no time its population increased. Gorabazar, a market was set up to provide essential commodities to the cantonment. A belmetal industry had come into existence at Khagra in the eighteenth century. Now the population increase gave it a boost. Country zamindars now came to reside there. In an age of absentee landlordism this was natural. The zamindars brought with them a vast retinue of attendants – clerks, doctors, *pundits*, *purohits*, cooks. Berhampore took the shape of a growing town. A middle class came up and lawyers were predominant in it. In spite of all these Berhampore lived in the shadow of Murshidabad. A great part of its population came from Kasimbazar. In the early nineteenth century, around 1813, the river Bhagirathi changed its course. Disease became rampant in Kasimbazar and some of the diseases became epidemic. People fled the place and found new shelters in the Barrack area of Berhampore.<sup>21</sup> In the fleeing population the Murshidabad culture found a new vehicle to travel in this newly growing settlement. The affinity of Berhampore with the dying city of Murshidabad was greater<sup>22</sup> than its affinity with the globalized cosmopolitanism of Calcutta. The city suffered in its orientations in the long run. The city lacked a predominant section of merchants and in their absence trade had no incentive to grow. Merchants are very often flag-bearers of urbanism and trade provides the real stimulus for urbanization. In the culture of the city in Berhampore lawyers were predominant and they introduced a middleclass motivation for rootedness in traditional aspects of life. The shadow of the Kasimbazar Raj did not allow the feudal aspects of life to die down. The result was that in spite of the new wind of change from Calcutta Berhampore turned its face to Murshidabad<sup>23</sup> and eventually could not get rid of the feudal rusticity which precluded its becoming as urban as Calcutta was.

### ***The Metropolitan Calcutta Had No Competitor***

The neighbouring towns of Calcutta suffered vis-à-vis the metropolitan city. Burdwan, Midnapur or the towns of Nadia and the Twenty-four Parganas were very much within the radiation zone of Calcutta and its influence overshadowed their aspirations. So long as the Nawabi administration was powerful the English in Calcutta was under a perpetual apprehension of interference from Murshidabad. Likewise when the rule of the Nawabs fell after the battle of Palasi every town in the immediate neighbourhood of Calcutta was under a similar apprehension of interference from Calcutta. In 1769 *Supervisors* were appointed to act as administrators over zamindaris and through them the influence of Calcutta was clamped on the centres of growth in the districts. Their aim was to excavate all sources of revenue, hidden or apparent so that their appointment was justified by an increasing trend of revenue maximization. This drive for the last dreg of social surplus had destroyed the potentiality of interior towns and *gunges* and the surplus that was raised from the countryside was siphoned to Calcutta without any equivalent return to the villages. After the enunciation of the Permanent Settlement the zamindars of interior Bengal were maintaining themselves in a precarious condition. They stood with a burden on their shoulders – a sky-high revenue demand from the state – and their existence was clouded with the apprehension that their zamindari in part or whole would be sold if they failed to meet the demand of the state. Their attention, therefore, was to keep agriculture buoyant in a revenue-yielding position so that the inner spirit of the agrarian life remained bereft of any desire to get rid of the rusticity of a peasant world. The internal marks of urbanity was absent there so that when the rule of the Nawabs collapsed there was no town in Bengal that could function as a successor of Murshidabad just the way Lucknow and Hyderabad became the successors of the Mughal culture of Delhi within the general ambience of imperial decadence. Lucknow was the biggest city of north India and even after the fall of Delhi it could maintain itself as the most vibrant centre of Islamic culture in south Asia. Later on it became the capital of a regional state which in many ways was the miniature replica of the Mughal empire. There was only one town in Bengal that could grow as a successor of both Dhaka and Murshidabad to function as a centre of Muslim culture. It was Hugli, a Shia colony for a long time which was particularly favoured by Murshid

Quli Khan.<sup>24</sup> But unfortunately while recapturing Calcutta in the beginning of 1757 Clive bombarded Hugli and Chandernagore and destroyed the two cities so that in future they could not raise their heads again. Long before this Surat was sacked and eventually was pushed to destruction by the marauding hordes of Shivaji. The destruction of Hugli and Chandernagore offered an indirect blow to Burdwan. The *faujdar* of Hugli and the French base at Chandernagore acted as a buffer between Burdwan and Calcutta. This buffer was removed and Burdwan was exposed to the full blast of the English power in Calcutta. The Nawab allowed the Raja of Burdwan to maintain in his zamindari a large number of *Najdean* force which maintained the security of the Raja and helped the *faujdar* of Hugli in time of distress. If necessary in collaboration with the *faujdar* of Hugli he could build up Burdwan into a garrison town. But unfortunately the English after coming to power in the second half of the eighteenth century disbanded this *Najdean* force. Calcutta thus disarmed a rival town and Burdwan lost the potential of urban growth. Slowly after this almost all the Rajas of the interior were disarmed in the same way so that the military potentials of the districts were stifled and the supremacy of the English in Calcutta was ensured. The police functions of the zamindars in the days of the Mughals allowed them to retain paramilitary forces – *paiks*, *barkandages* and *lathials* – and these men cordoned both the cultivators and their fields of cultivation so that no one could escape from the vigilance of the zamindars and flee their fields. The base of rack-renting remained secured for the zamindars and the countryside remained perpetually steeped in an agrarian economy. This had robbed the entire countryside of any initiative to grow in the line of urbanization. When Calcutta emerged as the most predominant town in south Bengal the English saw to it that its suburbs and the hinterland did not proceed beyond the margin of an agricultural economy set by tradition.

The smaller towns of Bengal were mostly scattered and their dispersed condition did not allow them to enjoy the benefits of a hinterland favoured by an organized, long-distance-trade – such as was enjoyed by Amritsar. This city reaped the benefits of a twin trade zone – the Kashmir-Afghanistan trade zone that served both as a hinterland and an outlet for Amritsar and the vibrant trade zone of the Ganga and its basin that linked Amritsar with Calcutta. Amritsar was a pilgrim city and its strategic trade location helped it to remain

buoyant even in moments of crisis. No Bengal town had the benefits of such strategic locations. The trade and economic parameters necessary for urbanization were never allowed to blossom in Bengal after the emergence of the English in Calcutta. Nor did any of the Bengal towns in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries experienced rejuvenation because of the rise of a new kingdom such as Lahore and Lucknow did in course of their concurrent rise with Calcutta as parts of two new kingdoms. Lucknow emerged into a new life with the rise of Awadh as a separate kingdom and Lahore emerged when Ranjit Singh established his Sikh kingdom in the north-west. Lahore at that time was called the London of the east. She suffered a temporary eclipse with the fall of the Mughal empire. With the rise of the Sikh empire under Ranjit Singh the city temporarily recovered its lost glory. The city was at its peak later. Burdwan could have enjoyed the same experience if in 1696 Shova Singh's revolt could lead to the formation of a new state in the western part of Bengal. Shova Singh's rise contained within itself the force of a change that could have stalled the rise of Calcutta and made Midnapur and Burdwan the most prime cities in Bengal. But this rebel and his associate Rahim Khan unfortunately led their adventure not toward making a new kingdom but toward securing wealth through loot and plunder. This robbed the *Radhbhumi* – the western part of Bengal consisting of Midnapur, Burdwan and Birbhum – the chance of evolving into a new state. In the sixteenth and seventeenth century the *Radh* area of Bengal had its distinct characteristics. Burdwan gave it an agrarian solvency; Midnapur gave it a contact with the sea; and Birbhum gave it a rich reserve of forests. Then there was no *faujdar* in western Bengal. It was not possible for the *faujdar*s of Malda, Jessore and Rajmahal to keep a watch on this vast expanse of territory in which coastal trade, agrarian wealth and treasures of forest made the economy vibrant. In 1760 when Mir Kashim, the Nawab of Bengal, handed over Midnapur, Burdwan and Chittagong to the English East India Company he parted with the most prosperous districts of Bengal. The entire *Radh* area thus passed under the control of a corporate body of merchants who operating from Calcutta kept its hinterland a subdued adjunct of the seat of a rising empire.

All these happened in the aftermath of a grave event namely the rise of the Marathas in the Deccan and their raids into Bengal. Emerging from Nagpur and commanding fast-moving cavalry hordes the Marathas swept over a vast

territory spreading from the borders of Maharashtra to the western and central part of Bengal. What emerged from the Maratha expansion in Bengal were loot, plunder and battles. The western part of Bengal, the *radhbhumi* – Midnapur, Birbhum, Burdwan and part of Murshidabad – were devastated. This was the neighbourhood surrounding Calcutta which collapsed. Calcutta benefited out of it. There was a massive influx of population into Calcutta and the worth of the city as an effective shelter for men in crisis was proved. The city received admiration of the population around whom from this time onward to respect the English might and repose their trust on their system of defense. From the collapse the western part of Bengal did not recover in the rest of the eighteenth century. In a three decades' time a major famine – the famine of 1770 – visited the area and made recovery absolutely difficult for the entire region. Some of the Deccan towns which suffered because of the rise of the Marathas limped back into recovery by 1830 and 1840. But none of the towns in Western Bengal that suffered colossally from Maratha raids could recover even by the middle of the nineteenth century. In some ways the towns of Rajputana were stable about this time. This was because they did not suffer from political instability on the one hand and on the other from the vagaries of rivers which affected many important towns of Bengal. Where the river was the main artery of trade towns grew in association with both the river and its trade. Changes in the course of rivers affected the fortunes of such towns very much. Some of the Bengal towns decayed because of changes in the course of rivers. Modern researches show that the towns in Nadia and Murshidabad declined because of the silting of the river Hughly.<sup>25</sup> It shows that the rise of Calcutta was facilitated by the natural decline of the cities of its hinterland.<sup>26</sup>

### ***Interior Towns Had Potentialities But No Incentives***

From the above observation one should not come to the conclusion that the interior towns of Bengal had no potentiality for growth. The immediate neighbourhood of Calcutta which comprises of western part of Bengal were the emporium of cotton, textiles and silk. It was the tyranny of the Company's servants that led to the ruin of the textile and the silk industry of Nadia, Burdwan and Birbhum. Aditee Nagchowdhury-Zilly who researched on rural vagrancy during the early years of the Company's rule said that Burdwan and its surrounding areas were the biggest cotton textile centres of western Bengal

– in Zilly’s own words ‘the most important centre for cotton manufacture in West Bengal’.<sup>27</sup> Within the context of a developed agriculture the entire *Radhbhumi* had the potentiality for urbanization but bereft of state protection it could not fulfil its destiny. From the middle of the nineteenth century Burdwan took a lead in mineral industry. In 1858 when the Sepoy mutiny and the great revolt were going on Burdwan had 49 coal mines. With the help of 27 steam engines 2,16,580 ton coal was lifted from the mines. In 1859 the amount of coal raised from the mines there was 3,27,590 tons. In 1860 it was 3,13,300 tons.<sup>28</sup> In the fields adjacent to coal iron ores were discovered. Hunter wrote : “There can be little doubt that, were the manufacture of iron successfully introduced, Ranigaanj would become one of the richest and most important Districts in Bengal.”<sup>29</sup>

In the thirties and forties of the nineteenth century the money world of Calcutta was essentially a tormented zone. The Agency Houses collapsed and the Union Bank was closed in 1847. The Calcutta capitalists were shattered and the Bengali business community withdrew from collaboration with the English. The cultivation of the indigo – the ‘remittance good’ of Bengal – was coming to a standstill. New avenues for investment were not opened. A capital-short economy prevailed over Calcutta and a vast part of its neighbourhood.<sup>30</sup> In this situation all development schemes centred around Calcutta and efforts were made to rejuvenate the money market of the city. Concerns for the districts were well-nigh absent.

From this it should not be deduced that industry and urbanization in the neighbourhood of Calcutta did not grow because of a lack of capital. Throughout the course of the nineteenth century no heavy industry developed in India. It was not that capital shortage was at the root of this. Foreign capital began to come into India from the middle of the nineteenth century. It was this capital from outside which financed the jute industry and the railways in India. Historians say that two factors were responsible for obstructing heavy industries in the country. They were, Amales Tripathi says, ‘lack of high grade iron ore’ and ‘inadequate production of coal’.<sup>31</sup> In 1839 Jessop and Co. began iron works in Barakar. Mackay and Co. and Bengal Iron & Co. did the same respectively in Raniganj in 1855 and in Asansol in 1875. But none of these projects were successful. The result was that domestic demands for iron had to

be satisfied by importing iron from outside. The requirements for the Railways, the textile mills, agriculture and the establishment of the planters were met by iron and steel brought from outside. Till the beginning of the World War I the total import of foreign iron was 8,08,000 ton worth Rupees 12 ½ crores. This event retarded the growth of industries in India. In England industrialization came under the lead of steel and iron industry. In India industrialization started with the application of steam in jute and textile industries.<sup>32</sup>

This explains why the towns of interior Bengal, particularly those of *Radh* area, could not grow into big cities equal to the premier city of Calcutta. Throughout the colonial period no great industry developed in the interior of Bengal which could give Bengal towns a fillip to grow. The British administration in India did not allow the necessity for industry to grow into an effective demand so much so that the vast interior of Bengal being bereft of commerce remained steeped in agriculture. It was not in the interest of England and its Indian Empire to permit the blooming of an industrial civilization in Bengal which would rival the industrial revolution at home. This uncharitable attitude of the Empire was the real barrier for urbanization in Bengal. In England industrialization started with an initial advantage. It had enough coal which ensured an abundance of fuel for industry. In Bengal the situation was different. Vis-à-vis British coal the Bengal coal had two deficiencies – its quantity as available to industry was small and quality wise it was inferior. Its deficiency in quantity was made up in the nineties of the nineteenth century when more and more coal was lifted from the mines. Between 1896 and 1900 the total coal lifted from the Bengal mines was 40 ½ lakh tons. Did this increased supply of coal anyway help to promote the industry of the districts? The answer will certainly be in the negative. It was used for the interest of three other industries – Jute, textile and the railways. The growth of jute industry eventually benefited Calcutta and helped it to emerge as an industrial city in south Bengal.

### ***No Internal Stimulation For Bengal Districts***

It is thus clear that the Bengal districts vis-à-vis Calcutta lacked sources of internal stimulation. Trade and industry – the providers of stimulus for urbanization – had little chance to grow in a situation where deindustrialization had become the order of the day. In later years industry came along the axis where jute was the central commodity for agriculture and trade.<sup>33</sup> Jute factories developed not in the far off districts, not even in the *Radh* region, but in the immediate neighbourhood of Calcutta – along the course of the river Ganga. This gave Calcutta a tremendous boost in all its processes of urbanization and deprived the interior towns of chances to promote their own selves. The first jute spinning mill was set up in Rishra in 1855. The first power-driven looms were set up at Barahanagar in 1859. These were followed by the establishment of a series of jute mills in Calcutta regions – the city and its immediate suburbs. Industry helps urbanization and naturally Calcutta saw its own uplift because of the surrounding jute industries appearing along the axis of the river. An industrial society grew up in the region between Barahanagar and Budge Budge and its influence was never felt in the districts to the west and north of Calcutta. This was how Calcutta grew toward the nineteenth and the early twentieth century but the district towns remained dwarfed under the shadow of this growing metropolis.

Calcutta was urbanized because of being the seat of power of a vast empire where a port and commerce, fort and a garrison, industry and administration merged to develop one unit of power. It should be remembered that throughout the course of the nineteenth century India offered hospitality to a vast and inchoate alien business community who invested their wealth in this country and created the field of India's industrialization. Tomlinson notes : "Throughout the nineteenth century India was host to a large and diverse expatriate business community that created the modern industrial sector of Bengal."<sup>34</sup> The aim of this expatriate community was profit and not the promotion of welfare of a country which was not theirs. Urbanization of a territory was always a part of a conscious scheme and expatriate capital would not have been invested in such schemes deliberately if it had other options of investment in their own world. In Burdwan foreign capital was invested in coal and iron industry but this did not lead to the growth of urbanization there. In Calcutta the river axis provided a very effective trade artery and backed by this Calcutta encompassing water-land-communication and administration created

a big zone of influence in which Hughly-Howrah-24 Parganas-Nadia-Midnapur-Burdwan operated as a clustered hinterland for the Calcutta port. The river provided Calcutta a passage to the sea and a traditionally rich link with the sprawling Ganga basin of north India as its hinterland. This advantage very few cities in India enjoyed. In later years when railway lines were set up along the river routes a very powerful system of conveyance emerged in which the cost of communication and time of transportation were slashed down. The newly set up railway tracks connected Calcutta with the vast sectors of the economy – the interior areas of production, storehouses and emporia, markets, fields of agriculture, habitations and diverse centres of distributions. The metropolitan economy of Calcutta burst into a dimension not known to any city in contemporary India. Calcutta could thus build up its network which was necessary for its own modernization. The other towns of Bengal were mostly static habitations fenced by agriculture absorbed in a sleepy culture of a non-industrial world. From this sleepiness Calcutta did wake up in the early eighteenth century. That was the time when the Agency Houses of Calcutta were financing commercial agriculture of the interior – particularly indigo. But they too did not mess up their existence with the whirlpool of agriculture. They used their own agents – their banians and sub-contractors – as links with the agrarian world and the relation of these parent fiscal bodies with their subordinates were determined by sub-contracts.<sup>35</sup> Thus between the fields of agriculture and the city capitalists there were different layers of small and intermediate capitalists and contractors who spared their Calcutta promoters of the clumsy attachment with the world of agriculture. The world of sub-agents was vast and varied and they helped to maintain the flow of commerce and the necessary and periodical replenishment of the stock. This was how the basic parameters of the economy – capital, enterprise, management and communication – were conducted through impersonal and objective channels of give and take. Thriving on these impersonal bonds the money world of Calcutta assumed a character necessarily governed by the motivations of a growing urban culture. Calcutta was actuated by this – the impersonal force of business give-and-take which was completely absent in the interior because the interior was wholly structured by zamindari imperatives shaped under the requirements of the British rule.

### ***Burdwan: A Case-study***

Given the above, we can take Burdwan as a case in point and carry our discussion a little further. From the beginning of the colonial period till the end of the first five decades of the nineteenth century Burdwan had witnessed the growth of four towns – Burdwan, Kalna,<sup>36</sup> Katwa<sup>37</sup> and Dainhat<sup>38</sup>. No other traditional towns could grow there. Meanwhile coal and iron mines were discovered in the district and ores were begun to be lifted from the mines there. As a result two new towns grew up around coal and iron fields – Raniganj in 1869<sup>39</sup> and Asansol in 1896.<sup>40</sup> The first four cities of Burdwan were situated in alluvial river basins where their orientation was naturally toward agriculture. From time immemorial their whole communication and business transactions were based entirely on the river transport. In the colonial period the condition of the rivers deteriorated and the systems of communication lost their functional efficiency. The incentive for town growth was thus lost. This led to the benefit of Calcutta. In matters of urbanization Calcutta did not receive any challenge from any of the urban and semi-urban settlements of the district of Burdwan and as a matter of fact from any district around. Meanwhile new growth was registered in the colonial economy. Roads were constructed and new railway tracts linked the interior with the metropolis. As importance of rivers functioning as arteries of communication dwindled the settlements which flourished along the banks of rivers also began to fade.<sup>41</sup> Because of the spread of railways big cities like Mirzapur<sup>42</sup> lost their glamour. This city was an entrepot for the riverine traffic that catered the business of the entire Gangetic plain of the north. With the coming of the railways a system of fast transport with lesser costs was explored and the river traffic was automatically bypassed. As the railways superseded rivers as arteries for business many of the prospective semi-urban settlements of Burdwan and other districts of Bengal lost their charm. The rivers of Burdwan – Bhagirathi, Damodar, Barakar, Khadi, Banka, Ajay, Dwarakeswar and Mundeswari – which once served as the life-lines of the district were now relegated to the background. In the past these rivers ensured a civilization based on plentiful agriculture and incentives for town-growth were, therefore, largely absent. The growth of towns in Burdwan was mostly a post-independence phenomenon. At the time of Indian independence there were altogether fourteen towns in the district. With the coming of the five-year plans and the

Damodar Valley Corporation the number of towns increased and at the end of the twentieth century the total number of towns in Burdwan was forty-nine.<sup>43</sup>

From this it is clear that throughout the colonial period Burdwan could not grow its potentiality for urbanization. She had water resources, strength of population, capacity for sound agriculture and a vast sprawling territory. None of these resources were properly taken care of under the British rule. The entire district remained steeped in the sleepy atmosphere of agriculture. Buchanan Hamilton informs us that in the beginning of the third decade of the nineteenth century – in 1822 – Burdwan was number one district in agricultural production in India. Next to Burdwan was Tanjore in the province of Madras. From the same source we learn that in 1811 the population of Lancashire was 476 per square mile. About the same time the population in Burdwan in every square mile was 600.<sup>44</sup> Thus, with a man-power potential greater than that of industrial Lancashire Burdwan could not become the base of any industry. And devoid of industry it could not become urbanized. The misery of the Bengal situation lay here. The case of Burdwan was indeed tragic. There was no attempt to promote some of the settlements which in the past acted on their own efficiency as inland ports. These places were Burdwan, Katwa, Dainhat, Kalna, Nadanghat and Nutanhat. It is true that the colonial government had planned road and railway networks and foreign capital was inducted in priority sectors. But the emphasis ultimately was on overland growth because of which the traditional networks of water communication suffered. It is vital to note that internal ports and water communications grew in association of agricultural economy and when road and railway networks developed the utility of the old systems dimmed slowly into insignificance. Calcutta triumphed over its internal rivals because it controlled an outlet to the sea and its river networks linked it to the vast up-country hinterland which was as sprawling as the water-fed Ganga basin. Burdwan and the other neighbouring districts of Calcutta had enough supply of water from rivers which washed their shores and provided the alluvial soil necessary for agriculture. But agriculture also needed better technology for growth. But improved technology and modern farming techniques were never applied in the fertile lands on the banks of the rivers. As time went on silting of rivers became a common phenomenon. The courses of rivers changed and their navigability began to be diminished.<sup>45</sup> In this situation there was no scope for

interior towns to grow. Meanwhile coalfields were discovered and quickly they were linked with the metropolis by railways. In the changed economy Calcutta occupied the central stage. In the meantime jute industry flourished and jute factories lined up along the axis of the river around Calcutta. Calcutta now became an industrial town. Its urbanization thus became an irresistible necessity of the time.

**Notes:**

1. See S. Bhattacharya's study of urbanization in Dharma Kumar ed. *The Cambridge Economic History of India*, vol. 2, c.1757-c.1970, Orient Longman in association with Cambridge University Press, pp. 270-332.
2. Dharma Kumar ed., *op.cit.*, pp. 277-278. Read for further study D.R. Gadgil, *The Industrial Evolution of India in Recent Times*, fourth edition, OUP, 7<sup>th</sup> impression, ch.X.
3. Cited by S. Bhattacharya in Dharma Kumar ed., *op.cit.*, p. 278
4. *Ibid.*
5. In an article entitled "The Victory of Site Over Situation : Exploring Ecological Dynamics Behind Calcutta's Selection as the Seat of Colonial capital", [*The Quarterly Review of Historical Studies*, Vol. XLIX, Nos. 3 & 4, October, 2009 March, 2010 (Published by Institute of Historical Studies, Kolkata)] Jenia Mukherjee argued that the foundation of Calcutta was really a triumph of a geographical site over ecological situation. In its origin Calcutta was really this but this alone cannot explain the whole of it.
6. This point has been properly analysed in Ranjit Sen, *Social Banditry in Bengal A Study in Primary Resistance 1757-1793*, Ratna Prakashani, Calcutta, 1988.
7. The zamindar of Birbhum was the only Muslim zamindar in Bengal who had the title of 'Raja'.
8. He wrote this in his *Bengal District Gazetteers : Burdwan*. There are good references to the Burdwan dacoits and their involvement with the Raja in the book in the section where the history of the zamindari has been discussed.
9. Suranjan Das, "Behind the Blackened Faces : The Nineteenth Century Bengali Dacoits" in Keka Dutta Roy and Chittaranjan Mishra ed., *Reflections in history Essays in Honour of Professor Amalendu De*, Raktakarbi, Calcutta, 2009.
10. In 1868 Allahabad became the capital of the newly formed province called the North Western Provinces.
11. Writing in 1772 William Bolts shows how the tyranny of the East India Company's government destroyed the economy of Bengal. He writes : "All branches of the interior Indian commerce, are, without exception, entirely monopolies of the most cruel and ruinous

natures; and so totally corrupted, from every species of abuse, as to be in the last stages towards annihilation. Civil justice is eradicated, and millions are thereby left entirely at the mercy of a few men, who divide the spoils of the public among themselves; while, under such despotism, supported by military violence, the whole interior country, where neither the laws of England reach, [n]or the laws or customs of those countries are permitted to have their course, is no better than in a state of nature. In this situation, while the poor industrious natives are oppressed beyond conception, population is decreasing, the manufactories and revenues are decaying, and Bengal, which used not many years ago to send annually a tribute of several millions in hard specie to Delhy, is now reduced to so extreme a want of circulation, that it is not improbable the Company (whose servants in Calcutta have already been necessitated, in one season, to draw above million sterling on the Directors, for the exigencies of their trade and government) will soon be in want of specie in Bengal to pay their troops, and in England enpleading incapacity to pay the very annual four hundred thousand pounds which is now received from them by Government." *Considerations on India Affairs; Particularly Respecting the Present State of Bengal and Its Dependencies*, Second Edition, London, MDCCLXXII, [1772] Preface, p.vii.

12. These two years were the two major famine years in the colonial history of Bengal.

13. D.R. Gadgil, *op.cit.* p. 139

14 Because of being agriculturally surplus districts the English East India Company at the first opportunity seized Midnapur and Burdwan from the Bengal Nawab in 1760.

15. The *Radh* region consists of Midnapur, Burdwan, Bankura and Birbhum

16. The southern part of the Indian state of Assam is known as Barak valley. The main city of the valley is Silchar. The place has acquired its name from the river Barak. The Barak valley mainly consists of three districts namely Cachar, Karimganj, and Hailakandi. Karimganj is the cultural centre of the region.

17. *Cambridge Economic History*, Vol. II, p. 266.

18. "If anyone was indispensable in the Mughal system it was the zamindar whom Ramsbotham in his *Studies in the Land Revenue History of Bengal (1769-87)* described as 'practically impossible to dispossess by constitutional methods', if he performed his customary duties attached to a *zamindari*" – Ranjit Sen, *Metamorphosis of the Bengal Polity (1700-1793)* Rabindra Bharati University, Calcutta, 1987, p. 182.

19. Berhampore is the sixth largest city in West Bengal after Kolkata, Howrah, Asansol, Siliguri and Malda. It is situated 200 Kilometers from Kolkata.

20. Rajarshi Chakrabarty, "Murshidabad City & Berhampore Town: Two Urban Centres Representing Two Ages", a paper read at the 17<sup>th</sup> Biennial Conference of Bangladesh History Association held at Khulna on 22 November, 2012. About the origin of Berhampore Jadunath Sarkar observes : "Its origin and importance were solely due to the cantonment built by the British here. For a time it was the most important military station between Calcutta and Dinapur" – *Ibid.*

21. *Ibid.*

22. The shadow of Murshidabad culture loomed large in the city of Berhampore. Rajarshi Chakrabarty thus gives an example of this : “From the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century ‘*Baijibilash*’ became an integral part of the various pujas and ceremonies performed by the zamindars residing in Berhampore. Many well known *baijis* came from Murshidabad Durbar and performed among the ‘babus’ at Berhampore. Along with ‘*Baijibilash*’, ‘*Khamta*’ also became popular among the ‘babus’ of Berhampore”. – *Ibid*.

23. “Thus we see that Berhampore looked towards Calcutta which was now the capital of British Raj but couldn’t forget the old capital of Subha Bangla which was fast sinking into oblivion”- *Ibid*.

24. Jadunath Sarkar ed. *History of Bengal*, Vol. II, Dhaka University, 1948, Ch. on Murshid Quli Khan.

25. “In western Bengal,” the Cambridge economic historian observes, “the Bhagirathi river system declined; the Bhagirathi was not navigable throughout the year according to Rennell (1781) and Colebrooke (1794). The Hugly was the artery of trade. In central Bengal the silting-up of rivers and oscillation in river courses was observed in Murshidabad and Nadia; the decline of Murshidabad town was partly for this reason. Such changes in the course and the volume of effluent discharge of rivers affected, among other things, navigability and the location of entrepots and urban settlements. The river was the highroad in eastern India, and in some parts of eastern Bengal it was the only channel of communication and bulk transport of commercial goods” – *Cambridge Economic History of India*, Vol. II, p. 271.

26. The relation between river and urbanization in Bengal has not been studied at length. Scholars have concentrated much on the changes in the course of rivers but how these changes impacted upon urbanization is yet to be studied. For changes in the course of rivers see James Renell, *Account of the Ganges and Burrampooter at the Royal Soceity*, 25 January, 1780, London, 1781; and *Memoirs of Map of Hindoostan* (London, 1793); M.M. Martin ed. *The History, Antiquities Topography and Statistics of Eastern India*, London, 1838; H. Blochmann, “Geographical and Historical Notes on the Burdwan and Presidency Divisions” in W.W. Hunter, *Statistical Account of Bengal*, Vol. I, 1975.

27. Aditee Nagchowdhury–Zilly, *The Vagrant Peasant Agrarian Distress and Desertion in Bengal 1770-1830*, Fraz Steiner Verlag, Wiesbadan, 1982, p. 80. Zilly wrote (p.84) : “Midnapur, Burdwan and Birbhum were important centres for the cultivation of silk, where the desertion of silk weavers was due to the oppressive measures of the EIC (East India Company)”.

28. W.W. Hunter, *Statistical Accounts of Bengal*, Vol. IV, p. 116.

29. Hunter, *op.cit.*, p. 125.

30. For details see N.K. Sinha, *The Economic History of Bengal 1793-1818*, Vol III, Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyay, 1970, pp. 70-72.

31. R.C. Majumdar ed. *British Paramountcy and Indian Renaissance Part-I* (Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan’s History and Culture of the Indian People, Vol. IX), Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, 1963, p. 1106.

32. "While the Industrial Revolution in Britain was ushered in by the growth of iron and steel industries it began in India with the application of steam to jute and cotton textiles: The latter lacked Britain's solid basis of domestic production of iron and steel, and even the ancillary engineering industries (like Jessop's workshop) were dependent on foreign trade for development" – *Ibid.*

33. "Jute was in many ways the central commodity in the agricultural and industrial economy of Bengal in the second half of the nineteenth century, and became the focus of the manufacturing activity of most of the larger colonial firms in Calcutta between 1880 and 1929" – B.R. Tomlinson, *The New Cambridge History of India*, III. 3. *The Economy of Modern India, 1860-1970*, Cambridge University Press, 1998, p. 119.

34. B.R. Tomlinson, *op.cit.*, p. 92.

35. "On the whole, the Calcutta agency houses did not develop direct business connections with the agricultural economy of the interior, preferring to sub-contract such dealings to Indian agents, or *baniyas*, who often contributed independently to the trading mechanisms by making capital advances for trade and stocks". – B.R. Tomlinson, *op.cit.*, p. 119.

36. The original name of Kalna is Ambika Kalna. At present this town is a municipality and the head quarters of Kalna subdivision in the district of Burdwan. It is situated on the western bank of the river Bhagirathi. Kalna is 60 kilometers from the city of Burdwan.

37. At present Katwa is the headquarters of the Katwan subdivision in the district of Burdwan. It is situated between the Ajay river and the Hugli river. It is at a distance of 150 kilometres from Kolkata and 56 kilometres from Burdwan. In ancient time it was variously known as Kankat Nagari and Indrani Pargana. It was devastated by the Maratha invasions in the eighteenth century.

38. Dainhat is situated on the Kalna-Katwa Road. Its present area is 10.36 square kilometres

39. Raniganj is situated between two rivers Damodar and Ajay. In the past it was a forest-ridden area and was industrialized only after the discovery of coalfield. The coalfields directly led to the introduction of the railways from Howrah to Raniganj then known as the East Indian Railways. This railway line was opened to traffic in early 1855.

40. Asansol is the second largest city in West Bengal after Calcutta. It is the 39<sup>th</sup> largest urban agglomeration in India. The name Asansol is derived from Asan tree, a species of tree found around the river Damodar in the district of Burdwan.

41. Yogneswar Chaudhuri, *Bardhaman : Itihas O Sanskriti, Vol. I*, (1990) second edn., 1995, Calcutta, p.2.

42. Mirzapur was a city on the Ganga and was equidistant – around 650 Km – from both Delhi and Calcutta. It was brought into life by the officers of the British government and the merchants of the East India Company.

43. Yogneswar Chaudhuri, *op.cit.* Vol.I, p. 60.

44. Buchanan Hamilton, *Geographical, Statistical & Historical Description of Hindusthan*, Vol. I, pp. 155 & 157.

45. “In the lower reaches of the rivers, increase of population leads to the construction of embankments, roads, and railways, which facilitate the silting up of river beds and the change of water courses, leaving a legacy of soil exhaustion, water-logging, and fever for the next generation. . .” – Radha Kamal Mukherjee, *The Changing Face of Bengal*, p. 15.

## CHAPTER 7 THE LOGIC OF URBANIZATION

### *How Calcutta Staged A Breakthrough*

Calcutta which in the beginning of the eighteenth century grew as a garrison town was eventually converted into a port town and then finally into a seat of administration. It grew under the pressure of geopolitics unleashed first by the fall of the Mughal empire and then by the global trade working under the stress of the formative stages of Western imperialism. The vigilance of the Nawabi administration was a permanent brake on its potentialities of urbanization. The Mughal watch at Hugli kept Calcutta within constraints because Calcutta with its potentialities of trade, security and global network had made itself a formidable competitor of Murshidabad. Madras was its rear area and the entire seaboard of the Bay of Bengal gave Calcutta a sea-route link with Madras. The removal of the Portuguese from the seas left the English almost the masters of the waves. Equipped with a powerful navy the English East India Company acquired the functional superiority of military maneuver which the Nawabi army never had. In the face of aggression they had an escape route through the seas. From the sea came the necessary reinforcement with which they overpowered their competitors and defeated their enemies on land. This was a kind of strategic flexibility with which they built up a kind of insulation around the city. Since they purchased the three villages of Kalikata, Sutanati and Govindapur they misconstrued the *sanads* which permitted them to purchase the land from a local zamindar. What they purchased was a *taluqdari* right which in all pragmatic sense they converted into a property right. Hence their urge was to keep their Calcutta lands as their property. They used to refer to their Calcutta lands as their estates and this was at variance with the constitution of the Mughals. They tried to build up an exclusive judicial jurisdiction in Calcutta so much so that a resident of Calcutta was considered to be their citizen who was thus made immune from the application of the rules of Mughal justice. A territorial enclave thus grew up on the soil of Bengal. The nucleus of a territorial possession was created. The components of a city came later. In the second half of the eighteenth century the territorial revenue of the Bengal *subah* came under their possession. The sinking of the *Nawabi* rule brought power within their sight. Calcutta was now free to acquire the parameters which made a city a tangible unit of growth.

The first major breakthrough toward making the city a unit of stable and functioning urbanity came in 1757. That year by the secret treaty with Mir Jafar the English Company got an extension of territory up to Kulpi a territory in the south of the 24 Parganas, a place that was near the sea. For nearly sixty years since the purchase of the three villages of Sutanati, Govindapur and

Kalikata, Calcutta did not experience any territorial dynamism. The Bengal Nawabs did not allow them to purchase any one of the thirty-eight villages which the Emperor had sanctioned them. A very powerful *nawabi* vigilance had cordoned the activities of the English in Bengal. This vigilance was maintained first from Hugli, then from Murshidabad and finally from Dakha. From this cordon Calcutta suddenly got release in 1757 just immediately after the Battle of Palasi. Two things happened simultaneously. One was the destruction of Hugli and Chandernagore by Clive on the eve of the retaking of Calcutta in the beginning of 1757. The second one was the military conquest of Calcutta by the English about the same time. These two events had great implications in history. First they destroyed two settlements which had very big potentialities of urban growth. They stifled their potentialities either as competitors of Calcutta or their capacity to act as a break upon the aspiration of the new city for growth. Secondly the English now held Calcutta as their conquered territory although their right to conquest they never exercised. Yet they extracted their pound of flesh. They made the Nawab to surrender many of his sovereign rights to them and this was done through innumerable concessions which the Nawab was forced to make over. The Company's territory was now free from Nawabi vigilance and Nawabi interference. This was freedom that was necessary for getting into a start for a territorial sovereignty. With the capture of Calcutta one thing became certain. There was no power in eastern India which could overpower the English. Thus the whole of the eastern flank of Mughal Empire lay at the mercy of the English. This position was brightened by the British victory at the Battle of Buxar in 1764. In this battle the combined force of the Emperor Shah Alam of Delhi, Shujauddaullah of Awadh and Mir Qasim of Bengal accepted a defeat in the hands of the English. Save the Rohillas there was no power in the whole of the Gangetic basin that could stop the march of the English to Delhi. But Clive did not do that. He knew where to stop. Instead he kept the territory of the English confined to Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. This was a masterly decision. In 1757 the territory of Calcutta was extended up to the sea. Now the influence of Calcutta extended over the whole Gangetic basin.

### ***The Strategic Importance Of The Sea-board***

In the meantime a new thing was explored. The English discovered the strategic importance of the sea-board that lay open from Madras to Calcutta. Madras had done its job in functioning as the military supply base for Calcutta in a time of crisis in 1756-57. Now it became free of its obligation to act as the feeder base for Calcutta. Henceforth Calcutta became the English base to supervise the Company's influence over the Gangetic trade routes and their

hinterlands in the upper Gangetic valley and Madras acted as its centre in promoting English interests in the south. Thus two power bases were created, one in upper India and the other in south India where from the English could encircle the rest of the country in time to come. Meanwhile Bombay emerged as the western power base of the English and the English became anchored in positions from where they could fence around the whole of central India with the advance of time. Thus between the Battle of Palasi and the Battle of Buxar, Calcutta emerged as one of the most strategically located centres in India from where power radiations could effectively take place. With this assumption by Calcutta of the status of an all India power base it easily superseded Murshidabad and all other Mughal towns in eastern and central India. In the west Bombay was gradually overpowering Surat which became a victim of Maratha depredations. Shivaji sacked Surat more than once and its potentiality to contain the rise of Bombay was destroyed. With Hugli in Bengal and Surat in Gujarat having gone down the power equation between Calcutta and Bombay assumed a linear axis. Calcutta now stood in a position to turn its face effectively from any of the Mughal power bases in the east to further radiations in the west.

In this situation the English made two things. First they made Calcutta the centre for a centripetal attraction for Bengal politics. This was done through an introduction of a new practice. The previous practice was that the English Governor of Calcutta or any of his agents, particularly the Resident at the Durbar, met the Nawab at Murshidabad when situations demanded. Now the process was reversed. The Nawab or any of his agents had to come down to Calcutta to supplicate the favour of the English. This meant that the political gravity in Bengal shifted from the seat of the Mughal administration to the seat of the English administration in Calcutta. The second thing was even deeper than this. They reared a class of rich people called the *banians* who controlled the money world of Bengal. These men supplied the Company, its officers and all its agents with cash. As a result a new class of capitalists grew in the city which could challenge the positions of the old magnates of the money-world, the *shroffs* (*sarrafs*) whose supreme leader and representative was the Jagat Setts. As the eighteenth century progressed the house of the Jagat Setts became an institution of the past. A process of supersession of old institutions began. In the rural world the institutions of the *qanungos* were withering away. The institutions of the *sarrafs* decayed. As Murshidabad sank as the capital of the *subah* the house of the Jagat Setts also collapsed because the Mughal state in Bengal and the institution of the Setts were intrinsically linked in a closed mutually support system. As the state and its fiscal support institution collapsed a community of new men emerged as the business

partners of the East India Company and its employees. They were not a homogeneous people. They emerged from both towns and villages and consisted of a medley of people shattered into splinters of a community undergoing change. They were small *dewans* and *amlas* of broken zamindaris, *dalals* and *gomastas* of small indigenous business houses and factories of various East India Companies of the Europeans, *munshis* and *mutsuiddies* of local courts, *do-bhashi* i.e. interpreters and agents of interior magnates and the various foreign companies, disjointed Mughal officers like *sazawals* and *wadedars*, clerks and accountants of various orders who supplied the intellectual know-how and the writers' skill to whoever required their service and many other such men. The emergence of such men helped to create the man-power support and the social base of collaboration with which the city could get on to its own foundation. All these had created in the second half of the eighteenth century the socio-economic and political ambience in which the imperial city of Calcutta could see its own start.

### **Calcutta Assumes Power**

II

From Hastings to Bentinck there was a conscious drive on the part of the British rulers to make Calcutta the seat of an imperial rule. It was here that Calcutta had aspects of power that influenced its evolving shape as a metropolis. Clive had initiated the city's installation in power when after the Battle of Palasi he allowed the new fort to come up under his auspices. Hastings gave a boost to the process when he transferred the major offices of the administration of the *subha* from Murshidabad to Calcutta. Along with the foundation of the executive authority the Supreme Court of Justice was set up in Calcutta. The sovereign status of Calcutta was thus fixed and the early beginning was thus made toward what later came to be called paramountcy. The functional supremacy of tile *Nizamat* gradually went down and the *Nawab*, the head of the *Nizamat*, stationed at Murshidabad, lost his glamour as the apex authority of the Mughal rule in the *subha*. Since the time of the Battle of Palasi a new process of give and take began between the Company's administration in Calcutta and the Nawab's administration at Murshidabad. The administrative etiquette and the power protocol changed. Previously the English Governor of Calcutta or his agents visited the Nawab at Murshidabad. Now the rule of the game changed. The Nawab came down to Calcutta to see the Governor who was harboured in the pretension of a new-found power. There was no need from the English side to reciprocate the gesture. The gravity of power shifted from Murshidabad to Calcutta. A new culture of power based on Calcutta began to evolve. With the change in the equation of power the dynamics of the country's economy changed. Revenue was extracted from

the interior of the districts and they were siphoned to Calcutta without any equivalent return to the countryside. Capital dried up in the rural world which thus went under the shadow of a money-short economy. The interior Rajas began to transfer their capital to Calcutta and began to purchase landed property there. Every one needed a foothold in Calcutta. This is how the districts began to rally around Calcutta, the newly emerging centre of power. The need for Calcutta to reach the interior was less than the need of the latter to build its nexus with this city which had substituted Murshidabad as the centre of power. With this the tendency began to grow a new legion of service elites both in the interior and also at the capital. The introduction of new principles of revenue extractions aimed at squeezing the last dreg of social surplus from the interior. New revenue managers called Supervisors were inducted in 1769 and their in-depth penetration into the finances of the zamindars shook up the stability of the interior revenue structures of the country. Everywhere there was a hunt for the hidden treasures of the land. The whole countryside, already under the stress of a capital short economy, collapsed like a house of cards. There was tremendous breakdown of zamindaries and *amins, shiqdars, sazawals, munshis, gomastas* – the old Mughal revenue personnel – were now formed into a class of revenue undertakers to provide the supportive platform to these ramshackle zamindaries. As the countryside collapsed the majesty of Calcutta grew. In the midst of surrounding destitution the glamour of Calcutta increased. This happened when the three towns of *Subah Bangla* – Dakha, Murshidabad and Hugli – had gone into eclipse. Employment and business now converged in Calcutta. With this Calcutta appropriated the functions of three important centres of activity namely those of a garrison town which Calcutta originally was, those of a port which was growing then in leaps and bounds and finally those of a seat of administration which the city had become since the administration of Warren Hastings. Thus the functions of the three rolled into one and Calcutta was thrust into the role of a beamed majesty. It was in this situation that the colonial masters contemplated that Calcutta would replicate London as the eastern centre for the east-moving Britons. As an appendage to this a power elite grew up in the city. This is how Calcutta became a model of power not only in south Asia but also in the whole of the east.

In the above observation we find the eighteenth century scene of Calcutta's rise to prominence. How did Calcutta then contrast with the other colonial towns in India ? Here is an observation on the point:

“Portuguese Goa was a museum of sixteenth-century imperialism, more plentifully supplied with churches than trade and with monks than soldiers.

Bombay was a British possession but as yet the heir-apparent rather than actual successor to the wealth of Surat. The British settlement of Madras and Calcutta were prosperous and populous but centres of trade rather than of political power. French Pondicherry fulfilled the same function to a lesser degree. Other European stations, such as French Chandernagar, Dutch Chinsura and Negapatam, and Danish Tranquebar, were trading posts without political significance”<sup>1</sup>

### ***Calcutta’s Political Take-off***

This was the condition of the colonial towns in the middle of the eighteenth century. Calcutta’s political take off started after that. In the beginning of 1757 when Clive recovered the city from the control of the *Nawab* the status of the city changed. It was now a conquered city where the English might could be stationed permanently as its base. Understanding this the new *Nawab* Mir Jafar Khan granted the whole of the 24-Parganas, the district where the city was geographically located, to the Company as its *jagir*. Immediately with this the status of the city changed once again. It was now a gift in perpetuity in all practical terms. From a pragmatic standpoint the status of Calcutta and Bombay now became akin to each other. Bombay was a dowry-gift and Calcutta was a gift in the form of a prize for enthroning a *Nawab*. With a puppet *Nawab* at Murshidabad that city lost its old supremacy and became an appendage to the power that was growing from Calcutta.

A power-packed take-off of the city started thus. In course of the next hundred years the internal character of the city changed. The first major example of the display of power of the city was an attempt to apply English justice in the case of Maharaja Nanda Kumar, the Brahman minister of the Muhammadan *Nawab* of Bengal, Mir Jafar.<sup>2</sup> It is widely believed by historians that Nanda Kumar was implicated in a false case and as Percival Spear says that “there was a miscarriage of justice for which the blame cannot be fastened on any one man”<sup>3</sup> Sir Elijah Impey<sup>4</sup>, the first Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Judicature at Fort William, Calcutta, which was established under the Regulating Act of 1773, was a friend of Hastings and it is alleged that he acted as the instrument of the Governor General to quash the case so stoutly put up by Nanda Kumar. Spear comments:

“Historically the incident is the supreme example of the absurdity and injustice of attempting to apply English legal methods to Indian conditions. The Supreme Court wished to impress on the Indian mind the seriousness of the crime of forgery;<sup>5</sup> it actually very successfully convinced men that it was dangerous to attack the governor general.”<sup>6</sup>

The Nanda Kumar case proved beyond doubt that the Governor-General was supreme in Calcutta and the English laws practised in Calcutta had already superseded the Muslim law practised under the *Nawabirule*. The Regulating Act of 1773 which had created power as an institution had set up two organs of supremacy – first, the office of the Governor General who was given supervisory authority over two other presidencies and was thus made the supreme authority of a unitary control over all the British possessions in India; secondly, the Supreme Court which declared a *de facto* primacy of English law over the laws of the Mughal government. The directional instructions given to the first Governor General of the British possessions of India contained large discretions. Hastings was efficient enough to make a full use of that. The Directors wrote to him,

“We now arm You with full powers to make a complete reformation.”<sup>7</sup>

The power to implement reformation was given to a man who was stationed in Calcutta. This, in terms of power, made Bombay and Madras satellites of Calcutta. For the east-looking Britons Calcutta was now the most coveted place to move, a place of pride where the British might had restored British possessions through conquest and forced the *Nawab*, the viceroy of the Mughal government at Delhi, to formalize it through a legal grant in terms of the Mughal law. There was none to challenge the position of Calcutta now. In the south Madras was still shaky vis-à-vis Haider Ali of Mysore and in the west the position of Bombay was not completely secure vis-à-vis the Marathas. Only in Calcutta the English were unchallenged since the time when the united force of the Emperor Shah Alam II, Shuja-ud-daula of Awadh and Mir Qasim of Bengal fell in the Battle of Buxar in 1764. The army that had so long guarded the eastern flank of the Mughal empire now collapsed and the might of the English in Calcutta became supreme. This might was located in the garrison town of Calcutta and gave Calcutta a boost in the power balance of the country. The victory at the Battle of Buxar, the new fort at Govindapur Calcutta, the Supreme Court of judicature and the office of the Governor-General made Calcutta's position paramount. Stationed in Calcutta the British power became both an instrument for coercion and an agency for persuasion. Operating from power Hastings defined Calcutta's role anew in the power structure of the country. Calcutta now became the seat of an overlord that could claim tribute from any subordinate authority that was suspected to have money stored in secret. The field where this claim was experimented was Benares and the hapless zamindar on whom the coercion was applied was Raja Chait Singh. The Company was in need of money. To the expenses of the Company's external wars and internal consolidation was added the lust of the

masters of the Company manifesting both in individual greed and collective desire for tribute. From Calcutta Hastings did what formerly the Bengal *Nawabs* used to do from Murshidabad -- fleecing money from the local *Rajas*. All *Nawabs* from Murshid Quli Khan to Siraj-ud-daullah squeezed the European Companies whenever they got a chance to do it. Now Hastings was in the mood of revenge and retribution. The *Raja* of Benares was the first victim. *The Oxford History*<sup>8</sup> says that Hastings was 'well assured' that the *Raja* of Benares 'had plenty of both men and money'. This was one assurance that came mainly from power. Seated in Calcutta

"He was so assured by his own representatives, whom he had thrust out into every key position, so that the administration was becoming one vast extension of his own masterful will. Their opinions were his own and their conclusions jumped eagerly with his, even if they sometimes slightly anticipated those which suited his policy."<sup>9</sup>

A huge money was fleeced from the *Raja* and it was alleged that Hastings himself accepted a bribe from him. The Select Committee of 1783 remarked: "With £23,000 of the *Raja's* money in his pocket, he persecutes him to destruction."<sup>10</sup> We do not go into the ethics and legality of Hastings's dealings with *Raja Chait Singh* of Benares. The point we stress is that through his dealings in the cases of *Maharaja Nanda Kumar* as well as *Chait Singh* Hastings was demonstrating a show of power which scared the native people in Calcutta and around and this fear and its memory provided a barrier to the unity between the ruler and the ruled in years to come. Historians say that Hastings was "lifted up with an egoism and complacency worse than those of Clive at his worst."<sup>11</sup>

The 'egoism' of the Governor-General of the East India Company's possessions in India made Calcutta a dreaded seat of a new power which appeared to be ruthless in imposing its own will and unfailing in aggrandizing its own jurisdiction. Hastings admitted this in open mind and flattered himself for what he had achieved for the Company and its city. His confidence in the Benares affair he expressed thus:

"I feel an uncommon degree of anxiety to receive the sentiments of my friends upon it. I have flattered myself that they will see nothing done which ought not to have been done, nor anything left undone which ought to have been done."<sup>12</sup> At the source of his self-compliment there lay his confidence of power. He wrote : "Every power in India dreads a connexion with us. . ."<sup>13</sup>

***From A Native Town To An Imperial City***

This was the legitimate boast that came at a time when a native town was being given the boost for its conversion into an imperial city.<sup>14</sup> The power-packed character of the city was thus created. It surely was the creation of Hastings<sup>15</sup> and his own times.

In the seventeen-seventies Calcutta had become the invincible centre from where the Company's government tried to stretch out to neighbouring Indian rulers. Hastings was the masterful mind here and will became the will of the city. The command of the city emerged from Hastings's position in relation to the total Indian administration of the Company.

"Hastings governed the three Presidencies for eleven years after Lord North's Regulating Act, but he was Governor of Bengal for two years before it, and it is in the civil administration set up during those two years that the foundation of our system in India were laid. Hastings brought twenty-three years of Indian experience to the work: for those two years his hands were free; he planned, organized, and executed his own policy unhindered; it is by the action he then took that he must stand or fall. Whether the object of study be his character or the justice of our rule in India the years that follow can best be understood in the light of his original aims, for much of the legislation of the three succeeding decades was designed either to carry out those aims or to prevent their fulfilment."<sup>16</sup>

With the power of an absolute ruler Hastings fleeced the Begums of Awadh. In removing Nanda Kumar from the political scene in Calcutta Hastings successfully negated the most formidable leader of the power elite of the old order. Nanda Kumar represented the last vestige of the power of Murshidabad and his fall only ensured Calcutta's triumph over that Mughal city in the east. Benares was the nearest city and its Raja was the most wealthy ruler in the immediate neighbourhood of Calcutta. Once they were crushed there remained no power in the vicinity of Calcutta that could stand as a barrier to the rise of the new city. Power has a tendency to radiate and Hastings made Calcutta the seat from where this radiation could direct itself to various ends in the immediate surroundings. We do not know whether Hastings wilfully did it. He was operating under financial stringency and the desperation born out of stringency propelled power to manifest itself in the most awkward political ambience of the time. In the process the Company's power crushed the primacy of men and cities that represented traditional sources of authority and affluence. It was this necessity that motivated Hastings's impingement on Awadh. The financial need of the Company was the most pertinent pretext that concealed the Company's megalomaniac and hegemonic demonstration of power. The *Nawab* of Awadh could not pay his subsidy arrears to the

Company. Hastings put 'relentless pressure to keep the *Nawab* up to the mark, exercised both on the Nawab himself and on two successive British residents, (Middleton, his own nominee, and Bristow a French man).<sup>17</sup> Percival Spear observes,

"In February 1782 Middleton wrote 'no further rigour than that which I exerted could have been used against females in this country', and in June Bristow added the opinion of the officer commanding the troops, 'all that force could do has been done'. By these means 100 lakhs (£ 1 million sterling) were eventually secured, the nawab's debt paid and the Company's finances restored."<sup>18</sup>

One may argue that Hastings could do this because the power of the Mughals had sunk. From a deeper understanding it may be said that the English could do it because they had consolidated their base of power in Calcutta. The whole series of the traditional cities, bases of Indo-Islamic power, had gone down. Dakha, Murshidabad, Hugli, Malda (where during the time of Murshid Quli Khan the zamindars were mobilized to move against the English), Benares, Patna and Monghyr (a temporary escape resort of Mir Qasim in his conflict with the English) that could cordon the supremacy of Calcutta had become degraded centres of native power, almost satellites to the rule of a city that had suddenly raised its head. From this situation a power was assumed whereby the ambition of a city was blown into a majesty cloaked under an overlord's right to intervene. The self-assumed power to swoop down upon the interior of the household of a native prince marked an impropriety of action unparalleled in the whole annals of the British rule in India.<sup>19</sup> It was deliberately demonstrated as a manifestation of a boast of power that was housed in the Fort William in Calcutta, a city now invested with pretension and pride to mark its supremacy as a centre of an upcoming empire in India. Hastings believed that the Indian institutions were still valid to be the basis for a British empire<sup>20</sup> but all institutions, he thought, should be subordinate to the will of Calcutta the city that housed the Fort William and its Council – the citadel of English power in India. He was impeached, three years after his retirement in 1785 on twenty charges arising from his activities in office but one thing was sure about the way he functioned. He grasped very quickly while others of his community could not, the implications of assuming a hegemonic power that was to rest in a city. He gave lead in contemplating the idea that the British possessions in India could not be ruled from a merchant's emporium but from a majestic city – a feeling that eventually manifested in full bloom in Lord Wellesley's declarations of 1803. It should not be thought that Hastings's achievement in transforming Calcutta into a seat of power was a

feat of individual prowess. Rather it was a part of a process that began with the hatching of the conspiracy against Sirajuddaullah, the *nawab* of Bengal which set the Bengal revolution in 1756-57. It was this conspiracy that led to two things – first, a series of revolutions beginning with the Battle of Palasi in 1757 and ending with a assumption of power by the Company in 1772 – a natural follow-up of the grant of the *diwani* in 1765. The second one was the eclipse of the *nizamat* and the emergence of the Calcutta Council as the superintending authority in the governance in the east. Clive was its master because it was his masterly intervention in Bengal politics<sup>21</sup> which had dwarfed the *nawab*, the Mughal ruling icon at Murshidabad who lent charm to this seat of power in the eastern flank of the Mughal empire. What is significant to note is that Clive was not the first European to intervene in Bengal politics. The Portuguese had done it before him. But they had not earned a position for themselves by which they could participate in power. Calcutta owed her emergence to this situation of transforming Bengal politics where participation in power by the Company was made possible by Clive. A mercantile body situated in Calcutta suddenly became a partner in power not because it had a command in commerce but because it had a command over military might. Clive was invested with the title, *Sabat Jung* – ‘the tried in battle’ – a title which Mir Jafar himself procured for him from the Emperor.<sup>22</sup> The district of 24-Parganas where the Company was made the zamindar was assigned to Clive as his *jagir*. *Sabat Jang*, the wielder of sword, was now the supreme master of the district in which Calcutta was situated. A *jagir* denoted both revenue and rank and Calcutta now became the seat of a defined position in which Mughal rank and revenue combined to highlight the dignity of a mercantile Company. The construction of a fort that was envisaged long ago was made possible in this context of transfer of power from Murshidabad to Calcutta. The territorial dynamism of the city which was arrested so long was now released and the city expanded up to Kulpi at the fringe of the sea. Calcutta suddenly seemed to have been lifted into glamour which it lacked earlier. This glamour was not so much an outcome of a growing port that Calcutta seemed to be but of a conquered city where the *de facto* authority of a Company had overshadowed the *de jure* sovereignty of the *nawab*. All *nawabs* from Mir Jafar onwards lived in Murshidabad by mortgaging their fortunes to the Company in Calcutta. A huge drain of wealth flowed from Murshidabad to Calcutta so much so that the officers of the Company here acquired and exercised a new power based on their new-found wealth. Calcutta flourished at the cost of Murshidabad.

### ***Calcutta-Madras Partnership***

The process that led to this destiny of Calcutta was ushered in 1756. When Calcutta was captured by the Nawab that year the Madras Council decided to temporarily withdraw from their involvements in the Deccan politics and concentrate their efforts in Bengal. "Had we been finally committed to the Deccan expedition when Calcutta was lost", writes Henry Dodwell, "Clive could not have sailed for its recovery and the course of events in Bengal might have been widely different."<sup>23</sup> Dodwell adds: "The Deccan could never have afforded the resources which, derived from Bengal, permitted to the capture of Pondichery in 1761."<sup>24</sup> Calcutta thus became the resource-providing centre from where conquests could be planned. In this it was not Bombay but Calcutta which became the associate of Madras in working out the strategies of an emerging empire. This was long before Hastings took over the reins of administration as Governor General over the British possessions in India. Calcutta became the source of a new military strength for the English fighting their battles against the French over the Carnatic in the south. Dodwell was the first historian to understand Calcutta's position in the geopolitics of the time. He wrote: "Clive dispatched an expedition from Calcutta under Colonel Forde, who defeated the French in the field, captured Masulipatam, held it under great difficulties, and obtained from the deserted Salabat Jang, without any obligation of service in return, the cession of the provinces which the French formerly had held."<sup>25</sup> Calcutta had thus been commissioned into its all India career as a stronghold of the English might that could step into safeguard the ramshackle position which Madras was presenting at the time. This position Calcutta gained not through the renovation of the old fort or through the mending of the garrison there. This resulted from the removal of the watchful eye of the *Nawab* on Calcutta and the disappearance of the Nawabi cordon around Calcutta that was effected through the *Nawabi* station at Hugli, Malda, Chitpur and Dumdum. A part of it was due to the collapse of Chandernagore from where the French maintained their watchful eye on Calcutta. The extraction of huge money from the *Nawab* Mir Jafar added to the self-confidence of the English. Calcutta in the immediate aftermath of the Palasi did not cease to be a old world city but its spirit had undergone a change. Clive's arrival in the city had always been a source of confidence not only for the English but also for the natives as well. His arrival at Calcutta for the second time on May 3, 1765 was hailed by all with exuberance.<sup>26</sup> The confidence necessary to consolidate an achievement had gone with the departure of Clive after the Battle of Palasi. This confidence returned now. Calcutta was now confident of a good governance and good governance was the real source of its power. Historians have seldom taken into account the fact that Clive's administrative and political achievement had gone a long way

toward the consolidation of Calcutta's status as an over mighty city that could defy frowning of the superior. Clive had given Calcutta the confidence to do this. Dodwell thus defines Clive's role in this:

“His (Clive's) mission had a double purpose. He was to establish with the country powers such relations as should not in themselves offer occasion for ceaseless revolutions: he was further to put an end to that insubordination which had recently pervaded all branches of the Company's government, refusing obedience to orders from home, or resolutions of the Council whenever these seemed to threaten pecuniary loss, and almost establishing private interests as the criterion of public policy”.<sup>27</sup>

This courage to sustain the worth of his political and administrative settlement against opposition from superior authorities gave Calcutta the political glamour it needed to become in future the seat of an empire. At the head of this courage came the decision that the Fort William would be relocated on a more convenient site. This was a remarkable decision taken in 1766<sup>28</sup> which eventually buttressed Calcutta's position as a city rallying around a fort not only for its own defence but also for the defence of the whole protectorate of which it had become the core. This was the protectorate of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa, the eastern *subahs* of the Mughal empire which served as the perennial source of revenue to the Mughals. In true sence of the term, Calcutta now became a garrisoned town and its strength was now equivalent to that of Madras. The removal of the *Nawabi* vigilance and the new fortification of the town ushered in a new age of hope and aspiration for Calcutta. The southern stations of the English were more or less free from the intervention of the subahdar<sup>29</sup> there.<sup>30</sup> Vis-à-vis these Calcutta suffered from *Nawabi* stringency. In the past Calcutta did not compare with Madras in terms of wealth and power.<sup>31</sup> Now because of the Plassey Plunder<sup>32</sup> a huge wealth was extracted from the Nawab of Murshidabad and in various ways that city had drained its wealth to Calcutta. Calcutta had become rich by the time Clive ended his second term of office in that city. It had been a developing city for many years but the Fort William was in a wretched state. Dodwell says that when the *Nawab* invaded Calcutta in 1756 “. . . Fort William was in a wretched a state as was Madras in 1746.”<sup>33</sup> From the position of a conquered and a defeated stronghold in 1756 Calcutta in ten years' time had become a centre of strength from where military reinforcements could be sent to the south to vindicate the British position there. On the basis of this military might a political status was conjured up. Clive while instituting his first government invited the *Nawab* to Calcutta. It was almost a conqueror's advice to the conquered and in doing this Clive was in effect creating a new balance of power not only between the

Nawab and the President of the Council at Fort William, but also between Murshidabad as the capital of a *subah* and Calcutta as the seat of power of an emerging empire. Clive wrote to Watts: "I need not hint to you how many good purposes the nabob's presence will answer."<sup>34</sup> He was thus initiating a process whereby the centrality of Murshidabad as the seat of Mughal power in Bengal was being surrendered to the rising authority of another city which had of late burst out of its fetters created and imposed so long by the vigilance of the *Nawabi* rule. The radiance of Mughal glory had dimmed after the Battle of Palasi and Clive was now undertaking an effort to regularize a process in which the dimming of the legitimacy of the Nawabi rule would seem to be a part of the consciously driven project of the English.

### ***Calcutta's Emergence an Eighteenth Century Phenomenon***

Calcutta emerged under these conditions over which the Company presided. Looked from this standpoint the emergence of Calcutta under the English was essentially an eighteenth century phenomenon. Till the end of the seventeenth century the English eyes were riveted on Chittagong. It was only under Clive and Hastings that Calcutta replaced Chittagong from the early English dream to build up their settlement in the east. The Mughal attack on the English factory at Hugli in October 1686<sup>35</sup> was mostly responsible for this. It convinced the English authorities at home and their men at Madras that two things had to be done at the earliest opportunity. First, they had to capture Chittagong<sup>36</sup>, a station far away from the Mughal base at Hugli and secondly their settlement wherever it was should be fortified in order to give protection to the English trade in Bengal. As a matter of fact the settlement of the English at Sutanati came after two broad failures of the English in their fight against the Mughals between 1686 and 1690. They planned to blockade the entire western coast of the Mughal Empire with the help of the coastal settlements there and capture Chittagong as a base for future settlement. Both the strategies failed and the English withdrew to Hijli at the mouth of the river from where they swooped down upon Balasore, sacked the city and burnt the town. It was a desperate act of revenge against the Mughal authority for the damage it had caused to English trading in Bengal.<sup>37</sup> There they were attacked once again by the Mughal forces while fever destroyed a sizeable part of their small army.<sup>38</sup> These experiences were never lost with the English and when they returned to Sutanati in the autumn of 1687 their first task was to build up a fortified settlement in Bengal. This was not only a local urge but a sentiment which the home authorities very powerfully drove into the minds of their local agents.<sup>39</sup>

It is, therefore, clear that the English settlement in Calcutta emerged only in the background of this failure of the English to capture Chittagong and

establish there a strong English base of naval power outside the orbit of Mughal interference.<sup>40</sup> In 1760 when Mir Qasim granted Midnapur, Burdwan and Chittagong to the Company the English were already firmly settled in Calcutta and there was no need for them to revive their old dream to settle at Chittagong. Since the last English attempt to capture Chittagong by force in 1688 down till the time of Hastings's assumption of power Calcutta had absorbed in its growth three major experiences of crisis that taught them the need of fortification. These were the rebellion of Shova Singh that shook the western part of the subah in 1696-97, the Maratha invasions of 1740s which helped the English to demonstrate their defence capabilities and the loss of Calcutta in 1756 and its subsequent recapture from the *Nawab* in early 1757. All these events taught them that the English town had to be properly garrisoned. Out of the logic of this that Calcutta was built primarily as a garrison town. At the time of the Maratha invasions Calcutta was a sanctuary for men in flight although its innate capacity to protect men was really very weak.<sup>41</sup> Both the rebellion of 1696-97 and the Maratha invasions in the middle of the 1740s showed how unprotected the western part of the Mughal *subah* of Bengal was whereas the invasion of Calcutta by the Nawab in 1756 showed how unprotected the English were vis-à-vis the outrageous Mughal rulers in the state. All these drove home with the English the fact that the Company's government must have a strong military force at its command and for this a fort had to be built which would house a strong garrison in the city. This was all the more a necessity because the population of the city had increased by leaps and bounds during the time of the Maratha invasions.<sup>42</sup> Despite the influx of native population the domestic development of Calcutta took the shape of a Christian town in the western lines.<sup>43</sup> The heritage of the town had also to be protected. Out of this need an imperial city was conceived. From the beginning it was clear that the city was not to go the way of a Mughal city. A Mughal city had no racial compartments. But in the new city the settlement of the whites was developed in contradistinction to the settlement of the brown people. From Govindapur and Calcutta natives were gradually driven to the north, to Sutanati and its beyond. The fort and its immediate neighbourhood became the nucleus of a white city. A port and a garrison town were now to be merged and on the basis of this merger the seat of a new power was to be erected. There was no declared aim in the eighteenth century toward which the city would direct its growth. But imperceptibly all orientations were taking shape. After the Palasi the office of the *Nawab* had sunk. After 1765 the office of the *Diwan* passed under the English custody. The Port, the fort and the office the Governor now assumed importance. A new urbanity was ring-fenced. Beyond this the old *Burra Bazar* remained to be the central hub where native business

enterprise remained to be a brisk phenomenon of the old world. The new city assumed its orientations outside the bustles of the old world.

### References:

1. Percival Spear in Percival Spear (ed). *The Oxford History of India by the late Vincent A. Smith* C.I.E., 3<sup>rd</sup> edn. Part III, pp. 452-453.
2. "In March 1775 Nanda Kumar accused Hastings of accepting a large bribe from Munni Begum in return for her appointment as guardian of the young Nawab Mubarak-ud-daula. The charge was welcomed by the majority, who immediately resolved 'that there is no species of speculation from which the governor-general has thought it reasonable to abstain'. Hastings refused to meet his accuser in council and dissolved the meeting, whereupon the majority ordered him to repay the amount into the Company's treasury, Hastings now brought a charge of conspiracy against Nanda Kumar. While this was pending Nanda Kumar was arrested at the instance of a Calcutta merchant on a charge of forgery unconnected with the previous controversy. He was tried before the new Supreme Court, found guilty and executed. Thereafter the charges against Hastings were dropped and never revived." Spear, *op.cit.*, pp. 505-6.
3. Spear, *op.cit.*, p. 506. Elijah Impey, it should be noted, was a class-friend of Warren Hastings at Westminster and at Calcutta their relationship got more cordial.
4. For Sir Elijah Impey read Elijah Barwell Impey (1780-1849), *Memoris of Sir Elijah Impey, knt. : First Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Judicature, at Fort William, Bengal*, London : Batten, Simpkin-Marshall, 1857.
5. "Forgery was not a crime punishable by death in the current criminal law of Bengal derived from the Muslim code, and the application of English penalties in Indian cases was opposed to a well-established Indian legal tradition." – Percival Spear, *op.cit.*, p. 506.
6. *Ibid.*
7. Cited in Spear, *op.cit.*, p. 502.
8. Vincent Smith. *Oxford History of India*, p. 537. This old book of Vincent Smith was one of the four major standard British interpretations of Indian history of the time, the three others being the old several-volume *Cambridge History of India*, Mr. P. E. Roberts's *History of British India*, Professor H.H. Dodwell's *British India*.
9. Edward Thompson and G.T. Garratt, *Rise and Fulfilment of British Rule in India*, Central Book Depot. Allahabad, 1962, p. 159.
10. The Select Committee said: "The complication of cruelty and fraud in the transaction admits of few parallels. Mr. Hastings . . . displays himself as a zealous servant of the Company, bountifully giving from his own fortune . . . from the gift of a man whom he treats with the utmost severity, . . ." Most of the British historians write in defence of Hastings and try to exonerate him from the charges which were levelled against him. *Roman Spear*, *op.cit.*, pp. 515-16 and Thompson and Garratt, *op.cit.*, pp. 159-60.
11. Thompson and Garratt, *op.cit.*, pp. 161.12. Cited in Thomson and Garratt, *op.cit.*, p. 162.

13. Cited in Thompson and Garratt. P. 161.
14. The real beginning of Calcutta's becoming an imperial city started only in the 1770s when the Company decided to stand forth as a *Dewan*.
16. M.E. Moncton Jones, *Warren Hastings in Bengal 1772-1774*, Oxford University Press, Preface.
17. Percival Spear, *op.cit.*, p. 516. British troops were sent to the house of the Nawab and the eunuch stewards of the Begums of the interior household were tortured, imprisoned, and 'subjected to fetters, starvation, and the treat of the lash' – *Ibid*.
18. *Ibid*.
19. "The begums were not left penniless, or even uncomfortable. Nor was their title to their riches quite certain. *But there is no doubt that faith was broken*, that the Company's government interfered in what was essentially a domestic and intimate situation in the nawab's own household, that the begums were severely treated and their dependants bullied and ill-used. *There also seem no doubt that Hastings's was the moving spirit egging on reluctant British resident and officers. When due allowance has been made for the dire necessities of Hastings's position at the time and the strains to which he was subjected, the fact remains that in both these cases (Benares and Awadh) Hastings sank below not only modern codes of conduct but the accepted Indian standards of the time.*" (Italics ours) – Percival Spear, *op.cit.* p. 516.
20. "The first governor-general, Warren Hastings, appointed under the first Parliamentary Regulating Act for India of 1773, took up his position with the view that the historical institutions already developed in India provided the best basis for British rule." – Burton Stein, *A History of India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1998, p. 212
21. Clive's intervention did not immediately change the old order. Spear writes: "Legally and to most outward appearance the old order continued. There had been revolutions before and the assistance of foreigners was well understood. The English were not even the first Europeans to interfere in Bengal politics, for the Portuguese had done it long before them." – Percival Spear, *op.cit.*, p. 468.
22. Percival Spear, *op.cit.*, p. 469 note.
23. Henry Dodwell, *Dupleix and Clive : The Beginning of Empire* (1920, Methuen & Co. Ltd., London), Vishwavidyalaya Prakashan, Gorakhpur, reprint, 1962, p. 107.
24. Dodwell, *op.cit.*, p. 108.
25. Dodwell, *op.cit.*, p. 110.
26. Dodwell writes (*op.cit.* p. 266): "His advent was hailed with an outburst of Oriental rhetoric. 'The flower of our wishes is blossomed in the garden of hope', wrote one; to another his coming was 'as rain upon the parched earth'. And these expressions represented something more than mere compliment. Save those who feared punishment for their misdeeds, there was not a man, of any race or creed, in Calcutta, but felt the safer for Clive's coming."

27. Dodwell, *op.cit.*, p. 267.

28. "Only in 1766 was it decided not to complete the fort on its original plan, since if ever the English were cooped up within its walls their affairs might not be regarded as irrevocably ruined. This change of policy is deeply significant. It marks emphatically the point to which the force of circumstances had driven the English, and to which all had ignorantly contributed -- Clive by his military success, Vansittart by his policy of re-establishing the Nawab's power, thus hastening the denouement of the piece, the Company's servants by their trade and the disputes occasioned thereby, until Clive returned to reap the harvest in whose sowing he had played so considerable part." – Dodwell, *op.cit.*, pp. 272-273.

29. The Nizam of Hyderabad was the *subahdar*.

30. Dodwell writes (*op.cit.*, p. 113): "Before the exploits of Dupleix and Bussy had produced their natural consequences, the position of Europeans in India had varied much. In the north they were at the uncertain mercy of the local Governors. At Calcutta, for example, the Council feared to condemn a Muhammadan to death; and neither French nor English were allowed to strengthen or enlarge their fortifications. But the government of Bengal under Alivardi Khan was comparatively vigorous and subordinate officials were closely watched. The governments dependent on the Subahdar of the Deccan, however, were much less strictly supervised during the later years of Nizam-ul-Mulk. He had adopted the custom of letting out the various offices for short terms to the highest bidder: and the local Nawabs were at liberty to recoup themselves as best as they could."

31. "Madras was a place of considerable wealth, a centre of trade and banking, not lightly to be meddled with, and there the English privileges were jealously upheld. When in 1744 a shroff, instead of applying to the English courts, dared to seek the aid of the amildar of St. Thome to procure payment from an English debtor, he was promptly fined 500 pagodas, and such representations were made to the offending amildar that he promptly offered apologies, explaining that he had but recently come from a remote part of India and knew nothing of English privileges." – Dodwell, *op.cit.*, pp 113-114.

32. For the details of the Plassey Plunder see N.K. Sinha, *The Economic History of Bengal*, Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyaya, Calcutta, 1965, pp. 12,78,103,152,221.

33. Dodwell, *op.cit.*, p. 130.

34. Cited in Dodwell, *op.cit.*, p. 158.

35. A detailed account of the operations is available in the introduction to C.R. Wilson's *Early Annals of the English in Bengal*, vol.I.

36. This point has been discussed in chapter IV entitled "The East India Company, 1600-1740" by Sir William Foster, in H.H. Dodwell (ed) *The Cambridge History of India, Vol. V, British India 1497-1858*, S. Chand & Co., Delhi Second Indian Reprint, 1963, p. 107. Here is an excerpt from Foster: "The home authorities, who ... were already persuaded of the necessity of adopting a bold policy, readily fell in with this view, and in 1686 they sent out orders that the Bengal factories should be withdrawn and an attempt made to seize Chittagong, for which purpose they dispatched several ships and a small force of soldiers.

At the same time on the western side of India the Mughal coast as to be blockaded and the local shipping seized; while the Coast settlements were to assist with the full strength of their resources. The enterprise was a rash one, though all might have been well if the Company had left the control of affairs entirely in the hands of Job Charnock, its experienced agent in Bengal; not that fighting would have been entirely avoided, but an accommodation would have been reached more speedily and nothing would have been done as regards the absurd plan of attacking so distant a port as Chittagong." – p. 107.

37. "These failing, the English withdrew further down the Hugli river and fixed their headquarters on the island of Hijli, at its mouth; while, in reprisal for the injuries sustained, their ships sacked and burnt the town of Balasore." William Foster, *op.cit.*, pp. 107-8.

38. "In their new station they were blockaded by the Mughal force, while fever made great havoc among the small garrison; but timely reinforcements enabled Charnock to effect an agreement under which, in the autumn of 1687, the English returned to Sutanati, where they remained for a year unmolested." – Foster, *op.cit.*, p. 108.

39. "The home authorities, however, were obstinately bent upon the plan of a fortified settlement in Bengal . . ." - *Ibid.*

40. Foster says that ". . . in September, 1688, a fresh naval force arrived under Captain William Heath, who had plenary powers to carry out the projected attack upon Chittagong. Despite the opposition of Charnock the new settlement was abandoned, and in January the fleet arrived at Chittagong, only to find it much too strong to be assailed with any chance of success; whereupon Heath decided to retreat to Madras."

41. "The approach of these raiders (the Marathas) created great consternation, for Fort William (finished in 1716) was of little real strength, and moreover its defensive capabilities had just been seriously reduced by the erection of warehouses against its southern face." – Foster, *op.cit.*, p. 112.

42. "Nevertheless Calcutta continued to grow in importance and wealth, and by the middle of the century its population was estimated at over 1,00,000 as compared with the 15,000 of 1704. This, it is true, was partly owing to a great influx about 1742, caused by the invasion of the province by the Marathas." – *Ibid.*

43. "The domestic history of Calcutta for this period [1700-1740] includes also the erection of a church (St. Anne's, consecrated in 1709) : the building of a fine house for the governor in the fort and the organization of a judicial system under a charter granted by George I in September, 1726, which also provided for the appointment of a mayor, sheriff, and aldermen. The courts thus established were similar to those erected at Madras under the same charter, as described later, but they did not come into full operation." – Foster, *op.cit.*, p. 113.

## CHAPTER 8 MUNICIPAL ADMINISTRATION

### ***Municipal Growth A Gradual Phenomenon***

The municipal growth of Calcutta in the eighteenth century was a gradual phenomenon. The Charter Acts of the British Parliament dated 1727, 1753 and 1794<sup>1</sup> created a municipal machinery for the town. The first effort towards the municipal organization of the city thus began within thirty seven years since Job Charnock set his foot on its soil in 1690. In 1803 Lord Wellesley's minute outlined a well-thought-out scheme for promoting the health and welfare of the inhabitants of the town. This minute, it is said, "stands as a beacon of light in the misty path of municipal reform."<sup>2</sup> Although these four major Charter Acts were worked out in course of slightly more than one century of the city's life no tangible achievement is said to have been made towards organizing the municipal life of the city. The East India Company's government could not create a fund with which the municipal life could properly be given a shape. People paid various taxes but they were credited to general revenues.<sup>3</sup> Lack of funds acted as a tremendous brake on the government's efforts to fulfil the major requirements of the town. Since the middle of the eighteenth century bad hygiene had become a serious constraint on population growth.<sup>4</sup> After the famine of 1770 when the interior of rural Bengal showed a picture of misery people began to crowd in Calcutta. Because of the paucity of fund "the efficiency of town administration suffered" and "neither the standard nor the volume of municipal services improved. It was increasingly felt that the stringency of finance could hardly be got rid of without calling in the King Stork of Taxation. The people of Calcutta were already heavily taxed; it appeared simply impossible to widen the tax net without soliciting the co-operation of the inhabitants in the working of the municipality."<sup>5</sup> This however did not happen before the beginning of the fourth decade of the nineteenth century.<sup>6</sup>

For a long time since the beginning of the eighteenth century Calcutta was ruled by one of the civil servants of the company. He was called the '*Zamindar*'<sup>7</sup> He had under him an Indian to assist him in the office and also to represent him in various activities. He was called the '*Black Zamindar*'. The main function of the *zamindar* was to collect rent and various other taxes and duties. But he usurped entire control over executive and revenue matters. He also exercised civil and criminal jurisdiction over the inhabitants of the town. This was in keeping with the Mughal tradition. According to the Mughal system of rule zamindars were the lowest unit of the executive and judicial authority of the State. At the village level they collected revenue, policed over the interior and dispensed small justice at the local level. In a sense they were the people who brought the might of the state at the doorstep of the peasants. At

Calcutta the zamindar appropriated the entire function of a rural zamindar. But the rural zamindar partly by tradition and partly by the compulsion of his station looked after some welfare of the people. But the zamindar at Calcutta had no regard for the people's welfare. "The regime of autocracy under the zamindar was ill-fitted for embarking on a policy of progressively improving the sanitary state of the town of Calcutta".<sup>9</sup> The result was that the city remained to be nothing better than "an undrained swamp surrounded by malarious jungles"<sup>9a</sup> The Charter Act of 1727 set up a Corporation for the town but it was "intended to exercise judicial rather than administrative function."<sup>10</sup> Under the Charter the main duties of the Corporation was to collect ground rents and town dues. Since the condition of roads and drains had become desperate the Corporation at the most undertook some efforts to make necessary repairs in them. The town administration was weak, the finance was short and the will to improve the condition of the town was absent. The Company's administration was anxious to whip up revenue because revenue provided them the sinews of commerce. The Company's stake at the Bengal trade and through Bengal trade its stake at the Asian trade were pressing and whatever revenue it could raise from the soil of the city would help them to provide for their investment in Bengal. Moreover the expenditure incurred for the civil administration in the city was to be provided from the general revenue. Hence revenue that was forcibly raised was dearly conserved. There was no will to expend this revenue in the municipal renovation of the town. When the will to promote the city was absent at the government level the creation of a Corporation by the Charter of 1727 was of little meaning. The Corporation entrusted the administration of the town in the hands of the zamindar who could not function in the absence of adequate funds. He failed and through him the Corporation failed.<sup>12</sup>

One of the main reasons why town administration suffered in the first half of the eighteenth century was the lack of coordination between the '*White Zamindar*' and the '*Black Zamindar*'. The White Zamindar was an autocrat and this autocracy began with Job Charnock<sup>13</sup> and persisted till such time as Siraj-ud-daullah's sack of Calcutta. The '*Black Zamindar*' under him was a scheming man who taking advantage of the ignorance of the white master of the intricacies of the land revenue administration sought to embezzle money. Nandaram Sen, the Black Zamindar of Calcutta in 1705, could not pull on well with his white master Ralph Sheldon. He was implicated in a charge of defalcation and was sacked from his office. But the Company's administration was in need of men who were trained in the revenue administration of the city. Hence Nandaram was reinstated in 1707. In no time he was again detected in a defalcation. But he somehow managed to escape from Calcutta

and fled to the nawab's territory at Hugli. The *Faujdar* of Hugli seized him and eventually handed him over to the English authorities at Calcutta. He was ultimately forced to make good the loss to the Company.

Nandaram Sen was succeeded by two Black Zamindars, Rambhadra and Jagat Das. In 1720 one Govindaram Mitra was appointed 'Black Zamindar' of Calcutta. Thus in course of fifteen years since the creation of the post in 1705 four persons were appointed "*Black Zamindar*". Govindaram remained in the post for thirty long years and his fall from his station took place when he failed to pull on well with his white master John Zephaniah Holwell. Since Holwell's appointment as the *Zamindar* of Calcutta took place in 1752 one may say that Govindaram was in power at least till that year. He fell a victim to Holwell's suspicions that he had amassed huge money by defrauding government revenue. Govindaram's salary at the beginning was Rs. 30 a month and this was later increased to Rs. 50 per month. He also had income from his farms received from the Nawabs of Murshidabad.<sup>14</sup> Since Govindaram built the largest temple in Calcutta called the Navaratna Temple<sup>15</sup> he became an object of suspicion to his superiors. Some historians are prone to accept the English version of the story that Holwell unearthed sufficient evidence of Govindaram's having screened the Company's revenue. Holwell's veracity was doubted by his own colleagues within the service of the Company. In any case nothing was proved against Govindaram and he was acquitted of charges of embezzlement. But he was not allowed to remain in office as the 'Black Zamindar' of Calcutta.<sup>16</sup>

The British charge of embezzlement levelled against successive Black Zamindars should not be accepted without scrutiny. It is said that the 'Black Zamindar' was "accustomed by immemorial practice to supplement his inadequate salary by that he . . . considered as the perquisites of his office, emoluments which, on scrutiny, would be regarded by his employers as embezzlements."<sup>17</sup> Under the Mughals officers' remuneration consisted of perquisites. Thus a *qanungo*, a *patwari*, a *qazi*, an *amin*, a *shiqdar* – all had enjoyed *russoms* or allowances drawn squarely from the interception of revenue.<sup>18</sup> The Mughal rule was a rule by devolution. The rulers at the top bartered away both revenue and authority to their representatives at subordinate levels and at the apex of power they remained as symbols of distant majesty. This point was not properly understood by the officers of the Company. When they complained about the corruption of the indigenous staff in their employment they invariably meant interception of revenue by them at their own stations. But the fact that this interception was an accustomed part of their living they could not understand.

In any case the absence of coordination between the '*White Zamindar*' and his subordinate '*Black Zamindar*' did not allow the town administration to take a proper shape. As years rolled on it was widely felt that the zamindar could not be allowed to remain at the centre of the municipal administration of the town. In 1794 the municipal management of the town was taken out of the hands of the Zamindar.

The context that necessitated the take-over of the administration has been well analysed by Goode. For a proper appreciation of the perspective of change we quote the following excerpts from his work. "The municipal administration of the town (if such a conception can be accurately applied to the early days of Calcutta) was originally entrusted to one of the Company's Civil Servants, who was called the '*Zamindar*' and later the Collector of Calcutta. Under a Royal Charter issued in the twenty-sixth year of the reign of George I (1727), a Corporation consisting of a mayor and nine aldermen, with a mayor's court, was established, of which Holwell, the former '*Zamindar*' or Collector of Calcutta, afterwards became president. The Mayor's Court was given civil, criminal, and ecclesiastical jurisdiction over British inhabitants, and dispensed a kind of rough and ready justice, according to broad principle of equity. We hear of a tax being levied on the inhabitants of Calcutta for the construction of a town hall or court house to accommodate the mayor and his court. And in 1729 the building was erected on the site now occupied by St. Andrew's Church".<sup>18a</sup>

"The Corporation seems to have done little to improve the administration of the town; its charter was surrendered in 1753 and a new Royal Charter granted, by which the Mayor's Court was re-established, and an ineffectual attempt made to organise a municipal fund by the 'levy of a house tax of two or three lakhs of rupees, to defray the expense of cleansing and ornamenting the place internally'. The revenue from ground rents, tolls, and other town dues was partly employed in maintaining 'an undisciplined battalion of thanadars' and peons, constituting the only established guard or night-watch of the city"<sup>18(b)</sup>

We hear of orders from the authorities to the '*Zemindar*' or Collector, to 'make the drains sweet and wholesome', and to cut-down the jungle in and around the town, but little improvement in the sanitary conditions of the town appears to have been effected. The ditch to the east of the old Fort, into which the bodies of the victims of the Black Hole had been cast, was not filled up until 1766, nor the Mahratta Ditch until 1780, though both had been the dumping-grounds for all the filth and garbage of Calcutta.<sup>18c</sup>

“In 1790 Grandpre could still write that the public drains were regarded as the natural receptacles for all refuse and filth, that carcasses were left to rot and putrefy in the streets, and that jackles had for two nights prayed on a human corpse thrown down at his gate. The need of drastic measures gradually forced itself upon the attention of the authorities.”<sup>18d</sup>

“The unsoundness of a system which, in addition to his multifarious revenue and judicial duties, made the Collector responsible for public order, convenience, and health, became more and more apparent, as the area and population of the town expanded and aggravated the evils of over-crowding and imperfect drainage.”<sup>18e</sup>

“*Appointment of Justices* – In 1794 under the Statute 33 Geo. III, the Collector was relieved of his municipal duties, the Governor-General taking powers to appoint Justices of the Peace for the Municipal administration of the town, with authority to make regular assessments and to levy rates. This statute may be regarded as a landmark in the development of municipal government in Calcutta.”<sup>18f</sup>

### ***Corporate Control Of The Justices Of The Peace***

Thus by a Statute of George III the town was placed under a corporate control of the Justice of the Peace. In this way the autocratic administration of the Zamindar passed away under the impact of a rightful application of law. It may be said that the municipal administration of the time came to be properly organised only in 1794. The institution of the Justices of the Peace was in existence for more than five decades. When the Mayor’s Court was established in 1727 it was laid down that the five senior members of the Governor’s Council would be called Justices of the Peace and they would dispense justice for all offence other than high treason. Through justices of the Peace efforts were made to extend the benefits of western institutions to the people in India.<sup>19</sup> But the number of Justices of the Peace was inadequate and their functions were not properly defined. These shortcomings were remedied by the Charter of 1794. The Act empowered the Governor General in Council to create new post of the Justice of the Peace. By commission to be issued from time to time the Governor General in Council might appoint or nominate covenanted servants of the Company or even private Englishman to act as Justices of the Peace. This provision removed the brake on the numerical strength of the Justices of the Peace.

The Charter of 1794 also organised the function of the Justices of the Peace.<sup>19a</sup> Their administration was to take place through three departments – the

assessment department, the executive department and the judicial department. The judicial department meant sessions of the justices. At the outset when business was small the sessions of the Justices were held once a year. Later on the volume of business increased and quarter sessions became a practice. The Justices in session had to hear appeals and decide complaints. That apart they had to preside over such functions as assessment of rates, making arrangement for the execution of the conservancy works, the collection of the assessment, looking into the ordinary watch and ward of the town, ratification of assessments and so on. Thus the function of the Justices of the Peace were properly organised.

Truly speaking, the Charter of 1794 brought about a great improvement upon the Charter of 1753. The latter Charter was “primarily judicial in its purport, it laid down elaborately the jurisdiction of the Mayor’s Court and the rules and practices to be followed therein”.<sup>20</sup> It did three things. “It envisaged the establishment of the Court to be called the Court of Requests for the recovery of small debts (not exceeding five pagodas). And it conferred a general power on the President and Council for Fort William for making by laws and imposing penalties. It also contained a provision, as in the earlier Charter of 1726, of a Sheriff for Calcutta.”<sup>21</sup> These were broad administrative changes and nothing practically came out of these changes in the long run. Vis-à-vis the failure of the Charter of 1753 the changes brought about by the Charter of 1794 seem to be innovating. “The Statute (of 1794 was), however, of great importance, in as much as it substituted corporated control and responsibility for the autocratic administration of the Zemindar. It bears the imprimatur of Government’s faith in committees and in the transplanting of English Institutions on the Indian soil.”<sup>22</sup>

Throughout the second half of the eighteenth century public health in Calcutta suffered very much. “The unhealthy conditions of town life persisted, the amount spent annually to remedy these was insignificant and, though the population was increasing, few actual reforms were undertaken for the sanitation of the town owing to the acute shortage of funds.”<sup>23</sup> Calcutta in all practical sense offered the picture of an undrained swamp, “filth lying in profusion everywhere, a cemetery in the very heart of the capital, and decoities within hark of Government house.”<sup>24</sup> To remedy this situation the Charter of 1794 specially enjoined upon the Justices of the Peace “to appoint scavengers for cleansing the streets” and “also to order the watching and repairing of the streets therein as they respectively shall judge necessary.

There are two divergent views about the success the Justices of the Peace acquired in course of their function over years. The first view holds that the

office of the Justices of the Peace were effective and successful. "The regime of the Justice lasted for many decades. At the beginning the Justices were largely Company's senior servants, but in due course, they included the leading citizens of the town. The Justices, we are told, set to their business in real earnestness and implemented certain reforms. One of their initial acts was the metalling of Circular Road.<sup>24a</sup> Town conservancy also received some attention. The Justices adopted the system of inviting tenders for the supply of bullocks for the carts to be used in cleaning the drains and streets of Calcutta."<sup>25</sup> As against this we have the other view. "It is true that before long, . . ., all real power began to concentrate in one person, the Chief Magistrate, responsible not to the people but to Government, while the Justices sitting in quarter sessions became for administrative purposes a mere nullity."<sup>26</sup>

### ***Not An Effective Institution***

The institution of the Justices of the Peace might not be an effective institution from a long term point of view. But it formed a part of the general effort towards organising the municipal administration of the town. As the offices of the Justices of the Peace came to be reinforced the executive branch of the administration was also recognized. The executive branch of the municipal administration was manned by an engineer in charge of roads and conservancy, and an executive officer under him who also acted as the head overseer and a flock of clerks and menials who acted as the general staff of the office. In spite of the great reorganization of administration nothing tangible was affected in terms of the improvement of roads and conservancy. Improvement in these directions was beyond the capacity of the Justices of the Peace.<sup>27</sup>

The institution of the Justice of the Peace had failed but it showed that a milieu of change had been ushered in the city. With the English East India Company effectively saddled in power the administration came to be centralized more and more in Calcutta. The change had begun during the time of Hastings. He did three important things. First, he transferred the exchequer, known by Mughal parlance the *Khalsa*, from Murshidabad to Calcutta. This was the most effective measure by which Calcutta became the capital of the financial world of Bengal. Secondly, he abolished the five provincial Revenue Councils at Burdwan, Dacca, Dinajpur, Murshidabad and Patna. Thirdly, he set up the Committee of Revenue in Calcutta. These measures not only brought about a centralization in administration but aimed at improving the collection and administration of territorial revenue. Revenue was in fact the main aim of the government. In consistent with this aim the Justice in Session were authorised by the Charter of 1794 to appoint the Collector of Assessment.<sup>28</sup>

Thus it may be said that the Justices of the Peace were important instruments of change. At least a work-culture had decidedly set in the metropolitan administration and the historian who regretted that the Justices in course of time were reduced to nullity could not help appreciate this. "The Justices seem to have set to work at once to improve the town."<sup>29</sup> With this mood of optimism the eighteenth century of Calcutta rolled on to the nineteenth. But the failure of the municipal administration in the city remained unredeemed throughout the course of the eighteenth century.

## NOTES

1. Keshab Chaudhuri in his *Calcutta : Story of its Government*, Chapter I, refers to the dates of the Charters as 1726, 1753 and 1793. S.W. Goode in his *Municipal Calcutta : Its Institution in their Origin and Growth*, Edinburgh, 1916, pp. 8-10 gives the dates as 1727, 1753 and 1794. Goode's accounts appear to be quite reliable and Chaudhuri had depended on Goode to a very large extent. Except these dates some of the staples of Chaudhuri's facts seem to be derived from Goode. Hence the dates given by Goode have been accepted here.
2. Quoted in Keshab Chaudhuri, *Calcutta : Story of its Government*, Calcutta, 1973, p.4.
3. "Despite the earnestness of the Government to provide the town with Municipal services conducive to the well-being of the inhabitants, almost nothing could be done because the tax receipts from a wide variety of sources were credited to the general revenues of the state and not to the town fund" – *Ibid.*
4. See Ranjit Sen, *Calcutta in the Eighteenth Century*, Vol. I, Chapter II.
5. Keshab Chaudhuri, *Op.Cit.*, p. 4.
6. In 1833 Mr. D.M. Farlan, the then Chief Magistrate of Calcutta proposed a new scheme for the up gradation of the municipal Government of Calcutta. The scheme aimed at setting up a committee consisting of not more than nine members to look into the welfare of the town. Of these members not fewer than five members would be selected annually by the qualified voters in each of the four divisions of the town. This new scheme of town government however, did not succeed. There was a public apprehension that taxation would increase because of the activities of the committee. The public cooperation with the government was therefore absent and this eventually resulted in the failure of the Committee.
7. This adoption of the Mughal nomenclature does not seem unique in this case. In 1769 when the Supervisors were sent into the districts they were given the Mughal title of *Amin*.
8. Mr. Ralph Sheldon and Holwell were the two most important 'Zamindars' of Calcutta. Govindaram Mitra was the most important 'Black Zamindar' in the Company's service in the eighteenth century. It is said that Sheldon was the first of the English Zamindars of the town. He was given appointment in 1700.
9. Keshab Chaudhuri, *Op.Cit.*, p. 18

9a. "The city was in fact little better than an undrained swamp, surrounded by malarious jungles and pervaded by a pestilential miasma" – Goode, *Municipal Corporation*, p. 9.

10. Hunter, *Imperial Gazetteer of India*, Vol. IV, p. 285.

11. For details of the E.I. Company's investment policy see N.K. Sinha, *The Economic History of Bengal from Plassey to the Permanent Settlement*, Vol. I, Ch. II.

12. "The Corporation did little to improve the administration of the town" – Keshab Chaudhuri, *Op.Cit.*, p. 19.

13. "The Zemindar virtually turned out to be an autocrat for the simple reason that there were no curbs on his power to collect rates and taxes" – Keshab Chaudhuri, *Op.Cit.*, p. 23.

14. About 1851, one hundred years after the fall of Govindaram Mitra, the following was written about him.

"Govindram was the Black Zamindar for 25 years and amassed an immense fortune. He also held large farms from the nawab of Murshidabad. There is still to be seen the remains of the largest Temples in Calcutta called the Navaratna or nine Jewels Temple built by Govindram. It was once crowned with a cupola visible from a distance of many miles" – Quoted by Keshab Chaudhuri, *Op.Cit.*, p. 16.

15. *Ibid.*

16. For further study on the subject of 'Black Zamindars' see J.C. Marshman, "Notes on the Left or Calcutta bank of the River Hooghly" in *Calcutta Review*, 1845-46; J. Long's article in the *Calcutta Review.*, 1851; Appendix XIV of the Census of India, 1951, Vol. VI, Part III.

17. *The Fifth Report, from the Select Committee of the House of Commons on the Affairs of the East India Company*, Vol. I Introduction, p. LXXIII.

18. These allowances were later resumed by the Government of the East India Company, see Ranjit Sen, *Economics of Revenue Maximization 1757-1793*, Ch.II.

18(a). Goode, *Municipal Calcutta*, pp. 8-9.

18(b) *Ibid.*

18(c) *Ibid.*

18(d) Goode, *Op.Cit.*, p. 10.

18(e) *Ibid.*

18(f) *Ibid.*

19. *Ibid.*

19a. "The administration of the justices was divided into three departments : (1) the assessment department, (2) the executive department, (3) the judicial department or the Justices in Session. The function of these departments were respectively (1) to assess the rates ; (2) to provide for the execution of the conservancy works, the collection of the

assessment, and for the ordinary watch and ward for town; (3) to approve assessments and to hear and decide appeals or complaints against the assessors and the collectors. We are told that the sessions were at first held once a year, but as the volume of business increased, quarter sessions became necessary. The Justices were assisted by a Clerk of the Peace” – a post corresponding to that of a registrar or record keeper – Goode, *Op.Cit.*, p. 12.

20. Keshab Chaudhuri, *Op.Cit.*, p. 21.

21. *Ibid.*

22. Goode, *Op.Cit.*, p. 10

23. Keshab Chaudhuri, *Op.Cit.*, p. 22.

24. H. Tinker, *The Foundations of Local Self Government of India, Pakistan and Burma*, p. 157.

24a. “In 1799 steps were taken to effect a notable improvement – the metalling of Circular Road” – Goode, *Op.Cit.*, p. 12.

25. Keshab Chaudhuri, *Op.Cit.*, p. 26.

26. Goode, *Op.Cit.*, p. 10

27. “It was however, soon evident that the most efficient conservancy could do nothing but mitigate in a small degree the ills under which the city laboured; in the absence of the wide roads and systematic drainage, conservancy itself was hardly practicable. Original works of a magnitude which placed them outside the resources of the Justices, were an imperative necessity” Goode, *Op.Cit.*, p. 12.

28. In 1830 the post of the Collector of Assessment was attached to the office of the Superintendent of Police. The Justices were thus relieved of their duties of watch and ward. Henceforth they, as Divisional Magistrates, confined their attention to judicial works.

29. Goode, *Op.Cit.*, p. 12.

## CHAPTER 9 DID CALCUTTA GROW AS A PILGRIM CENTRE?

### ***Kali : A Rallying force***

*Kali*, the goddess of prowess and strength, had for many centuries been the rallying point around which the Hindu Bengali mind had taken its shape. Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyaya, the novelist, while writing *Anandamath*, made the transforming image of Kali a great symbol of the changing fate of the motherland. At one place of the novel Mahendra beholds the mother in presence of the *Brahmochari* :

Mahendra - Who is she ?

Brahmochari - She is the Mother.

Mahendra - Who is the Mother?

Brahmochari - She is the one whose children we are

An awe-stricken Mahendra said : “*Kali*”

Brahmachari - Kali, smeared with darkness and robbed of all her possessions and hence nude.

Thus the destitution of our motherland – the great *Bharatabhumi* – under the British rule has been compared to the denuded image of *Kali*. Bankim Chandra did not stop here. He built up a triad to describe the image of *Kali* – *Ma Ja Chhilen* (what the Mother was like – the Resplendent), *Ma Ja Haiachhen* (what the Mother has been reduced to – the Destitute) and *Ma Ja Haiben* (what the Mother will be like – the Prosperous).

From the above one will understand what powerful a force the concept of *Kali* is in the Bengali Hindu mind. Over centuries the icon of *Kali* has been worshipped by the Hindus in different forms and in different names.<sup>1</sup> One of these forms was *Dakshina Kali* in which it was worshipped at Kalighat. In some ancient literature relating *Sakta Pithas* we come across the expressions *Kalighatta*, *Kalipitha*, *Kalikshetra* etc. but there is a great controversy among historians whether all these refer to Kalighat or not.<sup>2</sup> They, however, do certainly mean that the worship of *Kali* was universal in Bengal and the importance of Kalighat must be looked at from the general panorama of *Kali* worship in Bengal.

### ***Kali-Worship in the Eighteenth Century***

In the eighteenth century Calcutta witnessed *Kali* worship at two places – one at Chitpur and the other at Kalighat. Chitpur, at the beginning of the eighteenth century, was outside Calcutta but eventually at the end of the century it was incorporated as a part of the city and at present it forms a part of Central and Central-North Calcutta. A part of Chitpur now forms a part of the Burra Bazar Calcutta. At Chitpur the temple of *Chitresvari* or *Sarvamangala* was situated. The antiquity of this deity is unknown. The popular belief was that the icon of this *devi* was set up by one robber-chief called *Chite*. A biographer of Calcutta writes : “When they [the gangs of Chite] received the blessing of the *devi* in the form of consent they used to go out on land and on water for robbery.”<sup>3</sup> He adds that the temple of this *devi* was originally by the side of the Ganga but later on the Ganga receded. There were thick forests around this temple and human sacrifices were very common there.<sup>4</sup>

There was another temple which in the middle of the eighteenth century captured much of the attention of the people in and around Calcutta. This was the *Navaratna* or *Nine Jewels Temple*<sup>5</sup> built by Govindaram Mitra, the ‘Black Zamindar’ of Calcutta. This temple was richly ornamented and had a fine architectural structure. But it could never grow as a pilgrim centre. The Hindu Bengali sentiment from time immemorial capitulated to the attractions and spells of the mother goddess and hence this *Navaratna* temple in spite of having the glamour of its wealth and decoration, architecture and design, came to be overshadowed by the temples of *Dakshina Kali* and *Sarvamangala* or *Chittesvari*, respectively situated at Kalighat and Chitpur.

The point to be noted here is that middle of the eighteenth century there were three important temples in Calcutta vying for supremacy. Out of these the Kalighat temple emerged supreme. Two reasons account for this. The first was the pattern of belief of the Hindus. “Kalighat or Kalikshetra”, writes an observer, “is reckoned by the Hindus as one of the holiest places of worship in Hindustan”. “To a Hindu, whatever sect he may belong to, be he a Saiva, a Sakta or a Ganapatya, this place is very dear. From remote times, vows have been made here for the attainment of objects, and it is on record that in many instances the objects have been realized. Yogis and Sannyasis and saintly Hindus congregate at the place, and after quietly performing their worship of the great goddess go their own way. When the Feudatory Hindu Chiefs of northern parts of India happen to be in Calcutta they regard it as obligatory on them to offer Puja to Mother Kali before they return to their territories. The holiness of the temple has become to be known far and wide, and veneration for it is so deep-rooted in the minds of the Hindus that it may be compared to that of the temple of Bisweswar at Benares. It is that the East India Company in

their early days used to offer Puja to the Deity at Kalighat. On the occasion of their Punnahas [*punyahs*] they participated in the ceremony, which they solemnized”<sup>6</sup>

***Pattern of Worship and Support :***

Kalighat had a tradition of ritual worship. In this it received a very vast patronage of the richer sections of the community. It is said that Raja Nabakrishna of Shovabazar spent one lakh of Rupees “on the worship of this goddess”. “Amongst the offerings were a gold necklace valued at 10,000 rupees, a rich bed, silver plates, dishes and basins; sweetmeat and other food sufficient for the entertainment of a thousand persons; and trifling presents of money to nearly two thousand of the poor.”<sup>7</sup> Jaya Narayan Ghosal the Zamindar of Kidderpore (now in western Calcutta) “expended twenty thousand rupees at this place.”<sup>8</sup> There are records showing that brahmanas and merchants at different times spent thousands of Rupees for the worship of the idol *Kali*. Thus ten years after Jaya Narayan’s donation was made a merchant from East Bengal spent five thousand Rupees for the worship of the goddess here. In 1810 a brahman from East Bengal spent four thousand Rupees and in the following year another brahman, named Gopee Mohan spent ten thousand Rupees for the worship of the deity but “Being a Vaishnava he did not offer any bloody sacrifices.”<sup>9</sup> Animal slaughter was so rampant here that Jaya Narayan Ghosal “scarified twenty-five buffaloes, one hundred and eight goats, and five sheep, and presented to the goddess four silver arms, two gold eyes and many gold and silver ornaments” and ten years later the merchant from East Bengal paid “the price of a thousand goats which were slaughtered”.<sup>10</sup>

This tradition of animal slaughter gave Kalighat the status of a centre where the ritual worship of *Shakti* could be done. *Shakti* worship in Calcutta gained great currency in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and continued till the twentieth. In the rich households of Calcutta the *Shakti* was worshipped in different names – *Kali*, *Shyama*, *Jagaddhatri*, *Tara*, *Annapurna*, etc. One writer<sup>11</sup> has described how the *Kalipuja* was performed in the house of one Kalishankar Ghose, a very well-to-do man of Calcutta, with ghastly excitement. “The compound of this household”, writes the author, “became submerged with blood at the night of Shyamapuja; streams of blood used to flow through the drains”.<sup>12</sup> Such events were certainly later phenomena but they represented the culmination of a process which took shape over centuries and in the course of which Kalighat emerged as the central point of *Shakti* worship from where *Shakti* culture got its radiations. Vis-à-vis Kalighat *Chittesvari* temple at Chitpur could not grow there. This made the place somewhat desolate<sup>13</sup> in the early half of the eighteenth century.

### ***Antiquity Beyond Eighteenth Century.***

It took Kalighat nearly three centuries to journey to fame. One of the earliest mentions of Kalighat dates back to 1495. That year Bipradas Pipalai wrote his Bengali poem *Manasamangal*. Bipradas' hero Chand Sadagar undertook a journey down the river Bhagirathi from Bhagalpur to the sea.<sup>14</sup> In course of the journey he passed by Chitpur, Calcutta, Kalighat and Betor. "At Chitpur the king worshipped the goddess Sarvamangala<sup>15</sup> . . . Rowing by the eastern Bank the great and heroic Chand passed by Calcutta and arrived at Betor. The pious Chand Datta worshipped Betai Chandi at Betor. Kind Chand having worshipped Kalika at Kalighat, passed by Churaghat and Jayadhali".<sup>16</sup>

The antiquity of Kalighat has also been proved by references from Mukundaram Chakravarti's *Chandimangal*, a Bengali text written between 1577 and 1592. In this book Kalighat is mentioned as one of the places visited by its hero, Dhanapati. Dhanapati is said to have worshipped goddess *Kali* at Kalighat. In "a third Bengali poem written by Khemananda a little before, the blessings of all the well-known local gods and goddesses are invoked in a prayer, and the goddess *Kali* at Kalighat is mentioned in the same breath with 'Betai' at [as] Betor."<sup>17</sup>

Three points are to be noted here. First, goddess *Kali* at Kalighat had to compete with her rival goddess *Betai-Chandi* at Betor. In this competition goddess *Betai-Chandi* had an advantage over goddess *Kali* at Kalighat : Bipradas in his poem *Manasamangal* observed : "Betor was a place of trade, and it seems to have had a market. It was to Satgaon, what jedda is to Mecca"<sup>18</sup> Thus it may be said that goddess *Betai* enjoyed the backing of merchants which goddess *Kali* at Kalighat did not enjoy before the eighteenth century.

The second point emerges out of this. If the evidences of Bipradas and Mukundaram are to be believed goddess *Kali* at Kalighat did not enjoy the patronage of the writers and bards to a very great extent. Between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries the name of Kalighat-*Kali* was not a selling name. to those who wrote ballads and lyrics, poems and verses Calcutta and Kalighat did not denote the same place and this separation between the two places retarded the growth of the both – of the one as the leading urban centre and of the other as the leading pilgrim centre of the east. "It will be observed", writes A.K. Roy "that Calcutta had already come to be known as a place different from Kalighat and that Kalighat itself was a mere riparian village sacred to the goddess *Kali*, but not important enough to merit more than a word of mention. The goddess was deemed to be just sacred enough for a visit

and an offering on the part of the traveller, but not nearly so great as the goddess Sarvamangala at Chitpore or the goddess Betai-Chandi at Betor, who had ancient temples. Nor was her renown such as to throw the poet into ecstasies over her adoration.”<sup>19</sup> From this it is clear that in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the worship of *Shakti* in the form of *Chandi* and *Sarvamangala* was more popular in Bengal than in the form of *Kali*, *Syama* and *Tara* as were available in Kalighat and Tarapith in the eighteenth centuries. The worship of *Shakti* in the two forms *Kali* or *Shyama* and *Tara* became popular in the eighteenth century. The ascendancy of *Kali* to a dignified worship began since the days of Bipradas. But it took three centuries for this goddess to establish herself to popular worship although during one century since Bipradas’ time she was steadily emerging from her obscurity. This is the third significant point one should keep in mind before assessing the history of *Kali*-worship in Bengal. We quote from A.K. Roy’s observation on this point. “The goddess [*Kali*] had evidently acquired dignity since the days of Bipradas [the end of the fifteenth century]. In nearly a century’s time she had reached the level of these other goddesses [i.e. *Sarvamangala* or *Chittesvari* and *Betai-Chandi*]. As yet [till the time of Mukundaram i.e. the end of the sixteenth century], however, she had not attained that fame in Tantric rites which evokes the enthusiasm of later votaries. In the works of Bipradas and Khemananda, Kalighat is dismissed with a passing allusion to it and its goddess; in the *Ganga Bhakti Tarangini*, published about the year 1740 A.D., it is described as a wonderful place where the Brahmins chant hymns, while the worship of the goddess accompanied by the ‘Homa’ ceremony [*Havana*], is celebrated with much pomp and sacrifice.”<sup>19a</sup> From this Roy arrived at the unavoidable conclusion that Kalighat rose to complete fame not before the middle of the eighteenth century although in the earlier centuries its rise was noticed in literature. He writes : “It seems therefore, tolerably certain that, although Kalighat had become known before 1495 A.D. its fame did not spread till 1592 A.D., but was well established before the middle of the eighteenth century.”<sup>20</sup> The eighteenth century was the period when Calcutta became the seat of a power, trans-oceanic and commercial in nature namely the English East India Company. This was also the century when the rudiments of urbanization of Calcutta began. We shall now, therefore, see to what extent the growth of Kalighat as a pilgrim centre was a determinant factor for the growth of Calcutta as an urban centre and vice versa.

### ***Could Calcutta Grow as a Religious Centre ?***

Calcutta was not a place of traditional worship as Madurai was. Nor did it undergo the process by which Ramadaspur eventually became Amritsar. Yet Calcutta had the potentiality to grow as a pilgrim centre for, as it has already been said, it was the seat of *Kali*, the goddess of prowess and aggressiveness around which the Hindu Bengali mind had traditionally veered. "The ancient Hindus", writes a biographer of Calcutta, "called it by the name of Kalikshetra. It extended from Bahula to Dakshinasar. According to the puranas a portion of the mangled corpse of Sati or Kali fell somewhere within that boundary whence the place was called Kalikshetra. Calcutta is a corruption of Kalikhsetra."<sup>21</sup> This association with the puranic mythology was enough in itself to give Calcutta a boost towards its growth as a religious centre or as a pilgrim town. Historians say that cities which grow as religious and pilgrim centres have a slow growth but their growth is stable and lasting. As compared to this cities which grow as commercial and political centres grow quickly but their growth is unstable and is likely to be impermanent.<sup>22</sup>

Calcutta had great potentialities to grow as a stable and permanent pilgrim centre, a vast religious town that could have added much to the pilgrim heritage of India. But in the long run it did not. Why it failed to derive its inspiration for urbanization from its being a pilgrim spot will be our subject of study here.

Calcutta's potentiality to grow as a religious centre developed out of three factors. The first factor was the belief of the people that Calcutta had an association with the puranic past of this holy land of ours – *Pavitra Bharatbhumi*. It is one of the fifty one *pithas* or scared spots which were sanctified by the receipt of the cut-off limbs from *Sati's* body. It is said Kalighat, a place in the southern part of Calcutta, received the little toe of the right foot of *Sati*. Wilson, one of the earliest biographers of Calcutta, points out that according to *Pithamala* (meaning the garland of holy places) of *Nigama-Kalpa* the actual site where *Sati's* toe fell was *Kalikshetra* and not Kalighat. According to a version of the *Pithamala* "Kalikshetra extended over two joyanas from Behala in the south to Dakshineswar in the north, forming a sort of triangle, standing on the Ganges and containing the three primeval Gods of the Hindu Trinity – Brahma, Vishnu and Siva – at its three angles, with the goodess Kali at its centre."<sup>23</sup>

Kalighat in Calcutta thus could have grown into a substantially Hindu Tirtha before the rise of Calcutta as an urban centre of the east. That it did not grow into a full-fledged prime point of sub continental fame before the eighteenth century may be due to the fact that its pull factors were extremely weak. The status of a pilgrim centre depends upon its heritage. Kalighat did not get

sufficient time to grow its heritage. A very informative research on the *Sakta Pithas* of India makes this point clear. It says : “The sixteenth century author Vamsidasa of Mymensing does not regard Kalighat as a Pitha.”<sup>24</sup> In a further passage the same author observes that the name of Kalighat does not occur in a “list prepared in South-west Bengal possibly a little later than the composition of the Chandimangala. The popularity of Kalighata is probably later than the foundation of Calcutta by Job Charnock in 1690.”<sup>25</sup> The coming of the English thus proved beneficial for Kalighat. Whatever little flourish it had acquired over years must be dated to the period when the English were building up their commercial capital in Calcutta. The attraction of Calcutta as a centre for commerce was greater than its attraction as a pilgrim spot. Being situated in Calcutta Kalighat suffered two setbacks. First, it had to compete with another pilgrim centre at Chitpur, not very far from Kalighat, where the temple of *Chittesvari* or *Sarvamangala* was located. Secondly, since Calcutta had no natural endowment like scenic beauty etc. the pull factors of Kalighat did not grow. If we keep Benaras in mind we can understand how natural factors tend to contribute towards building the status of a pilgrim centre. We may quote the following passage to show how nature helps towards building up the antiquity of pilgrim centre.

“Of the antiquity of Benares there can hardly be any question. From its peculiar situation on the banks of a splendid river, with its eastern boundary converted by the current into a magnificent natural amphitheatre, facing the rising sun, it is not unreasonable to conjecture that even before the Aryan tribes established themselves in the Ganges valley, Benares may have been a great centre of primitive sun-worship . . .”<sup>26</sup>

It has been pointed out by an Indian scholar that the structure of pilgrimage must be understood in terms of three analytical tools : the sacred geography, the sacred performance and the sacred specialists.<sup>27</sup> Pilgrim centres like Benares, Hardwar etc. has sacred geography because they were situated by the side of the Ganga and to the Hindus the Ganga is holy river. In this sense also the location of Kalighat was holy because it had the water of the Ganga flowing by its side. Sometimes sacred geography becomes only a concept by virtue of a touch with mythology. If a place is mentioned in the *Puranas* then it is considered sufficiently old to common veneration. If a place has connection with any Puranic episode then it is said to have enough attributes to be holy. Both Kalighat and Tarapith became holy because they are mentioned in the *Puranas* as having received the small toe and the pupil of the eye of *Sati*<sup>28</sup> respectively. Sacred performances are matters of practice. The worship of *Kali* in Bengal is based on bloodshed which is done by animal slaughters. Previously

the worship of *Durga* used to have the highest ritual hallmark in a *balidan* – ritual slaughters of animals, particularly sheep and lamb. From this standpoint Kalighat had a unique record of sacred performances. Ghastly human slaughters which were practised near the *Sarvamangala* temple of Chitpur were never in vogue at Kalighat. The pattern of worship there was much more humane and this attracted since the eighteenth century a host of merchants and political magnates who gave the place a status of sanctuary. If epic heroes – the heroes of the *Mangalkavyas* – had worshipped *Betai-Chandi* at Betor and *Sarvamangala* at Chitpur, then the eighteenth century political heroes and the opulent magnates, like Maharaja Nabakrishna of Shovabazar and Raja Jayanarayan Ghosal of Kidderpore had worshipped the goddess at Kalighat. In the heritage of sacred performances Kalighat was weighing heavy since the eighteenth century. With the rise of Calcutta synchronized the fall of Hooghly. Chitpur being not directly controlled by the English it became one of the badly administered places near Calcutta. To ensure the tranquillity of the place Md. Reza Khan appointed a *faujdar* at Chitpur. But Chitpur did not prosper because of being outside Calcutta. For these reasons from the eighteenth century onwards the importance of Kalighat increased and good and effective performances in worship became a regular feature at Kalighat. As time went on the worship of *Dakshina Kali* of Kalighat became so popular that before any important domestic and social ceremony like marriage, *upanayana*, *sraddha*, commencement of business, signing of contracts, digging of pounds and even celebration of the Bengali New Year as *punyaha* people used to go to Kalighat and gave their offerings to the goddess. The image of *Durga* and *Kali* in Bengal like the image of *Ganapati* or *Ganesha* in western India and the image of *Hanuman* or *Bajrangvali* in North India became not only symbols of divinities but also symbols of great truths in life – inner strength, dedication, purity and felicity. They became poetic shorthand for the inspiration and elevation of mankind. The importance of *Kalipuja* encroached in other pujas as well. It is said that during *Gajan* a ceremony connection with the worship of Lord *Shiva* “the sannyasis of Calcutta used to go Kalighat very early in the morning and got them pierced with nails”<sup>29</sup> Kalighat was the rendezvous for all sannyasis willing to take part in the *Gajan*. From Kalighat they used to spread out to every locality and every bazar of Calcutta. They inserted needles and nails in their tongues, ears, palms and stomachs, made themselves up a *Shiva* and *Durga* and lost themselves in dance and music.<sup>30</sup> These were crude merriments but extremely popular ones. In these merriments took part not only men of caste – Hindu families but also a vast multitude of low caste men like *Hadi*, *Muchi*, *Bagdi* etc. Thus during the time of *Gajan* Kalighat and as a matter of fact every *Kalimandir* and *Shivamandir* in Calcutta and around

became rallying points where distinctions of caste and class temporarily vanished.

### ***Absence of Sacred Specialists in Kalighat***

From the above it is clear that Kalighat had enough attributes to score on two major points – sacred geography and sacred performance. But it has been deficient on the third point, namely sacred specialists. Two other *Shakti-pithas* in Bengal-Dakshineswara and Tarapith – were sanctified by the name and presence of two sacred specialists – Sri Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa Deva and Sri Sri Thakur Bamakhepa. Such extraordinary specialists have never been found to be available in Kalighat. Those who were there failed to build up legends around them. “Kamadeva Brahmachari”, one of the early mohants of Kalighat, “is traditionally known to have worshipped her in Calcutta, where his ground is said to have come subsequently to be known as the ‘Fakir’s ground’. This ground was north of Kali’s temple and had five sacred trees, from two of which Nimtala and Bat-tala are said to be named.”<sup>31</sup>

Prof. Wilson speaks of one Jungle Gir Gossain<sup>32</sup> and credits him with discovery of goddess *Kali* in Calcutta. Some associate Maharaja Pratapditya’s family with the discovery and eventual introduction of the worships of *Kali* in Calcutta. Bhubaneswar Chakrabarti, the first priest of *Kali*’s temple, was known to the family of Maharaja Pratapaditya of Jessore. It is said that at one time he was the priest of Pratapaditya’s uncle Basanta Roy.<sup>33</sup> In any case none of these early leaders of *Kali* worship in Calcutta and Kalighat could assume for themselves the status of sacred specialists such as the one assumed in the later days by men like Ramaprasad of Halihsahar, the composer of excellent *shyamasangeet*, Bamakhepa or Ramakrishna Deva. Prior to the coming of these men the *Kali* worship in Bengal was the worship of the Impersonal Absolute – the omnipotent and omniscient *Shakti*. But these men by their own identification with the goddess transformed her into an omnipresent power, a personal Divinity. “To the *Saktas*, no idea can be more sublime than the conception of the personal God as the Divine Mother – the source, support and end of the entire empirical universe.”<sup>34</sup> This worship of *Kali* in the form of a personal goddess was brought to its logical finish by Ramaprasad and Ramakrishna Deva. Theirs was a kind of worship where *Kali* was seen not in any of its classical forms – *Chandi*, *Chamunda*, *Kali*, *Mahakali*, *Bhadrakali*, *Kapali*, *Karali* etc.<sup>35</sup> – but in a different human form where there was a kind of equation between the worshipper and the goddess that was worshipped. With these men *Kali* was coming out of the *tantric* mode of worship as a result of which humanity and divinity came much close to each other and was eventually compounded into a unity out of which the worshipper’s halo grew.

This had made Ramakrishna Deva and Ramprasad appear in public eyes as sacred specialists of *Kali*-worship. Such sacred specialists Kalighat never had. Being devoid of the human mobilizer Kalighat had to depend upon other factors for its eventual promotion and growth. This was the eventual incorporation of Kalighat into Calcutta. The journey of Calcutta along the path of urbanization opened the doors for the rise of Kalighat into real prominence. Kali as the goddess of Kalighat did not get much support from literature so much so that prior to the founding of the city of Calcutta as an urban centre the people of Bengal did not get charged with the devotion for Kalighat. Until date no season in Bengal has come to be earmarked as the season of the worship of *Dakshina Kali* at Kalighat. Vis-à-vis this some other deities of Bengal – for example *Taraknath* of Tarakeswar and *Tara* of Tarapith – had well-defined season of worship. “Pilgrims to Tarapith”, writes an author, “in the month of Pausa stated that they had chosen this time to make their pilgrimage because worship of Kali in Pausa is especially favoured and the goddess of Tarapith was ‘Pausa Kali’.”<sup>36</sup>

That apart the worship of *Kali* did not enter into any order of religious belief. Vis-à-vis *Kali* “Tara is one of the Mahavidyas, the ten most important goddess of the Tantras. These are the Manifestations of Sakti representing transcendental knowledge (Maha : great, Vidya : wisdom). She is described in the Kalika Purana (Chapter 63, lines 64-9).”<sup>37</sup> Between *Kali* and Tara, *Kali* is a mellowed goddess, Tara is fierce. “Tara is terrible to look one and fierce. Her fierceness is emphasised in her epithet Ugratara.”<sup>38</sup> The result of this was that *Kali* eventually entered into the pattern of domestic worship, became a domestic goddess and was eventually identified with *Shyama* the Mellowed Blue. In this capacity she became the mother goddess of the Bengali household and any Hindu opened his mind with an acceptance of her as ‘Ma’ – the Mother. Vis-à-vis *Kali*, Tara was relegated into a pattern of tantric worship with her icon located at a definite *pitha* where annual pilgrimage became a part of her ritual worship. As against this *Kali* was less demanding, a holy domestic deity, her *pitha* being a sanctuary for all she was not particularly emphasised as the one whose ritual annual pilgrimage could be a formalized part of ritual worship. Once a deity becomes accepted in routine household worship her demand as an icon of a *pitha* decreases. On the other hand she became the sovereign subject of a system of songs called *Shyama-Sangeet* – “The songs of the Dark One.”<sup>39</sup> This helped spreading her glory but not her demands. Her presence became universal.

From the above discussion it is clear that Kali was a universalized deity in Bengal. This universalization destroyed her potentiality to be made up into a

core of a pitha-based worship where pilgrimage could be a ritual – at least as much a ritual as a pilgrimage to Tarakeswar and Tarapith was. The result was that the growth of Kalighat as a profound pilgrim centre was overtaken by the process of urbanization of Calcutta. The majestic performances of the English in Calcutta was a part of the conspicuous history of the empire. In the din and bustle of this conspicuous history what prospects could Kalighat hold for the potential recreation of life? In the eighteenth century as Calcutta reared into its new political and socio-economic life, Kalighat became resplendent. Kali of Kalighat became the goddess of Calcutta – *Kali Kalkattawali* – the deity presiding over the pristine religious genius of the people. The status of Kalighat rose and *Kali* became the symbolic essence of the new rise which Calcutta had begun to attain.

### NOTES :

1. For details see. D.C. Sircar, *Saktha Pithas*, pp. 39-42. Some of the forms in which *Kali* was worshipped or is still being worshipped in Bengal are given below. Lot others were there.

<u>Name of the place of worship i.e. region</u>	<u>Name of the Devi</u>
i. Bahula (Modern Behala in south-western Calcutta)	Bahula
ii. Vakresvara (in Birbhum District. This is essentially a Shivapith)	Vakresvari (The corresponding male deity is Vakresvara Shiva)
iii. Kalighat (in Calcutta)	Kalika or Kali or Dakshina Kali
iv. Yasora (in Jessore, now in Bangladesh)	Yasoresvari
v. Nalhati (in Birbhum District)	Sephalika, Tara, Ugratara.
vi. Chitpur (in Calcutta)	Chittesvari or Sarvamangala
vii. Tripura (in modern Tripura)	Tripuresvari, Tripurasundari
viii. Kshiragrama (Near Katwa in Burdwan District)	Yogadya
ix. Adyapith (near Dakshineswar)	Adyashakti or Adyama
x. Dakshineswar (near Calcutta)	Kali
xi. Balidanga (in Hooghly district)	Chandi
xii. Dhaka (in Bangladesh)	Dhakesvari
xiii. Shrihatta (Sylhet in Bangladesh)	Sadhana
xiv. Tarapith (in Birbhum district)	Tara
xv. Betor (in Hooghly)	Betai-Chandi

2. See D.C. Sircar, Op.Cit.; P. Thankappan Nair, *Calcutta in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century*, Part I Ch. 2; Raja Binaya Krishna Deb, *The Early History and Growth of Calcutta*, Rddhi edition, 1977, pp. 21, 63; Prankrishna Datta *Kalikatar Itibritta*, Chapter under the title 'Kalighat'

3. Prankrishna Datta, *Op.Cit.*, p. 10.
4. *Ibid.*
5. See Keshab Chaudhuri, *Calcutta : Story of its Government*, 1973, p. 16.
6. Raja Binaya Krishna Deb, *Op.Cit.*, pp. 63-64.
7. *Raja Binay Krishna Deb, Op.Cit.*, p. 65.
8. *Ibid.*
9. *Ibid.*
10. *Ibid.*
11. Prankrishna Datta, *Op.Cit.*, pp. 135-34
12. *Ibid*, p. 134
13. *Ibid*, p. 50.
14. A.K. Roy, *Calcutta Town and Suburbs : A Short History of Calcutta* (Census of India, 1901, Vol. VII, Part I), Rddhi-India edition, 1982, pp. 16-17; p. Thankappan Nair, *Calcutta in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century*, pp. 29-20 “Notes on the Banks of the Hooghly” in *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, 1892, p. 1893.
15. Sarvamangala was the other name of goddess *Chittesvari*.
16. P. Thankappan Nair, *Op.Cit.*, p. 30
17. A.K. Roy, *Op. Cit.*, p. 18.
18. Quoted by Roy, *Op.Cit.*, p. 18.
19. A.K. Roy, *Op.Cit.*, p. 18.
- 19a. A.K. Roy, *Op.Cit.*, pp. 18-19.
20. A. K. Roy, *Op.Cit.*, p. 19.
21. This statement of Pudma Nav Ghosal was originally published in *The Indian Antiquity*, 1873, p. 370. Also available in W. Newman & Co’s Handbook to Calcutta, 1875, p. 1. Raja Binay Krishna Deb, *The Early History and Growth of Calcutta*, Rddhi Edition, May, 1977, p. 21, note & also in P. Thankappan Nair, *Calcutta in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century*, 1986, p. 28.
22. “Out of different dominant growth factors, which may be identified as mainly religious, economic and political, the first two were more stable and secure. The religious faith of the people and their traditions of pilgrimage remained unchanged for centuries. There could be gradations in the popularity of religious centres – centres of local importance, regional importance, and national importance. But these gradation were, more or less, fixed. Also there was rarely any sharp rise or decline in the fortune of a religious city” V.D. Divekar, “Political Factor in the Rise and Decline of Cities in Pre-British India – with

special reference to Pune” in J.S. Grewal and Indu Banga ed. *Studies in Urban History*, pp. 92-93. To understand why political and commercial cities are unstable, see *Ibid*, p. 93-94.

23. Nisith Ranjan Roy, *Calcutta, The Profile of a City*. P. 3.
24. D.C. Sircar, *Sakta Pithas*, Calcutta, 1948, p. 34 note.
25. *Ibid*, p. 34. Note.
26. E.B. Havell, *Benares The Sacred City*, Second Edition, 1905, p. 2
27. See L. P. Vidyarthi, *Sacred Complex in Hindu Gaya*, Bombay Asia publishing House, 1961. Since Vidyarthi was one of the pioneer Indian Scholars to make a systematic study of the places of Hindu pilgrimage it is advisable to read the following along with the one mentioned above :
  - a) Vidyarthi, L.P. Jha, M. and Saraswati B.N. *The Sacred Complex of Kasi : A Microcosm of Indian Civilization*, Delhi, Concept Publishing Company, 1979.
  - b) Vidyarthi L.P. & Jha M. ed. *Symposium on the Sacred Complex in India*, Ranchi, Council of Social and Cultural Research, 1947.
28. “Only one classical source – the Sivacarita – considers Tarapith as a Mahapitha (great seat) of the goddess, where the eye of Sati fell. . .” E. Alan Morinis, *Pilgrimage in the Hindu Tradition, A Cast Study of West Bengal*, Oxford University South Asian Studies Series, Oxford University Press, 7984, p. 165. Also see Sircar, *Op.Cit.* 1973, p. 39.
29. Prankrishna Datta, *Op.Cit.*, p. 150.
30. For details of *Gajan* see Prankrishna Datta, *Op.Cit.*, pp. 150-51.
31. A. K. Roy, *Op.Cit.* p. 26, note also see Wilson, *Early Annals, Part I, Vol. II*, p. xlix – lii.
32. Wilson, *Early Annals*, Vol. I, Part 7 P. 130.
33. A. K. Roy, *Op.Cit.*, p. 27 note.
34. D. C. Sircar ed. *The Sakti Cult and Tara*, p. 16.
35. G. Sastri, “The cult of Sakti”, in D.C. Sircar ed. *The Sakti Cult and Tara*, Calcutta, 1967, p. 15, For details of Shakti worship in ancient India, see Ch. VI of D.C. Sircar’s *Studies in the Religious Life of Ancient and Medieval India*. 1971.
36. E. Alan Morinis, *Pilgrimage in the Hindu Tradition, A Case study of West Bengal*, p. 175.
37. *Ibid*, p. 172.
38. *Ibid*, p. 171.
39. *Ibid*, p. 170

## CHAPTER 10 CHALLENGES OF AN URBAN GROWTH

### *I. Planned Insulation of a Garrison Town*

The urbanization of Calcutta began in the first decade of the eighteenth century. As early as October 1707 the proposal was mooted that a hospital should be built so that the health of the soldiers could be adequately taken care of.<sup>1</sup> Along with this there was a proposal to keep the city properly fenced. A ditch was also to be dug.<sup>2</sup> The instruction of the Court ran thus – “That this Ditch will contain about 2000 yards in the whole length and that the Earth taken out of it would fill up the lower parts of the ground thereabouts that the water should not lie and stagnate there but might be made with a shoot or a little slope so as to carry the rain into the Ditch as our Ground in London Streets from which the water runs into the Kennell with ease . . .”<sup>3</sup>

The intention with which this was done was clear. Calcutta was to be an insulated city and the army that defended the city and the interests of the Company there were to be properly protected. As a matter of fact one of the major aims of the Company in acquiring the revenue-rights of the three villages in Calcutta-Govindpur-Sutanati was that their revenue would help maintaining the army settlement of the Company on the eastern bank of the Ganga. The territorial revenue of the three villages will finance the charges of the Company’s garrison there.<sup>4</sup> As soon as the three villages were actually acquired the Company set its aims to two things -- first to stimulate its revenue and then to strengthen its fortifications. “We shall now expect to see an Instance of your zeal and skill for our service by the advancement of our revenues there . . .”<sup>5</sup> This was the general instruction which ran from the Court on 21 November, 1699. Concurrent to this there was another instruction . . . “Besides. . . you may go on now in making any necessary additional strength to our fortification without fear of giving Umbrage to the Moors because they can’t pretend to make an inquisition in a place where they have nothing to do withal.”<sup>6</sup>

The position was thus clear. Calcutta and its surroundings formed a place where the Nawabi administration had “nothing to do withal.” Taking advantage of this the Company’s administration tried to strengthen their fortification and make the place an insulated one. It was widely believed that the proper administration of these places will help in the growth of population. The Court’s confidence in this was unique. It said : “. . . due care kind treatment of the Natives will make those Towns flourish under the mild Government of the English. . . .”<sup>7</sup> The Company’s administration also knew this. It was clear to the English that the revolt of Sova Singh had shaken the

confidence of the people who insured the efficacy of the Nawabi rule. The people longed for protection and peace. If the Company's administration provided protection why should it not take levy from the people on this account. With confidence, therefore, the Court instructed the Calcutta Council: "Protection being the true foundation on which all pretences for raising Customs Subsidies and other Taxes are originally built, for this it is Tenants swear fealty to their Lords, and all subjects owe Allegiance to their Princes, and on this Ground, and to Reimburse us our great charge [of building fortifications] we recommend to you the raising a standing Revenue by the Methods above mentioned, or any other you shall observe more adapted to the Genius and Custom of the inhabitants. . ." <sup>8</sup> In a further communication the Court's advice seems to be firm : "raise a Standing Revenue." <sup>9</sup>

## ***II. The Logic of Urbanization Grows out of Insulation.***

This attitude of the Court of Directors gives us an insight into the question as to what led to the urbanization of Calcutta. Calcutta was to be protected and insulated. A proper fortification was to be raised. People were to be given protection and security. They were to pay more tax to finance all arrangements of security. And once security was assured in a condition of general turmoil people will throng in and around Calcutta. This is the idyllic condition in which the urbanization of Calcutta could be thought of. From the beginning the Court of Directors was after revenue. They wanted to increase the demographic strength of Calcutta because more and more population meant more and more revenue and profuse revenue would, it was believed, help them to cover the cost of their own military establishments in and around Calcutta. The military might of the Company was the mainstay behind all their activities in trade and commerce in this country. Thus trade needed military support. Military establishments involved great expenses. These expenses could be met through revenues derived from people. In the early years of the eighteenth century the Company's administration in Calcutta did not have any settled plan of urbanization. They met eventualities. At the outset there were two things to which the Company's administration responded as primary points for consideration. In the first place those who settled in Calcutta and paid "Ground Rent to the Right Honorable Company for the compounds they live in" desired "liases [leases] for ground as customary in other places." <sup>10</sup> The Calcutta Council appreciated the problem and wrote to the authorities at Fort St. George for necessary permissions in this matter. The second thing that called the attention of the administrators in Calcutta was that mud-built houses did not satisfy the necessities which situations had created about this time. For example when in 1705 the prison in the Burra Bazar area was destroyed

partially by fire it was ordered that “the same are rebuilt with brick, the charge not to exceed one hundred and fifty rupees.”<sup>11</sup> In any case the concept that Calcutta was being built anew had already come into air. Only eight months after the Burra Bazar fort was ordered to be rebuilt with brick the Court of Directors in London informed their men at Calcutta : “We are told you are about new building Calcutta and making it more regular.”<sup>12</sup> Thus the idea “about new building Calcutta” and “making it more regular” had been so current that it reached the ears of the Court and so powerfully influenced them that they quickly sent their instruction to Calcutta : “. . . we recommend to you to order the streets so as that the fort Guns may be brought to bear on the Several Streets to beat out an Enemy . . .”<sup>13</sup> The instruction did not stop here. It added further : “. . . houses may be at such a Distance from the fort as not to prejudice any part of it in case by accident or design they should be set on fire.”<sup>14</sup> But Revenue was the terminal point to which all discussions were directed and immediately after this instruction the Court made their position absolutely clear : “It is a pleasure to us to understand the Revenues increase at Calcutta which is no wonder since you add the people increase there and though the Revenues don’t yet we hope they may in time by a prudent management be improv’d to pay the charge of Fort William.”<sup>15</sup> Thus the point was made clear that Calcutta was to be rebuilt and this was to be done so that military mobilizations through it became easier. Calcutta was also to be rebuilt so that more and more population came and settled here yielding more and more revenue to the coffers of the Company.

### ***III. A Fort-Centric Growth Pattern with Private Collaboration***

While all these were taking place reports were there that “the Towne buildings ncreased”<sup>16</sup> in Calcutta and the “Revenues especially the Rent of the 3 Towns encrease yearly people flocking there to make the neighbouring zemidars envy them.”<sup>17</sup> This report was sent to the Court to stimulate their confidence in their agents in Calcutta. In this report the authorities in Calcutta did not miss ensuring the most sensitive point to their authorities in London. The following expression was cautiously inserted in the report : “the Streets regular that the Guns can bear on those near the ffort and the ffort secured if the town should be fired.” Thus the town was of no importance to the English. The fort was to be preserved at moments of catastrophe and the interest of the town was subservient to that of the fort.

This extraordinary sensitivity to the fort was because in it resided the military and civil personnel of the company. The time had not come when the officers

of the Company would begin staying outside the area of the fort and the factory. If the safety of the fort was important to the authorities in Calcutta then they were equally keen to maintain the safety of the factory as well. In 1706 orders were issued to pull down the old factory and rebuild a new one in that place. The “Carpenters and Bricklayers with several other” were set in the work.<sup>17</sup> Apart from the factory the church-building was newly built and in 1707 as soon as the news came that the Emperor was dead the Company thought it proper to build new bastion to the fort.<sup>19</sup>

These civil activities could be properly undertaken if there was a fund of revenue assured. The Company’s authorities had always an eye to this. In July, 1705 orders were issued to measure the “Three Towns and Buzar” and “inspect into the revenues of these.”<sup>20</sup> From the beginning efforts were made to establish landholding rights on clear legal basis.<sup>21</sup> Measures were also taken to check screening of lands by those who were associated with land management.<sup>22</sup> Those who had thus screened lands and withheld revenue from payment were to be expelled from the Company’s service on the charge that they had defrauded the Company of its revenue.<sup>23</sup> The Company’s authority knew that it was not possible for them to understand the intricacies of the Mughal revenue system. Hence as early as 1703 “Bannarse Seat” [Banarasi Seth] was appointed in place of “Muda Metter “[Madan Mitra] to look into the revenues of the town. This was because it was found that one hundred and thirty one houses and two hundred and eighty-eight *bighas* of land were not assessed to revenue.<sup>24</sup> Four years later the Company realised the importance of the collaboration which the Seths offered to the English. Therefore it was decided that Janardan Seth, Gopal Seth, Jadu Seth, Baranasi [Banarasi] Seth and Jaykrishna Seth would “keep in repair the highway between the ffort and land mark to the Norward on the back side of the Town.”<sup>25</sup> For this they were allowed a rebate in their garden rent to the tune of eight *annas* in a *bigha*. Behind this rebate the considerations were primarily low – “they being possessed of this Ground which they made into Guardens [Gardens] before all had possessions of the Town and being the Company’s Merchants and Inhabitants of the place.”<sup>26</sup> Thus the entire area between the fort and Chitpur was brought under the care of the Seths. This was perhaps the first major instance to maintain and upgrade the town with private enterprise and investment.

In 1709 plans were made for additional constructions. In its letter to the Court, 18 February, 1709 the Calcutta Council informed the Directors in London that two new bastions to the fort had already been constructed and “a what next the River” was to be built.<sup>27</sup> Side by side with this “a small Tank to the

Eastward” of the fort was to be enlarged and deepened to keep the water good and constantly in it.”<sup>28</sup> Instructions came from the Court to improve Calcutta-Sutanati area because that was the most inhabited place at that time. The Court wrote : “Our reason for mentioning only Chuttanutte was because we understand the principall Native Merchants as well as our own people lived there and all were unwilling to put you on too much work at one time but when that is once done well . . . you shall have our directions about Govinapore and Soota Loota . . .”<sup>29</sup> Commenting on this Wilson says that the Court actually wanted to promote the growth of Calcutta and “Chuttanutte” in the letter, “is a mistake for Calcutta.”<sup>30</sup> Wilson adds that the Court in their letter of April 7, 1708 “spoke of making a wall and ditch round Calcutta town.”<sup>31</sup> Apparently from the last part of the observations of the Court it is clear that they wanted to promote the development of “Soota Loota” and “Goinipore” after they had promoted the growth of Calcutta. In any case Calcutta, Sutanati and Govindpur were not far from each other. The growth of the one was bound to improve the condition of the other. What is important was that the Court was definitely contemplating urbanization of these places for they wrote : “Whatever building you make of Brick it be done of Pucker (Pakur tree or wood?) work which though chargeable is cheapest on account of its duration.”<sup>32</sup>

#### ***IV. Introduction of Bricks in Civil Construction and Supersession of Timber***

In any case the nucleus of all developments in Calcutta at this time was the fort area. On 17 August, 1710 the administration at the Fort William decided that the ground in front of the fort was to be cleared because it was ‘very much choked up and close sett (set) with Trees and small country thatched houses and standing pools of stinking water.’<sup>33</sup> These were to be cleared, the water was to be drained out and the holes were to be levelled. This world, it was hoped, “contribute very much to the making of the Town wholesome and healthful.”<sup>34</sup> In doing this the question arose how would the water be drained out of the area if the pool was to be filled up? The answer was simple – by “cutting small Trenches on each side to carry the water clear from the adjacent places into the large Drain.”<sup>35</sup> In 1714 when the river broke its banks near the Perrin’s Garden threatening “the loss of great part of the Town”<sup>35a</sup> it was ordered that “a Drain be made of Brick”<sup>36</sup> Thus there was a tendency to use brick in every construction as far as possible. The reason became apparent when the ditch that was proposed to be dug around the town became a subject of discussion because of the high cost involved in it. A letter from Calcutta to the Court said : “The Soil of Bengall being two or three foot clay then sand and clay and sand can’t make a Ditch to last unless faced with brick and cemented with good Mortar for turfing or planting tree will not do and it

would cost 2000,000 rupees.”<sup>37</sup> There was another reason why bricks were increasingly used in the construction of buildings about this time. Rats had increased in the town and in the British records we find frequent mention that rats were making holes in the mud or clay walls.<sup>38</sup> On account of the damage caused by rats a long row of buildings in the fort near the river was to be pulled down and rebuilt.<sup>39</sup> Yet there was another reason why brick was preferred in the constructions in Calcutta. It was seen that fire did not affect brick buildings. A letter from the Court said : “we find a terrible Account in your Copy Book of Letters received where in Mr. Ange’s Letter from Cassimbuzar dated 19<sup>th</sup> March he writes that the Fire at Muzodavad had consumed all the houses within three Miles round except Brick work.”<sup>40</sup> Hence came the instruction to their agents in Calcutta “Be sure don’t use any of the Oalie Timber which by your account is subject to rot take care to get the most durable.”<sup>41</sup> The instruction was more clear than this “suffer no Buildings within the Fort what are of Brick and well secured from Fire for fear of Accidents.”<sup>42</sup>

The area around the fort was to be made clear of thatched huts. Fire was certainly the primary fear but this had given Calcutta a tremendous push towards urbanization. In 1717 order was given to the zaminder of Calcutta to demolish all the thatched huts “on the Rivers edge” “before the rains set in”.<sup>43</sup> While doing all this, the company was cautious to see that the eyes of the Nawab did not fall on Calcutta.

For this reason they tried to remove the influence of the *Nawab* and the *Faujdar* of Hughli as far as possible. About this time there was an “Octogon” built on a plot of land near Sutanati. The ‘Octogon’ was strategically placed so that “it overlooks the river up and down a great way.” For this reason “the collector of Hughly Customs has severall times attempted to get it into his hands in order to fix a Chaukey there”. Thinking that this would cause great inconvenience to the Company’s “Affaires both Publick and Private at this place” the company decided to buy it at a price of “four hundred Madras Rupees.”<sup>44</sup> The Company’s administration wanted to build up Calcutta as an insulated zone where the influence of outsiders would be marginal. This was one of the primary conditions necessary, they thought, for the eventual growth of Calcutta. In any case they had to handle all their transactions with the Nawabi government very cautiously because they needed revenue for which more and more land and population were required. No land could be acquired without the sanction of the government. In 1718 they were trying to “obtain the possession of the 38 towns” because it was hoped that “these would in a few years raise Revenues sufficient to bear all the charges and the necessary encrease of Military to defend them against the Moors.”<sup>45</sup>

Revenue was required and the company's administration wanted to save revenue by reducing expenses. They thus steadily went for slightly less expensive materials for building houses than those which were used earlier. They were particularly sensitive about the kind of wood that was being used in different constructions in the town. "Oaley (Oily) timbers rot so soon and are subject to breed white Ants"<sup>46</sup> and hence their positive instruction was not to use them. Their instruction was clear about this: "we hope you will use no more of them."<sup>47</sup> They advised the use of Teak and in the event of this not being found "Salty and Corea" which are "both durable and will bear all weathers" and are said "to be had at Ballasore."<sup>48</sup> This certainly increased the expenses of the company. There were thick wood around Calcutta but here cutting and felling of trees were not to the liking of the Company's administration. The so called oily timber was perhaps more expensive than the new ones prescribed by the Court either at its original cost or for the treatment that it required in order to last. The Court positively said "Oaley Timber.. . creates much more charge than the buying of New."<sup>49</sup> From a report sent from Bengal to the Court it is learnt that the oily timber got rotten by nineteen years where as "saltee timbers" "may last for 60 or 70 years."<sup>50</sup>

#### ***V. Road Construction – not yet a Phenomenon***

It is vital to note that in course of the first two decades of the eighteenth century there was seldom any reference in English records to roads being built in Calcutta. In a record of 1721 we came across an account of a proposal to build a road from the English factory near the fort to Govindapur. On this account subscriptions were raised from the merchants or the place.<sup>51</sup> The Company's government in Calcutta always depended on whatever resources it could pull by levying extra taxes on the merchants. It was either because the merchants were the only resourceful persons available in Calcutta or the Company's administration thought it improper and unethical to tax ordinary people who were not very used to taxations for public works. Moreover about this time the government was trying hard to make Calcutta habitable so that population might increase. After all population was the potential source of revenue. Therefore the government at this stage did not want much to tax all the people who had newly built up the inhabitations in the three villages of Calcutta, Sutanati and Govindapur.

This explicit purpose for making the new road from the factory at the fort to Govindapur has been detailed out in a record of 1720. "The reason for making the new roads was to drain Govindpore to bring Inhabitants thither this in time will increase the Revenues."<sup>52</sup> The ultimate purpose was to increase revenue. Govindapur was a low land and slightly marshy with tendencies for water-

logging. Unless the water was drained out from there it was not possible to make it habitable. On the low-lying areas of Govindapur these new roads was strategic : “by these roads [one] can see into the Neighbouring Zamindars Country who attack’d them two years since and March better to support the out guards if insulted by him.”<sup>53</sup> Right from the beginning of their possessions of the three villages of Calcutta, Govindapur and Sutanati the English East India Company were in conflict with the neighbouring zamindars. Therefore the English had to take guards against all possible attacks from their neighbouring zamindars. Even a cursory look into the first one hundred and fifty pages or so of Wilson’s *Old Fort William in Bengal*, Vol.I, will reveal records that show how much for strategic reasons the Company’s administration in Calcutta went in for the urbanization of the city. The company’s administration had a good artillery and this gave it the military superiority over the country powers. They knew that their guns gave them a sanguine capacity to fight with the hostile Nawabi administration around. Whatever roads they made, whatever building they had constructed were done with the ulterior purpose of making mobilization possible. One very important reason for discarding the so-called oily wood and switching over to new ones was that the new wood either teak or anything else, could support their heavy guns. Demolition of mud and thatched houses was prompted by the desire to get rid of fire. Mud huts were vulnerable and anytime the enemies could set fire on them. In any case the desire was there to keep the three villages insulated from enemy attack. For this army mobilization was to be made effective and hence these roads and buildings became necessary.

The third reason why new roads were built towards Govindapur was to make the place healthy. As a result of the construction of new roads “the place is now made healthier by the wind’s free passage to the town.”<sup>54</sup> The marshy lands were drained out, unnecessary jungles were cleared, mud huts were demolished and the new look of Calcutta and Govindpur became very apparent. In another letter dated January 31, 1721 the effect of the construction of the new road has been discussed : “For last 4 months the Revenues have been encreasing again since finishing the new Road and draining the Grounds the Inhabitants encreasing,<sup>55</sup> so that waste ground is now inhabited. “In the same report a hint was there at draining Govindapur further because that would “make Calcutta healthier” and “will bring inhabitants”<sup>56</sup>

The land which was actually drained was situated between Calcutta and Govindapur. It was a “low ground.”<sup>57</sup> It was made habitable by thoroughly draining the place and also “by making a high road across it.”<sup>58</sup> The government could now write confidently to the court : “ground now

tenantable the people begin to build and enclose about it.”<sup>59</sup> Those who settled in this ground were allowed to be there four months rent-free so that “they raise the Ground fit to live on.”<sup>60</sup> The demographic policy of the Government in Calcutta was shaped by its need for revenue. In 1721-22 the ground rent suffered from Rs. 13476.4.9 in 1721 to Rs. 13020.4.11 in 1722. This “was occasion’d by the Cowries falling from 5 to 6 Pan in a Rupee, customary to take them of the tenants at 40 pan, for a sicca Rupee, Ground rent for Tennants settled in 1722 will come in next years account being collected in October.”<sup>61</sup>

The Govindapur area seemed to be of great concern to the government. In 1724 the water of the Ganga inundated a part of the market place in Govindapur. Immediately there was instruction to repair the *gunj*.<sup>62</sup> In 1725 the roads near Perrin’s Garden were damaged and these were also ordered to be repaired.<sup>63</sup> These repair works were charged as the expenses of the government. To this the court reacted very sharply. On 17 February, 1727 the court wrote to their agents in Bengal : “we shall not at this time object to the repairing of the Bridges and Roads, but at fort St. George the Inhabitants are at the charge of Building and Repairing theirs. And we hope you will take care in future to engage the Inhabitants to contribute there to, for though all was done at our charge in the Infancy of the settlement, there is not the same reason it should always be so.”<sup>64</sup> Immediately on receiving this instruction the company’s administration in Calcutta tried to translate this into practice and on 28 January, 1728 they informed the Court that henceforth “The Inhabitants contribute to the mending the Roads and repairing the Bridge.”<sup>65</sup> In 1730 the Council at Fort William reported to the Court of Directors in London that “The Repairing the Roads, Bridges and Drains, amounting to Rupees Seven thousand nine hundred and ninety nine fifteen Annas, Order’d that the Inhabitants of Calcutta pay the sum of Five thousand Rupees and the Honorable Company the remainder.”<sup>66</sup>

The Principle was thus steadily coming into shape that the inhabitants must share a part of the expenditure which was being incurred to keep the roads and bridges in their right conditions. Among the inhabitants the merchants were under the highest fiscal pressure. Very often it was found in records that merchants were placed under certain fiscal levies in order that they shared a part of the government’s burden in respect of repairing and upgrading roads or undertaking any other public works. As a matter of fact between 1700 and 1740 bricks were increasingly being used in public constructions. Godowns, Storehouses, ware houses, *Kachhari* buildings, hospitals, jails, offices of the guards, *chowkies*, banks and many other such buildings which were in the past

made of mud, bamboo, straw etc. were demolished because they were worn out and in their place new brick constructions came up. Bamboo and straw constructions had to be repaired every year and this involved a recurring expenditure. To avoid this brick construction was also insisted upon. For example in 1733 the old *Kachhari* building “built of all Bamboo and straw and being fallen down and having cost a great deal of money to repair every year” it was ordered that “a substantial one be built of Brick for the Jamindars Business (i.e. what Wilson says “the Calcutta Collectorate”) and that no New one be hereafter built.”<sup>67</sup> Brick constructions were resorted to because of security reasons. In 1733 there were certain murders and robberies committed in the town. People were scared and fled out of the fear that the outgates of the town were damaged and the robberies might take place any day.<sup>68</sup> Immediately the authorities ordered the gate to be repaired. In May the government ordered that the *Kachhari* house of the zamindar should be built and in December the report came that the building was complete and for this an expense of Rupees 1836.1.3 was incurred.<sup>69</sup> The same report said that the factory house was repaired with teak timber and it had become so sound that even the President of the Council may live in it. These public works certainly involved heavy expenses. Attempts were made on every occasion to squeeze some money out of the Indian inhabitants so that the government was relieved of some part of these expenses. One occasion when some roads and bridges were repaired levies were imposed on the “Black Merchants.” But they resented it because they “reckon’d it Oppression if anything had been levied on them so soon after their Assessment to the Town Hall and Gaol [Jail].”<sup>70</sup> As a result of this the entire expense had to be borne by the government. In their letter dated 29 January, 1739 the Court of Directors took exception to this and left a clear mandate for their agents in Bengal : “we expect that for the future you find out some Method to ease us of that and all other Burthens, which ought to be bore by these who reside under our protection.”<sup>71</sup>

### ***VI. Tensions over Public Works***

Thus expenses for public works had always been a point of tension for the company’s government in Calcutta. On the one hand the Court of Directors were reluctant to spend their revenues which had been so strenuously raised. On the other the native inhabitants of the town, particularly the merchants were reluctant to pay any subscription or levy for they thought that they were overtaxed. There was no compromise between those two viewpoints. But the government had to make expenses because necessity demanded that. For example in 1735 it was “necessary for one of the Doctors to reside at the Hospital for the Attendance of the sick”. In response to this it was agreed to

“build a couple of upper rooms and a shop for the Medicines at one of the ends of the Hospital.”<sup>72</sup> Sometimes government revenues were expended to meet eventualities but often it was found that the purpose was not served. For example the ‘outgate’ of the town which was repaired to prevent robberies did not serve its purpose and a report of 1735 says that it was still “full of Robbers.”<sup>73</sup>

One reason why robbers could not be suppressed was that there were no good roads through which quick mobilization could be easily made. Every year roads came to be damaged heavily because of rains and the Company’s administration had little money to undertake the jobs of repair. Sometimes commodities could not be brought into the city owing to the roads being damaged and this led to a serious crisis in the supply of food staff. The government revenue suffered because of this. We quote below a record of 1736 to substantiate our point.

“Mr George Mandeville Jemindar representing to the Board that the unusual heavy Rains that fell last Month and the beginning of this Month has so Damag’d the ways and blown up severall of the Bridges in the avenues to the town, particularly in the Roads at the Northerly End of Town, that the country people all prevented bringing Provisions, Grain and Merchundize usually brought to the Bazars and Marketts of this town, and thereby are Obliged to carry their Goods to the Adjacent Towns out of the Honourable company Bounds by which the Revenues are daily decreasing. Therefore we think it for our Honourable Masters Interest that the Roads have a thorough Repair and the Bridges mended.”<sup>74</sup>

As the revenue of the government suffered it was instantly ordered that “the zamindar do immediately set about it . . .”<sup>75</sup> Next year when a great storm took a heavy toll on the population of Calcutta the same situation arose. People were about to desert the town and there was the apprehension that the government might lose revenue. The government decided to give them exemptions from payment of rents so that the people feel incentive to stay back in the city. The company’s administration on Calcutta wrote to the court on 31 December, 1737 : “Inhabitants in as low and wretched condition by the violent storm so that we remitted them part of the Arrears to prevent their Deserting the Towns.”<sup>76</sup> The people got remissions in their payment of revenues of August, September and October. The storm caused great devastations to the town. If, it is said, “Levelled most of the walls in the town, shattered and threw down many of the Buildings and blew up the Bridges, the Tide some days after broke in upon and carried away some of the wharfs slips and stairs . . . church steeple was overthrown.”<sup>77</sup> Sutanati was greatly

damaged. "A sad effect of the Hurricane was a Famine that raged all-round the country best part of the year."<sup>78</sup> The government "were obliged to forbid the exportation of rice on the 5<sup>th</sup> June which affected Private Trade, more particularly Mr. Elliot who had two ships laden with rice."<sup>79</sup> To remedy this situation the government "Took off the Duty on all rice brought into the Town the 12<sup>th</sup> June, Hooghly Government (the *Nawabi* government) had done the same."<sup>80</sup> At this time of distress revenue from the town decreased "but when the famine was over revenues arose as usual."<sup>81</sup>

Out of the fear that revenue would fall the Company's administration decided to repair "several Bazars and Market places" in the city.<sup>82</sup> As a matter of fact after the great storm of 1737 some construction works were undertaken. By December 1739 it was reported that "Part of the Buildings shattered by storm are repaired."<sup>83</sup> Yet the need was great and the Calcutta authorities, it was urged, "must build some New ones."<sup>84</sup> After the storm it was felt that there should be a granary for rice to be kept for extraordinary situation. A vast granary for 20,000 maund of rice was laid on 26 March, 1739. But later it was found to be of no use. Hence the granary and the stock were sold out.<sup>85</sup> All these constructional activities involved a lot of expenditure. The authorities in Calcutta was under the fear that the Court of Directors would not sanction this expense. On 21 March, 1740, the Court wrote to their agents in Calcutta : "we shall grudge no Expense so necessary, provided that you lay out our Money in a frugal manner, and see that we are not abused either in the price or quality of the Materials, and the day Labourers do not loiter away their time."<sup>86</sup> But the Court was tremendously angry that civil constructions did not keep the time schedule properly. The "Repairs being Delayed for above a year till the 18<sup>th</sup> January 1738-39" the Court seemed to be angry. The court suspected that there "was wrong management." They complained that "everything grows worse and worse where Repairs are postponed." To their agents in Calcutta their insistence was clear : "Your Assurance that we many depend the work shall be done in a frugal and secure manner must be complied with and made good."<sup>87</sup>

The general cause why the Court became angry with their agents in Calcutta was that for some time past revenue raised from the city was not upon the expectation of the authorities. At the beginning of 1741 the Calcutta Council admitted that "Revenues are a small matter more than last year". And the cause behind it was laid down in equally simple terms : "Ground Rents are difficult to collect – Tenants poor."<sup>88</sup> On the top of this reports were frequently sent to the Court that fire had consumed the assets of the Company. In December, 1739 the report was sent to the Court that "A Fire entirely

consumed Patna factory in March, 1738 with Broad Cloth Godowns.”<sup>89</sup> In January 1791 another news was sent to London that the “soldiers Barracks at Cossimbuzar were damaged by a Fire.”<sup>90</sup> The authorities in London developed the impression that their agents in eastern India were not looking after their business well. This impression had persisted right from the beginning and over years it gained momentum. What the Company’s authorities in London dreaded most was the loss of revenues. Revenue could not be increased if property was damaged and habitation was unsettled through Frequent fire and other dreadful events like banditry which in their turn had led to a general deterioration of the security of the place. In any case the management of the town in the first half of the eighteenth century did not give any impression to any one concerned with administration that there was any conscious effort on the part of the government to build up the three villages into any form of organized township.

### ***VII. A Mirror from the South***

In the above section we have analysed at random some basic data that show what factors shaped or retarded the coming into shape of the process of urbanization. Calcutta’s image as an English town vis-à-vis the *Nawabi* towns of Dacca, Murshidabad and Hooghly appeared to be the only fixed point paving the way for its urban form. Other factors – an undefined boundary, fluctuating population and a dynamic revenue – were all variable factors. Four fixed factors as were available in South Indian Urbanism, namely, geography, inhabitants, pattern of trade and patterns of pilgrimage could counteract one variable factor there namely unstable political boundaries<sup>91</sup>. Hence the process of urbanization did not suffer much set back there. Truly speaking in south India variable factors did not ever gain any upper hand in the process of urbanization. Fixed factors had always remained sound at the backdrop. “The economic nodal points did not change”<sup>92</sup> and hence till the eighteenth century the economic content of urbanization remained very sound. “In the nineteenth century, there was to be a significant modification in this – the geography, the inhabitants and the pilgrim pattern remained fixed points, so also the political control. The content and pattern of trade became a variable factor.”<sup>93</sup> Once again the fixed factors coagulated into a system which could contain the variable factor within its bounds. In Calcutta in the eighteenth century the situation was the reverse. The English control of Calcutta stimulating its image as an English town highlighted the only stable political factor in the process of urbanisation. All other factors remained variable. Its boundary was not settled till the end of the eighteenth century. Its population had a chance of increase only during the time of the Maratha invasions but

such temporary demographic gains were quickly offset by repeated famines that visited the city every decade from the middle of the eighteenth century, by rise in the incidence of banditry because of which people fled the city and also by bad hygiene and job-scarcity that did not allow the morphology of the town to grow. The weakness of the government had always been at its purse. The revenue-yield was never commensurate to the level at which the authorities at London had fixed their expectation. Moreover in the eighteenth century Calcutta remained to be a garrison town and the interests of the garrison remained as the uppermost factor dictating routes for the passage of goods and armies. Sustenance of the military manpower at the cost of the general population at times of famines and general scarcity was one factor from which the demographic stability of the city had always suffered. If Calcutta was a bandit-ridden and fire-afflicted city it was equally a city of rice-scarcity and labour shortage. These were certainly not conducive for a congenial habitation. People who very often came to the city from outside were attracted mainly by the pattern of service available at the colony and that being highly temporary they had very little chance of getting permanently domiciled here. The service of the colony in the context of Calcutta in the eighteenth century meant at a lower level jobs of ill-paid labour in civil and military constructions or employment in the cramped entourage of domestic retinues of luxury-addict Europeans. At a slightly higher level it meant the function where *banians, munshis, dalals, do-bhasis, gomastas* and the like competed with each other for meagre favour that might trickle down from the closed fists of their European bosses. The English from the beginning wanted to build Calcutta in a way that would bridge the distance in space and time to an English home.<sup>94</sup> But the influx of lower men did not allow their dream to come true. The English records in Calcutta throughout the eighteenth century are replete with evidences wailing on the fact that Calcutta was increasingly becoming a den of destitute and vagabonds, men of dignity being kept away from it.

### **VIII. Haphazard Morphology**

With plenty of bazars spreading haphazardly here and there in an utter hotchpotch of construction, Calcutta's chance of getting a European tone was

becoming steadily blurred. The early attempt to transfer the native population of Khiderpur to Shovabazar in the north was designed to keep the racial cut-out of the city clear. The intention behind this was that the racial segregation of the European part of the town in the south would maintain its characteristic distinction if the natives were pushed to the north. But hitherto the calculation misfired because a palpably growing native suburb in Kalighat and Bhowanipur had destroyed the ease of a quiet neighbourhood of the English town in the south. As a matter of fact Calcutta in the Eighteenth century gave the English a frustrating experience of town-building. The racial segregation of the natives was not possible because of the lurking of Kalighat and Bhowanipur in the immediate neighbourhood. The maintenance of the cultural identity of the tough island race of the English by keeping them insulated in the south was equally impossible because a cosmopolitan town with mixed population existed as a buffer between the natives of the north and the whites of the south. From the beginning the English in Calcutta tried to build up a culturally modified environment for themselves with which the English behaviour could interact. But the influx of unsubstantial men, European vagabonds and native destitute, did not provide the congenial atmosphere in which ethos could grow. The paradox lay here. The English administrators had before their vision London, their idyll. That idyll was to be sustained by the cooperation of the large labouring Indian population and this was the most unwelcome a factor to them. They wanted the city to thrive with substantial men but in its stead a large unsubstantial crowd formed the bulk of the population-mix of the city. This was that seemed to be most frustrating to them. This was one reason why the Englishmen in Calcutta in the eighteenth century came to throng more and more around Chowringhee in the south. They certainly sought a distance from the Indian population in the north but in course of time became painfully aware that they could not further expand to the south where Bhowanipur and Kalighat had created a native barrier. The result was that they lived in an encapsulated colonial world of an exile. This feeling of living in exile in Calcutta had stifled their incentive for town-building. Calcutta grew with the misery of a checkmated soul.

## Notes

1. The following is an extract from Bengal Public Consultations, Fort William, October 16, 1706, Range I, vol. I. "Having abundance of our Soldiers and Seamen Yearly Sick

and this year more particularly our Soldiers, and the Doctors representing to us, that for want of an Hospital or Convenient Lodging for them is mostly the occasion of their Sickness, and Such a place will be highly necessary as well for the Garrison and Sloop as the Company's Charterparty Shipping to keep the men in health, This therefore AGREED that a Convenient spot of ground near the ffort be pichted upon to build an Hospitall on, and that the Cashiers pay out of the Companys Cash for the said occasion. . .". – quoted from Wilson, *Old Fort William in Bengal*, Vol. I, p. 68.

2. The proposal was "that a Strong wall should be build[built] at the end of de [*dih*] Calcutta town between that and Chuttanuttee with one Gate to go in and out at which may have a redoubt or Small ffortification near it to beat off any Enemy. . . and at the End of that wall to the Land Side there should be cut a Ditch of 16 or 18 broad and 12 foot or more deep which should run from thence round Calcutta town . . ." and should eventually "fall into the River . . ." General Letters from the Court to Bengal, London, April 7, 1708, paragraph 37, Letter Book No. 13; quoted in Wilson, *Op.Cit.*, p. 69.
3. *Ibid*, paragraph 38, Wilson, *Op.Cit.*, p. 70.
4. "We have gained the Princes Neshan for a firme Settlement in this place with the rent of three towns which will be revenue sufficient to bare the Charge of the Garrison & ca." . . . General Letter from Bengal to the Court, Chuttanutte, February 22, 1699, Original Consultation (O.C.) No. 6,617, Wilson, *Old Fort William In Bengal*, p. 42.  
In the General Letter from the Court to Bengal, London, Nov. 21, 1699, para 5, Letter Book No. 10 [Wilson, *Op.Cit.*, p. 44] it is stated that the grant of the three villages was made against an annual rent of One Thousand and two hundred rupees. Wilson in the further note observes : "In the *parawana* of the diwan, Izzat Khan dated Shaban 2, in the forty-second year (British Museum Additiona MSS, 24,039, No. 39), the annual rent is given as Rs. 1,194,14,11. In the Bengal public consultations, May 4,1714, the annual rent is stated to be Rs. 1,281.6.9 The increase is in the rent of Govindpur in Paigan." (p.44 note).
5. General Letter from the Court dated 21 Nov. 1699, Wilson, *Op.Cit.*, p. 44.
6. *Ibid*.
7. *Ibid*.
8. Instructions from the Court to Charles Eyre, London, Dec. 20, 1699. Letter Book No. 10. Wilson, *Op.Cit.*, p. 47.
9. *Ibid*.
10. Calcutta Consultations 3 May, 1703. Factory Records, Calcutta No. 4. Wilson, *Old Fort William in Bengal*, Vol. I, p. 55.
11. Bengal Public Consultations, Fort William May 4, 1705. Wilson, *Op.Cit.*, p. 60.
12. General Letter from the Court to Bengal, London, January 18, 1706, paragraph 48, Letter Book No. 12, Wilson *Op.Cit.*, p. 61.
13. *Ibid*.
14. *Ibid*.
15. *Ibid*.

16. General Letter from Bengal to the Court, Fort William, Dec. 31, 1706, Wilson, *Op.Cit.*, p. 63.
17. *Bengal Public Consultations*, Fort William April 18, 1706, Range I, Vol. I, Wilson, *Op.Cit.*, p. 62.
18. Wilson, *Op.Cit.*, p. 63.
19. Wilson, *Op.Cit.*, p. 64.
20. *Bengal Public Consultations*, June 12, 1707, Wilson, *Op.Cit.*, p. 65.
21. "We therefore do think it equitable according to the custom of the Country and agreed that the Inhabited, tilled or mannured land or such ground as any one possesses do annually pay the following Rents. . . . and that the rent gatherer or Jemidar do give each Inhabitant a Putta or Ticket with a No. affixed to it, for the certain sum he shall annually pay and what received in monthly to be endorsed on said Tickett and the Ticket to be renewed once every year for which Putta, or Ticket the Tenants are to pay the Company as formerly. . . ." *Bengal Public Consultation*, 12 June, 1707. Wilson, *Op.Cit.* p. 65.
22. "The Putwarrys or black rent gatherers & ca. are found to have taken Clandestinely considerable quantities of land and formed it out notwithstanding they received monthly wages from the Company agreed therefore that all such land be taken from them or any other black officer and farmed out for the Company and that the Putwarrys be accounted with for the time they have possessed it" . . . *Ibid.*
23. Wilson, *Op.Cit.*, pp. 65-66.
24. *Calcutta Consultations*, June 10, 1703, Factory Records, Calcutta, No. 4, Wilson, *Op.Cit.*, p. 55.
25. *Bengal Public Consultations*, 11 Sept., 1707, Range I, Vol. I, Wilson, *Op.Cit.*, p. 67.
26. *Ibid.*
27. *General Letter from Bengal to the Court*, Dec. 19, 1709, Wilson, *Op.Cit.*, p. 77.
28. *Bengal Public Consultation*, Feb. 28, 170, Range I, Vol. I, Wilson, *Op.Cit.*, p. 77.
29. Letter from the Court, paragraph 65, 9 January, 1701, Letter Book No. 13, Wilson, *Op.Cit.*, p. 79, note.
30. Wilson, *Op.Cit.*, p. 79. Note
31. *Ibid.*
32. Vide 29, paragraph 68.
33. *Bengal Public Consultation*, 17 August, 1701. Range I. Vol. II. Wilson, *Op.Cit.*, p. 82.
34. *Ibid.*
35. *Ibid.* Wilson, *Op.Cit.*, p. 83.
- 35a. *Bengal Public Consultations*, 12 Oct., 1714, Range I, Vol.II, Wilson, *Op.Cit.*, p. 94.
36. *Ibid.*
37. Letter from Fort William to the Court 11 Dec., 1714, Wilson, *Op.Cit.*, p. 95.
38. A letter from Fort William to the Court, 11 Dec., 1714 speaks of the "Walls [of a long range of lodgings near the river] being ready to fall by Rats eating in and the timbers being rotten.. ." Wilson, *Op.Cit.*, p. 95.
39. *Bengal Public Consultations*, 7 March, 1715, Range I, Vol. II, Wilson, *Op.Cit.*, p. 97.

40. General letter from the Court, 18 January, 1717, paragraph 53, Letter Book No. 16, Wilson, *Op.Cit.*, p. 100.
41. *Ibid.*
42. *Ibid.*
43. *Bengal Public Consultations*, January 24, 1717, Range I, Vol. II, Wilson, *Op.Cit.*, p. 101.
44. *Bengal Public Consultations*, Nov. 14, 1717, Range I, Vol. IV, Wilson, *Op.Cit.* p. 101.
45. *General Letter from Bengal to the Court*, 6 Dec. 1718. Wilson, *Op.Cit.*, p. 103.
46. *General Letter from the Court to Bengal*, 9 January, 1719, paragraph 57, Wilson, *Op.Cit.*, p. 105.
47. *Ibid.*
48. *Ibid.*
49. *Ibid.*
50. *General Letter from Bengal to Court*, 14 may, 1719, Range I, Vol. IV, Wilson, *Op.Cit.* p. 106.
51. *Bengal Public Consultations* May 1, 1721, Range I, Vol. IV., Paragraph 167, Wilson, *Op.Cit.*, p. 111.
52. *General Letter from Bengal to the Court*, Dec. 2, 1720, paragraph 119 Wilson, *Op.Cit.*, p. 111
53. *Ibid.*
54. *Ibid.*
55. *General Letter from Bengal to the Court*, January 31, 1721-22 (?), paragraph 84, Wilson, *Op.Cit.*, p. 112. In our writing we have accepted the date as 31 January, 1721.
56. *Ibid.*
57. *Letter from Bengal to the Court*, 18 January, 1723, para 86, Wilson, p. 113.
58. *Ibid.*
59. *Ibid.*
60. *Ibid*, para. 89.
61. *Ibid.* para 89, Wilson wrote "A pan is 80 cowries" -- *Op.Cit.*, p. 113 note.
62. *Bengal Public Consultations*, 16 Nov., 1724, Range I, Vol. V, Wilson, *Op.Cit.* p. 116.
63. *Bengal Public Consultation*, 13 Dec. 1725, Willson, *Op.Cit.*, p. 118
64. Letter from the Court, 17 February 1727, para 39, Wilson, *Op.Cit.* p. 120.

65. *General Letter from Bengal to the Court*, 28 January, 1728, Wilson, *Op.Cit.*, p. 123.
66. *Bengal Public Consultation*, 11 May, 1730 Range I, Vol. VIII Wilson, *Op.Cit.*, p. 132.
67. *Bengal Public Consultation*, 7 May, 1733, Range I, Vol. VII, Wilson, *Op.Cit.*, p. 139.
68. "There being severall Murders and Robberies committed in the Town and the people making their Escape by reason of the Outgates being out of Repair. Agreed that they be repair'd" *Ibid.*, 13 Aug, 1733, Wilson, *Op.Cit.*, p. 140.
69. *General Letter from Bengal to the Court*, Dec. 26, 1733, para 78, Wilson, *Op.Cit.*, p. 140.
70. *General Letter from the Court*, 29 January, 1734, para 69, Wilson, *Op.Cit.*, p. 140.
71. *General Letter from the Court*, 29 January, 1734, para 69, Wilson, *Op.Cit.*, p. 141.
72. *Bengal Public Consultation*, 26 March, 1735, Range I, Vol. VII, Wilson, *Op.Cit.*, p. 141.
73. *General Letter from Bengal to the Court*, 28 Dec. 1735, para 97, Wilson, *Op.Cit.*, p. 143.
74. *Bengal Public Consultations*, Wednesday, 29 Sept., 1736, Wilson, *Op.Cit.*, p. 143.
75. *Ibid.*
76. *General Letter from Bengal to the Court*, 31 Dec. 1737, para 73, Wilson, *Op.Cit.*, pp. 147-48.
77. *General Letter from Bengal to the Court*, 29 January, 1739, para 76, Wilson, *Op.Cit.*, p. 150.
78. *Ibid.*
79. *Ibid.*
80. *Ibid.*, Wilson, *Op.Cit.*, pp. 150-51.
81. *Ibid.*
82. *Bengal Public Consultation*, 14 August, 1739 [Wilson, *Op.Cit.* p. 152] says : "Mr John Halsey Zemindar acquaints the Board that the Several Bazars and Market places not having been Repaired for these three years past are so much out of Order that the People cannot conveniently come to their stalls with Provisions and Other necessaries for the Town which if not duly taken care of much inevitably lessen the Honourable Companys Revenues". "Agreed that the Zamindar do see them Repaired forthwith and to do it with all possible Frugality."
83. *General Letter from Bengal to the Court*, 24 Dec., 1739, paragraph 134, Wilson, *Op.Cit.*, p. 152.
84. *Ibid*, paragraph 135, Wilson *Op.Cit.*, p. 152.

85. *Ibid.*, para 140, Wilson, *Op.Cit.*, p. 153.
86. *General Letter from the Court to Bengal*, 21 March, 1740, para 58, Wilson, *Op.Cit.*, p. 153.
87. *Ibid.*
88. *General Letter from Bengal to the Court*, 3 January, 1731, paras 133 & 135. Wilson, *Op.Cit.*, p. 154.
89. *Ibid*, dated 24 December, 1739, para 136.
90. *Ibid.* dated 3 January, 1741, para 127.
91. Narayani Gupta, *Towers, Tanks and Temples : Some Aspects of Urbanism in South India Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries*, Occasional Papers Series : 5, Urban History Association of India 1983, p. 3
92. *Ibid.*
93. *Ibid.*
94. The expression has been borrowed from Pamela Kanwar, *The Changing Image of Shimla*, occasional Papers Series : 10, Urban History Association of India, 1989, p. 5.

## CHAPTER–11 THE CITY ASSUMES FROM

### *The Eighteenth Century: Period of Poor Urbanization*

For Calcutta the eighteenth century was a period of poor urbanization. From the site of Hindu *Kalikshetra* it had inherited two things : absence of broad brick laid and stone laid streets<sup>1</sup> and uncleanness of a filth-strewn habitation. The result was that when Lord Wellesley came to rule India as an empire of the British he missed in Calcutta the marks of an imperial town. When his famous Minute of 1803 was drawn Calcutta lacked roads, drains, water courses, well arranged market places, corpse-disposal arrangements, burial grounds, law-regulated sites for animal-slaughters and effective system of town-cleaning.<sup>2</sup> In this situation Wellesley's Minute came as a mark of deliverance, or as A.K. ray says, it "stands out, as a beacon of light in the misty path of municipal reforms".<sup>3</sup>

The work of municipal reforms in Calcutta properly began in the last decade of the eighteenth century. From the dawn of that century the East India Company's administration in Calcutta had rarely concerned itself with municipal reforms. It was not that municipal welfare schemes were not there. From time to time agenda of improvement of the town were drawn up but they were more in the nature of patch work than of any systematic and planned action in the matter. The zamindar of the town from the beginning was entrusted with the charge of collecting ground rents. In addition he "was entrusted with the care of public order, convenience and health."<sup>4</sup> The zamindar's office had no competence of town management. It was not adequately manned and its purse was much too thin to cope with the problems of an expanding town – its extension of area, increase of population, over growth of houses many of which were still thatched and mud-built ones and its multiplying municipal and sanitary needs. Hence in 1794 under a statute of George III the management of the town was taken off the zamindar's hands and entrusted with a set of new officials, Justices of the Peace, who were appointed as authorized men to take charge of the town. They were to make regular assessments of the needs and duties to be discharged for the town.

Along with this change in Calcutta's administration two more things happened. "By the proclamation of 1794, the boundary of the town was fixed to be the inner side of the Mahratta Ditch."<sup>5</sup> The area was thus specified within which the Justices of the Peace were to function. With this the second thing got into a start. "In 1793 the practice of raising money for public improvements by means of lotteries first came into fashion"<sup>6</sup> The lotteries removed the crunch

for money and the brake on city-improvement was lifted. In the agrarian world a new order was ushered in with the enunciation of the Permanent Settlement. Now it was time to round off the British possessions in Bengal and create a centre from where the growing empire of the British in India would be ruled. It was with this urge that the nineteenth century set off for Calcutta's urbanization.

Urbanization was certainly not the idea which possessed the minds of the city-fathers in the early years of the nineteenth century. The concept was one of improvement. The Act of 1794 commissioned the Justices of the Peace to two set functions – collection of revenue and their proper utilization for the improvement of the town. The Act specified what it meant by improvement -- 'principally repairing, watching and clearing the streets'. The approach was to meet eventualities and not to create a planned urban structure.

In the eighteenth century planning for a sprawling urban location was never in the mind of the city-builders in Calcutta. A fort-centric politico-military castle-town resembling the castle-based urban centres of medieval Europe was hastily built up by the early English settlers in Calcutta. The precise model of Islamic town building which we see in northern and north-central India was absent in Bengal. The Muslim rulers in general had never shown any enthusiasm for town building in this part of the country. The only exception was Shujauddin Khan (1727-1739), the son-in-law of Murshid Quli Khan (1700-1708, 1710-1727) who raised some haphazard buildings and gardens in Murshidabad during the period of his governorship in Bengal and exhausted in the process the revenue reserve his father-in-law had left for him. The trade nexuses of the bigger Indo-Islamic world of commerce that connected the imperial cities of India's heartland, Delhi and Agra, with the coastal cities of Surat and Cambay and maintained tangential links with central Asian and West-Asian trades through Lahore and Kabul could not rope into their system far-off parts of India's interior in the east.<sup>7</sup> The result was that *Subeh* Bangla remained secluded on its consolidated agricultural base protected by its village kinship and rural commodity production system. It was in such an economy that the English attempted to build up their urban base in Calcutta.<sup>8</sup>

### ***Security and Protection: The Main Urge***

From the time of the purchase of three villages of Kalikata, Sutanati and Govindapur the main urge behind the growth of Calcutta was security and protection, mainly from the Nawabi interference and also from rebel zamindari upsurge like that of Shova Singh in 1696. The concept of a fort grew out of this – the need for protection. Screening the settlement from the eyes of other

European competitors was another necessity that inspired English exclusiveness. The fort was thus an outcome both of a need shaped by geopolitics and of a fancy fashioned by islanders' isolationist inclination.

The white town of the English in Calcutta which grew around the fort was thus intriguing. It had no semblance of an oriental town and to a European observer in 1727 – Alexander Hamilton – it seemed to be patterned after the baronial castle of medieval Europe.<sup>9</sup> It shows that planning at this early stage was determined by the need of security and the irregular clusters around the fort were hangovers of old and irresistibly stubborn habitations of the past.<sup>10</sup> Sheltered in the hub of security the English settlers felt no need to look beyond the periphery of their own settlement. The southern part of their settlement was unexplored almost till the end of the eighteenth century and the eastern part was either covered by the Salt Lake or dotted by an intense jungle covering the modern territory of Sealdah (the then Srighaldaha)<sup>11</sup> and Beliaghata. The result was that only the northern part of the settlement remained open for habitation and the town-improvement in the early nineteenth century thus directed itself irresistibly to the north and partly to the south-west along the axis of the river towards modern Khidirpur.

The fort-centricity of this circumscribed settlement did not require any great planning for it. But the castle-like bearing of the whole town must have some planned setting inside it which has gained confidence with a modern historian. It "had" writes Pradip Sinha, "a powerful element of planning in it." "In basic design," he adds, "the settlement was in line with European urban transplants on the maritime belt of Asia, arising out of the needs of defence, hygiene and exclusiveness, growing round the semblance of a medieval baronial castle".<sup>12</sup>

### ***Techniques of Space Utilization***

Time was not ripe for spacious, preconceived town-planning and a quick-settlement motivation within a secured habitation called for techniques of space utilization which was otherwise not known to Mughal settlement with Islamic structures. "The technique of utilization," Sinha goes on, "on highly limited space proceeded from pragmatic considerations rather than from preconceived notions of planning that can be related to contemporary urban development programmes in Europe".<sup>13</sup> Coming in the wake of a war with the Emperor and the tremor of a formidable rebellion (that of Shova Singh in 1696) the purchase of three villages was marked by the exigencies of time. The English needed a foothold in Bengal where the commercial interests of the Company had to be cushioned by adequate security measures. Thus planning, if there was any, was for exigency. In such circumstances the map of a baronial

castle complex was a readily available design that possessed the minds of the town-planners. “The European urban transplant”, Sinha further adds, “is a highly interesting historical phenomenon but strikingly free from complexity. It was an interesting form, but even at the height of its elegance, its should lay in the vaults of a commercial house.”<sup>14</sup>

### ***Motivation Changed in the Nineteenth Century***

Security was not a predominant motivation in town planning with the dawn of the nineteenth century. The Nawabi rule had sunk. European competitions had been beaten. Chances of a local rebellion were all defeated. Overriding security now emerged two other factors – requirements of a port and the necessities of a seat of administration. To address to these needs the first essential pre-requisites in town-planning were drawn up. One of these was to clean the town. Dilapidated structures, abandoned houses, thatched huts grown of irregular and haphazard habitations, ghettos of men belonging to the work force, slums of domestic menials, shelters of Hindu idols, roadside butcheries, improvised shops and market places had filled the city at the dawn of the nineteenth century. In a letter to the Governor General<sup>15</sup> in council on August 31, 1804, the Committee for improving the Town of Calcutta urged the necessity of removing “the existing nuisances” in the town.<sup>16</sup> Three measures were immediately recommended by the Committee – the removal of the Dharmatala Bazar to a situation ‘eligible and contiguous’, building a Town Hall or “any large Ornamental Building which Government might have occasion for” in the place thus vacated which was ‘central and commanding’ and finally “pulling down all the remaining original works of the Old Fort”. Trade in the city had increased manifold and larger space was required for import and export wares which needed to be properly housed. The Export Warehouse Keeper had been representing on this point for a long time and the Committee for improvement now drew the attention of the Governor-General in Council to the ‘heavy annual expense which is incurred by renting store Houses for the Export and Import Establishment.’<sup>17</sup> The Dharmatala Bazar was situated to the ‘North East Quarter of the Esplanade’<sup>18</sup> “The ill-judged construction of this Bazar, and the consequent uncleanly state of it added to the central and exposed situation of the place induce us to represent it as a grievous nuisance” – the Committee for improvement wrote. “To the South East of the present Bazar”, the Committee added, “there is a considerable piece of Ground perfectly well calculated both by situation and extent, for the erection of a new Bazar and on which there are no Buildings of any consequence at present.”<sup>19</sup>

From the immediate vicinity of the fort the town planners’ gaze moved a little far to the north and south of the city – but certainly on the line along the axis

of the river bank. To the south the road to the Alipore and Kidderpore (Khidirpur) Bridges had to be overhauled. 'The rapid descent from the top' of these bridges had 'occasioned dangerous accidents' in recent times. Therefore, it was recommended that the ground on the northern side of both the bridges be raised and the rails on both sides be continued.<sup>20</sup> The entire zone from the Chandpal Ghat to Khidirpur was taken within the purview of improvement and improvement then meant diverse things : from raising, levelling and dressing grounds just as what was recommended for the Khidirpur area to filling ditches, a very imperative need of the time; from widening of roads and road-crossings to removal of debris of dilapidated structures; from shifting of ineffective and shabby government offices to erecting new ones; from shutting old burial grounds to providing new places as substitutes; and from pulling down thatched huts to substituting them with tiled ones. Necessities were big and recommendations were great but the work was very slow and it took a long time to bring Calcutta to an order which might be called fit for an imperial headquarters.

### ***Effective and Planned Measures from 1805***

In July 1805 the Town Improvement Committee recommended the following measures.<sup>21</sup>

***Measures to Avoid Accidents*** : The landing slopes on the northern side of the Alipur and Khidirpur bridges had to be properly raised and dressed up. The "sharp angle formed by Park Street and Chauringhee (Chowringhee) Road on the South side [had to] be removed". "Carriages proceeding in different directions frequently run against each other at this point in consequences of the view of each other's approach being obstructed by the angle of the compound to the House lately occupied by Colonel Garstin". "Ditches in the North East quarter of the Esplanade [had to] be dressed up by sloping the sides" and "their inequalities in the Ground in that quarter [had to] be filled up."

***Removal of Thatched Houses*** : It was "proposed that none but Tiled Houses be allowed in the Cooley Bazar, and that the sheds belonging to the Garrison Store Keeper and other military Officers in the vicinity of the Bazar be tiled." This measure was recommended to prevent fire in the city. This recommendation was very urgent. Fire was rampant in the city that was covered from end to end with 'thatched bungalows and straw hovels'<sup>22</sup>

***Removal of Obstructions which served to impede 'the free Navigation of the River*** : The bank of the river between Chandpal Ghat and Chitpur had to be

cleared. Innumerable huts and sheds were built on the western part of the bank. Many of them were unauthorized and irregular and had obstructed both the sight of the river and a passage to it. They had to be removed.

“This measure is recommended”, the Special Committee wrote to the G.G. in Council,<sup>23</sup> “with a view to the removal of Huts and the sheds which may be found improperly situated to promote the free Navigation of the River, and to afford to Boats an easy access to the shore at all places.”<sup>24</sup> There were a good number of bathing ghats and an innumerable pathways, narrow and serpentine which had connected them with the town in the interior on the eastern part of the road. Habitations in this region have already become congested and this had choked the business arteries into the river.

***Spatial expansion for army drill and public work*** : The area between the fort and the Chandpal Ghat\* provided the space for routine army drill. Therefore, the Town Committee recommended that ‘the quarter of the Esplanade, on the river side adjoining to Chandpaul Ghat be cleared of the brick rubbish, Timbers and Old Guns, which are scattered upon it and that instruction be given to the officer in charge of the Engineer Department to level the ground and to keep it in a good order for the Militia Parades, and Public Walks, and that a Rail be put upon the East side of the bridge at the water shed to prevent accidents.’<sup>25</sup>

The whole area around two kilometres in radius centring the Fort had become congested. The congestion was caused not only by thatched huts and improvised sheds but also by the godowns of the Company. Thus ‘the passage from Hastings Street to the River’ was covered by a ‘range of godowns’ commonly called ‘Vrignous Godowns’. The Hastings Street was then a ‘narrow passage’ which served as “the principal thoroughfare for goods and passengers proceeding from Chandpal Ghaut and Kootchagoody Ghaut into the town consequently [because of the godown obstructions] carriages, hackness [hackney carts] and palanquins are frequently interrupted in their progress and detained to the great inconvenience of the inhabitants and obstruction to the

\* Ghats were places with flights of stairs or general slopes on the ground by which people descended on the water of the river to take bath in the morning and afternoon and perform their religious rituals and other rites in the early morning and evening.

commerce of the Town.”<sup>26</sup> White men’s bungalows often created bottleneck points in some important thoroughfares in the white town. Thus at the

bankshall houses occupied 'by Mr. Hare the watchmaker and Mr. Torry' made the Lane 'narrow and irregular passage' for traffic. The Lane had to be widened.<sup>27</sup>

Sometimes the official buildings occupied large plots of land and obstructed passages to the river and the town. One such building was the Marine Paymaster's Office which occupied 'upwards of 3/4<sup>th</sup> of the Ground which formerly constituted the approach to one of the principal Ghauts of the Town'. In the judgement of the Committee "the disuse into which Quouillah Ghaut [present Koila Ghata Street area] has of late years fallen for commercial purpose may fairly be ascribed to the obstructions occasioned by encroachment above adverted to you".<sup>28</sup>

**Creation of Burial Grounds** : The old burial grounds had become a source of nuisance in the city. There were separate burial grounds for the Portuguese, Greeks, the English and the Muslims. There was a separate burial ground called the Hospital Burial Ground. These were mostly in the eastern part of the city and adjacent to areas around the modern Circular road. Of these the condition of the Hospital Burial Ground and the Muslim Burial Ground was the worst. The Hospital Burial Ground was "represented as being one entire Mass of Bones". "It appears from the testimony of the Reverend Mr Brown that one quarter of it has been filled four times over (the Graves have been regularly marked out close to each other) within the period of his remembrances". The Muslim Burial Ground was considered to be one of the filthiest parts of the town. It was "represented as being during the rains a perfect Marsh". "The Bodies are generally interred in a negligent manner, sometimes within two feet of the surface and the jackals constantly prowl in the place. In a memorial presented to the Government in 1804 the families in the vicinity of the 'Mussulmen's Burying Place' represented it 'as being a precarious nuisance, particularly at the later end of the rains.' In view of all these the Town Improvement Committee recommended that the Muslim, the Christian and the Hospital Burial Grounds "be shut up" and "that [for the English] a site for a new place of Internment be selected somewhere between Boitaconnah and the Portuguese Burying Ground in the east side of the Circular Road." What is significant is that the burial grounds were to be shifted to the eastern part of the town parallel to the Circular Road that not only marked the eastern boundary of the town but also provided new space to the town in the east. "It is objectionable", the Committee wrote to the Government, "that the Repository of the dead should be on the South East quarter of the town".<sup>29</sup>

**Measures to ensure Free Air Circulation** : The removal of burial grounds was a part of the sanitizing efforts resulting directly from Wellesley's Minutes of

1803. The circulation of free air was another necessity that was taken care of. The old fort was the greatest obstruction to the passage of free air in the city coming from the river. The 'decayed and ruinous state' of the fort 'building', its "high walls equally useless to the proprietors and disfiguring to the appearance of the principal quarter of the Town serve to obstruct a free circulation of air and must also from their being strongly impregnated with saltpetre and extremely damp, occasion noxious and unwholesome vapours." This was one reason that was causing distress to the entire site where the Fort and the Esplanade were situated. To get rid of poisonous air blowing into the town it was advisable to pull down the entire structure. The old fort and the Maritime Paymaster's Office occupied a vast area which the Town Improvement Committee considered 'a very valuable piece of Ground' which should be retrieved and utilized for other purposes. The Committee's recommendation was that "if the approach were widened by the removal of this [Paymaster's] house the Ghaut [the Koila Ghat] in question would in consequence of its local advantages become one of the most convenient and popular Ghauts in Calcutta."<sup>30</sup> These recommendations were tentative plans which needed the support of experts' opinion. Hence Mr Taylor, the Export Ware House Keeper, was consulted by the Committee. His concurrence was secured. He advised that the old fort must be pulled down and the Paymaster's office should be removed.<sup>31</sup> The proposal to erect a 'range of spacious godowns' in the place of the old fort did not seem to be sound as a measure of town-planning. The predominant motive behind change was to meet trade requirements and the prime places at the heart of the white town were not considered as sites necessary for the construction of stately edifices which otherwise would have added to the dignity of the town. This narrow utility-oriented commercial vision did not reflect any planning deficiency on the part of early planners. It only showed that a commercial company did not have the mind to adjust its commercial ends with the majesty of a ruling authority that was endowed with the function of governance of a growing town. The First Report of the Special Committee instituted for the town envisaged at one point measures for free air circulation and at other point planned to erect dirty constructions which obstruct passage of free air from the river and add to the filth of the town. It was this desire to extract service-utility from the natives which led extravagant and luxury-prone early British officers to permit the growth of menials' quarters around their apartments which eventually took the shape of slums in the town.

***Measures for Beautification of the Town*** : The Special Committee for Town Improvement recommended measures for the renovation of the great tank in

the white town. The renovation was to proceed on a two-fold plan consisting of clearance and construction as follows:

“That the ground on all sides adjacent to the Great Tank be cleared away and that the present Buildings of every description as well as the gardens on the North side be removed and measures be taken to prevent further encroachments of the like nature”.

“That a wall, Railing and chain similar to those which encompass the South side of the Government house be constructed all-round the Tank and a spacious gravel walk for Public accommodation be made immediately within the enclosure and that Handsome substantial Benches or Garden Chairs be placed in the centre of each of the walks which enclose the great Tank.”

Along with the great tank the Holwell monument raised in remembrance of the so-called Black Hole victims was to be taken care of. The recommendations said.

“That the Monument situated at the west end of the Writers’ Buildings be thoroughly repaired and handsomely decorated and that an ornamental Iron railing be erected around it.”

The First Report of the Special Committee laid out a bare programme for the development of the white town. The riverbank area of the fort complex was to get a face-lift and eventually turned into a nucleus from where the town-planning for nineteenth century Calcutta would start. Trade requirements, military needs and public utility demands were all present in the recommendations made in the report. The basic aim, however, was to make the white town habitable with comfort and dignity, or, as the eighteenth century parlance went ‘flourishing, sweet and wholesome’.<sup>32</sup>

**Constructions of Roads** : While these recommendations were made the town planners seemed to be equally aware that roads were necessary for promoting the town . For construction of road land was necessary and the Committee drew the attention of the Government to this most essential element ‘for the improvement of the Town’ namely land. The earliest note in this regard was sent to the Governor General in Council on January 22, 1805 stating the necessity of ‘the purchase of the ground requisite for opening the new roads from North to South and from East to West.’<sup>33</sup> The Chitpur-Chowringhee axis which led to Halisahar to connect this holy place with the pilgrim spot of Kalighat was the only and major axis along which the town in the eighteenth century grew. This road was to the western part of the city and ran parallel to the river bank. It was on this street that the ancient Sutanati Hat which was

turned into Bura bazar by the Marwari and Gujarati traders in the eighteenth century was situated. There were innumerable bathing and ferry ghats on the bank of the river and the lanes which connected them with the bahitations in the interior crisscrossed with this road. The pressure of habitation and the rush of ever-increasing business transactions met at every point of this criss-cross and made life difficult. Therefore, an alternative to this road had become a dire necessity. Out of this necessity later grew the parallel arteries of the town running north to south – the one was the College Street – Cornwallis Street corridor and the other was what later came to be developed as the Central Avenue link between Shyambazar and Esplanade. To the north and the east of these newly conceived arteries was situated the Circular Road which formed the eastern boundary of the town and was called at that time as Boithakkhana Road.<sup>34</sup>

The east-west roads which the planners had in their contemplation would be parallels to the road which went from the zamindar's cutchery near the Fort to Srigaldaha in the east which is known as Sealdah in modern times.

### ***The City Becomes Compact***

The main thrust of the city-planners was to construct north-south arteries funded by the money raised from lotteries. With the coming of these arteries the white and the black town came to be compacted. Till the end of the eighteenth century the Government did not open its purse for public welfare. The upkeep of the army and the fort, the cost of administration and the system of policing the town and siphoning money as sinews of commerce consumed the bulk of revenue of the town. In the first part of the eighteenth century Calcutta was a money-short economy. But after the battle of Palasi situations changed. Krishnadas, the son of Raja Rajballabh, the *dewan* of Dakha, had already fled with vast treasure to Calcutta before Palasi. After Palasi the Nawab Mir Jafar was fleeced. No one could say with certainty which one was bigger in terms of extractions – the private squeeze by the Company's officers of the Nawab or the restitution money donated by the Nawab as a stipulation of the conspiracy contract. Big zamindars of the interior then began to deposit their wealth in Calcutta because Murshidabad had sunk. This was also because Calcutta offered security to people – an experience people had enjoyed since the time of the Maratha incursions in the 1740s. Previously men in the interior used to bury their wealth under earth because of fear from robbery. Now these treasures were lifted from their hidden shelters and men, money and family all henceforth shifted to Calcutta. Moreover this was the city where the banians used to stay. They were the men who amassed wealth through their trade with the foreign East India Companies and through their own individual

business. This was how they turned into the greatest capitalist class in the country superseding the Jagat Seths now in a state of decline. By the time Cornwallis came to rule Calcutta had already become an affluent city. The tendency to pump out money from private sources thus began to gain momentum. In the next three decades it came to be called *Kamalalaya* : the abode of goddess Lakshmi urging one writer of the city Bhabani Charan Bandyopadhyay to write his famous tract *Kalikata Kamalalaya*. In view of all these the government up to the time of Lord Cornwallis had never had the urge to open its purse for public use. This administrative miserliness had held Calcutta's development in check for a long time. Situations changed only in the nineteenth century after the assumption of the administration by Lord Wellesley. No major street was built up to that time. But certainly Calcutta developed its aspirations. The public opinion was steadily formed and public pressure was mounted on the Government. To this the Government yielded and planning was set into action with the turn of the nineteenth century.

### ***The Evolved Process of Internal Town Formation***

This was how the internal town formation of the city began to take place. The original idea was that Calcutta was to have a planned insulation of a garrison town. After the battle of Palasi the idea did not hold away any more. The Nawabi vigilance over Calcutta was over and the Company's officers came out of their cramped life within the fort. A new fort was on the way to being constructed and the confidence was grown that any menace from outside could be thwarted. Since the life of a sprawling existence now started for the English new roads and drains necessary for the cleanliness of the city became essential for a settled urban life. The town in the nineteenth century grew in response to this.

By the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century the urbanization of Calcutta, it may be said, had already shed much of its early hesitations. In 1803 to a European visitor the white part of the city appeared to be a full-grown urban settlement. The picture of Calcutta's urban growth was a point of pride to a European visitor looking at the white town from the side of the river. The pride was not an unjustified exuberance. Its unmatched superiority vis-à-vis the black town provided its own *raison d'être*.

"The town of Calcutta is at present", a visitor observed, "well-worthy of being the seat of our Indian Government, both from its size and from the magnificent buildings which becorate the part of it inhabited by Europeans. The citadel of

Fort William is a very fine work, but greatly too large for defence. The Esplanade leaves a grand opening, on the edge of which is placed the new Government House, erected by Lord Wellesley, a noble structure, although not without faults in the architecture and upon the whole not unworthy of its destination. On a line with this edifice is a range of excellent house chummed and ornamented with verandahs. Chowringhee, *an entire village of palaces*, runs for a considerable length at right angles with it and altogether forms the finest view beheld in any city".<sup>35</sup> [Italics ours]

With all its splendour Calcutta was still a village – considered by a beholder as ‘an entire village of palaces’. This was because of two reasons. Calcutta had no roads and was still a mud-strewn place without any specific system of drainage. A series of brick-built structures had come up giving a wonderful view of the city from the river-end but they could not efface the rusticity of the neighbourhood. A little away from upcoming quarters of the Europeans there was, one could see, the black town coming up with equal speed with the white. This was the second cause of irritation in the otherwise placid surface of a new-found urbanity. A congested interior now contrasted with a sprawling white habitation with a mesmerising picture of a riverfront. Affluence and misery, growth and stagnation, elegance and ugliness of the city were now marked features in the entire stretch of the river bank from the south to the north. Vis-à-vis the white town the black settlement was picture of settled gloom around a clustered habitation. In the visitor’s impress on it was this:

“The Black Town (i.e. the Indian quarter, is as complete a contrast to this as can be well conceived. Its streets are narrow and dirty, the houses of two stories, occasionally brick and generally mud, and thatched, perfectly resembling the cabins of the poorest class in Ireland.”<sup>36</sup>

This was colonial Calcutta available in the year the famous Minutes of Lord Wellesley were drawn. Intrinsically its character was defined. Externally it resembled Madras of a little later date. In span of less than fifty years since the battle of Palasi its internal lay-out was marked. Chowringhee was to be the European civil line slightly away from the new fort and it touched the Esplanade at the right angle. This Esplanade was a vast space dividing the European civil settlement from the fort on the one hand and on the other it separated the white town from the black town allowing a small grey town of mixed population of natives, Portuguese, Greeks, moors, Chinese and Armenians to emerge in the middle. It acted as a buffer between the white and the black town. Looking from the standpoint of town morphology Madras of 1813 resembled Calcutta of 1803.

“Madras is divided into two parts, the Forte or White Town, and the Black Town . . . The Black Town is to the northward of the Fort, separated by a spacious esplanade . . . The town is the residence of the Gentoo, Moorish, Armenian and Portuguese merchants . . . Some of the merchants at Black Town (own) large and elegant buildings. . .”<sup>37</sup>

The city-form, the segregation of the blacks from the whites, which Calcutta assumed even in the beginning of the nineteenth century had apparently resembled Madras in its outward formation.<sup>38</sup> The existence of Esplanade as an imposing buffer separating the white from the Black Town gave the two towns the shape of apparent similarity but there were enough differences between the two. In the beginning of the nineteenth century the Black Town in Calcutta was yet to witness the coming of palatial structures which in Madras had already started making its appearance giving the Black Town its own distinction. In Calcutta the Black Town had its surreptitious penetration in the White Town. Calcutta ceased to be a paradise in a mid-nineteenth century report.

“But with all its advantages”, goes the report, “do not imagine that Chowringhee is a paradise, one of those localities that every person desires to live in. Bishop Haber, in a cursory note of Moscow, informs us that in that city the palace and the hut are often close to each other. This may be said to be the case, though most probably not so often, in Chowringhee. The road has on its eastern side many fine colonnaded mansions in the Grecian style and which have indeed a fine effect when viewed from the river, but it has also in the very front of it a cluster of miserable native huts, tenanted by some two hundred natives. This incongruous neighbourhood of huts and lowest Soodras to palaces and European magnates speedily banishes from the mind of the near spectator the paradisiacal notions he may entertain about Chowringhee. The splendid mansion loses half of its architectural attraction when it is besides a collection of mud and bamboo huts. For the good of the fair name and for the “sake of the fair ladies of Chowringhee, it would be desirable that a north-western would one of these days blow down every hut in this and in other parts of the district, and if this sweeping away can be done by a north-western without injury to the persons and goods and chattels of the native who settle down in these places, it will be consummation most earnestly to be wished by every white face in Chowringhee.”<sup>39</sup>

### ***Interpenetration Between the White and the Black Settlements***

The greatest feature of this upcoming city in the beginning of the nineteenth century was, therefore, not the seclusion of the white from the black town but the slow and steady interpenetration between the two. The white population of the city, particularly the officers and servants of the Company, had developed the eastern habit of living in idleness with a touch of luxury and comfort in the routine of their life. They needed menials to serve their domestic chores but seldom were these menials allowed to stay inside the residence of their masters beyond their service hours. Naturally they built their own quarters, their hovels and huts, in the proximity of their masters' residences. Moreover from the time of the construction of the new fort there was an influx of coolies and a vast workforce associated with the business of construction, both government and private. A cooly habitation, called the 'cooly bazar', grew near the fort along the lower circular road axis at a point known to us a present as Hastings. The cooly workers and the domestic menials had a free exchange of their population so that their slum residences spilled over beyond Chowringhee and marred much of the organized smartness of the white city. What, therefore, attracted the attention of the authorities most was the mud and swamps and the filth and un-drained water that choked the animation of an otherwise vibrating town. Lord Wellesley's first concern was, therefore, streets and drains the improvement of which eventually led to the first and real beginning of the town as an imperial city.<sup>40</sup> Lord Wellesley's rule initiated the third phase of the growth of Calcutta. In the first century of British rule in India Calcutta as a city grew in three stages. In the first stage, between the purchase of the three villages of Sutanati-Govindapur-Kalikata in 1698 and the battle of Palasi in 1757, Calcutta was territorially static and had no sovereignty of its own. With a will to grow yet to be born it was in all real sense a stagnating city rooted in its fort-centric existence. Its impulse to grow began when the fear of Nawabi impingement was removed and the English had started experiencing a sprawling life outside the cramped existence of the fort. That was the time when Calcutta acquired the space for expansion upto the sea and renovations of internal infrastructures of old possessions began. The entire phase of the administration of Clive (1757-1760 and 1765-1767), Vansitart (1759-1764), Verelst (1767-1769) and Cartier (1769-1772) was oriented for stability and was unmarked by ambition. The momentum for change was developed under Warren Hastings followed by incentives acquired during the rule of Cornwallis. That was a new age and new constructions and innovative structures were ushered in. Hastings took over as the Governor General of the British possessions in India and Calcutta began its career as the seat of British administration. The ambition to convert Calcutta into an imperial city took off under Lord Wellesley.<sup>41</sup> Calcutta became the seat

of British administration in 1773 only with the passing of the Regulating Act in that year. Lord Wellesley's Minutes came in 1803. In course of these intervening thirty years the city character of Calcutta was formed but its imperial majesty was still unborn. That majesty came first by the initiation of the practice of raising money through lottery in 1793 which removed the money-constraints from urbanization and secondly by the Minutes of Lord Wellesley which set the town to a new career free of filth and marshy lands laced with beautiful roads and streets running through north to south making the white and the black town clubbed into one imperial urban unit which in course of time would acquire the entitlement to be called the second city of the Empire.

With Lord Wellesley, one may say, Calcutta's city formation really took off. In the first eight decades of its existence Calcutta resembled a village with no sign of modernization. A.K. Ray, one of the early biographers of Calcutta, observes that even in 1780 Calcutta was a compound of swamps and jungles unfit for habitation. He writes : "Calcutta at this time (1780) was little better than an undrained swamp, in the immediate vicinity of a malarious jungle, 'the ditch surrounding it was, as it had been for thirty years previously, an open *cloaca*, and its river banks were strewn with the dead bodies of men and animals'."<sup>42</sup> This was the situation in which Calcutta was placed even after the city was declared to be the seat of the growing British Empire in India. The post Palasi years witnessed the first British experience of moving out of a cramped life into a sprawling existence. This experience was a bewildered process – one of a simple stretching out from the fort in search of new space where there would be an escape into a kind of a free and individual residential existence. The need then was to be a little away from accommodations where the garrison was sheltered. Moving out from the fort the first concern of the English was to rearrange their ramshackle shelters – godowns, barracks, workshops, offices, residential quarters and the like – and there was little urge to improve the municipal life of the city in general. The result was catastrophic. "From 1780 and onwards", writes A.K. Ray, "correspondents in the newspapers make frequent complaints about the indescribably filthy condition of the streets and roads. This is fully confirmed by the account of Grandpre in 1790, who speaks of the canals and cesspools reeking with putrefying animal matter, of the streets as awful, of the myriads of flies, and of the crowd and flocks of animals and birds acting as scavengers. Often the police authorities are reproached for suffering dead human bodies to lie on the roads in and near Calcutta for two or three days."<sup>43</sup>

### ***How Stagnation was Lifted: Emergence of Public Opinion***

This was entirely a picture of a stagnating city. Two things lifted it from its condemned existence. The first was the practice of raising money through lottery and the second was the vision of Lord Wellesley to make the city an imperial seat of power. In the 1790s there was the real beginning of change effected in Calcutta. In 1794 the first advertisement for lottery for 'benevolent and charitable purposes'<sup>44</sup> went out. It was a "lottery of 10,000 tickets, at Rs. 32 each, and some of the best streets and churches were constructed out of these funds."<sup>45</sup> Reverend James Long gives us a major insight into the benefits of the lottery. He writes : "Lotteries were the order of the day; large houses fetching Rs. 10009 monthly rent were sold by lottery tickets of Rs. 600 each, also garden houses, a *Howrah house is put up to lottery*, situate on the bank of the river where the bore has no effect. The Harmonic house, a celebrated Tavern, was put up to auction by lottery in 1780, and won by the Hon'ble Mr. Justice Hyde. A garden house in Entally was raffled in 1781 for Rs. 6,000 prize tickets Rs. 75 each. Some of the best roads in Calcutta were subsequently made by the sale of lottery tickets."<sup>46</sup>

If the lotteries, commonplace as a practice and officially commenced in 1794, opened a new vista of urbanization in Calcutta another important event then took place in the same year which marked the beginning of the most productive phase of urbanization in the city. This was the replacement of the zamindar of Calcutta by Justice of the Peace in the management of the town. Since the foundation of the city the civic management of the town was in the hands of a zamindar but in none of his administrative fields his achievement could match the rapid expansion of the town with its expanding sanitary needs.<sup>47</sup> Hence this drastic measure was taken in 1794. An institution of nine decades was scrapped. The management of the town was entrusted to a body fashioned after western institutions, the Justice of the Peace.<sup>48</sup>

"The Justices set to their business in real earnestness and effected various reforms," writes A.K. Ray and he adds: "One of their first acts was the metalling of Circular Road."<sup>49</sup> The Circular Road was the major thoroughfare which encircled the entire city from north to south starting near Baghbazar where the Maratha ditch was dug and ending at the bank of the river near Govindapur. The soil that was dug out of the Maratha ditch was used in filling up the road and elevating its surface. Five years after assumption of charge the Justices issued the following notice in the *Calcutta Review* dated 24<sup>th</sup> October, 1799.

"Notice is hereby given that His Majesty's Justices of the Peace will receive proposals of contract, which must be delivered sealed to their first clerk, Mr. John Miller, within one week from this date, for levelling, dressing

and making in pucker, within the least possible time, the road forming the eastern boundary of the town, commonly called the Bytockunah Road and commencing from the Russapugla Road at the corner of Chowringhee and terminating at Chitpur bridge”.<sup>50</sup>

Dressing the streets, filling the obnoxious drains and taking care of the conservancy of the streets were measures that had already gone into the civic agenda of the Company’s authorities in Calcutta long before the Minutes of Lord Wellesley were drawn up but they were adhered to as small improvements for meeting eventualities and not as any part of a planned scheme of urbanization. Meeting eventualities was a routine exercise of the eighteenth century. Planning was an event of the nineteenth century as it descended from the top in the form of an advice from the Governor General. From 1780s public opinion was pressing for reform and more planned improvements. Filth, mud, undrained water and street nuisances had become colossal obstacles to the growth of township. Public opinion roared against it. Calcutta had assumed a status with the foundation of the office of the Governor General, the Supreme Court and the new fort. The civil residences of the Company’s servants had been separated from the army quarters in the fort. The Chowringhee Road had established itself as a new civil line.

New men of the interior, rich and solvent, had shifted to the city with their treasures. And with them expectations were on the rise but the city landscape had very little signs of planned urbanity. Naturally, therefore, the *Calcutta Review* on Thursday, October 19, 1766 had expressed its concern thus : “the nuisances in the streets are of late loudly and generally complained of dirt and rubbish of every kind are permitted to lie before the doors of the inhabitants in a most slovenly and offensive manner.”<sup>51</sup>

This was how public opinion was taking care of the need for overhauling the defects of the city. This public opinion was new phenomenon in the city. A civil society was slowly emerging in Calcutta and the civic life was slowly being taken under public address. A.K. Ray writes: “These and similar Press notices of the prevailing un-healthiness and insecurity of different parts of the town put the authorities on the alert, and they planned and effected various little improvements. Some old drains were filled up and the wretched old bazar in the Fort – the ancient Govindapur bazar of mud and thatch – was demolished.”<sup>52</sup> Removal of bazars created space and filling up of drains had provided the city a levelled surface of grounds on which roads, streets and constructions could be built. Removal of ugliness from the face of the city was

not only a part of beautification but also a deliberate move to create convenience in which plans of development could be ushered in. The demolition of the Govindapur bazar was informed to the public in the Gazette of Thursday, August 30, 1787 thus :

“The old bazar composed of an irregular and confused heap of straw huts, not only collected filth and threatened contagion, but proved in fact an asylum for every theft that escaped the hands of justice in Calcutta : robberies were, of course, daily committed without the possibility of detection.”<sup>53</sup>

The city inconveniences called for redress not only because they were related to civic sanitation and hygiene but also because they were conducive for crimes to flourish. Urbanization was a form where shortcomings of life had to be overcome with organized facilities of existence. Towards that Calcutta started moving from the end of the eighteenth century. In the course of that century the three villages of Sutanati-Govindapur-Kalikata slowly gave up their rustic orientations. Their city formation was yet to come in their configuration. The process to that end started from the time of Lord Cornwallis. Under Lord Wellesley it consummated. In the first three decades of the nineteenth century Calcutta received its first formal city form.

## Notes

1. “Hindu Kalikashetra boasted of only two roads. One of these, with an avenue of trees at its sides, led eastwards from the zamindar’s cutchery, which was at the site of the present Collectorate, to a ghat at the Adiganga, at its confluence with the Salt Water Lakes on the south of Sealdah, then called Srigaladwipa. The other, wider than this, was the immemorial Pilgrim Road to Kalighat, which was dignified by the British with the name of Broad Street, where it bounded their first Settlement”. – A.K. Ray, *A Short History of Calcutta*, p. 220.
2. See A.K. Ray, *op.cit.*, p. 157.
3. *Ibid.*
4. Beverley’s *Report on the Census of Calcutta*, 1876, p. 41..
5. A.K. Ray, *op.cit.*, p. 110. Calcutta’s territorial dynamics got a boost twice in hundred years’ time. First in 1757 when by the secret treaty with Mir Jafar Khan lands as far as Kulpi in the south near the sea was granted to the English. Then in 1857 when the “suburbs” of the city by Act XXI of 1857 “were defined to include all lands within the general limits of Panchannagram. It is important to remember that they included from the very beginning mauzas Dallanda, Dhaldanga, Sealdah, Serampore and parts of Kamapara and Simla, Dakhin Paikpara, bahir birji and Bahir Serampur . . .” – *Ibid.*
6. See A.K. Ray, *op.cit.*, p. 158. Beverley’s *Report on the Census of Calcutta*, 1876, p. 47.

7. To know this trade pattern read Ashim Dasgupta "Trade and Politics in 18<sup>th</sup> Century India" in D.S. Richards ed. *Islam and the Trade of Asia*, Oxford, 1971, p. 183.
8. "In the context of the developed bazaar economy of the 16<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> century it is possible to speak of a rough quadrilateral of trade – the two coasts and the two axes which connected the extremities of the coasts with the heart-land of imperial cities like Delhi and Agra. This hinterland was further connected with central Asian trade via Lahore and Kabul. Major Indian cities crowded round these routes and the hinterland of each felt the pull of the market to some extent. But this pull naturally disappeared after a point, as the cost of land transport became prohibitive. This interior India with its innumerable villages remained distinct from these other areas of trade and administration." – Pradip Sinha, *Calcutta in Urban History*, Firma KLM Private Ltd., Calcutta, 1978, Introduction. p.xvi.
9. Alexander Hamilton, *A New Account of the East Indies (1727)* cited in H.E.A. Cotton, *Calcutta, Old and New*, Calcutta, 1907, pp 5-10.
10. In the neighbourhood of the fort two bazars flourished in the eighteenth century – within one and a half kilometre was situated Dharmatala Bazaar just at the spot where the Town Hall stands today and within three kilometres that spot grew the Burra Bazar. The slums of the minerals gradually raised their heads near the modern Chowringhee road and took the shape of crowded bazars. To the south of Dharmatala Bazar there was another bazar called the Govindapur Bazar which was later demolished.
11. Sealdah region was also called the *Srigaladvipa*
12. Pradip Sinha, *op.cit.*, p. 4.
13. Sinha, *op.cit.*, pp. 4-5.
14. Sinha, *op.cit.*, p. 5.
15. Marquis of Wellesley was the Governor General at this time.
16. "The First Report of the Special Committee for considering the Nuisances which exist throughout the Town of Calcutta and proposing the best means of removing them." *Judicial Criminal Consultation* No. 22 and 23 dated 31<sup>st</sup> August 1804 & 25 July, 1805.
17. *Ibid.*
18. *Ibid.*, 110.23
19. *Ibid.*
20. *Ibid*
21. *Ibid.* In the records The Committee for improving the Town of Calcutta has often been referred to as Town Improvement Committee, Town Committee, Special Committee, etc.
22. See A.K. Ray, *op.cit.*, pp. 161-162
23. *Judicial Criminal Consultation*, No. 23, 25 July, 1805.
24. *Ibid.*
25. *Ibid.*
26. *Ibid.* For further details of Chandpal Ghat and Kootchagoody Ghat see A.K. Roy, *op.cit.*, p. 245.
27. *Ibid.* The tendency of the whitemen to build their own houses at the river front often created dislocations in building up thorough fares. This was one constraint from which it was difficult for Calcutta to recover.

28. *Ibdi.* Koileghata was situated at the centre of the main business hub of Calcutta. Therefore, both crowd and commerce encroached upon this area making it less and less habitable.
29. *Judicial Criminal Consultation* No. 23, 25 July, 1805.
30. *Ibid.*
31. The opinion of Mr. Taylor, the Expert Ware House Keeper was this: "I entirely concur in the observations made by the Spacial Committee on the state of remaining original Buildings of the Old Fort. It would be desirable that the whole of those buildings should be pulled down and a range of spacious Godowns erected in the room of them which from the great additional accommodation they would afford, would enable the Board of Trade considerably to reduce the annual expense incurred for the hire of Godowns for the use of the Export and Import Warehouse Departments amounting on an average of the last three years, ending 30<sup>th</sup> April 1804 to nearly 12,000 Sicca Rupees per Annum – *Ibid.*  
The Ware House Keeper further said : "For the reasons urged by the Committee I am of opinion that the Marine Paymaster's Office should be removed I think it proper however to state for the information of Government that the office in it's present situation being contiguous to the Bankshall, is extremely convenient to 150 Europeans and 70 Natives employed under the master attendant who receive their wages from the Marine Department." "The Marine Pay Office was purchased by Government in April 1788 for the sum of Sicca Rupees 10,000 and a further sum of Sicca Rupees 4000 was afterwards expended by Government in repairs and in building an additional upper room in the office." – *Ibid.*
32. Pradip Sinha, *op.cit.*, p.1
33. R. W. Cox and S. Davis to the G.G. in Council, Fort William, 22<sup>nd</sup> January, 1805, *Judicial Criminal Consultation*, No. 25, 25<sup>th</sup> July, 1805.
34. A.K. Ray *op.cit.*, p. 198.
35. This picture of Calcutta was drawn by Lord Valentia who visited Calcutta in 1803 the year when Lord Wellesley's famous minutes were drawn. Lord Valentia's statement has been cited in Dr. P.C. Bagchi ed. *The Second City of the Empire* (The Twenty Fifth Session of the Indian Science Congress Association, Calcutta, 1938) p. 42.
36. *Ibid.*
37. Milburn, *Oriental Commerce* (1813), Vol. 2, p.1
38. This racial division determining the morphology of a town was hallmark of urbanization in the colonial age. The Esplanade in Calcutta or Madras became the imposed buffer that separated the residence of rulers from the ghettos of the ruled. But in Calcutta the splendour of the white town was not an unmixed grandeur.
39. Griffin (pseu) *Sketches of Calcutta*, Edinburgh, 1843, p. 315.
40. See appendix to this chapter under the title Lord Wellesley's Minute of 1803.
41. Among the early Governors whose labours in this direction are of a more systematic character may be mentioned the Marquis of Wellesley. He appointed a committee of experts, both Indian and Europeans; and their reports embodying schemes of reform exhibit the anxious care which the noble Marquis bestowed on its improvement. He opened the Government purse, and his attentions were early paid to the defects of the drainage system. It is worthwhile quoting here his

own observations; 'The defects of the climate of Calcutta during the latter part of the rainy seasons may, indeed, be ascribed in a great measure to the state of the drains and the watercourses, and to the stagnant water remaining in the town and its vicinity'. It was the desire of the noble Lord that 'India should be governed from a palace, not from a counting house, with the ideas of a prince, not with those of a retail dealer in muslin and indigo'. Governor Vansittart, Lord Clive, Governor Verelst, Governor Cartier and Governor General Hastings have also rendered services towards cleansing the town and making it wholesome and convenient."

Raja Binay Krishna Deb, *The Early History and Growth of Calcutta (1905)*, edited by Subir Ray Choudhuri, Rddhi, India, Calcutta, 1977 pp. 40-41.

42. Cited in A.K. Ray, *op.cit.*, p. 152.

43. *Ibid.*

44. The expression is cited from Raja Binaya Krishna Deb, *op.cit.*, p. 38.

45. *Ibid.*

46. Cited in Binaya Krishna Deb, *op.cit.*, pp. 38-39

47. See Beverley's Report on the Census of Calcutta, 1876, p. 41. Also see A.K. Ray, *op.cit.*, p. 156.

48. "The management of the town was, therefore, taken off his [zamindar's] hands, and in 1794, under a statute of George III, Justices of [the ] Peace were appointed for the town and regular assessments authorised. The first assessment under the Act was made in 1795 by Mr. Mackay". – A.K. Ray, *Op.Cit.*, p. 156.

49. *Ibid.*

50. Seton Carr, *Selection from the Calcutta Gazette*, Vol. III, p. 37.

51. Seton Carr, *op.cit.*, p. 159.

52. A.K. Ray, *op.cit.*, p. 156

53. Cited *Ibid.*

**APPENDIX – I****1****Lord Wellesley's Minute on Calcutta, 1803  
Reports of the Fever Hospital Committee 1839****Appendix – F****Page – 301****No. 100****MINUTE OF THE GOVERNOR GENERAL ON THE IMPROVEMENT OF CALCUTTA**

The increasing extent & population of Calcutta, the Capital of the British Empire in India, and the seat of the Supreme authority, require the serious attention of Government. It is now become absolutely necessary to provide permanent means of promoting the health, the comfort, and the convenience of the numerous inhabitants of this great Town.

The construction of the Public Drains and Water-Courses of the Town is extremely defective. The Drains & the Water-Courses in their present state neither assume the purpose of cleaning the Town, nor of discharging the annual inundations occasioned by the rise of the River, or by the excessive fall of rain during the south west Monsoon. During the last week a great part of this Town has remained under Water, and the drains have been so offensive, that unless early measures be adopted for the purpose of improving their construction, the health of the inhabitants of Calcutta, both European & Native, must be seriously affected.

The defects of the climate of Calcutta during the latter part of the rainy season may indeed be ascribed in a great measure to the State of the drains & Water Courses, and to the stagnant water remaining in the Town & its vicinity.

The health of the Town would certainly be considerably improved by an improvement of the mode of draining & cleaning the Streets, Roads & Esplanade. An opinion is generally entertained that an original error has been committed in draining the Town towards the River Hooghly. And it is believed that the level of the country inclines towards the Salt Water Lake, and consequently that the principal channels of the Public Drains & Water Courses ought to be conducted in that direction.

Experience has manifested that during the rainy season, when the River has altered its utmost height, the present drains become baseless; at that season the main continues to stagnate for many weeks in every part of the Town, and

the result necessarily endangers the lives of all Europeans residing in the Town, and greatly affectes our Native subjects.

Other points connected with the preservation of the health of the inhabitants of the capital, appear also to require immediate notice. No general regulation at present exist with respect to the situation of the Public Markets, or of the places appropriated to the slaughter of cattle, the exposer of Meat or the burial of the Dead. Places destined to these purposes must necessarily increase in number with the increasing population of Calcutta. They must be nuisances wherever they may be situated, and it becomes an important branch of the Police to confine all such nuisances to the situation wherein they may prove least injurious and least offensive. It must however have been generally remarked, that places of burial have been established. In situation wherein they must prove both injurious & offensive, and Bazars, Slaughter-Houses & Markets of meat now exist in the most frequented parts of the Town.

In those quarters of the Town occupied principally by the Native inhabitants the houses have been built without order or regularity, and the streets and lanes have been formed without attention to the health, convenience or safety of the inhabitants. The frequency of Fires (by which many valuable lives have been annually lost, and property to a great extent has been destroyed) must be chiefly attributed to this cause.

It is a primary duty of Govt. to provide for the health, safety & convenience of the inhabitants of this great Town, by establishing a comprehensive system for the improvement of the Roads, Streets, Public Drains, and Water-Courses, and by fixing permanent rules for the construction and distribution of the Houses & Publick Edifices & for the regulation of nuisances of every description.

The appearance and beauty of the Town are inseparably connected with the health, safety & convenience of the inhabitants, and every improvement which shall introduce a greater degree of order, symmetry, and magnificence in the streets, Roads, Ghats and Wharfs, Public Edifices, and Private Habitations, will tend to ameliorate the climate and to promote & secure every object of a just & salutary system of police. These observations are entirely compatiabie with a due sense of the activity, diligence and ability of the present Magistrates of Calcutta, by whose exertions considerable improvents have been made in the general Police of the Town. The Governor General in Council has frequently expressed his approbation of the conduct & services of the present Magistrates of Calcutta, who have jealously and judiciously employed every effort, within their power to mitigate the effects of the evils described in this Minute. But the Magistrates of Calcutta must be sensible that the

establishment of a more comprehensive system of permanent regulation, is indispensably necessary for the purpose of security to the Town the full benefit of the laudable service of the Officers to whom the administration of the Police has been entrusted by Govt.

With these views, the Govt. proposes that the under mentioned gentlemen be appointed a Committee to consider & report to his Excellency in Council the means of improving the Town of Calcutta :-

Major General Frasers	Mr. Ross
„ „ Cameron	Mr. Alexander
Mr. Speke	Major Colebrooke
Mr. Graham	Captain Wyatt
Mr. Brooke	Mr. Dashwood
Mr. Taylor	Captain Aubury
Mr. R.C. Birch	Captain Preston
Colonel Pringle	Captain Blunt, of Engineers
Mr. S. Davis	Captan Sydenham
Mr. G. Dowdeswell Suptd. of Police	Messrs. C.F. Mastin
Lieutenant Colonel Harcourt	W.C. Blaquiere
Captan Shawe	E Thorlon
Colonel Garstia	and
Mr. Tucker	A. Macklew, Justice of the
Mr. Farlie	Peace for the Town of Calcutta
Mr. Colvin	and Mr. R. Bleclynden

The Governor General further proposes that Mr. Tiretha be directed to attend the committee and that Captain Blunt of Engineers, be appointed to officiate as their secretary.

The Governor General further proposes that the following special instructions be issued to the Committee – 1<sup>st</sup> To take the level of the Town of Calcutta and the adjacent country and ascertain & report what alternative may be necessary in the direction of the public Drains & Water-Courses.

2<sup>nd</sup> ly To examine the relative level of the River during the rainy season compared with the level of the Drains & Water Courses.

3<sup>rd</sup> ly To suggest what description of Drains & Water Courses may be best calculated 1<sup>st</sup> to present the Stagnation of rain water in Calcutta & the vicinity thereof and 2<sup>nd</sup> ly to cleanse the Town.

4<sup>th</sup> ly To consider & report what establishment may be necessary for cleaning the Drains & Water Courses and for keeping them in constant repair.

5<sup>th</sup> ly To take into consideration the present state of all places of intervent (?) in the vicinity of Calcutta and to propose an arrangement for the future regulation of those places in such manner as shall appear to be best calculated for the preservation of the health of the inhabitants of Calcutta and its vicinity.

6<sup>th</sup> ly To examine the present state & condition of the Bazars & Markets for Meat and of the slaughter Houses in Calcutta and to propose such rules & orders as shall appear to the Committee to be proper for the regulation of these already established for the removal of such as may have actually become nuisances – and for the establishment of New Markets or Slaughter Houses hereafter.

7<sup>th</sup> ly To inquire into all existing nuisances in the Town & vicinity of Calcutta, and to propose the reasons of removing them.

8<sup>th</sup> ly To examine and report for the consideration of Government the situation best calculated for appearing new streets & Roads, leading from East to West from the new Circular Road to Chowringhee and to the River, and from North to South in a direction really parallel with the New Road.

9<sup>th</sup> ly To suggest such other plans and regulation as shall appear to the Committee to be calculated to promote the health, convenience and comfort of the inhabitants of Calcutta and to improve the appearance to the Town & its vicinity.

10<sup>th</sup>, To form & submit to the Governor General in Council an estimate of the expense required to complete all such improvements as may be proposed by the Committee.

The means of raising the funds for the purpose of defraying the expense which must attend the execution of the important, improvement suggested in this minute, will claim the early & deliberate consideration of Government. The Governor General in Council entertains no doubt, that those funds may be raised without subjecting the Honourable Company to any considerable expense and without imposing a heavy tax on the inhabitants of Calcutta; -- it will certainly be the duty of Government to contribute in a just proportion to

any expense which may be requisite for the purpose of completing the improvements of the Town.

FOR WILLIAM  
June 16<sup>th</sup>, 1803.

(Signed) WELLESLEY  
(The Governor-General in Council)

## Chapter 12

### **The City on a Hind Sight Some Observations in Conclusion of Book I**

Calcutta's growth was a phased out development. From a territorially clustered village settlement its journey to a modern town was an event of chance – slow and unperceived at the outset but later quick as it picked up momentum since the end of the eighteenth century. The chanced victory of the English at the battle of Palasi truly ensured its destiny. Prior to that, about six decades since the purchase of the three villages of Sutanati, Govindapur and Kalikata, the English settlement at Calcutta had no territorial dynamism. The English had the permission to purchase 38 villages around Calcutta. But it did not materialize because of the opposition of the Bengal Nawabs. The vigilance of the Bengal Nawabs put a cordon around it. Robbed of a chance of expansion Calcutta had little prospect of growth. The Company's personnel lived in the fort, the nucleus of the town. Suffering from a cramped existence Calcutta's early fate was to grow as a garrison town. The fort had a small garrison essential both for defence of settlement and security of trade. Emerging out of a war with the Mughals (1686-90) and the turmoil of a massive zamindari revolt (Shiva Singh's revolt of 1696) the logic of a fort-based settlement did never miss the English mind.

The more the English became fort-centric the more they became suspect to the Nawabs. Four things made them objects of suspicion and finally accounted for Calcutta being under Nawabi scanner. An island people the English had a river inclination. To this they added a fort inclination as well. The Mughal rulers knew that they were weak at the sea. They also had the knowledge that stationed at Madras the English could move out to the sea with command. This had always scared the Mughals. When such people, redoubtable as they were with command at the sea, developed an inclination for fort and territory they became suspect in the eyes of the rulers. This was Calcutta till the middle of the eighteenth century -- a suspect territory that had little chance to develop itself.

The English were suspect because of many reasons. They claimed a jurisdiction which was contrary to Mughal Principles of governance. They imposed their own will and applied their own law in Calcutta. This practice was initiated by Job Charnock himself who ordered offenders to be lashed in the evening so that, it is said, their groans served to be the music of his dinner. As time went on this practice gained momentum and the Company's authority claimed exclusive jurisdiction for their settlement in Calcutta. Residents in Calcutta were to be tried by their own laws and not by the laws of the government. This was opposed by the Nawabs. Subjects of the Nawab committing mischief in Nawabi territories escaped to Calcutta and got shelter there under Company's authority. The Bengal *Nizamat* and the Company's government in Calcutta had always been at loggerheads on this issue and their conflict since the time of Murshid Quli Khan cumulatively mounted to an open conflagration in the time of Siraj-ud-daullah over the custody of Krishnadas, alias Krishnaballabh, son of Raja Rajballabh of Dhaka, who fled to Calcutta with a huge amount of unauthorized wealth. Disapproving this Siraj invaded Calcutta in 1756 and the English were routed. After the Company's war with the Mughals in the years 1686-1690 this was the second round of incidents when the English seemed to be on the path of war with the Mughals. In 1690, after the end of the war, the English were invited back into the Mughal territory of Bengal by the then Mughal Governor of the *subah*. This time in 1756 they were driven out. The English entry back again into the city was forced through a war. This time the Mughals were routed. The defeat of the Nawab changed the status of Calcutta and inaugurated series of further changes that ensured Calcutta's rise to power. Calcutta became the station from where the English could coordinate the rise of the British Empire in India.

In Calcutta the English combined a position of reality and vision. The reality was that the Company was a small assignee of revenue – a *talukdar* of three villages within the framework of Mughal system of governance. The vision was that their *taluk* was their property. From the beginning they construed it as their 'estate' where they could exercise their own authority. This conjured image of a possession had blurred Calcutta's constitutional position from the beginning. The result was that the *de facto* authority the English enjoyed and exercised in Calcutta was mostly appropriated and hence unauthorized. In order to defend its entitlement to this authority the Company always needed

to be in a state of preparedness for war. For this they required very urgently the defence of a fort. Immediately after the battle of Palasi their first duty was, therefore, to raise a new fort and discard the old one. To this effect a new site was selected at the village Govindapur near Calcutta which was immediately vacated and its residents were transferred to Similia (later known as Simla) in north Calcutta. This was the first major case of mass transplant of population in Calcutta. This demographic resettlement was a prelude to a set of bigger changes in Calcutta. Three major institutions were installed in Calcutta in the aftermath of Palasi which gave stability to the Company's regime in Calcutta and consolidated the Company's claim for an extra-territorial jurisdiction in the three villages in lower Bengal –Kalikata, Sutanati and Govindapur. These were construction of the fort, installation of the office of the Governor General and the setting up of the Supreme Court – three major institutions of power in one city, Calcutta, and at one given time – the immediate aftermath of Palasi. From the 1770s, one may say, Calcutta began its career as an imperial city. With an imperial status newly acquired Calcutta seemed to have no infrastructure. As a city it was really a bundle of inconsistencies and its inherent contradictions continued till the time of Hastings. The new Governor-General was too busy in arranging the internal consolidation of power in Calcutta and coordinating from there the formation of the British possessions into a British empire to make any planning of city improvement tangible in terms of contemporary requirements. The result was that up till the time of Cornwallis the city seemed to have been desperately trying to patch up its acquired imperial status and balance it with its sham infrastructural reality.

Students of the English rise to power in eastern India in the eighteenth century know that the conflict between the Company's authority in Calcutta and the Nawab's government at Murshidabad blocked Calcutta's rise to power and its early colonial city formation up to the battle of Palasi. The English command over the sea with a powerful navy, their pretension to extra-territorial jurisdiction, their craze for a fort and finally their lust for territory and commercial privileges were the four major factors which had always made the English suspect to the Bengal Nawabs. Concessions on the acquisition of new territory and trade privileges the English had cleverly extracted from the Emperor of Delhi in 1717. They gained permission to purchase thirty-eight villages near Calcutta. The villages were spread on either side of the river. It

meant that the English were planning to assume a pervasive influence on both sides of the river-banks. If they could do it extra-territorial enclaves would be formed bordering on the *faujdari* of Hugli with Calcutta as their centre. The Nawabs always dreaded this. Therefore, they put barriers to all English efforts to acquire new territories anywhere in Bengal. Calcutta thus lost its territorial dynamism during the first six decades of its foundation by the English.

The Company's relations with the Nawabs grew out of antithetical adjustments. So did Calcutta's fate. The Nawabs fleeced the English whenever they were in need of money. This was because they were traders and had money. Contrary to fleecing they were also placated because they brought bullion to Bengal without which money could not be minted and Bengal's economy would run dry. The English were aware of this. Within the context of this relationship Calcutta and Murshidabad developed their cross-political adjustment. As early as the time of Murshid Quli Khan they engaged themselves in two serious adventures which made Calcutta all the more suspect to the Nawabs. They tried to build a more formidable structure in the site of the present fort. This was promptly thwarted by Murshid Quli Khan. Parallel to this they consolidated their own jurisdiction by setting up the Mayor's Court in 1726. With the fort and the Court operating together as units of exclusive existence Calcutta became, much to the annoyance of the Nawabs, an enclave of the English outside the structure of Mughal governance in Bengal. The Mayor's Court continued till 1774 when it was taken over by the Supreme Court of Judicature that had of late come into existence.

By the time the Maratha invasions took place in Bengal in the 1740s Calcutta had become a consolidated zone resembling a sanctuary. People in distress took shelter there and its population increased. Calcutta could be considered now as one of the most important military strongholds in south Bengal. It was likely, therefore, that men of Calcutta and around had begun to repose faith on the English and accommodate the city in their confidence. Calcutta was now slowly emerging out of its garrison status. It had begun to gain political importance. Krishnaballabh's flight to Calcutta in 1756 was a milestone toward this. As an asylum of a fugitive Calcutta now assumed a kind of political importance. It was a new reality for Calcutta. The city was now considered as an alternative seat of power by those who went for defection in the Nawabi

camp and joined the English in a conspiratorial alliance before Palasi. Political gravity now seemed to have been slowly shifting to Calcutta.

From the beginning the English in Calcutta had a set of ambitions to fulfil. These were an accession to mint [which they got in 1757], a fort, compact territories of villages, trade privileges and extra territorial jurisdiction in the form of imposing their own law in dealing with natives who otherwise were subjects of the Nawabs. All this was tantamount to claiming an entitlement to autonomy for Calcutta. Many new things happened now which helped Calcutta's rise to prominence. First, Clive on his way to Calcutta bombarded Hugli and Chandernagore thus disabling the prospective Mughal-French alliance in a moment of crisis for the Mughals. This also destroyed the capacity of the two cities to rise ever as competitors of Calcutta. The status of Calcutta was also now changed. So long its status was that of a purchased city based on the grant of the Emperor. Now it added a new feather to its status. It was a conquered city – a spot where the Nawab was made to surrender to the English. In many ways it had anticipated the bigger Mughal surrender at the battle of Buxar in 1764 where the combined army of the Emperor and the two Nawabs of Bengal and Awadh surrendered to the English. The whole movement was manoeuvred from Calcutta. Between Clive's victory in Calcutta in early 1757 and the English victory at Buxar in 1764 there took place the battle of Palasi where a chance victory changed the status of Calcutta. In the treaty of Alinagar (Calcutta was renamed by Siruddaullah in 1756 as Alinagar) a defeated Nawab surrendered many marks of sovereignty to the English. The English now achieved an accession to mint. This *de facto* authority over currency-making gave Calcutta a new boost. Within three months' time, after the battle of Palasi, the English gained access to territories as far as Kulpi, near the sea in the south. This was a concession the English gained because of their participation in the conspiracy against the Nawab. This lifted the brake on Calcutta's territorial space for expansion. Immediately after the battle of Palasi a new fort was constructed. This completed the status of Calcutta as a garrison town. This positioning of Calcutta as a military station provided new benefits to Calcutta in the long run. After the battle of Buxar the Mughal army that guarded the eastern flank of the Mughal Empire was crushed. In the vacuum that was created a militarily upgraded Calcutta stepped in. This helped Calcutta to emerge as the arbiter of the post Mughal situations in the east.

The coming of Krishnadas to Calcutta was important. It signalled the alliance between the English on the one hand and the country's power elite on the other. From this point on ward started Calcutta's defiance of Murshidabad which was both political and constitutional. This defiance became an institution after the battle of Palasi when the English changed the protocol of addressing to the Nawab. Previously the governor of Calcutta as the authority of the Fort William Council or any of his agent operating through the Resident at the *darbar* met the Nawab at Murshidabad. Now the Nawab had to come down to Calcutta to meet the governor and his council members in Calcutta. Later Calcutta's defiance changed its target. From the Nawab the Governor General in Calcutta – Hastings – turned his attention to the Emperor whose annual tribute he stopped. Thus one of the most unconstitutional events took place in order to boost up Calcutta's imperial arrogance to the point of defying the apex imperial authority in the country.

Hastings placed Calcutta in an all India perspective of power. His participation in the First Anglo-Maratha war, his Rohila war, his treatment of Chait Singh of Benaras and the Begams of Awadh and finally his tribute-defiance of the Emperor—all made Calcutta a station of concern for everyone who either contested to be the successor of the Mughal Empire or wanted to remain as sovereign splinter of that fractured overarching structure. Positioning Calcutta in power was a mammoth job and being engrossed with it the new Governor-General did not get much time to rivet his attention to town-planning.

Yet remarkable things happened in the process of town development. First after the battle of Palasi the Company's officers influenced by the newly acquired confidence of victory over the Nawab moved out of their clustered existence in the fort. The age of Clive and Hastings in Calcutta saw Englishmen spreading out into the sprawling zone of Chowringhee. English residences began to grow along this new axis beyond the rampart of the fort. This was the new civil line that had grown up about this time. As this had happened the English officers, merchants and people of rank and file became accustomed to new ways of life fashioned after the leisurely styles of the orient. They became accustomed to domestic service offered by Indians. Cheap labour and its abundant supply transformed the European life in Calcutta. This was the beginning of the appearance of what was later called 'nabobs' – Englishmen

free of occidental rigours, rich with oriental wealth and given unmistakably to the luxurious comfort of leisure.

From the middle of the eighteenth century conversion from mud hut to brick-building started in Calcutta. Calcutta was very much afflicted with fire and pests –rats and white ants. Naturally the trend was ushered in that clay structures had to be substituted by brick structure. Two things happened in consequence. Brick kilns developed around Calcutta and jungles began to be cleared in the city proper so that kilns could be provided with wood as fuel. There was so much demand for wood in the kilns that domestic supply of wood became short creating uproar in the European households. As jungles were cleared new space was available within the city providing scope for house-building and real estate growth. Calcutta developed as a security zone – the greatest, perhaps, in south Bengal. This was also the time when there was a colossal rise in banditry in Bengal. Those in the interior who had wealth and a stable family and whose invariable practice it was to bury their wealth for safety began to migrate to the city. As a result the native sector of the town, technically called the ‘black town’ in the north, swelled with population and became congested. Slave–trade was still in vogue. Lifting and kidnapping of young girls and boys were a common practice. To escape this horror many solvent families left their home and hearth in the districts and settled in Calcutta and its immediate neighbourhood. This process of migration doubly benefited Calcutta. First, because of the rise in population the Company’s revenue increased. With the coming of rich families the wealth so long accumulated into the interior now found its way to Calcutta. In next seventy years’ time so much wealth poured in Calcutta that toward the end of the first quarter of the nineteenth century Calcutta was considered to be the abode of Lakshmi -- *Kalikata Kamalaya* – by Bhabani Charan Bandyopadhyay. Much toward the building of this wealth was also contributed by the *banians* who traded with foreign Companies and acted as the liaison men of private European traders and amassed conspicuous wealth out of their business, particularly their connections with men of power. After the battle Palasi another new trend was seen in Calcutta. Zamindars in the interior began to deposit their wealth in Calcutta. Calcutta now became the focus of the interior. This elevation of Calcutta was surely the achievement of the Clive-Hastings regime that spanned nearly three decades after the battle of Palasi.

The geo-political elevation of the city did not necessarily mean that the city was also keeping up morphologically. During the first twenty years since the battle of Palasi the thrust of the Company's city planning was renovation and not innovation and new construction. Ramshackle structures, shades, barracks, godowns, storehouses factories and the like which had become dilapidated or worn-out were sought to be either overhauled or substituted by alternative accommodations. The Company's administration in Calcutta always received instructions from the home government advising them to be frugal. Operating under ban from superiors the Calcutta administration practised economy and all planning for constructive improvement was set aside as extravagant. One may say that the Clive-Hastings phase of Calcutta's growth was broadly a phase of transformation. It was a period of Calcutta's geopolitical elevation. Only in the nineties of the eighteenth century it was realized that the morphological growth of Calcutta did not match its geopolitical elevation. Then attention was paid to town planning. It was a turn to a new direction for which money was needed. The city's boundary was not yet determined. It was to be done on the basis of an urgent necessity. After the digging of the Maratha ditch in 1742 people it became the fashion to describe it as the boundary of Calcutta. Later on the Maratha ditch was filled up and along its axis the Circular road was constructed. By a proclamation of 1794 the inner side of the Maratha ditch was declared to be the boundary of Calcutta. The previous year, in 1793, the system of public lottery was instituted for public improvement. Thus a new phase began. From the proclamation of 1793 to Wellesley's minute of 1803, one may say, the real phase of town planning for Calcutta started.

The massive spate of building construction in the city took place since the time of Wellesley. It means that Calcutta's take off started with the turn of the nineteenth century. Prior to that situation in Calcutta was not conducive for urban construction. The Company itself was in financial crisis. There was famine in 1770 and also in the middle of 1780s. Calcutta was also affected by famine. Moreover there was a dearth of building materials. *Chunum* had to be brought from distant places like Sylhet. Supply of soil to brick kilns was also a factor. Random and clandestine digging of soil was destroying the face of the earth around Calcutta. Up to the beginning of Hastings' rule the major supply of brick and labour went for the construction of the fort. Poaching of labour for private construction was not of course uncommon. But none could thwart the

irresistible pull with which the fort had drawn labour and building materials to its site. The work of fort construction was such vast that at one point the Company's authorities in Calcutta requisitioned masons and bricklayers from England. The labour-force necessary for construction was drawn from among the peasants. After the famine of 1770 one-third of the population in Bengal died and one third arable land returned to jungle. As a result agriculture suffered. It was difficult to procure men from the interior who would work as construction labours in the city. This was one reason why city constructions did not take off in the second half of the eighteenth century. Secondly, there was paucity of public fund which could be invested in the construction of the city. The East India Company itself solicited loan from the Parliament and there was talk in England that those at the helm of affairs in Calcutta and the districts had squandered money. There was a picture of spoliation everywhere. The profits of the 'Plassey Plunder' – the huge money extracted from the Nawabs -- enriched officers allowing them to grow as owners of private wealth. This spoliation was the event of the Clive-Hastings regime. In this phase Calcutta's urbanity suffered. Every English house needed domestic labour. Every English officer was surrounded by service attendants. These men lived in slums that grew behind the residences of the Europeans in the white town. A big 'coolie bazar' grew near the fort itself. Streets had not been developed and no drainage system was there to keep the city free of filth. The city ambience of Calcutta was yet to grow under active government patronage. That patronage came only under Lord Wellesley. As a preparatory to that preliminary works like boundary fixation and fund-raising through lottery were done under Cornwallis. That much only was the city achievement. A capital city with bare infrastructure: that was Calcutta in the eighteenth century.

In 1789 one observer, Grandpre, noted that the "roads were merely made of earth; the drains were ditches between the houses, and the sides of the road, the receptacles of all manner of abomination."<sup>1</sup> "Even in 1803", A. K. Ray observes, "the streets in the 'Blacktown' as the Indian portion of the town was called, were, according to Lord Valentia, narrow and dirty and the houses generally of mud and thatch."<sup>2</sup> There was no sign of take off before 1803 when

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Lord Wellesley declared that Calcutta was to be improved so as to suit the majesty of an empire. "We have it, however, on the authority of Mr. H. E. Shakespear, that up to 1820p, the improvements sanctioned by the Government had not been carried into effect, , and the streets were, with four or five exceptions, kutcha, and the drains mere excavation by the roadside."<sup>3</sup> The real improvement of the town began with the coming into force of the system of lotteries. Although started in 1793 nothing much was achieved from the lottery fund till 1805. Some important works were executed by lotteries between 1805 and 1817. Finally in 1817 the Lottery Committee was appointed and the balance of the previous 17 lotteries was made over to it. The Lottery Committee existed till 1836. During these twenty years tangible benefit was accrued to the city. A. K. Ray says that "the town improvements ceased with the abolition of the Lotteries." And then " with the establishment of the Corporation of the Justices in 1871, under Act VI of that year, a fresh era of Town improvements dawned, and streets , lanes, tanks, landing and bathing ghats , drains , markets, houses and all other matters connected with the sanitation and ornamentation of the metropolis obtained considerable attention."<sup>4</sup>

Given the above, it is clear that the urbanization of Calcutta was essentially a phenomenon of the nineteenth century. Its eighteenth century career was one of mixed developments. The first sixty years of its foundation were absolutely non-dynamic. It experienced a geopolitical elevation in the aftermath of the Palasi. But then its city formation did not match its political rise. There was little government patronage for town-building during this period. The major concern for town-building came when the fort gave security to the settlement. Business within and outside the city increased. The need for boundary demarcation was felt. Means were devised to raise money for civil construction. What was now needed was the political will which would spur visions into action. This came early in the nineteenth century, in 1803, with the minutes of Lord Wellesley. With the political will taking shape Calcutta now set <sup>5</sup>in for its destination to be the second city of the Empire – the city of palaces in the east. Under Hastings Calcutta began her career as the capital of the

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British Empire. Under Lord Wellesley she became enthroned assuming the imperial majesty of a capital.

Notes:

1. Cited by A. K. Roy, *A Short History of Calcutta*, p.221
2. *Ibid.*
3. *Ibid.*
4. A. K.Ray, *op.cit.*, pp 221-222

**BIRTH OF A COLONIAL CITY: CALCUTTA**

**BOOK - II**

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**WHAT IT IS ABOUT**

The Book II of the thesis discusses how Calcutta in the Nineteenth Century was developed into a global town and was positioned in the global map as the second city of the British Empire. In the eighteenth century Calcutta was not very much urbanized. But it was elevated to power and in terms of political importance it became the most important city in India. The process of effective urbanization took place in the nineteenth century. The book II discusses the Nineteenth Century tale of its effective urbanization.

## PREFACE

This book grows out of my desire to know the city where I was born – Calcutta. The city has a checkered history. Originating as a riparian village it climbed to a status unique in history. It became the second city of the British Empire in India and the capital of the Empire itself. After the Magadhan Empire in the sixth century B.C. no empire had emerged from eastern India which may be called an Indian empire. The British Empire was that – an east-originated Indian empire successor to that of the Mughals. Being the seat of an empire from the east Calcutta had a glory no other Bengal city could boast of. As the seat of an imperial power Calcutta was also the house of a new culture: the Renaissance of the nineteenth century. Reconciling power and culture in one form Calcutta became the harbinger of a new civilization which coming from outside facilitated a new dawn: the modern age in Indian history. In this sense Calcutta was the first modern city in India. What is curious is that as the city grew the entire population on the riverbank adapted itself to this new change giving rise in the process to a cosmopolitan culture speaking of global humanity of which Rabindranath Tagore seemed to be the best specimen. This city experienced a chance-directed urbanization in the eighteenth century. Its real modern uplift began in the nineteenth.

In the following pages Calcutta's experiences in urbanization has been described, of course with an emphasis on the eighteenth century – the least known period in the history of Calcutta. Urbanization needs a strong political will to grow. That will was not there in most of the years of the eighteenth century. Geopolitical pressures were mostly unsuitable for Calcutta. What redeemed its growth were two things. The first was a population pressure that helped retrieving land for habitation and the second was the English determination and obstinacy to hold the city as their prized possession within a cordon of very powerful *Nawabi* vigilance. Three things ensured its journey to global city – the introduction of the system of lottery in 1793 to raise funds for public works, the fixation of the boundaries of the city in 1794 and finally the appointment of the Justices of Peace in the same year as a modern instrument of municipal management. So long the office of a zamindar, a ramshackle Mughal institution, was made to look after all municipal activities in the city. That was over in 1794. Now it was time for the political will to

manifest and take grip of the city. This happened with Lord Wellesley's famous minutes of 1803. The British Empire had taken its shape and it needed to be ruled from an imperial city – not simply from a traders' emporium. Wellesley's minutes gave direction to that end suggesting as to what way Calcutta was to grow in order to be the seat of an empire. Calcutta was bedecked accordingly. As time progressed it presented itself as an imperial city aspiring to be the London of the east – a global halt for east-moving Britons.

In the eighteenth century Calcutta was an undrained swamp. In the nineteenth and the twentieth century it was a global city from where the British Asian Empire was coordinated. This was a metamorphosis seldom experienced in history -- a metamorphosis from within. Calcutta as a modern city housed many changes. The emergence of a civil society with public opinion was one such change. This change became instrumental for social and cultural reforms. Reforms originating from Calcutta were in many cases a state-society partnership – although more so in the reform phase under the Governor Generalship from Bentinck to Dalhousie. This partnership was an outstanding development mostly anchored in Calcutta. A new education came to this country via this city; the Indian society changed through impulses drawn, if not otherwise, from the same city; and the Indo-Islamic culture bred mostly from Delhi and Lucknow, Dhaka and Murshidabad was replaced by an Anglo-Indian version of global culture that was first sheltered in the city. The city's primacy was paramount.

This city was initiated into vigorous urbanization in the first half of the nineteenth century. That was a very innovative phase in British Indian history so far as Calcutta was concerned. It can be called Calcutta's high watermark for urbanization. Most of the major roads, parks, squares, drains, buildings and other municipal works of modern Calcutta were constructed during this phase. Calcutta's fate was guided by the star of the Empire, particularly during the span of fifty years from the rule of Lord Wellesley to that of Lord Dalhousie when the imperial juggernaut moved relentlessly forward. The Empire needed a city that would represent its majesty. Calcutta was eminently suited for that. Originating as a garrison town with a fort it developed into a port with a hinterland of over thousand miles spreading beyond Punjab. As one of the greatest commercial outlets of the country it had emerged as the regulating

centre of the world of Indian business. To this it had added its own pride as the capital of an Asian empire. Calcutta at the end of the nineteenth century was truly this -- a global city subsidiary only to London --the metropolis of the global empire of the English.

At the peak of its years of rise Calcutta adopted a new culture – nationalism. Patriotism became its political creed. The city that was designed to be the London of the east now aspired to assume a place by the side of Paris and Petrograd as a seat of revolution. The capital of an empire lost its status. The aristocracy of imperial heritage now yielded place to the pride of a new culture: global awakening of dominated humanity. Seized with the zeal of a neophyte the city turned against the Empire. The Empire was threatened. Bengal was partitioned in 1905. The state-society partnership broke down. The city became a centre of storm. It unleashed agitation and terror against the state. The state retaliated. Capital was shifted to Delhi in 1912. Calcutta lost its glamour as an imperial city. But it acquired a new glamour. In the midst of anti-partition agitation it gave rise to the slogan of *Bande Mataram – Mother! I hail thee*. The slogan reverberated in hills and dales, in cities and country-sides, in every home and hearth. The treatise of the new age was written in the city about the same time by Surendranath Banerjea – *Nation in Making*—his autobiography. A new nation was taking its birth. The Empire witnessed these two phenomena in its life time in India—*Birth of a City: Calcutta* and more incredible than this *Birth of a Nation: India*. Calcutta was the chosen site of history for both these events – the site where history decided to transform itself.

This Calcutta had always been in my mind. In the two books, the present one and its companion volume noted above, I have tried to trace this history. Calcutta will be meaningless unless its story of urbanization is properly told. Therefore, my emphasis in these two books happens to be the story of urbanization. For scholars Calcutta study is difficult in one sense. It does not provide private papers and family records for its history. Government documents are, therefore, the only source on which our research has to be based. Cross-checking of sources which is so primary in the methodology of historical research suffers because of this. Nevertheless, we have tried to make our narration objective as far as possible. Certain basic aspects of the city not

properly addressed so far constitute the direction of our research. These are: the pattern of urbanization, growth of Calcutta as a city of palaces, financial ambience of the city, its industrial orientation, its experiences of disasters and finally its internal transformation as a seat of nationalism. Out of these the book assumes its shape. My function is to bridge the book to its fate: the ultimate care of readers. In this union between the reader and the book Calcutta, the global city, I trust, will eventually fulfill its mission to be a monument of time.

## INTRODUCTION

### THE GLOBAL TRANSITION

Calcutta was one city of the British Empire which had the history of a meteoric rise from a riparian village to a capital of a vast south Asian empire. It acquired a global status becoming in the process the second city of the British Empire. In my first book *Birth of a Colonial City Calcutta* I traced various aspects of the rise of the city to prominence. The present book is in many ways a follow-up to this earlier work. Together the two books bring into light the detail of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century history of the city. In no way they trace what may be called the origin of the city. They look at the city as an imperial formation that took its gradual shape after the third and final arrival of Job Charnock in 1690 at Sutanati, one of the three constituent villages of the great city of Calcutta. Given this historical perspective what I have avoided in the book is looking at the antiquity of the village *Kalikata* which in medieval Bengali literature has been given prominence as a river bank settlement that attracted attention of merchants sailing by. In recent years there has been a kind of a nationalist urge to locate the antiquity of the city to a hoary past so as to prove that the city was not the creation of the British. Not being able to subscribe to this theory of the city's antiquity I have confined myself to the study of the process of urbanization which had made the city a marvel of colonial creation. *Kalikata* as a village was pre-British but it was the propensities of an empire that turned it into a city almost of the stature of a growing metropolis.

The present book starts with the conception that in the eighteenth century the urbanization of the city did not match its political rise to prominence and power. It lacked the necessary political will that would allow it to surmount its circumscribed riparian setting. That will was manifest only toward the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century when Lord Cornwallis and Lord Wellesley arrived in India as the Governors General of the British Empire.

In the eighteenth century the urbanization of Calcutta was more incidental than an outcome of deliberate planning. Urged by population thrust three things came to be processed. The jungles in and around the city were cleared.

Land was retrieved and was quickly occupied by constructions of mud and thatch huts with a pond within an enclosure—a typical country model of chance-directed habitation. Wood that was available from felling of trees was used as fuel for burning bricks. From the middle of the eighteenth century thus bricks came to replace slowly mud and thatch in the urban area of the city. The new fort was the great symbol of the inauguration of this new age of construction.

For the first sixty years of the foundation of the city in 1698 Calcutta enjoyed very little of territorial dynamism. With the beginning of the Maratha invasion in 1742 there was a rush of population in the city and lands in its immediate outskirts came to be forcefully occupied by a surging population. Calcutta, now a collective entity of three villages, had become a sanctuary for a threatened population. Rallying around the fort a sanctuary had grown up. This was the first landmark in Calcutta's rise to prominence. This had led to two things. It created the city's liaison with its neighbourhood and contrary-wise the country reposed its confidence on the English. This had other corollaries. Some new lands were unofficially integrated to the city while some country formations made their forceful entry into the border areas around Calcutta allowing in the process a formal union of the urban mind of an upcoming city of the English with the mind of Bengal's countryside.

This was Calcutta when it was attacked by Siraj-ud-daullah, the *Nawab* of Bengal in 1756 – an unformed city with a reputation of a sanctuary, bustling with population and potentials for growth. The following year was its status-raising year. Coming from Madras with a force Clive recaptured it. This event changed the character of the city. It now became a conquered city – a status not officially claimed by the English under fear that it might embroil their status as traders in the country. All through the eighteenth century the English upheld the status of the city as their purchased property claiming an extra territorial jurisdiction over the residents of the city. This was one claim which the Bengal *Nawabs* had never conceded.

Clive taught Calcutta the art of self-defence. With Madras as its rear area Calcutta could now be a forward-looking outpost of the British trade in eastern India. New opportunities quickly opened for the city and historical forces began to operate in its favour. The English, victorious by winning over the

*Nawab* gained from him some major concessions that went to make a quasi sovereign status for the city. The Nawab signed an ignominious treaty known in history as the Treaty of Alinagar (Siraj named it as Alinagar) in February, 1757 by which the English gained the right to mint coins in territories of their own jurisdiction. Meanwhile Clive had achieved other things for the city. While coming to Calcutta he had bombarded two cities, two adjacent centres of power -- the French settlement at Chandernagore and the Mughal *faujdari* establishment at Hugli thus eradicating two rival cities which could have in time obstructed the rise of Calcutta to prominence.

Calcutta could now grow as a centre of power parallel to Murshidabad. The geopolitics of the time had facilitated the process. The Portuguese were expelled from the Bay of Bengal by Emperor Shahjahan in 1632. As the Mughals had no navy the entire sea board now lay open at the mercy of the Europeans. Since the English had a powerful settlement at Madras with a strong navy there they could easily bring the sea under their own command. As an upcoming city Calcutta thus gathered momentum with Clive's arrival with a force in 1756.

The battle of Palasi was a watershed in Calcutta's rise to prominence. After the battle the English East India Company was granted the district of 24-Parganas in and around Calcutta as their zamindari. Instantly the city gained space for territorial expansion over a vast area in the middle of which it now remained as a revenue-free tenure. This tenure was a gift from the *Nawab* after Palasi. Now the English were free. The over-arching Mughal supremacy was gone and the English steadily came out of the fort to enjoy the sprawling habitation around. The civil line of Chowrangi was formed at this time so as to allow the white town to create its own nucleus of growth. As Chowrangi was settled the English abandoned Sutanati and the latter merged into the complex of the native colony of the north. Between the native north and the white Chowrangi in the south there lay a buffer zone populated by a mixed humanity -- the Portuguese, Armenians, Muslims of diverse origin and assorted Indians. With this 'grey' town in the middle the segregation of the city between the white town of the south and the native town of the north became properly marked. As the white town assumed its identity in contrast to the other towns Calcutta seemed to be on the way to prepare itself for an amazing lift known in history

as the 'city of palaces'. The character of an island people was now defined in the upcoming river-front habitation of the settlement.

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The post-Palasi period marked the age of the political rise of Calcutta. Three institutions gave the city power, authority and dignity. The office of the Governor of Fort William now assumed the status of regulating authority. With this elevation of the office the diplomatic protocol in governance was changed. Previously the Governor or his agent had to go to Murshidabad to meet the *Nawab*. Now the order was reversed. The *Nawab* had to come down to Calcutta to meet the Governor. As the Bengal *Nawabs* mortgaged their fortune to the English the subordination of Murshidabad to Calcutta became a functional reality. This was manifest in the sinking of the office of the Mughal Governor of Calcutta, an office which Umi Chand the millionaire Sikh merchant used to hold on the eve of the battle of Palasi. Calcutta was free of Mughal control. It was on the way to being British.

The second institution which gave the city the authority was the new fort. Anchored in the fort the might of the English became an institution of manifest power, the only shining semblance of authority in eastern India. Immediately after Palasi Clive insisted that a new fort should be raised in order to prevent all prospective intervention by European powers. It was done at a huge cost. Then in 1764 when the Mughal military power collapsed at the field of Buxar Calcutta and its fort became the unchallenged arbiter of the political fate of eastern India. Politically secured, militarily protected and administratively organized Calcutta now became the safe custody where wealth flew from the interior. People came from neighbourhood and settled in Calcutta. Zamindars transferred their treasure to this emerging haven of accumulating capital. The process went on for many decades more so that in the third decade of the nineteenth century a representative of the Bengali intelligentsia, Bhabani Charan Bandyopadhyay termed the city *Kalikata Kamalalaya* – Calcutta the abode of Lakshmi, goddess of wealth.

The third institution out of which Calcutta gathered its authority was the Supreme Court founded in 1774 by an Act of Parliament. This Court replaced the Mayor's Court (1727) and itself was replaced in 1862 by the foundation of the High Court of Judicature, Calcutta. Initially it imposed judicial authority on all men residing in Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. Later it was restricted to only those who lived in Calcutta or to any British subject living in Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. With a jurisdiction thus defined it initiated the process of replacing in practical terms the *Sadar Nizamat Adalat* at Murshidabad.

Calcutta was now the base where the trinity of the British power was founded: the Fort, the Court and the Office of the Governor. At this time Calcutta's fortune smiled on her and she was ranked as the foremost city under British possession in India. In 1773 the British parliament passed a legislation to regulate the territorial affairs of the British East India Company. Known as the Regulating Act it appointed Governor General at Fort William with a supervisory power over two other presidencies of Bombay and Madras. Calcutta, the seat of the Governor General, thus ranked foremost as the headquarters of the British possession in India. The making of an empire was in the horizon. Calcutta was fated to be its capital.

This was how Calcutta gained the status of an all India city. Murshidabad sank. Dhaka was obscured. No other city in eastern India could be as effective as Calcutta. This state of affairs continued till 1803 when Delhi fell to the English. In the entire Indo-Gangetic basin Calcutta was one city which was upreme.

Meanwhile events moved in other direction. In 1765 the East India Company became the *diwan* of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. Calcutta was suddenly called upon to house the office of the Bengal *diwan* -- the finance officer of the Bengal *subah*. In 1698 Calcutta was the house of a *talukdar* which the East India Company was. In 1756 the city became a retrieved territory. Next year it was a free tenure within a zamindari of which the Company was the master. Now in 1765 it was the financial headquarters of the eastern part of the Mughal Empire. Calcutta reconciled two opposite characters in one form. It was Mughal in being one of its financial headquarters. On the other it was deemed to be the would-be capital of a rising empire rival to the Mughal Empire itself. Calcutta was both at once – the prospective point of rejuvenation of a decaying empire and a prospering stronghold of a rising new one. Eventually its Mughal character withered away and its British character triumphed when Hastings decided not to pay Rupees 26 lakhs as tribute of the Bengal *subah* to the Emperor of Delhi. This was tantamount to relinquishing the vassalage as the *diwan* and the virtual annexation of Bengal. Calcutta thus became a free city with new direction to being global.

Up to this point the story of Calcutta's political rise to power and prominence was complete. We turn to its story of urbanization.

## CHAPTER 1

### Calcutta Grows into a Global City

#### 1. PARADOX OF GROWTH

Calcutta's growth was set in a paradox. In the eighteenth century it did not grow into a full-fledged urban city – even after hundred years of the possession of the three villages that made up the territorial mass of the city itself. More than after three decades since the battle of Palasi (1757) its boundary was not settled and there was very little public fund to process the villages into a developed urban centre. Yet these shortcomings could not stop the city's rise to power. It was almost an uninterrupted event. The process was complete before the century came to a close. It started coordinating the rise of the British Empire in India since it became a combined unit of three forms – a garrison city, a port town and the seat of an administration. All these three functional attributes of the town became a manifest unity immediately after the battle of Palasi. In the process of all these Calcutta became a global city – yet only half urbanized then.

A.K.Ray charts Calcutta's growth since 1706.<sup>6</sup> It was certainly not a coveted zone for habitation then. There was only one masonry building on the bank of the Ganga: the *cutchery* of the *jagirdar*. Two roads ensured journey to this ancient *Kalikshetra* – the land of the goddess -- Kali the Mother. One road moved eastward from the *kutchery* to the confluence of the *Adi Ganga* to Salt Water Lake at a place called *Srigaldwipa*. The other one, moving north to south, was the ancient pilgrim road that connected *Kalighat* in the south and *Halisahar*, another pilgrim spot in the north far away beyond the rim of the city

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<sup>6</sup>A.K.Ray, *A Short History of Calcutta Town and Suburbs, Census of India 1901, Vol. VII, Part I*, (1902) Rddhi – India, Calcutta, 1982, p. 96

into the district of the 24 Parganas<sup>7</sup>. The Calcutta part of the road the English termed as the 'Broad Street'. This was the road on which the future white town grew. All surrounding areas were jungle and waste. Out of 5076 *bighas* of land the English were allowed to purchase in 1698 only 840 *bighas* were inhabited in 1706.<sup>8</sup> In a decade's time two structures were raised: the fort and the Church. When the Surman Embassy returned from Delhi in 1717 it saw that population had increased, trade had improved but no expansion of the town area had taken place. The English had made a little advance in the matter of their defence. Previously their defence consisted of a flotilla of boats lying on the river.<sup>9</sup> Now they had a fort which served two purposes – their abode and their defence. A fort overlooking a port and providing defence and shelter was a marvellous achievement, however meager it might be. Its dividend came in 1742 when the Maratha invasion started devastating western part of Bengal. Calcutta guarded by the fort and protected by the river turned into a sanctuary for men fleeing from terror and devastation. Population rose by leaps and bounds in the city. This population was, however, a crowd in an emergency and hence could not be dispersed or resettled with ease. What suffered because of this was town planning. The Company's primary aim at this time was revenue. Population led to habitation and habitation fetched revenue. Population was profitable to the Company and it provided the English the confidence of a stable settlement.

## 2. THE 1740S : A SCARE-DRIVEN BUT A LANDMARK PERIOD OF CALCUTTA'S GROWTH

The 1740s thus should be looked at as a landmark period in the history of the rise of Calcutta into a global town. Population dispelled the desolation of the English settlement. The scene of a wilderness was now gone. The demographic settlement of the city based on population segregation now began to take its final shape. People of native origin were concentrated in the north while the

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<sup>7</sup> The district of 24 Parganas was handed over to the English East India Company as their *zamindari* by Mir Jafar as a term of the pre-Palasi conspiracy in 1757.

<sup>8</sup> A.K.Ray, *op.cit.*, pp. 96-97, 220-221. In *Dihl* Calcutta proper only 248 *bighas* of land were inhabited. *Ray, op.cit.*, p.96

<sup>9</sup> "The first English settlement at Sutanuti," says Wilson, "seems to have consisted of mud and straw hovels with a few masonry buildings. Its chief defence was the flotilla of boats lying in the river. The renewed settlement established by Charnock in 1690 was of the same nature, but as time went on, the number of masonry buildings increased." --- Cited by A.K.Ray, *op.cit.*, p.96

south was retained for the whites. The middle zone between the north and the south, termed by historians as a 'grey zone', was occupied by a medley of mankind: the *Portuguese*, the *Danes*, the *Dutch*, the *Armenians* and Muslims of diverse origin. This was the buffer zone that in later years helped the white town maintain its character. The English success in defending the native population had far-reaching effect. For the first time the bond of trust between the English and their neighbours came to be forged. Those who were opposed to building a church a few decades ago were now reconciled with the aliens. Relying on the fort the English might could build a bridge of confidence with local people that served for the future the manpower base for a growing city. What happened during the years of 1740s, one may say, was to lay the foundation of the developments of the next few decades. The English developed their confidence in their own strength while the city grew famous as a sanctuary parallel of which there was none anywhere in Bengal.

The rush of crowd in the city gave the English a lesson in coexistence with natives. Since the northern part of the city was organized into a colony of natives thatch and mud structures became rampant as dwellings in the north. This had delayed the process of urbanization in the city. The Maratha invasions were a decade-long phenomenon.<sup>10</sup> Naturally population influx continued throughout the period and eventually turned out to be the most important phenomenon in the entire pre-Palasi phase of the city's history. The freedom of entry into Calcutta was a two-way blessing. To the natives it gave a freedom from wealth-robbery and human abduction by brigands engaged in slave trade. The practice with the natives in the country-side was to bury their wealth beneath the soil in order to protect them from theft. As the door was now open for migration into the city many respectable people from the interior gradually shifted their family and wealth to the city. The process started in the 1740s and continued till the third or fourth decade of the nineteenth century when the financial institutions of the city, the Agency Houses, began to collapse leading particularly to the fall of the Union Bank in 1848. Because of this influx of wealth the city benefited. It grew into a repository of treasure so much so that in 1823 Bhabani Charan Badyopadhyay, a representative of local

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<sup>10</sup>The Maratha invasions lasted from 1742-1751.

intelligentsia, described the city as *Kamalalaya* – abode of Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth.<sup>11</sup>

On the Company's side it was a boon in a double sense. Population influx gave the city the character of a bustling settlement. The Company's revenue increased and the Company got their first training in governance geared to crisis management. It had other benefits. Its arms were tested. Forty-six years ago in 1696 when the revolt of Shova Singh took place the English were outsiders and had no role to play in forestalling the insurrection at any stage of its growth. But in 1742 the situation was different. The English had been able to protect their own settlement, provide security to neighbours and help the *faujdar* of Hugli to defend his own station. The organization of arms and manpower strength at one point of time and in one incident was a massive exercise that gave a positive boost to the city's morale. Calcutta was saved from Maratha incursions and there is no reference in contemporary literature that the society of merchants in the city, their largest trade mart, *Burrabazar*, and any stockpile of their commodities were plundered. This helped building the city's image as a sanctuary.

So long the city had acted as a sanctuary for delinquents. Whoever committed an offence in the *Nawabi* territory fled to Calcutta in order to enjoy an exemption from the Mughal law. The Company's authorities insisted that a resident of Calcutta would be tried by its own rules -- the laws of the English. This was in the long run a claim of jurisdiction tantamount to an extraterritorial privilege which the Bengal *Nawabs* could not approve. Conflicts on this issue were rampant between the English and the Mughals and had strained relations between them since the time of Murshid Quli Khan. After 1740s situations changed in favour of the English. The *Nawabi* administration was battered by the twin scourge of Maratha invasion and the Afghan insurrection. When the state was in turmoil the city became a refuge not only for delinquents but also for dissidents. This was how the Kishnaballabh affair emerged in 1756. The quiet with which the English had accommodated the dissident son of Raja Rajballabh, the *diwan* of Dhaka, during the time of Sirajuddaullah, showed that they had acquired a mood of confidence which could only grow out of

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<sup>11</sup>Bhabani Charan Bandyopadhyay wrote a book the title of which was *Kalikata Kamalalaya – Calcutta the abode of Lakshmi*.

experience in a trying time. When Sirajuddaullah ascended the throne the English did not show the courtesy of greeting the new *Nawab*. This was an outrage from the standpoint of the *Nawab* but certainly it was also from the English point of view an expression of self-assertion based on a mood of confidence recently acquired. What was significant for Calcutta in the immediate pre-Palasi days was this buoyancy in a mood of confidence that were not visible in any other contemporary town on the river bank.

The contours of the white town were figured out in the pre-Palasi days but certainly not with the same vigour as after the battle of Palasi. Chowrangi developed its rudiments between 1726 and 1737<sup>12</sup> marking the settlers' segregation from the natives. The process of clearing jungle had started but not to any great extent because there still stood a tiger infested jungle between Chowrangi and Govindapur.<sup>13</sup> Felling of jungle was required because of two reasons: to provide land for habitation and to provide fuel – wood – to brick kilns. From the middle of the eighteenth century construction of brick and masonry building in Calcutta gained momentum. Rats, white ants and fire were causing devastations to the city. For a growing town mud and thatch supported by wood seemed to be out of mode in a changing situation. The Company was enduring damage and native inhabitants suffered huge loss. Substitution of mud and thatch was the need of the time. But the Company was not in a position to indulge in any innovative construction lest it should attract the attention of the *Nawabs*. That was one reason why Chowrangi even after an initial start in the late twenties of the eighteenth century did not form into a formal residential hub before the battle of Palasi. After Palasi when Calcutta was in command of politics and power the English felt free to come out of their 'convenient lodgings' inside the fort and settle along the Chowrangi. A proper civil line was then created in Calcutta. In this sense the first mark of Calcutta's elevation to a global city began after the battle of Palasi. But its town formation had already started. A.K.Ray observes

“Before the Mahratta invasion, then, Calcutta had become a town, not merely in name but also in appearance.”<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> A.K.Ray, *op.cit.*, p.97

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> A.K.Ray, *op.cit.*, p.98

### 3. PATTERN OF PRE-PALASI TOWNSHIP

Calcutta was thus shaped long before the white civil line had assumed its formation. This happened on two different axes – the two roads that passed by the fort. One road moved north and south and was situated to the east of the fort and west of a park that was newly created then. It marked its way to the Great Bazar, later known as *Burra Bazar*. The other one starting from the east gate of the fort moved to further east intersecting in its way the Broad Street<sup>15</sup> of the city. The point of intersection was exactly where the present Chitpur Road and Bowbazar Street cross each other. Along these two thoroughfares the wealthy merchants of the Company and opulent natives built their garden houses.<sup>16</sup> Omichand, the Sikh<sup>17</sup> and Ramakrishna and Rashbehari Sett -- millionaire merchants of Calcutta lived in this region.<sup>18</sup>

This was the beginning of a new trend in which one will find a clustered zone of upcoming residences around the fort. Individual garden houses<sup>19</sup> which became a familiar fad with European officers in Calcutta in the eighteenth

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<sup>15</sup>Broad Street of the eighteenth century is now called the Bentinck Street.

<sup>16</sup>“Along both these thoroughfares “, says Hyde, “the garden houses of the wealthier of the Company’s merchants and of the opulent native traders were beginning to become numerous.”--- cited by A.K.Ray, *op.cit.*,p.98

<sup>17</sup>Omichand was the Sikh governor of Calcutta. He had saltpeter contracts with the English and was one of their agents in all their ‘investments’ for Indian goods annually purchased for shipment to Europe. He lived in Calcutta for forty years and turned out to be one of the worst landlords of the city. He was appointed the *Nawab’s* agent to represent the government in its negotiations with the English. Taking advantage of this he became a conspirator and took part in the Palasi-conspiracy that was hatched to dethrone the *Nawab* Siraj-ud-daullah. A.K.Ray calls him the ‘salt broker’ of the Company. – Ray, *op.Cit.*p.104

<sup>18</sup>For detail see A.K.Ray,*op.cit.* p.98

<sup>19</sup>A study of the Garden Houses of Calcutta is available in Swati Chattopadhyay, “The other face of Primitive Accumulation The Garden House in Colonial Bengal” in Peter Scriver and Vikramaditya Prakeh ed. *Colonial Modernities Building Dwelling and Architecture in British India and Ceylon*, Abington, Routledge, 2007. See also SwatiChattopadhyay,*Representing Calcutta: Modernity, Nationalism and Conial Uncanny*, Routledge,2006. In this book Chattopadhyay has analysed the burgeoning capital of the Raj in the nineteenth century. In doing this she has successfully brought together three parameters of the city—architecture, space and culture.

century<sup>20</sup> and which rich natives were quick to adopt as their own style of living owed their origin in the pre-Palasi days when jungle was being cleared under pressure of population and land was available for habitation and thoroughfares. Yet before Palasi it was a localized event. A diffused area of construction was yet to grow. Unless prolific constructions could be in sight the picture of a global township would not be a reality. Calcutta was then a picture of a growing township but certainly with no pattern of planned growth. A perusal of some eighteenth and nineteenth century maps so cutely analysed by pioneers show that the town had dynamics of growth urged mostly by pressures of increasing population.<sup>21</sup> The fear of *nawab's* interference had always acted as a brake on Company's endeavours for township. The result was that sprawling township had never been a part of urban experience in Calcutta before the battle of Palasi. Calcutta had no scope for territorial expansion before 1757. No single piece of ground could be acquired before that year. Although Chowrangi surfaced as a prospective zone for white men's residences it was yet to acquire its own momentum. This was because the Company's factors, traders and soldiers had little opportunity to come out of the fort for residential living. As Chowrangi surfaced the white town became settled and as the white town was settled Sutanatati was abandoned by the English.<sup>22</sup> "The original town of Calcutta" writes Hyde, "was at one time at least a 'fenced city'... ." "Every road issuing from the town," he adds, was secured by a gate."<sup>23</sup> A walled town was built around the fort and in 1742 it contained only 70 masonry houses.<sup>24</sup> By 1757 the town must have lost its palisades

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<sup>20</sup>Lord Clive lived in a garden house at Dum Dum, Sir William Jones at Garden Reach, Sir R. Chambers at Bhawanipur, General Dickenson at Dakshineswar, etc.

<sup>21</sup>In chapter viii entitled *Town and Suburbs* of his book A.K. Ray analyses the following maps to find out the changing land area of the city: (1). Upjohn's map of 1794, (2). A map of 1742 inserted in Upjohn's map, (3). A map of 1756, (4) Capt. Cameron's map, (5) Claud Martin's map, (6) Colonel Call's map of 1786, (7) William Ballie's map of 1792,, (8) Schaleh's map of 1815, (9) Simms' map of 1850, (10) Surveyor General's map of 1891. For further understanding of British Empire's town and the Empire itself see Matthew H. Edney, *Mapping an Empire: The Geographical Construction of British India 1765-1843*, Chicago & London, Chicago University Press, 1997. Upjohn's map has been analysed in Kathleen Blechynden, *Calcutta Past and Present* (1905) Ch.9

<sup>22</sup>"As Calcutta became settled, Sutanuti became abandoned by the English as a place of abode."—Hyde's statement in *Parochial Annals* cited by A.K. Ray, *op.cit.*, p.103

<sup>23</sup> Cited by A.K. Ray, *op.cit.*, p.100

<sup>24</sup>A.K. Ray, *op.cit.*, p.103

because we do not hear of palisades during the time of Siraj-ua-Daullah's invasion of the town. Meanwhile the town had moved into a state of transformation. In 1742 there were only sixteen streets where as in 1756 the city could boast of not less than 27 big streets and 52 smaller streets with considerable improvement in masonry structures.<sup>25</sup> There were 21 masonry structures outside the fenced city in 1742. In 1756 they rose to 268 – a massive spate of construction indeed in a phase of nearly one and half a decade.<sup>26</sup>

This was not the period, one will remember, when scientific space management started in Calcutta. The new roads and buildings were mostly in the native quarter of the town where jungles were cleared to create space for a surging population. There space succumbed to random occupation. Weavers came and settle there, mostly under the encouragement of the Company. Even in the northern fringe of the city where the white cum grey town met the expanding and ever-encroaching quarter of the natives a long series of buildings, Hyde informs us, were raised for "calico-printers". Since the Company's officers did not yet settle at the Chowrangi they still had no need for menials for their household support. Therefore, at least at the time of Siraj-ud-daullah's coming to Calcutta there did not grow slums as large scale subaltern colonies behind the splendid mansions of the growing city of palaces. Siraj-ud-daullah invaded this town in 1756 which was slowly acquiring potentials for a blossoming habitation.

#### 4. OVERCOMING THE INITIAL CHALLENGE

Starting with dense jungle and sparse population Calcutta in nearly six decades (1698-1756) had fared well. In 1690 standing at a desolate village Sutanati Job Charnock gave a free call to persons in need of a habitat to come there and build their houses at a spot of their own choice in the waste lands under the possession of the Company.<sup>27</sup> Sutanati was certainly not a populated village then in spite of there being a cotton mart and a big bazaar nearby. Riparian villages in south Bengal had fishermen communities on the river bank.

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<sup>25</sup>A.K.Ray,*op.cit.*, p.104ING

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup>"In 1690, Job Charnock issued a proclamation permitting persons desirous of living in Chuttanutte to erect houses at their pleasure, on any site they chose, in any portion of the waste lands belonging to the Company."—A.K.Ray,*op.cit.*, p.146

They were not enterprising men to clear jungle and build up habitation. Charnock looked for more enthusiastic elements – cultivators, weavers, traders, artisans—who could apply both enterprise and wealth to promote a settlement. At that time – in 1690 – the English were unsure whether they would live in Sutanati at all. Charnock’s call was found to be well responded and that settled the English mind. In a few years’ time the English purchased the three villages of Sutanati, Govindapur and Kalikata. The surge came with the turn of the century. Within a decade the township development found its own direction. The space retrieved from jungle was quickly covered with irregular constructions. Such was the force of a pattern-free habitation that on the 10th of March, 1707 the Company’s authorities at the Fort William banned irregular construction in the town.<sup>28</sup> In Bengal villages constructions had their own pattern. People would acquire a plot of land, cover it with walls and dig a pond inside the enclosure so as to use the mud dug from the soil to raise the ground and build a construction on it at a comfortable height. Then along the inner line of the enclosure they would plant trees and set up a corner for their family deity. This model of a habitat was surely being followed in Sutanati in the early years of the eighteenth century and the Company’s administration had wisely put up an objection to it. The township of Sutanati-Kalikata-Govindapur was not to be inculcated in a country model. This was, one may say, the earliest attempt to provide the township a sovereign character for itself. The early inhabitants dug ponds here and there and put up walls surrounding their houses. Congestion was writ large around the native dwellings. This might be one reason why the English eventually shifted to the more southerly village, Kalikata (later Calcutta), leaving Sutanati to its destiny with the natives.

The southward push of the English was, therefore, urged by their desire to segregate themselves from native contacts. Two developments provided philip to this urge. One was the surge of crime and the other was the appearance of diseases in the town. Banning of irregular constructions proved to be of little

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<sup>28</sup>“Finding that several of the inhabitants had built walls and dug tanks in their compounds without leave from the Government at Fort William, the Council resolved that an ‘order be wrote up and put up at the gate to forbid all such irregular proceedings for the future.”— A.K.Ray, *op.cit.*, p.147

effect.<sup>29</sup> Congestion called for sanitation because malaria had swept the city taking a huge toll on the English population there.<sup>30</sup> But sanitation could not be properly addressed until it was taken up as special agenda by Lord Wellesley in 1803.

Calcutta was, in many ways, a challenged city from the beginning. Born in the intrinsic association of congestion, crime and disease and living through these the city eventually became a marvel of life in a situation of closing animation. Crime and disease called for two measures: the police and the hospital. The city police was first installed in February, 1704 because robbery and theft had become rampant.<sup>31</sup> The police force increased every year but crime could not be controlled. So was disease. The 'sick and dying were superabundant' and in October, 1707 it was resolved to set up a hospital in the town. But even then seasonal miasma in the city could not be controlled. In 1757 epidemic was so high in the city that the Government had to take immediate measures to protect its soldiers. Yet situations were never under control.

Calcutta was born after a war<sup>32</sup> and before a rebellion.<sup>33</sup> It, therefore, met exigencies almost as routine<sup>34</sup> balancing in the process two antithetical forces:

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<sup>29</sup>"This order (prohibiting irregular buildings) appears, however, to have remained a dead letter." – *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup>"About this period, viz., from 1705 to 1707, the place was reeked with malaria and the mortality was so high that 'in one year, out of twelve hundred English in Calcutta, no less than four hundred and sixty died between August and the January following.' --- *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> " The origin of the Calcutta Police can also be traced as far back as the 6<sup>th</sup> February 1704, when it was ordered in Council' that one chief peon, and forty-five peons, two chubdas (chobdars), and twenty guallis (gowalas) be taken into pay'. Next year in July, 'there having been several robberies committed in the Black Town, (it was) ordered that a corporal and six soldiers be sent to lodge in the Cutwall's (kotwal's) house, to be upon call to prevent the like in future.' But the Police force could not check the progress of increasing crimes and nuisances, and thefts and robberies and nuisances of all kinds became so very prevalent that the Council ordered in the following year an additional force of thirty-one paiks 'to be organized to protect the public against them.' "A.K.Ray, *op.cit.*, p.146

<sup>32</sup>This was the war between the Mughals and the English which lasted from 1686 to 1690.

<sup>33</sup>This was the rebellion of Shova Singh in 1696 which shook the western part of Bengal.

<sup>34</sup>Two exigencies had been notorious for the city. One was the storm, described as a 'furious cyclone' by A.K.Ray (*op.cit.*, p. 99) which took place on 30<sup>th</sup> September, 1737 and destroyed both shipping and buildings of the city. The second one was an epidemic in 1757 which swept away great numbers of English soldiers in Calcutta. Hyde in his *Parochial Annals* (p. 84) gives some description of the losses the city suffered from the storm. Eight English houses and

increasing population and aspiration of growth on the one hand and declining public health and increasing crime on the other. Natural disasters were occasional visitors. Calcutta lived all though these throughout the course of the eighteenth century.

##### 5. CALCUTTA'S GLOBAL RISE STARTS FROM THE DECADE 1757-1767

Given this, the question arises: when did Calcutta first exhibit the signs of a global city? The answer would be simple: in the decade following the battle of Palasi

The battle of Palasi was the real turning point for Calcutta in its rise as a global city of the east. It offered a world of new opportunities to the English. They were relieved from the fear of chastisement from above – the *Nawab* – whose practice it was to keep the English under relentless fiscal squeeze. The government would fleece foreign merchants whenever it was in need of money. Operating under apprehension of the government the English had little freedom to work. Thus while welcoming people as new residents the Calcutta Council had always seen to it that the Mughal spies did not enter the city. Their first concern was to hide their wealth from the gaze of the *Nawab*. It was a restraint in its utmost which did not allow the city to grow.

Understandably, therefore, the English in the first half of the eighteenth century had one aim: to build up their trade network outside the intervention of the *Nawab*. With that purpose the Surman Embassy to Delhi was organized. When the Embassy returned (1717) with a host of concessions the concern of the Council at Fort William was to apply them to a successful end. The first effort at municipal government in Calcutta thus could not come into effect before 1727 – ten years after the Surman Embassy had returned to Calcutta. That year a Corporation consisting of a Mayor and nine aldermen was created.

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the steeple of St. Anne's Church were blown down. Some of the houses belonging to native merchants were ruined. Many thatched houses were crushed. Trees fell and shady roads were laid bare. Twenty-eight sailing vessels were damaged. Some ships were driven ashore near Governor's garden. The ship Newcastle went ashore below the fort.

1757 Calcutta suffered from a severe epidemic. We are informed that Major Carnac reported the matter to Clive saying that Calcutta had become unsuitable for soldiers. Thereupon order was issued that n more troops would be landed in Calcutta. *Proceedings of the Court, August, 1757* available in James Long , *Selections from the Unpublished Records of Government, Vol.I*

A Mayor's Court was also set up.<sup>35</sup> The rudiments of municipal government, however, did not fit the needs of a prospective town. The administration was patterned after an archaic Mughal model centring on a *zamindar*. He was the collector of revenue and the entire finance was under his control. Mughal nomenclatures were applied to different officers in the office of the *zamindar* so that in the long run his office came to resemble a *cutchery* of a Mughal *zamindar*.<sup>36</sup>

Beverley informs us that the zamindar had two-fold duties: to collect rent and town duties on the one hand and to "make necessary repairs in roads and drains"<sup>37</sup> on the other. Prior to that there was no special department in the city that could take care of roads and drains. Thus in 1710 when the fort was 'choked' the *buxy* (*bakshi*) was called to clear the obstruction. Three things had caused obstruction to the fort: closely set trees, country huts and stinking water logged on holes.<sup>38</sup> As an officer the *buxy* did multifarious duties. During the construction of the new fort after 1757 the *buxy* was found being used as a supplier of bricks and supervisor of labour. The creation of a Corporation did not rule out his office. In an old-patterned administration he remained to be the same service man as he remained earlier. Since there was no administrative innovation service-management on a new line was equally not there. In the first half of the eighteenth century the English in Calcutta had been in a state of continuous exercise adjusting too many of their contradictory things one against the other -- their trade with their settlement, their own governance with the overarching Mughal administration, their ever swelling population with problems of law and order and finally their trend of

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<sup>35</sup> *Calcutta Review*, Vol.XVIII: "Calcutta in the olden times –Its localities." Zephaniah Holwell, the *Zamindar* of Calcutta ( meaning the then collector of Calcutta) was afterwards made the President of the Court.

<sup>36</sup>"The English in their early days followed the practice of the zamindars in naming their officers. Their 'Bukshie' was a junior factor and a covenanted servant and not a petty native clerk as the name would now signify.Their 'zamindar' was similarly a higher official and was a Mayor, Magistrate, Collector and Settlement Officers."—A.K.Ray, *op.cit.*, note, p.185.

<sup>37</sup>Beverley's *Report on the Census of Calcutta, 1876*, p.41.

<sup>38</sup>The official version was that the fort was "choked and close set with trees and small country thatched houses and standing pools of stinking water."A.K.Ray observes: " ... the Council ordered the *buxie* in the month of August 1710, to open the way directly before the Fort, filling up all the holes and cutting small trenches on each side to carry the water clear from the adjacent places into the large drains." – A.K.Ray, *op.cit.*, p. 147.

improper habitation with the need for effective space-management. As a matter of fact from its inception till the end of the century Calcutta did not experience any improved municipal government. No office was created that could be called new and radical till the appointment of the Justices of the Peace in 1794. For sixty seven years since the coming into force of the Corporation in 1727 no innovation was made in the municipal administration of the corporation. Since there was no specific budgetary allocation for the repair and maintenance of roads public works activities seemed to be very poor. Population was increasing but no fund was available equal to its needs. A. K.Ray's observation in the matter seems to be poignant.

“But the amount spent annually on these repairs,” writes he, “was insignificant, and, although the population went on increasing, but a few actual reforms were achieved by this corporation for the sanitation of the town. We often hear of its great unhealthiness and of the ineffectual attempts made from time to time to improve it during the period of the zamindar's control of the town revenues. *Substantial and lasting sanitary or municipal works were really not undertaken , until the Justices of the Peace were appointed in 1794, or to be more precise, until the year 1817, when the Lottery Committee was formed.*” [Italics ours]<sup>39</sup>

The Lottery Committee ushered in a new age in municipal governance in Calcutta. This was because this Committee created a public fund with people's money for municipal improvement of the city. Any time before and after Palasi the government wanted people to spend for their own improvement. People's unwillingness in the matter matched government's own parsimony. Matters did not resolve.

#### 6. NO DETERRENT TO SPATIALEXPANSION AFTER 1757

The door for spatial expansion of the city opened after the battle of Palasi. Mir Jafar granted three things to the Company: a “free tenure” of the town of Calcutta, the zamindari of 24-Parganas and a sum of Rupees one crore and seventy lakhs as restitution money to meet damages caused by the invasion of

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<sup>39</sup>A.K.Ray, *op.cit.*,p. 147.

Siraj-ud-daullah. Bulk of this money was lost in personal appropriation but a part of it was used in the reconstruction of the city. The site of Govindapur was retrieved and the new fort was moved out there. A few 'out-towns' were already annexed to the town for revenue purposes. Now there was vast expanse of land beyond the Maratha ditch to the north and to the south as far as Kulpi near the sea where Calcutta could expand. In course of sixty years since its inception the city did not expand for it was cordoned by vigilance of the government. Now it was for the first time that the Company acquired landed property. One of their frustrated dreams had thus come true. The first thing, the English did, therefore, after 1757, Holwell informs us, was to "annex a considerable tract of land taken from the 24-Parganas adjoining to Calcutta in order to extend its bounds." Fifty-five villages, called *panchannagram*, now provided an acquired neighbourhood for Calcutta's expansion. But since the boundary of the city was not yet fixed the new acquisitions remained as suburbs.<sup>40</sup>

The urge for territorial expansion was partly satisfied long before Palasi -- by forced incorporation of territories during the time of Maratha scare. Streams of population rolled into the city. Jungles were cleared and the city expanded into suburbs. Hogolkuria, Simlah (Simla), Tuntuneah (Thanthania), Arcooly, Mirzapur, Mullunga, Dingabhanga, Collinga, Taltola, Birjee and Ooltadanga (Ultadanga) and some parts of Gobindapur (Govindapur), Sootalooty (Sutanati) and Dhee (*dihis*) Calcutta which was not yet urban now officially became parts of Calcutta. They provided the territory of modern central Calcutta which came to be properly urbanized by the finance raised by the Lottery Committee in the second and third decade of the nineteenth century.<sup>41</sup>

This was, therefore, the state of things for Calcutta in 1757. It had territories for expansion but spatial expansion on a large scale was not in the agenda of planning. As on 1757 situations for Calcutta stood like this: the city authorities

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<sup>40</sup>This tract (*panchannagram*), added to some of the mauzas intended for the town but lying outside the Ditch, made up fifteen *dihis* or homestead lands, raised above the level of the surrounding country, and comprised 55 mauzas or *grams*, and was, therefore, called *Panchannagram*. These were called the 'Suburbs' and Bolts, the Collectors of Calcutta, became the Collector of the Town and Suburbs as well as of the 24-Parganas." --- A.K.Ray, *op.cit.*, p.110

<sup>41</sup>A.K.Ray, *op.cit.*, p.99

allowed population to come in for population provided revenue. This led to clearance of jungle and occupation of retrieved territories for habitation. The limit of the town was not yet settled. A spatial expansion of the urban territory was a probability now, but there was little enthusiasm for it. Instead the city was laced with suburbs. The immediate need for territory was resolved for the time being by incorporating nine *mauzas* or villages within the town-grant which was revenue-free.<sup>42</sup> This allowed the town an expansion to the east and northeast without formal declaration. There might be reasons for this. In 1757 the city was a 'free tenure'. The government might have objected to any official expansion of the city for that would have caused loss of revenue to it. Moreover, in course six decades, the city had acquired a territorial connotation and the city authorities immediately after Palasi had no mind to change it for any temporary gain. For further habitation there was still considerable space within the city itself – all covered with jungles. Clearance of these jungles was a greater necessity than a territorial expansion of the town. The area of the white town – the riverfront part of Kalikata and Govindapur and a part of the eastern outskirts of Sutanati – had already been earmarked as the white town. Since there was no scope for further space acquisition within this defined part of Calcutta going for further official acquisitions in the north and the east would be fatuous. That might have led to additional complications from the administrative point of view.

The new territories acquired between 1742 and 1757 served two purposes. It, on the one hand, created a buffer between the south-moving white town of Calcutta and the ever congesting native colony of the north while on the other it provided space for the masters of the city to transplant the population of Govindapur to Simla and its outskirts to make room for the new fort. The Fort William Council was bent on inner consolidation of the city than its outward expansion and the whole attention was placed on the construction of the fort and not anything else. This effort, making a new fort, however, must not be taken as inaugurating the phase of new constructions in the city. That phase came later under Lord Wellesley. At the time of Clive the main concern was to protect the city, first from the Nawab and then from the European

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<sup>42</sup>These *mauzas* were Dallanda, Dhaldanga, Sealdah, Serampore (Srirampur), parts of Kamarpara,, Simla, Dakhin Pikepara, Bahir Birji and Bahir Serampore. These were cut off from 24-Parganas and made parts of Calcutta after 1757. A.K.Ray, *op.cit.*, p.110.

competitors. It was explicitly with this purpose that the new fort was built. Up to the liquidation of the combined Indian force in the field of Buxar, one may say, the guiding motive of the English in Calcutta was self-defence. Even then they were not very complacent although the knowledge dawned on them that they were supreme in eastern India. Calcutta they never wanted to be an expansive city outside the concern of their trade. Trade and other concerns submerged the urban propensity of the town.

The Proclamation fixing the limits of the Town of Calcutta came in 1794.<sup>43</sup> Thirty-seven years after Palasi the boundaries of Calcutta were fixed. Things did not seem to be bright enough before that so as to enable the administration to go for the final demarcation of the boundary of Calcutta. There was the need to bring about a balanced adjustment of three institutions in the city – the office of the Governor-General, the fort and the Supreme Court. Calcutta was to be consecrated in its new status as the capital of the British possessions in India. But things did not turn well with the Company and its administration in Calcutta. There was acute dearth of money in the seventies of the century and the Company had to apply for a loan to the Parliament. This was preceded by a severe famine in 1770. In the midst of this an ambitious and unprecedented thing was attempted at. Hastings decided to stop the payment of the revenue of the *subah* to the Emperor in Delhi. This was the first major assertion made from the city of Calcutta towards assuming a sovereign posture for empire-building. From the seventies of the century the political rise of the city began.

#### 7. POLITICAL RISE OF THE CITY

Clive had taught Calcutta self-defence. Hastings lifted it to order out of mid-century chaos and gave it a direction. That direction eventually created the ambience for Calcutta's elevation to the status of a global city.

After Palasi the English came out of the fort. The prospect of a sprawling living thus opened before the English in Calcutta and they found space to develop their own culture. This happened when the politically overarching supremacy

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<sup>43</sup>The Proclamation was 'Issued by the Governor-General in Council the 10 September, 1794'.

of the Mughals was gone and Calcutta's *de facto* position became almost equal to the *de jure* status of Murshidabad. A new phenomenon that had started from the days of the Pre-Palasi conspiracy and continued for many years thereafter was unique – namely an alliance of the English with the power elite of the country. Represented by men of diverse origin -- Raja Nabakrishna, Krishna Kanta Nandi (Kantu Babu), Gokul Ghosal, Ganga Govinda Sinha and many others of the like they owed no allegiance to Murshidabad but had certain stakes in Calcutta. Reporting to Calcutta instead of Murshidabad they allowed the city to acquire its own glamour as a centre of a new power. Guards of the old order, men like Md. Reza Khan and Maharaja Nandakumar, were gone and the new men reared in Calcutta and in the districts became the bridge between the Indo-Islamic order of the past and the forth coming culture of the new age. Calcutta depended much on these new men who provided the English the substitute service elite as necessary cushion for the new regime. These men helped Calcutta present its new pretension under the crumbling canopy of the old order.

It was in this situation that institutions of power came to be based in Calcutta. One was the office of the Governor at Fort William while the other one was the fort that was newly constructed in the city.<sup>44</sup> Basing on these two institutions the diplomatic protocol was changed after the battle of Palasi. Previously the Governor or his agent went to Murshidabad to meet the *Nawab*. Now the *Nawab* had to come down to Calcutta to meet the Governor and other members of the Council. Much of the resplendence of the capital was gone. Calcutta emerged with a new blaze. The military dimension of this blaze was revealed after the battle of Buxar (1764) in which the combined army of Emperor of Delhi Shah Alam II, *Nawab* Shuja-ud-daullah of Awadh and *Nawab* Mir Qasim of Bengal fell before the English. An army moving from Calcutta had quashed a combination of power that would have been ultimate in the country. There was none around Calcutta now that could challenge the

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<sup>44</sup>Govindapur was the river-faced village adjacent to Kalikata (later called Calcutta). This was the southernmost of the three villages acquired by the English in 1698. Immediately after the battle of Palasi its population was transferred to a place called Similia (later Simla) in the northern part of Calcutta in the immediate outskirt of Sutanati. The site thus vacated was used for the construction of the new fort. Sometimes in the late sixteenth or early seventeenth century the Setts, Basaks and the Malliks settled here. The temple of Govindaji, the family deity of the Setts, was situated here. Later it was shifted to Barra Bazar area.

authority of the English and contain the rise of the city. With the fall the combined Mughal strength at Buxar the army that had so long guarded the eastern flank of the Mughal empire was shattered. The whole of eastern India now lay at the mercy of the English, their fort, their arms and their city-- Calcutta. The process started long ago when Clive recaptured the city in 1756, extracted some sovereign concessions from the *Nawab* including the right to mint coins in Calcutta. The event had marvelously changed the status of city. It was now a conquered city although the English had never claimed the right of conquest lest it should create complications for their trading positions in eastern India. From Buxar things moved dramatically in favour of Calcutta. Diwani was granted in 1765 and Calcutta became the headquarters of the *diwan* or the finance minister of *Subah*. Sixty five years ago Murshid Quli Khan shifted the office of the *diwan* to Murshidabad (then known as Mukshusabad). Within three quarters of a century the political gravity of the country shifted from Dhaka west-ward via Murshidabad to Calcutta. Mint, revenue, banking and business now began to move eastward. The climax reached in 1773 when the Governor of Fort William was declared by the Regulating Act of that year the Governor General of all the British possessions in India. It was the first major step to map up the British Empire with a capital. Calcutta was now the declared capital of an emerging empire.

In 1773 Calcutta was a city with double status. Its Mughal status was that it was the headquarters of the *diwan* and in that it was the successor to Dhaka and Murshidabad as the financial capital of the Bengal *subah*. Its new status was that it was an imperial city with a global base of power. The city now superseded Dhaka and Murshidabad in Bengal and Bombay and Madras in the rest of India. In 1774 the Supreme Court was founded in Calcutta by an Act of Parliament. It replaced Mayor's Court. Calcutta's rise to power was complete. The city could now become the most comfortable halting station for the east-moving Britons.

#### 8. THE INITIAL MISMATCH

The rise of Calcutta as an urban centre, however, did not match its political rise. This was because the growth of the city was too capricious and too

disorderly to match with its planned promotion. The city was growing in its own way through population pressure and occupation of territory retrieved from jungles. This being a continuous process the authorities were uncertain as to where they would start urbanizing the city. In contemporary literature we come across two words 'town' and 'out-towns.' The latter word in modern parlance would have meant suburbs. But in contemporary usage it meant territories adjacent to the 'town' but not included in its governance. In 1717 the Surman Embassy had prayed for the purchase of 38 villages which they termed as "38 towns." When Job Charnock set his feet for the third time on Sutanati and later when in 1698 the three villages of Sutanati, Govindapur and Kalikata were purchased they were called 'towns.' When in 1742 the Maratha ditch was excavated it came to be called as the inland boundary of the 'town'. If that was so the four villages Holwell described as 'out-towns'—Baniapooker, Tangrah<sup>45</sup> Dhallanda and Pagladanga – must have been within the town proper. We have reasons to believe that because of continuous influx of people from outside the territorial parameters of the city could not be worked out properly till 1794. That year the boundary of the city was finally determined. In this context the observation of A.K.Ray that "between 1794 and 1872 the urban area of the city remained more or less constant"<sup>46</sup> seemed to be meaningful.

Everything was, thus, in flux before 1794. The entire territory from the Maratha ditch in the north and the circular road in the south at its junction with Chowrangi – about four and a half miles long and one mile and a half wide -- was half urbanized. Piecemeal efforts were made to make the town habitable but no systematic planning was undertaken even in the middle of the eighteenth century to urbanize them. Thus in 1749 a few rupees were sanctioned "to make the drains sweet and wholesome."<sup>47</sup> This was a desultory effort to meet an immediate necessity and was essentially reminiscent of the state of affairs that prevailed as early as 1710 when the choking of the fort was

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<sup>45</sup> Baniapooker (later Beniapukur) is in modern Park Circus and Tangrah (later Tangra) is adjacent to modern Park Circus and Sealdah. The four *moujas* of Beniapukur, Tangra, Dhallanda and Pagladanga consisted of 3,900 *bighas* and belonged to John Nagar area. – A.K.Ray, *op.cit.* p.134

<sup>46</sup>A. K. Ray, *op.cit.*, p.127

<sup>47</sup>Beverley's *Report on the Census of Calcutta for the year 1876*, p.41.

temporarily relieved by the efforts of the Buxy. In 1750 a rudiment of planning was made. The zamindar of the town was advised “to survey the drains about the town” and then put their survey into proper execution so as to make “the settlement sweet and wholesome.”<sup>48</sup> The matter was reported to the Court of Directors for their appraisal and final approval.<sup>49</sup> This was here, one may say, another hurdle for undertaking efforts for urbanization. The control of the Court was an insurmountable brake on the Company’s freedom to spend. The result was disastrous. The Company became spendthrift in organizing renovation on a planned basis. Its aim was to make residents of the city take part in public works so that all enterprise in promoting the city became in the end a public-private partnership. Piecemeal efforts to this end were rampant. In 1750 the “wharf to Sutanuti market (was) washed away by the river.” The Council advised the local *zamindar*, Mr. Edward Eyle “to rebuild the same by taxing the merchants in proportion to their ground.” Merchants refused to be taxed. Additional local taxation for roads was resented. The Company’s administration was not yet in a position to impose its will as a mandate of the government. Hence a compromise was reached. The road was built by allowing rebate to merchants’ accounts presumably proportionate to their contribution.<sup>50</sup> Jungles were obstacle to growth. Therefore, clearance of jungles proved to be as much a necessity as the working up of the drains. In 1751 the zamindar of the town was directed “to cut down all the old trees and underwood in and around the town.” This was a dire necessity because of two reasons. Scarcity of habitable lands led to congestion and to make the city sprawling and decongested more lands had to be retrieved from jungles. That apart, conversion to brick-building had started in the city and fuel was needed for brick kilns. To this purpose in 1752 jungles were ordered “to be burnt down to be used for burning bricks.”<sup>51</sup>

Bricks replaced mud and thatch in construction. The turning came from the middle of the eighteenth century so that in 1762 we find jungles cleared for making new roads. Perhaps for the first time an establishment was set up for

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<sup>48</sup>Long, *Selections*, Vol.1, No12

<sup>49</sup>Despatch to the Court, January 13, 1753

<sup>50</sup>The order of the Council contained these words: “the merchants’ accounts current were to be debited with the amount.”-Long’s *Selections*, Vol I, Despatch to Court, January 27,1750.

<sup>51</sup>Long, *Selections*, Vol.I.No.107 Despatch to Court, August 20, 1752.

supervising and executing them.<sup>52</sup> Surveyors in the establishment proposed facing the drains and the new roads with brick. The proposal was rejected as too expensive. But experiences brought home the knowledge that mere trenches were unfit to be drains of the growing town. This was rudimentary planning highlighting an approach toward innovation. At this stage the constraints on urbanization were two. One was finance. The Council at Fort William had to operate under strictures from the home administration with regard to finance. All decision-making was, therefore, short-term, rudimentary and necessity-specific. Long term projection in planning was absent. Things changed in the nineties of the eighteenth century only when the office of the Governor General had consolidated itself into a self-directed apex authority free of inhibitions from the top.

The second constraint in urbanization was the *zamindar* and his circumscribed office. A Mughal office competent to run a country administration from a local *kutchery* was maintained to perform multifarious duties from rent collection to municipal management of roads, drains, buildings and forests in a new and upcoming town with modern directions. A ramshackle office was not confident enough to address beyond immediate needs and had to adjust with diverse and ad hoc day to day business. It was not in the *zamindar's* command to mobilize large funds for municipal business. Road-making, drain-construction, scavenging – all modern municipal functions – had thus never been in the planning ambience of the city. In 1760 good roads were not plenty in Calcutta and the one major long distance road that was in use was the road leading to Barasat in the north. This was a *kutchra* road and ‘was the favourite walk of the populace’<sup>53</sup> The river served the purpose of trade. In a document of 1766 we have a statement<sup>54</sup> of municipal expenses for some roads and ‘watercourses’

<sup>52</sup>A.K.Ray, *op.cit.*, p.149

<sup>53</sup> “In 1760”, we learn, “there were but few good roads in Calcutta; the *kutchra* road that ran to Baraset was the favourite walk of the populace, and ‘the river answered the purpose of trade...’” A.K.Ray, *op.cit.*, p.149. Long, *Selections*, Proceedings of the Court, 1760

<sup>54</sup> The statement was submitted by Mr. J.Fortuam, Civil Architect from the New Fort on 10<sup>th</sup> March, 1766. It read as follows: (Long, *Selections*, No.846)

	Rs.
To take down the old hospital and clear away the rubbish &c	500
“ 2 watercourses in the Sambazar road	250
“ 2 bridges in the Dullanda road	1,000
“ 1 watercourse in the Chitpur road	125
“ 2 new bridges in the Dumduma road	1,500

(shallow drains) of the town. There a few roads have been named as Sambazar (modern Shyambazar) Road, Dullanda Road, Chitpur Road, Dumduma (modern Dumdum) Road, Baraset (modern Barasat) Road, Bellegatta (modern Beliaghata) Road and Chowringhee (modern Chowrangi) Road. These roads cover the entire length and breadth of the town – from the Maratha ditch in the north to Chowrangi in the south and had recently been covered with innumerable bridges as structures necessary for neighbourhood-linking.<sup>55</sup> These were mostly connecting bonds for local areas and as such for a long time they had not been connected into linear long-distance thoroughfares. Such thoroughfares came into existence only with the initiative of the Lottery Committee in the second and third decades of the nineteenth century when almost all the major roads of modern central Calcutta were constructed. Territory integration was complete by the seventies of the eighteenth century so that lands which were occupied as forced acquisitions in the 'forties because of population swell and also through grant of the *zamindari* of the 24-Parganas in 1757 now became formalized parts of the town itself. That is why Dullanda, Beliaghata, Dumdum which were originally outskirts of the city now became areas taken into considerations of town management by the Civil Architect operating from the new fort. Drains termed in records as 'watercourses' had not yet been brick-faced but public health had certainly become a concern for the management. Thus in 1766 when large scale overhauling of the town was undertaken by the Civil Architect the ditch to the east of the fort was filled up.<sup>56</sup> This was 'a great boon to health' for it had become a receptacle of all the filth and garbage of Calcutta.<sup>57</sup> Public health care needed proper scavenging of the town. The scavenging establishment then was insufficiently paid. Hence by a Council order dated April 21, 1760 the

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" 2 "	"	in the Baraset road	1,500
" 3 "	"	in the Bellegatta road	1,800
" 1		watercourse in the Chowringhee road	125
" 28		small bridges and watercourses in Calcutta	<u>3,000</u>
		Total	9,700

<sup>55</sup>Vide note 49.

<sup>56</sup> Long, *Selections*, proceedings of 1766

<sup>57</sup>A.K.Ray, *op.cit.*, p.151

Scavenger of the town Mr. Handle's salary was increased by Rs. 20 to make it Rs. 80 per mensem.

These were random efforts to bring order out of chaos in the city. But chaos was ineffaceable because it was congenital for the city. Till the time of the take-over by the Justices of Peace in 1794 this picture of Calcutta did not change. Below we present two observations on Calcutta that show what Calcutta was like from the middle of the eighteenth century nearly to its end.

1746: An observation of the *Asiaticus* research "whose writings about ancient Calcutta in the local press served as the nucleus round which more modern research has accreted.." :<sup>58</sup>

"Calcutta is near three leagues in circumference," goes an observation, "and is so irregularly built that it looks as if the houses had been placed wherever chance directed. The bazaars or markets, which stand in the middle of the town, are streets of miserable huts."<sup>59</sup>

1780: An observation made in the Census of 1901 by A.K.Ray :<sup>60</sup>

"Calcutta at this time (1780) was little better than an undrained swamp, in the immediate vicinity of a malarious jungle, 'the ditch surrounding it was as it had been for thirty years previously, an open *cloaca*, and its river banks were strewn with the dead bodies of men and animals.'<sup>61</sup> From 1780 and onwards correspondents in the newspapers make frequent complaints about the indescribably filthy condition of the streets and roads. This is fully confirmed by the account of Grandpre in 1790, who speaks of the canals and cesspools reeking with putrifying animal matter, of the streets as awful, of the myriads of flies, and of the crowd and flocks of animals and birds acting as scavengers. Often the police authorities are reproached for suffering dead human bodies to lie on the roads in and near Calcutta for two or three days."<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>58</sup>A.K.Ray, *op.cit.*, p.151s

<sup>59</sup> *The Calcutta Review*, vol xxxv,,p.198

<sup>60</sup>A.K.Ray, *op.cit.*,p.152

<sup>61</sup> *Echoes from Old Calcutta*, pp. 157-59

<sup>62</sup>A.K.Ray, *op.cit.*, p.152

The reference to 'correspondents in the newspapers' is significant for us. It gives us a glimpse into a new situation where public opinion seemed to have started forming as a new direction to civic management in Calcutta. By the end of the seventeen eighties there were signs of a change over to a new age. The making of the British possessions in India into one formation by the Regulating Act of 1773 presupposed an empire that would henceforth shape the destiny of Calcutta. The office of the Governor General which was seated in Calcutta consolidated itself in course of the next three decades and Calcutta accordingly prepared itself for a face-lift that would allow it to become the capital of a new empire. All experiences of the eighteenth century had accumulated into a new knowledge. They had shown that a country model of habitation could not be resisted unless replaced by an innovating breakthrough of a modern township modeled after the West. The English also learnt that the Mughal pattern of administering a township through the stereotyped office of a *zamindar* was unworkable so that at the first opportunity the Justices of Peace were let in to take over the entire corpus of civic management in the Calcutta. Public works needed money and money was never plentifully available with the city-fathers in Calcutta. Fund-management, as a matter of fact, had never been in the record of the Company's success. The insistence of the authority on making the residents pay for their own improvement did not succeed. Hence new ways had to be thought of. Hitherto innovations were required. Raising fund through lottery was one major step toward that innovation.

#### 9. CALCUTTA ON THE WAY TO A GLOBAL CITY

The *ancien regime* in Calcutta's town growth came to an end in the closing decade of the eighteenth century. Change came on the heel of three things. Fund raising through lottery began in 1793. For the first time the accumulated wealth of the city found its outlet in civic development. The boundaries of the city came to be defined in 1794. The territorial mapping of the city was complete. Administrative ambiguities relating to its jurisdiction were ruled out once for all. The Justices of Peace were instituted to take over municipal management of the town from the office of the *zamindar* of the city. Modern town management was thus inaugurated. Planning of city's improvement was the only thing now to be ushered in. That was done by Lord Wellesley's Minutes of 1803. These minutes envisaged physical improvement of the town

through construction, renovation and orientation. Drains, roads, restructuring and relocating of utility service centres like burial grounds, butchers' shops, etc. and building new edifices were parts of the new orientation in the master planning of the city. By Wellesley's time the British possessions in India had taken the final shape of British Empire in India. That Empire was now to be ruled not from the emporium of merchants but from a city of imperial majesty. That city was now to be Calcutta. The political will to develop a city now made itself manifest in planning. Calcutta's journey to a global city began.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE GLOBAL CITY IN MAKING: THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

#### 1. 1793-1803: THE CRUCIAL DECADE OF INITIAL PLANNING

For Calcutta the nineteenth century opened with prospects of change. The preparatory years for this change were the last decade of the eighteenth century. Some of the major problems of the city which waited for solutions for many years were resolved now. The problem of fund raising had not been properly addressed so long. The home authorities advised their men at Fort William to practise austerity in public expenditure. The latter wanted to pass the burden on to the shoulders of the residents who resented it. The result was a deadlock. *Hickey's Gazette* for 1781, for example, informs us that Colonel Campbell's proposal for cleaning and draining the town on an estimate of Rupees two lakhs per annum was rejected by the Board as very high. Money was to be raised from the town itself -- by imposing a property tax from 7% to 14% which was termed as a "stupendous tax." In no time applications came for its "remission".

This tug-of-war between city-fathers and the residents came to an end in 1793 by the innovation of public lottery as the source for municipal fund. For twenty four years from then on public lottery proved to be an effective system – such effective that in 1817 a new committee was instituted to take care of the city's urbanization through lottery. This was the famous Lottery Committee with which the illustrious era of Calcutta's urbanization began. The Committee drew its last in 1836 when public opinion in England opposed this method of raising money and the Committee was closed. It now gave way to a new Committee – the Fever Hospital Committee. The first phase of the battle for urbanization was over. The war against miasma now started.

In 1793 the Permanent Settlement was promulgated in Bengal. The Bengal countryside was now under a settled revenue order. The city was, therefore, to be properly overhauled now and shaped for effective liaison with the interior. It was the headquarters of the finance minister – the *diwan*. *Zamindars* were slowly making their move toward Calcutta and wealth from the district was being siphoned to the city. The ambience of social and economic mobility was presenting with a mood of urban confidence. In this situation the anomalies of the city had to be corrected. Two such anomalies were crying for redress. One was the undefined boundary of the city. The other was the pattern of its municipal administration through a ramshackle Mughal office, namely the office of the *zamindar*. The boundary of the city was defined by a promulgation of 10th September, 1794 (see Appendix 1 to this chapter).<sup>63</sup> The office of the *zamindar* was eventually taken over by the Justices of the Peace in 1794 thus inaugurating the modern municipal administration of the town. With the Justices of the Peace the first western model of municipal management had come to the city. The *zamindar's* office was the country model of local management. The transition was now made from ad hoc local management to systematic municipal governance in the city. The age of organized planning was yet to come. But rudiments of planned governance were not far in the landscape. With the fund raised from lottery priorities of its disbursement had to be decided. That was planning in its earliest form. The Justices of the Peace did those priorities.

The first priority of the Justices of the Peace was the metalling of the Circular Road. The eastern boundary of the City had gone along this road. Beyond this there was the vast Beliaghata jungle which was ridden with robbers. Some land of the jungle had already been taken into the boundary of the town. With pressure of further habitations there the town was threatened with

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<sup>63</sup> From the promulgation it is very difficult to mark clearly the boundary line of the city. In general it started from the Baghbazar canal in the north to the end of Chowrangi near Chakraberia in modern Bhawanipur and in the west from the river Hugli to the Baithakkhana Road or Circular Road in the east. In the boundary declaration the northern boundary has been shown as starting from the western part of the river moving along the Baghbazar canal to the east. Likewise the western boundary of the town has also been shown as starting from the western bank of the river but excluding Ramkrishnapur, Howrah and Sulkea. From the reading of the declaration it seems that much new territory was added to the original territorial jurisdiction of the town,

congestion. Many of the Europeans used to visit the jungle for hunting. Eateries had developed around the region. Banians also sat there for the day-time transaction of their businesses. Burial grounds of the Muhammedans and Europeans were also there. This region had gained importance fast. Realizing this the Justices of the Peace had executed metalling of the Circular Road in 1799.<sup>64</sup> From this year the first modern formatting of the city began.

With the turn of the nineteenth century the city stood at the crossroads of change. The fund for public work was now available. The agencies of municipal administration had been commissioned to action. The city had to have now a political will that would give it directions of change. This will was already inherent in the statute of George III that had substituted the office of the *zamindar* with that of the Justices of the Peace. Now it presented itself in manifest form in Lord Wellesley's Minute of 1803. This Minute, writes Mr. A.K.Ray, "stands out, as a beacon of light in the misty path of municipal reform."<sup>65</sup> One may say that the modern improvement of the town started from this time. The Governor General envisaged a complete set of directions for change.

"He remarks," A.K.Ray observes, "that the construction of the public drains and watercourses of the town is extremely defective, and that they neither answer the purpose of cleaning the town, nor of discharging the annual inundation occasioned by the rise of the river or by the excessive fall of rain; that no general regulations at present exist with respect to the situation of public markets, or the places appropriated to the slaughter of cattle, the exposure of meat or the burial of the dead; that the irregularity of buildings should be forbidden and that streets and lanes, which have hitherto been

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<sup>64</sup> Seton Carr informs us that on 24 October, 1799 the Justices of the Peace published the following notice in the *Calcutta Gazette*: "Notice is hereby given that His Majesty's Justices of the Peace will receive proposals of contract, which must be delivered sealed to their first clerk, Mr. John Miller, within one week from the date, for leveling, dressing and making in pucker, within the least possible time, the road forming the eastern boundary of the town, commonly called the Bytockunah Road, and commencing from the Russapugla Road at the corner of Chowringhee and terminating at Chitpur Bridge." -- Seton Carr, *Selections from the Calcutta Gazette*, Vol.III,p.37.

<sup>65</sup> A.K.Ray, *A Short History of Calcutta Town and Suburbs Census of India, 1901, Vol.VII, Part I*, (1902), RDDHI-INDIA, Calcutta, 1982,p. 157

formed without attention to the health, convenience or safety of the inhabitants; should thenceforth be constructed with order and system.”<sup>66</sup>

This was how Lord Wellesley after assessing the needs of the time had shown the directions the town was to grow.

## **2. FROM AN ADMINISTRATIVE DILEMMA TO A NEW THRUST IN PLANNING**

The Act of 1794 authorised an assessment on the gross annual value of urban property in Calcutta – houses, buildings and grounds -- and specified that the Justices of the Peace would collect the said property tax and administer them for the improvement of the town -- “principally repairing, watching and clearing the streets.”<sup>67</sup> They would also grant licenses for the sale of spirits and liquor. The fund that would accrue from this would be spent on conservancy and police.

The Justices of the Peace for the time being thus appeared to be complete masters of municipal administration. Collection of tax, public works, police and conservancy -- all belonged to their routine functions. But these were functions attached to an office alien to this soil. It was innovated as a break-through in the traditional system of municipal management. They served their purpose till a focused approach was made for town improvement by Wellesley. Once that was done town improvement needed emphasis and directions which were absent in the general layout of functions assigned to the Justices of the Peace. The Governor General wanted planned development and execution and to that end he appointed in 1803 a special committee for the improvement of the town. It was called the Town Improvement Committee. The Committee consisted of thirty members and their special function was to push his scheme into action.<sup>68</sup> In the year 1800, three years before the appointment of the Town Committee, the Justices of the Peace for Calcutta were elevated to new positions. They were appointed Magistrates of the 24 Parganas and administrative man-power being short their jurisdiction extended over parts of other adjacent districts within a radius of twenty miles. Within a few years the

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<sup>66</sup> A.K.Ray, *op.cit.*, pp.157-158

<sup>67</sup> Making of roads was part of all these works of the Justices of the Peace as was apparent by the metalling of the Circular road in 1799.

<sup>68</sup> Beverley, *Report on the Census of Calcutta, 1876*, p.46

police administration of the town was equally overhauled. In 1808 a Superintendent of Police was appointed for the town to control increasing crime in and around the city. He was also made one of the Justices of the Peace and a Magistrate of the 24-Parganas. These were preliminary administrative experiments geared to the changing needs of the city. But they jumbled up administration. The Lottery Commissioners who had been looking after the improvement of the town since 1793 were still there and in no time the conflict between administrative offices came to surface making clear the dilemma of the new administration. This dilemma did not escape the notice of Mr. A.K.Ray, the ancient biographer of Calcutta. Below we cite two observations by Ray showing the primeval confusion of the colonial administration about the development of Calcutta.

“But the improvement advocated by them on the result of extensive enquiries, though sanctioned by Government and intended to be executed from its funds, were not all carried out. Government having in 1805 extended its patronage to the Lottery Commissioners, the funds raised by the latter were spent for improving the town, and records of the Improvement Committee were in 1814, transferred to the Lottery Commissioners.”<sup>69</sup>

“The multiple administration of the affairs of the town by the Justices, Committees, and Magistrates produced friction amongst the officials and dissatisfaction amongst the ratepayers; and the idea of associating a few representatives of the latter in the administration of the city gradually gained ground. So early as 1833, the first scheme for a representative Municipal Government in Calcutta was submitted to Government by Mr. D. N. Falan Chief Magistrate of the Town. In accordance with this scheme, the Government sanctioned the appointment of a committee for one division of the town as an experimental measure. But although the scheme proved an utter failure, the experiment was not discontinued.”<sup>70</sup>

In course of nearly four decades since the appointment of the Justices of the Peace the Government could not work out effective forms of town management. A few things were clear to the administration. Solo rule by

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<sup>69</sup> A. K. Ray, *op.cit.*, p.158

<sup>70</sup> A. K. Ray, *op.cit.*, p.164 Also see Beverley, *Report on the Census of Calcutta, 1876*, p.49

Englishmen would not do. European manpower was short and their extraction from rate-payers in the name of city development would be fruitless unless a representative participation in administration was made. With this aim in view, therefore, the Act XXIV of 1840 was passed.

By this Act “the town was divided into 4 divisions’ and ‘the Governor of Fort William was empowered on the application of two-thirds of the rate-payers of Calcutta to authorize them to undertake for themselves the assessment, collection and management of the rates up to a limit not exceeding five per cent., on the assessable value of property in Calcutta.”<sup>71</sup> This was a scheme for devolving responsibilities on the natives. But it failed. No application reached the Government. Conjoint town management was still unworkable. It had to wait for a few years more to come true.

The third attempt at evolving a representative municipal administration was made in 1847. That year a new legislation, the Act XVI of 1847, came into force to constitute a Board of seven Commissioners for the improvement of the town of Calcutta. Of these Commissioners four were to be Europeans and three natives. Again three of them were to be appointed by the Governor of Bengal and the four to be elected by rate-payers. If election was in default then the Governor would appoint them directly. The functions of the Commissioners were specified. They could purchase and hold property for the improvement of Calcutta. They were to have a common seal in their administrative name of Commissioners. They were to take over from the Justices of the Peace the conservancy functions of the city with effect from 1<sup>st</sup> January, 1848. They were to remove obstruction to circulation of free air by making new streets and squares in the crowded parts of the town. Taxes on horses and vehicles were imposed as new sources of revenue.

The “Act XVI of 1847 is the earliest enactment,” writes Mr. A.K.Ray, “which dealt with the formation of streets in Calcutta.”<sup>72</sup> This was the culmination of a process. Long before this legislation came into force the Lottery Committee had set into motion vast agenda of road construction. Business was increasing in Calcutta. Population congestion was mounting. Neighbourhood lanes had to

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<sup>71</sup> Macleod’s *Lectures on the Sanitation of Calcutta, Past and Present*, 1884

<sup>72</sup> A. K. Ray, *op.cit.*, p.165

be broadened and linked in order to connect properly one locality with the other. Drainage and sewage had to be properly worked out. Particularly there were no proper facilities for the disposal of sewage. This had affected the city. The directions in town-planning envisaged by Lord Wellesley were partially put into action by the Lottery Committee in the twenties and early thirties of the nineteenth century. As the Committee was wound of enthusiasm ebbed out. That enthusiasm was revived in 1848. A legislation enacted that year— known as Act II of 1848 – envisaged following directions: that that management of streets should henceforth be vested in the Commissioners; that a proper system of sewerage and drainage, a pressing need of the time, had to be properly addressed; and that means had to be worked out to prevent effluvia of drains from exhaling.<sup>73</sup> The Act envisaged two landmark directions. It recognized the necessity to bring pure water to Calcutta and to survey the town for ascertaining its numerous defects. It was in response to this call that Simm’s survey map and report of the town for 1850 was prepared.

In no sense did the years of 1847-48 mark a watershed in the history of the urban planning for Calcutta. Shortly another Act followed – known in history as the Act XXXIX of 1850. It was a short Act and had only two sections with two objects. One object was to continue the Commissioners appointed under Act XVI of 1847 in their office till the constitution of the Commission was revised. The second object was to admit that previous Acts did not satisfy their purpose and were, therefore, ineffectual. The Act X of 1852 was then enacted. The number of Commissioners was reduced to four<sup>74</sup> – two were to be appointed by the Government and two elected. Real changes in administration were introduced by Acts XXV and XXVIII by which the Commissioners were declared to be Corporation. Municipal funds went under their control and they were empowered to impose rates on property and carriages and also for lighting the town. This time the emphasis was on the construction of drainage and

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<sup>73</sup> All legislations enacted for the promotion of Calcutta has been wonderfully summarized by A. K. Ray in his book (*op.cit.*) in chapter X entitled “Municipal and Sanitary.”

<sup>74</sup> The four Commissioners were S.Wauchope, Major (afterwards Colonel) Thuillier, Tarini Banerjee, and Dinabandhu De. Their Secretary was Mr. Clarke “to whom,” it is said, “the Calcutta drainage scheme owes its birth.”(Ray, *op.cit.*, p.166). Also see Beverley’s *Report on the Census of Calcutta, 1876*, p.53

sewerage and a sum of  $1\frac{1}{2}$  was set aside for this. This was indeed a radical advice and coming from the Legislature<sup>75</sup> it henceforth changed the character of the town. Previously Act XII of 1852 authorised the Commissioners to fill up unwholesome tanks and register bazaars. The process of filling up tanks was not complete till the end of the nineteenth century. Bazars were too rampant in Calcutta. Hence periodical destruction or removal of bazaar started since the second half of the eighteenth century accompanied by filling up of obnoxious drains and ditches. What was significant was that bazaars, drains, ditches, swamps and tanks were so great in number that even many years after the mutiny they persisted in one form or other in spite of the best efforts made by the authorities to clear them off.<sup>76</sup>

### 3. PHASES OF REAL TAKE OFF

The years from 1793 to 1803 are truly the preparatory years for the city's growth to a modern township. It marked the transition to the first major illustrious phase of the city's urbanization – the period of the Lottery Committee (1817-1836). One cannot say that the city had gone through proper township experience during these years. But it certainly emerged from a flux to enjoy the initiation into stability. Road making and sanitation had not been in the priority list for the city. But roads beyond the native colony of the north were being opened and internal neighbourhood links like Chitpur Road, Dullanda Road, Dum Dum Road, Barasat Road, Belliaghata Road etc. were taken care of and connected with bridges so as to facilitate their

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<sup>75</sup> All the legislations noted above emanated from the Supreme legislative Council. Acts of 1856 were last such Acts. After that the mutiny started. With the end of the mutiny India was ruled by the British crown. Thereafter all Acts emanated from the Council of the Provincial Government.

<sup>76</sup> In 1787 the Govindapur bazaar consisting of mud and thatch was demolished. We have the following account of it : "The old bazaar composed of an irregular and confused heap of straw huts, not only collected filth and threatened contagion, but proved in fact an asylum for every thief that escaped the hands of justice in Calcutta: robberies were, of course, daily committed without the possibility of detection. The Commandant has also laid a plan before Government, which has been approved, for filling up the drains, particularly those more obnoxious ones leading from the treasury gate."—Seton Carr, *Selection from the Calcutta Gazette, Vol.I* pp. 205-206

communication with Chowrangi and the areas around the fort, the core area of the city. Dum Dum and Barasat were looming large as prospective destination for expansion.<sup>77</sup>The development of the preparatory years was an outcome of government initiatives. We learn on the authority of A.K.Ray that public opinion from the 1780s was awakening to the perfect sense about the needs of the city. This was an additional impulse for the city's improvement.

"From 1780 and onwards," writes A.K.Ray, "correspondents in the news papers make frequent complaints about the indescribably filthy condition of the streets and roads. This is fully confirmed by the account of Grandpre in 1790, who speaks of the canals and cesspools reeking with putrifying animal matter, of the streets as awful, of the myriads of flies, and of the crowd and flocks of animals and birds acting as scavengers. Often police authorities are reproached for suffering dead human bodies to lie on the roads in and near Calcutta for two or three days."<sup>78</sup>

It was from this state of affairs that Wellesley's Minute of 1803 wanted to relieve Calcutta. Proper urbanization beyond piecemeal patchwork was the only answer to the situation but that urbanization was never in the agenda of the government. More than public will it was shortage of money that had held up work. That constraint was over by 1793 because of the surfacing of the lottery fund. Once means was explored to raise fund the necessity to define the boundary became pressing. As boundaries were determined the need to replace stereotyped town management through a *zamindar* was possible and it was properly addressed through the appointment of the Justices of the Peace. The first work of the Justices, undertaken in 1799, was to metal the Circular Road so as to create a line of demarcation between the ingrowing township of Calcutta and its native township beyond. All these events, no meager achievements by themselves, created the context in which Wellesley's Minute could be born.

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<sup>77</sup> "More importance was attached in those days (in the 1760s and beyond) to facility of communication with Dum-Dum and Baraset than to the internal or sanitary arrangements of the town or its environs." –A.K.Ray, *op.cit.*, p.150

<sup>78</sup> A.K.Ray, *op.cit.*,p.152. Ray makes this statement on the basis of an observation made in *Echoes From Old Calcutta*,pp.157-59 and footnotes

The sum of money raised from lottery between 1793 and 1817 (when the Lottery Committee was formed) was fabulous. The first phase of urban infrastructure was funded by the yields of lottery. The Town Hall was built, large tanks were dug, the Beliaghata canal was constructed and several new roads including the Elliot Road were made.<sup>79</sup> Street-watering started in 1818 and the white town got its first benefit.<sup>80</sup> Till 1820 most of the streets in Calcutta were not paved<sup>81</sup> and hence their watering could not be started. Towards the end of that year, the process of metalling the road along the side of the river bank, started. This was how the famous Strand Road of modern Calcutta took its shape. Side by side with road making new walkways were also created.<sup>82</sup> The effort by 1820 was to bring the entire block between the Chowrangi and the river including the area around the fort under the renewed scheme of urbanization. On December 28<sup>th</sup> the Town Improvement body now operating through the Lottery Committee invited through the *Gazette* tenders for the supply of “shingles, gravel or stones to be employed in the construction of a quay and road, along the banks of the river Hooghly.”<sup>83</sup> Systematic road metalling had now come into business. A plan for metalling all *kutchra* roads

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<sup>79</sup> At the first issue of the lottery 10,000 tickets were sold each at Rs. 32. In 1805 – twelve years after the inauguration of the lottery – the price of each ticket was raised to Rupees 1000. 5000 tickets were sold that year. The next year lottery fetched R. 7<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> lakhs of Rupees. In one year we come to know that the same sum of money raised from lottery profit was allotted to town improvement. Between 1793 and 1817 at least 17 lotteries were drawn and the net profit of all previous lotteries amounting to Rupees 4<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> lakhs were handed over to the Lottery Committee in 1817 as a corpus fund for the promotion of the town. It remained there for 20 years i.e. till the year 1836 when the Lottery Committee drew its last. Conservancy expenses, however, were kept outside the purview of this fund. Town conservancy henceforth remained in charge of the Magistrate as before.

<sup>80</sup> The *Calcutta Gazette* dated February 19, 1818 reports thus:

“We observe with much satisfaction the great improvement to the convenience and comforts of the residents in Chowringhee, by the road being watered from the corner of the Dharamtollah up to the Chowringhee Theatre.”—Sandeman’s *Selection from the Calcutta Gazette, Vol.V*, p. 245

<sup>81</sup> “Up to the year 1820 the streets themselves throughout the greater part of the town were simply kutchra lanes.” A.K.Ray, *op.cit.*, p.160

<sup>82</sup> Bevrley, *Report on the Census of Calcutta, 1876*, p.48.

A. K. Ray writes : “... in 1820 among the many improvements in the town of Calcutta, the new walk on the west side of the course from which it was only separated by a balustrade, was particularly worthy of notice.”—A. K. Ray, *op.cit.*, p.160.

<sup>83</sup> Sandeman’s *Selections From the Calcutta Gazette, Vol.V*, p.58

year by year at the cost of Rs.25,000 was adopted. Urbanization moved full steam into action.

The achievement of the Lottery Committee was that it initiated “the work of reconstructing chaotic Calcutta into the decent shape of a modern town.”<sup>84</sup> Once the Strand Road was made the white town of the fort-Chowrangi complex became a perfect river-front city with an integrated block of residence cum business district in sprawling land mass of a modern town. As in the meanwhile the Circular Road was properly metalled in 1799 the urge became obvious that the territorial block between that road and Chaowrangi should be properly made so that an eastern expansion of the city could take place. Keeping London in mind new roads were created with linear north-south orientation with tanks, squares and open spaces so as to relieve the congestion of the town. This is how the entire central and central-south Calcutta came into being before the Lottery Committee came to a close.<sup>85</sup>

There are a few points which deserve notice. None of the roads created by the Lottery Committee moved southward far beyond the crossing of the Chowrangi Road and the Circular Road. Near that point, somewhere around modern Middleton Row, the East India Company had a vast vegetable garden. That garden existed even in the early quarter of the nineteenth century. Beyond that point the white town did not progress much. A movement toward Bhowanipur had slowly begun but it never acquired momentum. The main

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<sup>84</sup> “It may be truly said that it was under the direction of the Lottery Committee that the work of reconstructing chaotic Calcutta into the decent shape of a modern town was not only inaugurated but pushed on with vigour. That handsome roadways which traverses Calcutta from north to south and includes Cornwallis Street, College Street, Wellington Street, Wellesley Street, and Wood Street, was driven through the town, and the fine squares -- Cornwallis Square, College Square, Wellington Square and Wellesley Square -- with large tanks in their centre, were constructed at intervals along its course under the auspices of the Committee.”---A.K.Ray, *op.cit.*,p.159

<sup>85</sup> “Other streets, such as Free School Street, Kyd Street, Hastings’ Street, Creek Row, Mangoe Lane and Bentinck Street, were also opened, straightened and widened by them. Themaidan was improved by the construction of roads and paths, by the excavation of tanks, and the erection of Balustrades; the Strand Road was made; Colootollah Street, Amherst Street, and Mirzapore Street were laid out, and the Mirzapur tank, Soortibagan tank and several tanks in Short’s Bazar were dug by the same Committee. Several roads were metalled and arrangements of watering various streets were also made by them, an engine being fixed for that purpose at Chandpal ghat.”—A K.Ray, *op.cit.*, pp.159-60. For further detail see Dr.Mcleod’s *Lecture on the Sanitation of Calcutta, Past and Present, 1884.*

effort of the Lottery Committee was toward consolidation and not for any immediate expansion.

The Lottery Committee had achieved much but it had its failure as well. It could not stop thatched construction in the city. The result was that fire was rampant in Calcutta and it continued till the fourth decade of the nineteenth century. Fire was, truly speaking, a legacy from the past. Calcutta suffered from two pests, rats and white ant, along with a disaster, fire. In the aftermath of the Palasi the city started getting congested. The Company in need of revenue allowed people to come in and settle in habitation of packed country huts. It gave rise to miscreants. Straw-dealers profited if straw-houses were burnt. Incendiaries thus became a routine phenomenon in Calcutta. We have good number of instances for such incidences. In one year – in 1780 -- there was fire at least in five places -- Sobhabazar, Bowbazar, Mechhua Bazar, Kulibazar and Dharmatala. In Bowbazar 700 straw houses were burnt. In Kulibazar and Dharmatala 20 natives perished. In Sobhabazar sailors rescued natives from flames. The greatest incident of fire occurred in Calcutta in the same year. 15000 straw houses were consumed by flame and 190 people were burnt to death – 16 only in one house. The Calcutta fire took place in March and the others in April – but all in the same year. Miscreants were caught at the same time. Here is a report:

“A few days ago a Bengali was detected in the horrid attempt to set fire to some straw houses, and sent prisoner to *Harringbarry*, and on Thursday last he was whipped at the tail of a cart, through the streets of Calcutta – too mild a punishment for so horrid a villain.”<sup>86</sup>

From 1780 when the above incidents of fire took place no definite measures were taken to prevent fire in the city. Meanwhile the process of urbanization was set into. It gathered momentum and spread. The Lottery Committee took up with earnest the work of road making in the city. The use of brick in civil construction started as early as the middle of the eighteenth century and from the early nineteenth century brick houses were taking precedence over

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<sup>86</sup> Cited in A.K.Ray, *op.cit.*, p.162. Ray adds: “The plan of incendiarism adopted was to fill a cocoon shell with fire covered over with a brick and tied over with a string, two holes being left in the brick that the wind may blow the fire out. A fellow was caught in the act in Dhurrumtollah in 1780, but he slipped away, his body being oiled.” – *Ibid.*

country houses in the city proper. Brick structures were slow to affect the suburb where till 1856 random straw houses were seen coming up as a pattern. Long before that was stopped preventive measures against fire were adopted. The Act XII of 1837 was the first enactment to that end.<sup>87</sup> This Act secured the provision of an outer roof of incombustible materials on houses and out houses. Thatched houses ceased to exist gradually as an effect of this Act. Yet it took some time more for the Act to come into force. Up to 1856, however, we have no evidence that mud huts disappeared altogether. The Act of 1856 empowered the Commissioners “to enforce the erection of huts in regular lines, with proper passages for ventilation and scavenging and at such level as would admit of sufficient drainage.”<sup>88</sup> Streamlining mud houses had not been a problem by the middle of the nineteenth century. It could now be done through legislation. Town planning now took into account three things into proper consideration: scavenging, ventilation and drainage. Commissioners of Calcutta had now legislative space for function. Section 54 of the Act XIV of 1856 had made two things mandatory marking an escalation of their authority. Before beginning to build or rebuild a house Commissioners of the city had to be informed through a notice. A plan of the construction had to be submitted to them showing the levels of construction. These were two measures of modern municipal management. They were intended to ensure the passage of free air in the city by imposing symmetry in the pattern of house-building. Section 56 of the Act entitled the Commissioners “to alter or demolish a building within 14 days, if no notice had been sent.” Not only house building but also road construction underwent mandatory specification between 1852 and 1856. New rules were framed to the effect that all streets and roads, made either by Commissioners or private individuals, and intended for carriage traffic, were required to be 50 feet wide. Locality lanes which would not admit such traffics were to be less wide: 20 feet only. This expansion in the width of the roads gave a new dimension to the city.

Calcutta started its journey to modernity after the revolt of 1857. In 1863 the first Municipal Act – the Act VI of that year -- was passed by the Provincial Government. It did two things. It repealed the three Acts of 1856 and

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<sup>87</sup> This Act was passed by the Governor General in Council.

<sup>88</sup> *The Report of the Calcutta Building Commission*, p.3,11,13.

perfected the municipal administration under the Corporation. The Justices of the Peace composed the newly formed Corporation. All the Justices of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa resident in Calcutta now became municipal authorities. They appointed their Vice-Chairman subject to the approval of the Government. Health-care was now taken within the purview of Municipal activities. Hence a Health Officer for Calcutta was appointed. This was for the first time that a welfare officer was appointed for the city. Calcutta's public health was going down and public health officer was really the need of the time. Health-care meant that there were three more things to be taken care of – water-supply, sewerage and drainage of the town. It now became incumbent upon the Justices of the Peace to work out a complete system of these three public utility system. The measure was revolutionary indeed. Its execution meant new men in the service. The Justices of the Peace accordingly appointed their Secretary, Engineer, Surveyor, Tax-Collector and Assessor. Consistent with necessity their Chairman was empowered to appoint other minor officials. Burning and burial grounds were to be registered – a new measure to keep the city clean and organized – free of contagion. The Corporation now became an empowered body to levy water-rate, a maximum house-rate of 10 per cent. and a license fee on trades and professions. This ensured funds necessary for carrying out new measures. Between 1863 and 1876 there were frequent introduction of new Acts to ensure changes both in the administration of the Corporation and devising new measures for revamping revenue through taxes, rates and licenses as a means for promoting new measures of town development. Thus the Act IX of 1867 instituted a police rate of 3 per cent. Yet money was not adequate for the entire corpus of town developments. Hence new measures were thought of. Act I of 1872, therefore, increased the general borrowing capacity of the Municipality to an extent not more than 30 lakhs. Within two years a new source of market-loan was devised. Act li of 1874 authorised an additional market loan of seven lakhs. As time went on schemes of work under the Corporation increased. So did its source of finance. Now it was time to restructure the management potentiality of the Corporation. Keeping an eye to this a new Act was passed in 1876. By this the number of Municipal Commissioners was fixed at 72. They were to be guided by two other men of authority – the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Corporation.

The Corporation itself was now at the crossroads of change. Two-thirds of the Municipal Commissioners were to be elected by the rate-payers and the rest nominated by the Local Government. This was one of the early measures toward giving the Corporation a democratic shape. But it did not proceed very far. By this Act, however, five major directions were envisaged: the payment of interest on municipal debts, construction of the underground drainage system throughout the town, suitable arrangement for the removal of sewage from the town, making proper arrangement for the water-supply in the town and creating a reserve fund for the maintenance of the police force in the city.

The Municipal achievements by 1870s were unique. "The drainage scheme" writes A.K.Ray, "was, under these provisions of the law, pushed on with vigour; brick sewers were erected to run along under all the main streets, and pipe-sewers along lanes and alleys, so that by the year 1875,  $37\frac{3}{4}$  miles of brick and 37 miles of pipe-sewers were completed."<sup>89</sup> No township development is complete without adequate provisions for supply of pure water for domestic purposes. The scheme for supplying pure and wholesome water to domestic households was adopted in 1860. The Local Government sanctioned the scheme and its execution started the same year. River water was collected in a large vat at Pulta, two miles north of Barrackpore where it was purified through a process of exposure, subsidence and then by filtration. This water was then conveyed to the city through large iron pipes so that by 1870 Calcutta began to receive six million gallons of water per day – per head share being 15 gallons per diem. In later years this water supply increased so that over 20,356,573 gallons were supplied to the city and its increased adjacent municipal areas Of Barrackpore, Dum Dum, Cossipore, Chitpore and Maniktala.

This was how the city of Calcutta was formed. One may say that the real beginning started in 1793 when the boundary of the town was first defined in clear administrative terms and when the system of raising money through lottery was taken into confidence as a source of financing the growth of the city. Early planners created a municipal administration through the setting up of a corporation in 1727. But that was not very effective. The Company's administration was then bent on territorial expansion by acquiring thirty-eight

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<sup>89</sup> A.K.Ray, *op.cit.*, p.170. For further detail see *The Municipal Administration Reports for the years 1875-76 and 1900-1901*.

villages sanctioned by the *farman* of 1717 and territorial self-defence through raising a fort as necessary for trade security. Both these measures were baffled by a robust vigilance imposed by the *Nawabs* of Bengal. Their mind was then riveted on consolidating trade privileges gained from the Emperor Farrukhsiyar so that they could outdistance their European competitors in their Asiatic trade. In this they were skillfully using the *dastaks* which were their instrument for escape from customs duties in their trade. Meanwhile the country was placed in a crisis of first magnitude. The Maratha invasions swept the country and from around Calcutta pushed into Calcutta for security and shelter. This was the first major population boost in the city. The city was not prepared for that. This was the first major thrust toward irregular habitation around the periphery of Calcutta. Within one and a half decade later since this event the two major developments took place. In early 1757 Clive forcibly retrieved the city from the control of the *Nawab*. This was followed by the battle of Palasi. The English arms emerged victorious. Calcutta's station as a garrison town was vindicated. Immediately after the battle the Company received from a grateful *Nawab* Mir Jafar the grant of the district of 24-*Parganas* in which Calcutta was situated as their *zamindari*. Calcutta now gained space for territorial expansion and this prospect took them as far as the sea in the south. The English in Calcutta gained three things out of this: space, authority and confidence. This confidence now spread in two directions. A new fort was raised thus consolidating the city's position as the centre of a military power. The confined habitation of the English within the fort which had so long forced them into a cramped living was now over. The English spread out into the eastern part of the city beyond the rampart of the fort called Esplanade into the vast expanse called the Chowringhee. The process started since the middle of the thirties of the eighteenth century but it gained momentum after the battle of Palasi.

The condition was thus created in which the city could take shape. Unfortunately the Company had little finance to give it its required shape. Its attention was diverted from urbanization to its elevation to power. Immediately after Palasi the city had three major orientations. First, it became the centre of power rooted in the fort. The diplomatic protocol of the country was then changed. Previously the English moved to Murshidabad to meet the *Nawab*. Now the *Nawab* had to come down to Calcutta to meet the Governor

of the town. Meanwhile the condition for the third orientation set in. By the Regulating Act of 1773 The Governor of Fort William became the Governor General of three Presidencies into which all British possessions were integrated for administration. Calcutta became the capital of the emerging British Empire in the country. Immediately after this the Supreme Court of Judicature at Fort William was founded in Calcutta by an Act of Parliament in 1774. It replaced the Mayor's Court in Calcutta which had been in operation since 1727. With this Calcutta acquired a well-defined legal jurisdiction for itself.

With its steady rise to power Calcutta acquired a new status. From 1765 when the Company was granted the *diwani* of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa the city came to house the finance department of the Bengal *subah*. All territorial revenue of the eastern part of the Mughal Empire now came to be deposited into the city. It relieved the Company of its anxiety for procuring its sinews of commerce. Meanwhile the battle of Buxar was won in 1764. The army which so long had guarded the eastern flank of the Mughal Empire was crushed. This ushered in the military supremacy of the English in the east and with it the city of Calcutta came to be positioned into the confidence for coordinating the rise of the British Empire in India.

This was Calcutta's direction of growth in the eighteenth century. Its first major initiation into urbanization came in 1803 with Lord Wellesley's Minute of town growth. This Minute was the first major declaration of the political will for the development of the city. Meanwhile the British possessions in India had been massed into an administrative structure necessary for an Empire. An Empire in the offing needed a capital city from where the Empire would be ruled. Calcutta was now groomed to that end. Two institutions were commissioned into action – the institution of the Justices of the Peace and the Lottery Committee. From 1817 when the Lottery Committee was instituted there began the real improvement of the town. Roads were built; drains were constructed; burial grounds and places for disposal of corpse were arranged; new parks, squares and ponds were created; carcasses were no longer seen on the street; with the construction of the central and part of the city – the modern College Street-Cornwallis Street area – the city congestion was

removed and the demarcation between the white town of the south and the black town of the north was complete. The city got a new face-lift.

Throughout the first century of British rule in India Calcutta went through moderate experiences of urbanization. The result was that by the year 1875 only 37  $\frac{3}{4}$  miles of brick and 37 miles of pipe-sewers were completed in the city. By a statute law of 1888 the area of the city was increased by new additions from suburbs. The town area now increased from 11,954 acres to 20,547 acres and a rush of construction started. New measures were required to control buildings in the city and prevent their encroachment on the public space around. The Municipal Consolidation Act II of 1888 contained all such measures and kept the door open for further administrative actions toward proper town management. The city formation was now given an appropriate shape and it appeared to be complete. The new territorial additions to the city were termed 'added area' and 'fringe area'. The congestion of the city was overcome and plans for spacious living were envisaged.

One may say that after the phase of the Lottery Committee the town development became sloth. It picked up only after the mutiny and gained momentum thereon. Drainage, sewerage, water supply and road construction now came in the municipal agenda with a proper sense of urgency. This urgency was not there before the mutiny. Lord Wellesley's Minutes of 1803 gave a direction to town development but the pressure of urgency was not there. Under the impact of the University age and western education Calcutta was acquiring a metropolitan mind. All government actions were now under scrutiny. Because of unemployment middleclass discontent was steadily growing in the city and also in the district. Nationalist analysis of the British rule now focused on such things never talked of before as drain of wealth, poverty and 'un-British rule' in the country. In this situation the British rulers were not prepared to see Calcutta, the city they founded, grow as a pocket of discontent. Moreover the Empire was going for a new consolidation. Throughout the first century of the British rule in India the city formation of its own capital was not complete. With the beginning of the second there seemed, therefore, to be an urge to provide pace to urban development. In the 1860s and 1870s the basic works of urban infrastructure were planned and commissioned into action. The 1880s were the period of consolidation. The Act

of 1888 was thus aptly termed as 'Municipal Consolidation Act'. Three principal measures of consolidation were envisaged in the Act. First, the Commissioners were given additional power to make bye-laws to supplement the statute law. This was absolutely necessary to meet eventualities that might arise in processing the principal projects of municipal works. Secondly, the extended municipal area was restructured. It was divided into 25 wards. Of these 18 were old city wards. Thirdly, the number of Commissioners was raised to 75. 50 of them were to be elected, 15 appointed by the government, 4 by the Calcutta Trades Association and 2 by the Port Commissioners.

This Act was the culminating event in Calcutta's urbanization in the closing years of the nineteenth century. Its life spanned for eleven years – from April 1, 1889 to March 31, 1900. It came with a gust of hope but it was not very effectual at the end. " Both the Act of 1888 and the bye-laws were, however, drawn in such a manner that many of the improvements which they were intended to introduce, proved impossible of achievement, and a Building Commission sat in Calcutta to devise means for giving the Commissioners the necessary power."<sup>90</sup>

All experiences about urbanization in Calcutta had not been a crowning success. The power of the municipal fathers, either the Justices of the Peace or the Commissioners, their total numbers in the Corporation, the highest town improving body in the country, had never seemed to be adequate and in consequence their activities and achievements had proved to be short of the desired ends. The Building Commission submitted their report in 1897. Their recommendations consequently went into making the content of the Calcutta Municipal Act of 1899. Under this Act the number of Commissioners was reduced from 75 to 50. The powers of controlling financial and executive acts which were previously vested in the Corporation were now vested in a General Committee of 12 members which formed in all practical sense a new power-elite in the Corporation. Appointments of Commissioners were now restructured. Half of them were now elected by the rate-payers, four by the Chamber of Commerce, four by the Trades Association, and two by the Port Commissioners. The remaining 15 were nominated by the Government. All the Acts since 1856 gradually increased in their volume of content thus showing

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<sup>90</sup> A.K.Ray, *op.cit.*p.171

that the regulatory management of the town proved inadequate to the growing urban complexities of the city.<sup>91</sup> Nevertheless, the achievements of the Corporation under changing Acts and transforming milieu were not meager. Overcrowding of the town was reduced. Surface drains were reduced and were included in the road area. New streets were opened. Slums were cleared to a great extent. Approved sanitary principles were enunciated. A new beginning was made in providing some model dwelling for the poor. With the last measure the nineteenth century of Calcutta's urbanization came to a close. At the close of the century Calcutta had 330 miles of roads. Of these roads 103 miles were stone metalled and 165 miles brick-metalled. In 1876 the stone-metalled and brick-metalled roads were respectively 82 miles and 50 miles. In 24 years from 1876 road construction in the city was very fast indicating the culmination of the momentum gained in the period after the mutiny. In spite of all these developments the city did not gain an urban shape which could be comparable to any of the cities in the West. Yet efforts were put up for road construction which in the process required removal of surface drains, clearance of slums and bringing house-building under proper regulation. Of these the last measure was most difficult and in spite of regulatory measures at the end of the century overcrowding remained to be one of the major scars of the city.

The aftermath of the mutiny witnessed a remarkable spate of town development. Planned activities started in the second decade after the Mutiny -- between 1867 and 1876. Three outstanding developments marked the pattern of growth in this phase. The construction of the Hooghly Floating Bridge by the Port Commissioners in 1873-74<sup>92</sup> which connected Howrah with Calcutta was the first of these developments. It gave the city's business world a wider space for expansion and its population an instant relief of their own congestion. The Municipal Railway was constructed between 1865 and 1867 to ensure a free mobility for business and population.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> " While Act XIV of 1856 ran only to 142 sections , Act VI of 1863 to 240 sections, Act IV of 1876 to 376 sections and Act II of 1888 to 461 sections, while of its 21 schedules , some are as big as the old Acts. The Building Regulations occupy no small space, nor are they the least difficult portion of the improved law." – A.K.Ray, *op.cit.*, p.172.

<sup>92</sup> The cost of construction of the HNooghly Floating Bridge was Rupees 18 lakhs.

<sup>93</sup> The Municipal Railway was constructed at the cost of 6½lakhs of Rupees.

A new phase of road construction was ushered in – an aspect of the second development of the period. Some of the old roads were widened and footpaths were made along all the major thoroughfares of the city. The Beadon Street and Grey Street were opened in this phase of development. They gave a new orientation in road formation in the otherwise congested northern part of the town. One may say that after the Lottery Committee this was for the first time that the major east-west road formation was planned. The College Street-Cornwallis Street network of north-south thoroughfares was created under the management of the Lottery Committee around fifty years ago. Now the two new roads gave a crisscross formation of road construction in the north – much of this being a part of modern town-planning. The Beadon Square was opened and ornamented. The northern part of Calcutta – the native part – thus flourished and assumed a façade of spectacular town development not known before. Clive Street, Free School Street, Canning Street, Mott’s Lane, Janbazar Second Lane and plenty of other streets were expanded to create free movement of vehicles and pedestrians. Some roads were extended to meet old roads. Thus Clive Street was extended by the creation of the Clive Road which now met Canning Street. Free School Street was now extended to meet Dharmatala Street. Trees were planted along some of the major thoroughfares of the white town, namely, Chowringhee Road, Camac Street, Theatre Road and southern part of Circular Road. The white town was getting a new face-lift. As the Free School Street touched the Dharmatala Street a lane parallel to Chowringhee was created. A large urban space between two was now available for a modern commercial complex befitting the status of the new city. The New Market was thus built between 1871 and 1874<sup>94</sup> at the heart of the white town. It was both an embellishment and a response to business necessity. The city was graced with its first modern style trade complex.

The market orientation of the city which was an old heritage now became a very important catalyst for change. The Dharmatala Market<sup>95</sup> which was an obstruction to both the Dharmatala Street and the New Market was removed. Space thus gained provided scope for new planning which was under way. New

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<sup>94</sup> The New market was built at a cost of over 6 ½ lakhs Rupees.

<sup>95</sup> The Dharmatala market belonged to Babu Haralal Seal. It was purchased for seven lakhs of Rupees.

constructions were coming up and hence there was hunt for space. The drive to remove slums thus became a special feature of city's urbanization in this period. Several slums in the city, *bustees* in local parlance, were cleared and space thus gained was utilized for effective purpose. A big *bustee* was removed in the Beadon Street area to make room for Free Church Orphanage and Zenana House. Thatched houses and shanties were cleared in the Jorabagan area so that the Mayo Hospital could be erected there. A vast *bustee* at Jorasanko was demolished and a host of new streets were constructed there. Chorebagan Street, Rajendra Mullick's lane, Sarcar's lane, Singhee's Lane and some other such link roads owed their origin to outright clearance of *bustees*. This was the Jorasanko-Mechhua Bazar complex of central Calcutta, the heart of the erstwhile *grey* city, which now suddenly sprang into new life. Adjacent to this area was the Burrabazar on the one hand and Colootola on the other. Both these areas were cleared of *bustees*. In the Burrabazar thatched clusters were removed to provide space for warehouses while in Colootola a large *bustee* yielded place to the Eden Hospital. In this flush for clearance the Duncan's *bustee* in Wood's street disappeared and the Surveyor-General's office came up in its place.

This was how the central part of Calcutta was upgraded. This part of the city which included the *grey* town of former years where a mixed population of the Portuguese, Armenians, Muslims, Chinese, Pathans and up-country Indians used to stay, thus received a boost. The whole area now ceased to be a buffer between the white town and the black town which it happened to be in the eighteenth century and in the aftermath of the mutiny it became an excellent sector connecting the rejuvenated Beadon Street-Grey Street area of the north with the recently upgraded parts of the white town – the Theatre Road- Free School Street – Chowringhee area in the south. The city thus became very integrated and compact.

By the side of conspicuous up-gradation of the city there took place other ancillary activities indicating the third category of growth in the city – the sanitary up-gradation of the city. In 1866 public latrine and night soil depots were constructed.<sup>96</sup> Slaughter houses were relocated and rebuilt, many open drains were covered tanks were filled up, underground drainage and filtered

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<sup>96</sup> Rupees 3½ lakhs were spent for the construction of public latrines and night soil depot.

water-supply extended year by year and various conservancy works were taken in hand. On a developed road surface the Tram Company first started their service in 1880. Starting from Sealdah Calcutta trams plied through Bowbazar Street, Lallbazar Street, Dalhousie Square and Hare Street. The city's logistics gained a new pace. To meet the pressure of business the Strand Bank – later Strand Road -- was widened. Jute ware houses were erected along the bank of the Ganga. The riverfront now assumed a new look. Habitation and business were reconciled in a settlement. This harmony was Calcutta, the global city of the east at the end of the nineteenth century.

Calcutta's coming to shape was essentially a nineteenth century phenomenon. The first major initiative to build the city was witnessed at the time of the Lottery Committee (1817-1836). Its growth became sluggish thereafter. A new momentum was infused in the process of urbanization after the mutiny blast. Acts necessary for civic development and municipal management were enacted from time to time but none of them seemed to be adequate to meet requirements of the age. A corporation was created as the major institution for municipal governance but its administrative man-power and the corpus of its effective powers had never been very smart enough to work as a wholesome system commensurate with the needs of a growing town. What the local government and the city administration did was to prepare themselves for meeting eventualities. Yet whatever measures were taken to develop the town had benefited the city – all being, however, an outcome of experiences of an upcoming habitation. Civic actions had always been need-based and pre-planning had little role to play. All efforts from the beginning to the end were directed to the needs of realities. Calcutta, in the true sense of the term, was out and out a manufactured town processed through planned formation here but otherwise shapeless, there – perhaps everywhere, because of overcrowding and pressures of business necessities of merchant rulers. Yet the overall picture from the end of the eighteenth century was that the city had a slow but incessant direction to development constrained always by the dearth of finance and occasionally by absence of the necessary political will. In spite of all setbacks Calcutta grew and at the end turned out to be a global city. This was certainly a mark of triumph of the Empire over time.

CHAPTER 3  
URBANIZATION AS A PATTERN  
THE NINETEENTH CENTURY TREND REVIEWED

The urbanization of Calcutta was mostly a nineteenth century phenomenon. In the seventeenth century it was a village. In the eighteenth century it grew into a town. It assumed the formation of a city only in the nineteenth century. The three riparian villages of Kalikata, Sutanati and Govindapur were amalgamated into one administrative unit under the rule of the English East India Company in 1698. For the first half of a century since the possession of the three villages by the English the evolution of the entire settlement was determined by two major factors. The first of these was a fear of *Nawabi* interference in the settlement coupled with an apprehension for a competition from the other European companies stationed in the neighbourhood and a scare about local unrest which the English had experienced many a time in different forms but most notably twice – at the time of the rebellion of Shova Singh in 1696-97 and then at the time of the Maratha invasions in the 1740s. Operating under fear the English had only security as motivating all their planning for settlement. This led the English to build a fort and grow their settlement around it. Thus at the dawn of their journey to township the three villages assumed the shape of a medieval castle and an irregular growth around it.

The second factor that influenced the town formation of these villages was a shortage of land. The three villages had a territory of around three to four kilometres all round. This expanse of land had to accommodate extensive native habitations that both dotted the borders as well as penetrated in irregular formations deep into the interior, almost in the close proximity of the fort. The English settlement from the beginning acted as a harbour and hence trade requirements of a port grew in leaps and bound with the passage of time. The crunch of land shortage hurt the English settlement from the beginning. The English needed space for their warehouses, for army barracks, for garrison stores, for officers' quarters, for residences of the Company's factors and the merchants and their menials, for the office of the zamindar, for erecting

churches and burial grounds and finally for creating some kind of a sprawling buffer between the white and the black towns to satisfy the isolationist inclinations of an island race. Over and above this there was a need for revenue. The expense for running the establishment around the fort was quite high. Occasional exactions of the *Nawabs* at Murshidabad, the *faujders* at Hughli and their official agents had immensely increased over time and forced the Company to send an Embassy to the Emperor at Delhi in 1717 to fetch concessions on trade and land acquisitions. The Embassy carried a rich tribute to propitiate the Emperor. Money was required for all this and also needed to sustain their commerce. Land where agriculture and habitation could be arranged was thus the most urgent need of the time. But land was scarcely available. This was a constraint on any planning for the town.

A desire for land, therefore, was an insatiated hunger of the English confined in a closed settlement from the beginning. A permission for the purchase of fifty five villages in addition to the existing ones was secured from the Emperor quite at the dawn of their settlement. But the Bengal *Nawab*, Murshid Quli Khan, did not allow them to proceed further with land acquisitions. The result was that the territorial dynamism of the English settlement remained suspended and shut up in an inelastic possession around the three villages of Kalikata, Sutanati and Govindapur. The brake on land acquisition was lifted only when by the secret treaty with Mir Jafar the English Company secured land as far as Kulpi bordering on the sea and the *Zamindari* of the 24 *Parganas* in which this strip of land was situated.

Thus the early urban settlement of the English had a retarded infancy. Agriculture was not absent in the three riparian villages which formed the settlement. In the immediate suburbs and in the sprawling hinterland around it was still the dominant industry of the people. Surrounded by swamps and jungles the settlement seemed to have occupied the highest ground available on the bank of the river. Security of commerce continued to be the predominant concern in building up the organizational setup of the settlement till the sixties of the eighteenth century. Therefore, urban planning did not gain momentum in the first few decades of the eighteenth century and till such time as the erection of the new fort in the wake of the battle of Palasi no major contemplation went into the making of the settlement as a town comparable to the urban settlements of the West. In spite of the coming up of some elegant edifices Calcutta remained in partnership with agricultural neighbourhood around and did not have to mourn the loss of its rural grace that had always been the attraction of deltaic south Bengal. As a result there had never been the one who like William Morris could mourn for Calcutta's rural past and look for the charm of its vanishing nature.<sup>1</sup>

In course of the eighteenth century Calcutta's urbanization built its pattern on three major changes. The first of these was the disappearance of the Govindapur village.<sup>2</sup> Its appropriation was necessitated by the expanding fort complex and the Esplanade area which ensured a sprawling buffer to the fort and a passage to the newly opening resort zones of the opulent whites in Alipur<sup>3</sup> and Khidirpur.<sup>4</sup>

The second event was the gradual disappearance of the so called 'grey town'<sup>5</sup> where the Armenians, the Portuguese, the Greeks, the Muslims and the Chinese used to live. This was the intermediate town, the sophisticated zone of mixed population, which had separated the white town of the English of the Fort-Esplanade-Chowringhee area and the black town of the indigenous people in the north. The fall of the 'grey city' was the result of a historical process. The two old Mughal cities of Bengal, Hughli<sup>6</sup> and Murshidabad<sup>7</sup> declined. Much of the commerce of these cities was now diverted to Calcutta. This diversion swelled the Burra Bazar, the largest river-bank market of the city.<sup>8</sup> With this the population-mix changed. The older residents, the Greek, Portuguese, the Armenians, gradually disappeared and men of the soil, the indigenous merchants from different parts of the country, filled in their vacuum. Standing between the white town in the south and the native settlement in the north this 'cosmopolitan bazaar network' in the eighteenth century had provided 'the focus for a large part of the urban area'.<sup>9</sup>

The third event was the coming of opulent men in Calcutta. At the outset the Company's administration tried to settle weavers in Calcutta. Their main concentration was mainly in the old village of Sutanati. There and in some other corners of the river banks they lived with fishermen who were some of the oldest populations of the river-bank villages of south Bengal. There was also the need to fill up swamps, clear jungles, level ditches and make lands ready for both cultivation and habitation. To promote population and man-power potentiality of the settlement was, therefore, a perennial urge of the Company. Out of this urge the Company in the early days of its administration allowed men of inferior status to infiltrate into the city.<sup>10</sup> A huge labour force was also required for the construction of the Fort. Men from the interior were brought in and were settled mostly in the neighbourhood of the Fort in a place called 'coolie bazar'. This had wiped out the chances of urbanization. The city came to be crowded with men of little fortune. The northern part of the city became congested and the south-central part where the white town was situated also had ghettos intermixed with mansions. Slums became the regular feature of the urban landscape. Mud huts and thatched sheds were rampant. Even in the midst of the nineteenth century urbanization was a defeated phenomenon so that there was an exclamation: ". . . do not imagine that Chawringhee is a paradise . . ." <sup>11</sup>

In this apparently bleak situation scenes of a paradise were not altogether absent. From the middle of the eighteenth century money began to flow to

Calcutta. Scrafton informs us that after the battle of Palasi the interior *Rajas* began to dispatch their fortunes to Calcutta and saved money there. The countryside was drained and Calcutta's wealth flared up. After the enunciation of the Permanent Settlement in 1793 when interior *zamindaries* began to break up the Calcutta merchants and banians, men who amassed money as liaison agents of the various European Companies, began to purchase *zamindaries* in the districts. Many of them were absentee landlords living in Calcutta. They siphoned their wealth to this growing cosmopolitan town where for the first time a real estate orientation was ushering in under the canopy of a bazaar economy. The general hypothesis, therefore, is that Calcutta's urban status was raised by comprador capital. "The impulse of the bazaar", goes on the argument, "combined with comprador economic and social activity. The compradors, that is, the *dewans* and banians representing the upper echelons of a large body of intermediaries, lifted a basically bazaar town to a further stage of development."<sup>12</sup> Two things facilitated this comprador investment in the town. One was the concept of security, the most redoubtable element on which the town of Calcutta had built up its reputation since the time of the Maratha invasions in the forties of the eighteenth century. The other was the concept of property the Company's administration had been successful to ensure in this city vis-à-vis the anarchy of the *Nawabi* administration in the country. The flight of Raj Ballabh's son Krishna Ballabh to Calcutta with a huge treasure under the protection of the English and the eventual failure of the *Nawab* to coerce the English into submission and secure their permanent reduction convinced the aristocratic circles of lower Bengal that henceforth Calcutta would be the centre from where money and power would spring. With ground rent as a newly found source of revenue and the new legal-economic notions of property as a law-defined unit of possession not threatened by the whims of an individual or a coterie of rule emphasized the new sense of real property. Security and property were thus the early foundations on which Calcutta's urbanization could take off.<sup>13</sup>

Given that comprador wealth was to be invested in Calcutta in the eighteenth century the question arose as to what shape Calcutta's township would take in subsequent years. Calcutta was either to be manufactured or it was to grow. But certainly it was not to grow the way London grew out of an agglomeration of disjointed settlements,<sup>14</sup> or, Paris grew from a fishing village.<sup>15</sup> It was to be constructed just the way Rome<sup>16</sup> was constructed, or, it was to grow the way Moscow<sup>17</sup> did. Moscow had an advantage. She was conveniently situated to monitor both the river and the trade route traffic. This advantage Calcutta also had. She could control both the sea-going and sea-returned traffic. With a superior naval force at the command of its masters and a solid support system from Madras she could control the movement of vessels up and down the river. After the suppression of the Portuguese they had control over the entire sea

board. The *Nawabs* of Bengal knew this and they dreaded it as well. The Company's authority at the outset had a very modest ambition. Twelve years after the three villages were purchased the Court of Directors wrote to their agents in Bengal : “. . . What is laid out [is to] be done with good husbandry not so much for our present benefit as for the sake of our successors.”<sup>18</sup> That was in 1710 and the Court of Directors in England could not think of anything beyond ‘good husbandry’ in the newly acquired villages. Their vision of a growing habitation was centred on agriculture. The only exception was to be the Fort where no thatched sheds were permitted. The mandate ran thus :

“You are in the right have no thatched or matted houses within the ffort [Fort] . . . That whatever building you make of Brick it be done of Pucker [masonry] Work which though chargeable is cheapest on account of its duration.”<sup>19</sup>

Why was this? Was the mind of the Directors conditioned by the image of a placid land of agriculture which they thought the Orient was? Or were their ideas patterned after what they saw in contemporary London<sup>20</sup> and its surroundings? The desire to promote husbandry at least showed that the Directors did not want their new acquisition to be a grimly mirrored London. After the fire of 1666 London was found hurriedly and somewhat desperately regrouping itself.<sup>21</sup> This fire burnt London at a stretch for three days and caused an immense destruction of property.<sup>22</sup> In 1710 when the Directors were sending their advices to their men in Calcutta London did not properly recover from the shock of the two fires in one decade [three fires in one century] and wake up to a new life so that she could stand as a model for promoting a cluster of oriental villages into an eastern town. Yet London was a growing city. In 1700 it was the largest city in Europe. In 1800 it was the largest in the World. The planner of Calcutta imitated London in the nineteenth century so that it could become predominantly a colonial town where the east-moving Britons could see the image of London in an oriental setting. Calcutta's physical fulfilment was this. It had its nucleus in a white town that resembled in the eighteenth century the irregular growth around a medieval castle in the West and in the nineteenth century found itself patterned after the great city of London in its very apparent formations in a small area contained between the Chowringhee in the east and the Fort on the bank of the river on the west; and between the Circular Road in the south and the ‘grey town’ in the north situated between the Dharmatala Bazar adjacent to the Esplanade Square and the Burra Bazar bordering on the black town in the extreme north.

The image of a London was not an elastic vision which the city planners could implement in Calcutta. They allowed from the beginning their menial servants and service men to settle around them. These men were the work force of the city providing the labour base of a growing colonial town. The slums and the

ghettoes with improvised and thatched sheds over mud houses were the only make-shift arrangements where irregularly expanding habitations could be housed. The result was that not far from the Fort the 'cooly bazar' grew up and the 'Dharmatala bazar' took shape at a place adjacent to the Esplanade. More that that slums of those who manned the households of the whites laced the Chowringhee and found their stations in the areas between the Park Street and the Circular Road.

The physical set-up of the city which emerged out of this had thus a dualism in it. It was a dualism in a double sense. At the first sight it was a dualism between the black and the white town in which the black town of the north gradually progressed towards the south swallowing up in the process the middle or the intermediate zone called the 'grey town'. This was the area which was characterized by a cosmopolitan population-mix with predominantly Greek, Portuguese, Armenian, Chinese and Muslim population serving as a buffer between the White town of the central-south and the indigenous Hindu population of the North. Under pressure the white town progressed a little to the south-west letting the rich members of the White community to have their garden houses and community clubs at Alipur-Khidirpur-Garden Reach area. This dualism persisted throughout although it was getting fade toward the end of the colonial rule. The white-black dichotomy was not unique to Calcutta. Madras and Bombay had similar physical features in which the white town seemed to be open, sprawling and a little separate while the black town a somewhat congested one – the two being apparently separate but eventually touching each other at their rims.<sup>23</sup>

At a deeper level the dichotomy in the physical entity of the city was marked by a rich-poor divide in the white town itself. Such divides were normal in colonial towns or in towns like London where the industrial revolutions were creating ghettos of poor men around the factories. In Calcutta slums grew around mansions not because of lack of space necessary for human habitations. They grew out of the need of the Empire itself. European households in the white town, particularly in the Chowringhee-Park Street-Circular Road complex, had a large retinue of attendants as their routine necessity. "The European", Pradip Sinha writes, "was threatened by the 'native' squatters but he could not do without his milkmen, washer men and domestic servants who had to live very close."<sup>24</sup> The result was that in the rear side of the spacious Chowringhee as far back as Jan Bazaar there grew up an extensive slum-zone where access was difficult except through one or two crooked lanes. These slums gradually spread their wings to areas around Park Street, Theatre Road and Circular Road, that is the area which even at the end of the nineteenth century was considered to be the most white-dominated region of the city. These were ineradicable slums and they persisted defying official frowning throughout the colonial rule. As late as 1878 the officiating Commissioner of Police, Calcutta, represented to the

Government that some of the slum habits like the burning of ‘damp straw and stable manure’ and the lighting of fire at night for cooking and driving mosquitoes ‘in streets contiguous to European residents’ and also ‘in the native bustees adjoining the Circular and Theatre Roads’ were causing distress to people.<sup>25</sup> The Government took less than three weeks’ time to look into the matter and finally agreed with the Police Commissioner that ‘the real nuisance comes from the native bustees.’ The matter was referred to the Advocate General and his explicit opinion was ‘that proceedings can be taken against offenders’.<sup>26</sup> Forty years ago similar reports were forwarded to the Government by the Hospital Committee. It said

“Crooked Lane was only a few yards from the Governor General’s mansion . . . on the east of the Crooked Lane, there is a regular Bustee all clotted together, and the place altogether is always in a most filthy state occasioning most abominable stench, whenever the wind blows from the south-east.”<sup>27</sup>

The Lottery Committee was equally vocal on the same point.<sup>28</sup> It was a common observation among English administrators that miasmas spread from different slum-settlements in Calcutta and endangered the health situation in the city. The absence of sanitation in the slums was as glaring as it was in the suburbs. The result was that the city of Calcutta because of its structural imbalance remained to be a terrible miasma-afflicted city even in the middle of the nineteenth century.<sup>29</sup>

The black-white dichotomy and the rich-poor disparity had from the beginning robbed the city of its chance of an even growth. The dualism in the physical entity of the town was inherent in the logic of the situation. Two things marked its coming shape. The English first landed at Sutanati but their fort and their base of power were shifted further south and were built in the two villages of Kalikata and Govindapur. Thus they left Sutanati, the heartland of the trade zone of the east bank of the river, which had in its core the ancient cloth and yarn market – the *Sutanati Hut*. The region and its surroundings were thus vacated in favour of the indigenous population. The retreat of the English to the south coincided with the gradual withdrawal of the Setts and the Basaks from their position as the leading cloth merchants of Sutanati. They had the control of the *Sutanati Hut* and the entire trade of cloth and yarn yielded them their business leadership. This position of leadership in business was taken over in time by the leading merchants of the *Marwari* community. The cloth trade eventually passed under their control. They took over the reins of the *Sutanati Hut* and changed its name to Burra Bazar.<sup>30</sup> Thus at the centre of a growing township a formidable bazaar, traditional and Indian in its essence, now formed its vibrating heart. When Gobindapur was dismantled “the villagers had to seek new spots for their residences and family deities.”<sup>31</sup> The bulk shifted to

Sutanati, in the places around modern Burra Bazar and the Setts installed their family deity, *Govindaji*, there.<sup>32</sup> The sudden surge of population in the southern fringe of Sutanati needed its living space and it spilled over the ‘grey town’ – even moving beyond its rim. The disappearance of the ‘grey town’ and the encroachment of its territory by a swelling population must have taken place over the span of one century so that by the turn of the nineteenth century when the Town Improvement Committee began to function its first job was to clear the entire river bank between the Chandpal Ghat and Chitpur where thatched huts and improvised sheds had obstructed ‘the navigation of the River.’<sup>33</sup> A very important anchorage point for river vessels, the Koilaghat, had also fallen into disuse.<sup>34</sup> Under pressure of population and trade business of the Burra Bazar the native town in the north had become a very aggressively swelling formation and the Company’s administration preoccupied with measures of its own security remained indifferent to its duties of taking care of the town. As early as 1710 they dug a trench 16 feet by 18 feet apparently to drain water from the town but also as a measure to keep the white town separate from the black town.<sup>35</sup> But the population surge was irresistible and as the country side dried up of its wealth and as famine stared people at their face time and again in the eighteenth century the rural mass turned their attention to the city. From the second half of the eighteenth century new edifices were coming up in the northern part of Calcutta and men who were cultivators the other day now served the needs of the city as tis necessary labour force. The Company’s administration in Calcutta was engrossed with two things – trade both locally and globally and expansion territorially. Between these two ambitions the urbanization of the city had little chance to be taken care of. It suffered. The colonial pull failed to lift the town from its village moorings in which ethnicity and caste sociology remained to be the most adamant determinants of its urban parameters.

It is clear from the above that the failure of Calcutta to rise above its circumscribed village and caste moorings was mainly due to the lack of sensitivity of its early masters with regard to the aspirations of a growing town. The patterns of pre-colonial trade settlement were allowed to retain their overarching tenacity to continue even in the colonial town setting and the whitemen’s predilection for exclusiveness allowed habitation settlements to grow in their own rigid caste and professional lines.<sup>36</sup> The white town followed in its physical setting the Victorian model<sup>37</sup> in which business structures and professional buildings existed side by side with institutional ones but nowhere their spaciousness and exclusiveness were compromised at the outset. “The Black Town had, in contrast, an inclusive character. People belonging to different castes among the Hindus, the Muslims, the Armenians resided in native or Black Town.”<sup>38</sup> Village specific caste and trade practices flourished in urban settlements<sup>39</sup> and localities were marked by the professional and village nomenclatures of the inhabitants and their original homes.<sup>40</sup>

Given this, the question arises as to whether there was any real and conscious attempt to grow the town under proper planning consistent with the needs of the time? The answer cannot broadly be in the affirmative or negative.<sup>41</sup> Local needs were met when specific eventualities were addressed. Therefore, in place of any comprehensive planning there was planning for specific requirements. The town grew almost the way London grew in the late seventeenth century after the great fire of 1666 or in the early eighteenth century when a need for makeshift habitation seemed to be both inevitable and very urgent to the city planners.<sup>42</sup> Yet London got a time span of more than three decades after the fire to regroup itself before it landed at the turn of the eighteenth century. Throughout the eighteenth century it developed its own stateliness.<sup>43</sup> It developed its economic parameters and grew rapidly in terms of territory and population. Its economic situation, a gift of the Industrial Revolution, ensured the real foundation of a town which quickly assumed a central role in the evolving empire. In comparison to London Calcutta had little chance to grow. The urge to develop Calcutta came only in the nineteenth century. It was only after the defeat of Tipu Sultan of Mysore in 1799 that the British acquired supremacy in India. With this their political and military status changed. With the change of status their need and responsibility to govern territories under their control also changed. The British possessions in India now became the British Empire in India. The English were now seen as a powerful, civilizing force beyond the challenge of the Indians. In this situation the English needed a seat of power from where they could rule. They now set up their Military Boards which developed concepts of secular architecture, like barracks, forts, housing for soldiers and other assorted buildings. For the purposes of government and the church, more assertive stately structures were needed which would proclaim the supremacy of the British. It was at this moment of a transforming time that Wellesley came to rule India. His Minutes of 1803 emerged in this context only. Calcutta got into the start of new life.

If urbanization is to be talked of in a proper sense then Calcutta must be said to have been urbanized in the nineteenth century. From Wellesley's Minute of 1803 to the great revolt of 1857 Calcutta grew spatially. Its roads were built, the drainage system was overhauled and residential mansions came up in the length and breadth of the country. Calcutta emerged as an imperial city. It became the second city of the Empire only in the second half of the nineteenth century when its rise became phenomenal. Between 1857 and 1900 the railway-age was ushered in and Calcutta was connected to all important places in India through railways. This was the time when coal mines north-west of Calcutta began production and the first modern wet dock went into action.<sup>44</sup> The iron, steel and jute industry developed and the Pontoon Bridge<sup>45</sup> on the Hugli River was constructed. All these created the ambience necessary for urbanization.

In this situation two opposite things happened. There was need for land and there was opposition to its acquisition. The Lottery Committee grabbed lands and landlords protested encroachments. The conflict between the Government and the society on the question of land-acquisition thus became an impediment to Calcutta's urbanization. In many cases compensation had to be paid to landowners and the Government had not enough money to go for it.<sup>46</sup> Ground rent in Calcutta in the nineteenth century had increased to a great extent and this had become a lucrative source of earning for the landowners. In the first half of the nineteenth century de-industrialization had set in. Rural handicrafts were crushed and employment opportunities shrank. The country-side now looked to the city for support. In the first few decades of the nineteenth century there was a spark of an industrial revolution in and around Calcutta and there were jobs associated with it.<sup>47</sup> Those who had money began to purchase property in Calcutta. As a result the value of property in the city rose. Those who had land at their disposal revolted at the idea of losing them. With the turn of the nineteenth century the city had turned into an abominable place in the absence of roads, drains and conservancy. Mud roads strewn with filth and ditches had to be cleaned, dressed, widened and properly paved. New plots of land were essential for this. This was, therefore, the first drive of the Town Improvement Committee to make land available for urbanization.<sup>48</sup> Even when land was available its utilization was not properly planned in the interest of the city. For example when in 1805 the Town Improvement Committee proposed to dismantle the old fort near the Tank square and utilize the space to be created thereby the immediate suggestion both from the Town Committee and the Export Ware House Keeper was that spacious godowns should be constructed there. This would save the Government 12000 Rupees per annum which were being spent to rent godowns elsewhere.<sup>49</sup> The old fort was situated at the heart of the white town flanked by the river on the one side and the great tank on the other just at the place where the modern General Post Office is situated. In such a prime land the proposal to construct commercial sheds meant that needs of commerce predominated over other needs of the city – its needs for urbanization and infrastructural developments.<sup>50</sup> The white town was the most elegant part of the growing city where European model of town planning was partly applied. But in situations where the rulers were a corporate body of merchants, commerce remained to be the compelling logic behind all planning. A historian comments “ . . . even at the height of its elegance, its soul lay in the vaults of a commercial house.”<sup>51</sup> It is vital to note that the black town of the north had an irresistible tendency to expand southwards in the process of which it had swallowed up the intermediate zone of mixed population and extended its legs on the river-bank side or on the white town. This was because the white town on the river side was the only specious zone, sprawling and free from congestion. But the black town was aggressively expanding toward that. When in 1805 the Town Improvement Committee was out to retrieve areas between

the old fort and the Chandpal Ghat it found that lanes that had connected the area with the town into the interior were thickly congested. It was this aggressive expansion of the black town which made the task of city fathers difficult. Some planning for urbanization, although in a haphazard manner, had begun at the end of the eighteenth century. But the aggressive expansion of the black town and the opposition of land-owners to all efforts of land-acquisition by the Government made planning difficult. Therefore it took a little time more to get planning into serious thinking.<sup>52</sup> The expansion of the black town towards the south in the direction of the white town contained its own menace. The black town was essentially an aggregate of bazars<sup>53</sup> and its approach to the south would mean an extension of the bazar itself. Until the end of the eighteenth century the whites of the white town were conscious of their separateness from the black town. Thus Lt. Col. More Wood's map of Calcutta drawn in 1784-85<sup>54</sup> showed a clear-cut demarcation between the white and the black towns.

In the nineteenth century two opposite developments determined the character of urbanization of Calcutta. In the first half of the century a group of entrepreneurs emerged in Calcutta who marked the end of the banian predominance in the city. One may say that with the rise of such men as Ramdulal De Sarkar, Dwaraknath Tagore, Motilal Seal and others the stage of comprador capitalism had come to an end. The *dewan-banian-mutasuddi* collaboration with the Europeans was essentially an eighteenth century phenomenon that had come to an end with the rise of Indian entrepreneurs who initiated an advanced stage of capitalism growing in the womb of colonial economy. Under the *dewan-banian-mutasuddi* patronage the city had fought its competitions with murshidabad and Hughli. A Raja Nabakrishna of Shova Bazar, a Gokul Ghosal of Bhukailash and a Ganga Govinda Sinha of Paikpara, the new money elite of Calcutta, provided the city its early glamour and its initial base of capital standing on which the city could fight against the predominance of the Jagat Setts, Reza Khan and Raja Nanda Kumar, the old power elite of Murshidabad in the age of the Nawabs. Basing himself on the support of this *dewan-banian-mutasuddi* collaborators Hastings could transfer the pride institutions of Mughal sovereignty from Murshidabad to Calcutta. The English East India Company accepted this collaboration because it was to their benefit and it did not compete with their trade and economic supremacy. But in the first half of the nineteenth century situations changed. A class of Indian entrepreneurs emerged who sought to control the technology and innovations of the new economy and establish their predominance. The leader of this community was Prince Dwarakanath Tagore<sup>55</sup> whose innovative entrepreneurship even mesmerized the English and their Governor-General, Lord William Bentinck. Their rise<sup>56</sup> synchronized with the growth of the town

of Calcutta under the leadership of the Town Improvement Committee, the Lottery Committee and the Fever Hospital Committee.

The rise of a very competent capitalist class created a social space for the city which was not there before. In their rise one will certainly not find the growth paradigm of western cities blooming under the impact of the Industrial Revolution. But their rise and the competition they had put up to British business created an atmosphere in which the urbanization of the city was placed under serious consideration. When in 1805 the Town Improvement Committee proposed purchase of land for creating roads ‘from North to South and from East to West’,<sup>57</sup> it seemed to be an altogether new proposition inconceivable in the previous century. The *dewan-banian-mutasuddi* capitalism that had linked itself with the early foundation of Calcutta was in essence a comprador capitalism that failed to disengage itself entirely from its rural links. Superseding them there appeared in the first half of the nineteenth century the mercantile capitalism of the Bengali entrepreneurs who took the river into confidence and utilized the interior of the city for building up their property and spreading them along with their activities almost up to the grounds of the river-bank. Under their impact it was necessary that Calcutta should be given a face-lift. Almost all the major roads of Calcutta were built in the first half of the nineteenth century when this class of merchant and entrepreneurial capitalists had their hey days.

Competitions were, however, not favoured by the Empire. Calcutta might grow as a subordinate partner of London but not as its competitor, or as a competitor of Sheffield.<sup>58</sup> and Lancashire.<sup>59</sup> It meant that it was to grow only as a satellite of the Empire and certainly not with any economic potentiality that would entirely be its own. From the middle of the nineteenth century all the economic activities of the early entrepreneurs collapsed. The fate of Calcutta growing with its own economic parameters was sealed.<sup>60</sup>

Then what happened to Calcutta in the second half of the nineteenth century? Did it grow spatially? Very little. Did its infrastructure flourish? Not too much. Did its transport and communication system improve? Not up to the expectation. Yet Calcutta became in the second half of the nineteenth century the second city of the Empire. In the eighteenth century it became the ‘City of Palaces’. In the nineteenth it became the greatest city of the east. Its university – the first university in India – was set up in 1857<sup>61</sup>. The High Court of Judicature<sup>62</sup> was founded in 1862. The Howrah Bridge was constructed in 1874<sup>63</sup> and the Port Trust came into function in 1870. In 1897 Calcutta got its first electric lighting.<sup>64</sup> All these came in the aftermath of the fall of the Union Bank in 1847 which destroyed the money-elite of the city. More than that all these were the outcome of the need of a household rearrangement of the Empire so urgently thrust upon it by the great revolt of 1857. What we see, therefore, in

Calcutta after the revolt of 1857 were not events born of pursuit of peace; not even were they results of efforts to create a second home for the ruling race in the far distant orient where they could have reminiscences of their dream city of London. It was all out of necessities imposed upon them by an unkind destiny which they experienced in 1857-58. In the first four decades of the nineteenth century when the going was good native wealth went into making the urban infrastructure of the city. In the second half of the nineteenth century nationalism emerged as one ideology that absorbed the educated elite and the political public of the country and before the turn of the century the rulers could realize that the epicentre of this social quake lay in the city itself – in its educational institutions – the University in particular. The urge to promote the city which had turned hostile to the rulers could not be breathed into the administration. The Bengal partition of 1905 was not an event of the moment. It was contemplated long before. The desire to promote the port of Chittagong, parallel to the Calcutta port, as an outlet to serve the entire hinterland of Assam and Eastern part of Bengal was hatched in secret since the time the Indian National Congress was born. That was one body which was dominated and led by the Bengalis. In that age of nationalism it would be futile to think of social welfare through the promotion of a town.

In spite of these political and social setbacks Calcutta was urbanized and lifted to the status of the second city of the Empire. From the establishment of the University in 1857 to the introduction of the electric light in Calcutta in 1897 a period of four decades had gone by when it may be said that Calcutta gained its majesty. Its city-formation came a little earlier. From the building of the Calcutta Town Hall in 1813 to the establishment of the Calcutta Medical College and Hospital in 1835 the city witnessed one of the most active phases of its internal development. Its major roads were constructed at this time; its beautiful tanks were dug and squares were built.<sup>65</sup> It assumed the formations of a modern city. It shook of its eighteenth century shade of rusticity. A new awakening was manifested in the spirit of the city. The Hindu College was founded on 20 January, 1817.<sup>66</sup> From this college emerged Derozio and the Young Bengal group who championed reason, freedom and reform. Rammohan Roy began his reform activities in the city. Dwarkanath Tagore embarked on his entrepreneurial enterprises in the city itself. Lord Bentinck, the Governor General was there at the head who presided over the agenda of a transforming era. There was a partnership between the state and the society and throughout the course of the nineteenth century this partnership had functioned well. It had been taking shape since the eighteenth century. It was not an unmixed blessing for it had its own dichotomy. At the social level it was a bond a partnership for social awakening and reforms that lasted till the end of the century – more precisely till Bengal was partitioned in 1905. At the economic level its dichotomy was revealed. It remained to be a partnership so long as the *dewan-*

*banian-mutasuddi* collaboration was there. That collaboration was an event of the eighteenth century. In the nineteenth century it gradually turned into a contradiction – a conflict of irreconcilable interests between the British Indian state and the Indian entrepreneurial society. It was under the stress of this partnership-conflict situation that the urbanization of Calcutta took place.

In the first four decades of the nineteenth century the money necessary for urbanization was provided mainly from lotteries.<sup>67</sup> That was a time when the society had provided the nests for capital formation. In this capital-forming age the partnership between the state and the society came to operate for the benefit of urbanization. A phenomenal increase of wealth in *Goudadesha* (Bengal)<sup>68</sup> was noted by the journal *Bangadoot*<sup>69</sup> in its issue on 13 June, 1829 and it referred to three reasons that accounted for this: increased value of lands, increased volume of trade and an increased presence of Europeans in the country. The fourth factor and a very major one it did not mention namely an increase of indigenous population in the city. The value of land swelled twenty times so that a plot that was purchased with Rupees 15 thirty years ago now went for Rupees 300. As a result of this, the journal went on, the *sampad* (wealth) of the country increased, opportunities opened and those who had no status in the past now acquired some dignity. What happened in the process was remarkable. A middle class emerged and gained sway in the society. Writing on this class the journal gave us the dynamics of change under which urbanization of Calcutta was made possible. Before the rise of the middle class, the journal said, wealth was polarized. A few had wealth and the majority going without wealth was subordinate to them. As this new class would consolidate itself numerous benefits, it was hoped, would accrue to the society.<sup>70</sup> Wealth, the journal added, was like fertilizer which would be waste if heaped at one place. Wealth in the country got circulated and through circulation created a new situation. *Cowrtie* or shells were disappearing as the medium of exchange. Prices and wages were also increasing. Free trade was at the root of this social change.

The Emergence of a middle class in the society is a remarkable event. This class could not be ignored. Thus when the Fever Hospital Committee<sup>71</sup> was instituted in Calcutta in 1838 under the leadership of Dr. Martin, Surgeon of the Native Hospital in Dharmatala, consultation was made with a good number of leading men<sup>72</sup> in the city. The process of taking the indigenous people and native agencies into confidence thus began. A new phenomenon began with this. Calcutta's improvement got into its stage of planning. A quest began as to what could be the model of Calcutta. The Fever Hospital Committee "took London and other cities in Britain as role models."<sup>73</sup> In 1847 Robert I. Rose, Superintendent of Roads wrote :

“There a system of close or covered drainage, both public and private, is strictly pursued, and I feel confident that, that system which has already been tested with success, is the most perfect, which can be adopted, nor can I perceive anything peculiar in this country which would render it less efficient here than England, on the contrary, considering how quickly animal and vegetable substances putrefy in this country, I think an uniform system of closed drainage, both public and private, would be found more salutary than in colder climate.” Mr. Rose added: “that the fall or slope of the main sewers towards Tolly’s Nullah was great as in many of the principal sewers in some of the London Districts.”<sup>74</sup>

Not only in drainage but also in the matter of water supply London in 1847 was taken as a model.<sup>75</sup> “In the 1840s”, the editors of the Select Documents inform us, “an important project to supply water to the inhabitants of Calcutta was undertaken following the model of London.”<sup>76</sup> It was, however, difficult to transplant the model of an occidental city in oriental town-building. Sixteen years later the failure to imitate London was officially recognized. A Memorandum drawn in May 1863 for the consideration of His Honor the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal said.

“The stagnation of Calcutta has become a proverbial saying. It is confessedly behind almost every European City, and there ought to be no valid reason why it should still stagnate.”<sup>77</sup>

Failures, however, did not deter the planners of Calcutta from looking to the West for their model and guidance. Twenty-four years later while planning a road between the Hughli Bridge and the Sealdah Station western cities were once again invoked as a model. “This is the plan”, the official recommendation said, “which has always been followed in structural improvements of this kind in Calcutta, as well as in London, Paris, Birmingham and other civilized cities.”<sup>78</sup> This looking to the West was bound to be normal in a situation where town-planning meant for the rulers mere upgrading of villages by promoting their organic unity and stripping them of their rusticity at one level and then at another to invest them with a dignity in which they would become in their single entity a partner of an imperial metropolis. While Calcutta was growing there was no Indian city which could act as a model for Calcutta. Spaciousness was not a characteristic of Indian towns and the bazaar-based morphology which became the hallmark of Indian towns grown under Muslim rule did not tally with the sense of majesty with which the seat of the British power in the east was destined to grow. The concept of a sanitary city in which conservancy was required to keep the town clean, drainage was necessary to keep it free of surplus water on the surface, and levelling, dressing and paving of roads were requisite not only for ensuring proper logistics but also for keeping the city free of dust – in a word the configuration of an organized civic life had never been

the objective of oriental town-planning under the Muslims. Naturally when the need to develop Calcutta as an imperial city became imperative the planners of the town and its administrators looked to the West for models.

During the first fourteen decades since the foundation of this colonial town this quest for models from the West was not urged. "Until 1830s", goes the commentators' observation, "Calcutta's streetscape had reflected the late eighteenth century ideal about governance and health, based on the segregation of 'filthy' natives and 'vulnerable' white populations, and the confinement of disease." This meant that till the third decade of the nineteenth century Calcutta remained to be a 'dual city' and the black-white dichotomy in the physical entity of the town was maintained with cautious alacrity. As the nineteenth century gained pace this dualism began to fade. Three factors account for it. First, the native intelligentsia and an enlightened middle class grew hand in hand with a class of adventurous entrepreneurs who had the wealth and the stamina to ensure its own rise even in the cramped milieu of colonial economics and set racialism. Without the support and collaboration of this class of men no urbanization was possible in Calcutta.<sup>79</sup> The cooperation of these men was necessary when urbanization struck at the roots of social taboos that had so long obstructed the process of town-growth. It was they who managed public opinion to keep it in favour of change. Secondly, this was the period when English utilitarianism was gaining ground in India and there was an urge to transfer as much as possible the blessings and the utilitarian benefits of western civilization to India. The civilizing mission of the British Empire which had gained momentum under Lord Bentinck required that the seat of the British power in India must develop in cosmopolitan lines so that the structured artificiality of town-growth that had been maintained in Calcutta since its inception should disappear. His friendship with the native rich men and the celebrities of the society like, Ram Mohan Roy and Dwarkanath Tagore vouchsafe a kind of new alliance between the state and the society which was the necessary concomitant to the welfare outlook of the state. The logic of the imperial desire to promote the glamour of a British town in the orient lay here.

The third factor that gave incentive to town development was the pressure of the white men in the city. Throughout the first half of the nineteenth century the population of the town had increased rapidly. The number of Europeans also increased considerably. From their cloistered shelters in and around the Fort they started moving away to the east and the south in the middle of the eighteenth century.<sup>80</sup> Since then for about a hundred years they had lived in the city in complete coexistence with the natives slightly away from the protected zone of the Fort. Yet in the eighteenth century they had the roads, the river-bank and the Maidan and the Esplanade – the territories adjacent to the Fort under their control. Now in the nineteenth century this command of what they thought their own pastures gradually slipped out of their hands. An assertive class of

natives had emerged who had equal logistic and man-power commands which enabled them to penetrate into the areas so long protected as the corners of the whites. It was with them that congestion had steadily infiltrated into the rims of the white town. The English had become sensitive to their physical existence in the city. Tired of pestilential Calcutta they in the past sought to live at distance. The leading Englishmen of the time lived far away from the town.<sup>81</sup> In course of the hundred years since the middle of the eighteenth century they had seen their white town being cordoned by the natives. As congestion increased they began to feel the lack of city amenities. This was how the clamour began. In the forties of the nineteenth century the town-planners became concerned with the murmurs in the European towns. Therefore, the major city improvement schemes that were taken up at hand then had come to centre around the improvement of the white town. Thus when a project to supply water to the town was executed in 1847 Mr. F.W. Simons, the then consulting engineer to the Government of India observed: “The European inhabitants would hail its introduction as a great boon, and the natives themselves after the first shock to their prejudices have been overcome will rejoice in it also.”<sup>82</sup> This was how the concern for the Europeans got a priority in town planning. Construction of new roads around the Maidan that would link European quarters in Chowringhee with the Garden Reach, the bank of the river and the Race Course areas were thought of concurrently with moves to promote the Maidan and embellish it as a place for recreation in the evening. A Memorandum dated 1863 observes: “The increase of European population demands corresponding means [that is the same as those in European cities] to provide for the recreation of the community, and the great traffic now crowding the evening drive or [of ?] Mall requires to be carried off in other direction than those now existing. The influx of wheeled conveyance of late years has been so great that constant accidents are occurring whilst the frequenters of the Mall or River side Course are confined to the same up and down lane, being prevented from reaching the chief European quarter in Chowringhee except by the very long detour either north or south of the Fort.”<sup>83</sup>

European exasperation now became a driving force for the urbanization of Calcutta. Three things now combined to create the impulse for this urbanization – influx of western liberal ideas of utilitarianism, rise of a wealthy native class and the exasperation of the community of the whites. No measure for the improvement of the white town was possible without taking corresponding measures of improvement for the black town. Till the middle of the nineteenth century the disparity between the white and the black town remained and it became an abject distress for town-planners. The Fever Hospital Committee could find out as to where the real ill of the city lay and in its elaborate and incisive report it mentioned it in the following way:

“That the parts of the City inhabited by the natives, forming a great population to whose numbers the British inhabitants bear a small portion and the whole of the suburbs are in all these respects, in a condition of such total neglect, as to render them necessarily the seats of diseases, destructive of individual happiness, and of life, and inconsistent with moral improvement and political prosperity.”<sup>84</sup>

The city-planners had no means to eradicate this disparity altogether and the imperial administrators had no mind to see the white town, the nucleus of an imperial city, lose its distinctive characteristics altogether. Western benevolence had already started creeping into town-planning in Calcutta under the Lottery Committee. In the recommendations of the Fever Hospital Committee the black town was further taken as an integral part of the city so that a composite structure for town-planning could be evolved in terms of water supply and health, sanitation and medical care. It was here that the concept of a sanitary city was developed.

“The sanitary city embodied”, goes the commentator’s version, “liberal theories of governance, and the medical doctrines and ethnological diagnoses that came with it. Unlike the ‘dual city’ that separated people and proscribed movement, the liberal cityscape prescribed a free flow of goods and people, ventilation and exchange.”<sup>85</sup> The concept of a sanitary city was not a sudden innovation. It was growing over years with the accumulation of distress in the white town and other sources of miasma in the black town. The white men’s sensitivity to their physical existence in a pestilential town was the real concern to which the administrators had addressed themselves from the beginning. All concepts of a sanitary town which we see flourish from the thirties of the nineteenth century owed their origin to the desire to see Calcutta grow under the shadow of London and other western towns. The tropical heat, the rains, the annual inundations in this part of the country were permanent scourges to which were added the unsanitary lifestyles of the natives and their religious and social practices functional only as counter-sanitary disruptions of a clean and decent civic life. It was not in the hands of the city-planners to remove the tortures of climate and geography, but the ills of a civic life could be remedied. Between the thirties and the sixties of the nineteenth century all efforts were directed to this end. This meant that during this period not only urbanization got a boost but also the native people of the city experienced their first apprenticeship in a modern civic life. This was modernization in its early urban form. Benefits of investigations and planning in city formation have now assumed a universal orientation. Keeping their eyes riveted on the white town the planners extended their gaze far beyond so that the city from end to end now became a negotiable structure perceptibly superior to any of the urban formation available outside. All aspects of the city grew as a result of a response to challenge and every stage of its growth was an outcome of a conscious effort belying all perceptions of a

‘chance-erected’ and ‘chance directed city.’ Calcutta has no founder as many of the circumscribed trade settlements of the past had none. Its characteristics as a garrison-town were born of an eighteenth century foundation and its bearings as a port city and a seat of power were essentially acquired orientations concomitant with the British settlement in lower Bengal and the rise of the Empire from the East. In no sense could the sanitary town that Calcutta became in the middle of the nineteenth century be dated back to the pre-British days. The majesty of an imperial seat of power with which Calcutta came to be invested was in the true sense of the term a phenomenon of the second half of the nineteenth century that was marked by the ascendancy of the British crown as the ruler of India in place of a corporate commercial body. Calcutta’s modernism was a nineteenth century British gift on the foundation of which the Bengal renaissance took the city to the modern age. The fulfilment of Calcutta’s urbanization lies here.

Notes:

1. A profound nostalgia for London’s lost green led William Morris to begin his *The Earthly Paradise* with the following lines  
 “Forget six counties overhung with smoke,  
 Forget the snorting steam and piston stroke,  
 Forget the spreading of the hideous town:  
 Think rather of the pack-horse on the down,  
 And dream of London, small, and white, and clean,  
 The clear Thames bordered by its gardens green.. .  
 While nigh the thronged wharf Geoffrey Chaucer’s pen  
 Moves over bills of lading.”
2. A fairly good account of the disappearance of Govindapur is available in Pradip Sinha, *Calcutta in Urban History*, Firma KLM, Private Ltd., Calcutta, 1978, pp. 12-13.
3. Alipore was a region adjacent to Khidirpur. It is at present the headquarters of South 24 Parganas district and a neighbourhood of South Kolkata. It is flanked by the Tolly’s Nullah to the north, Bhowanipore to the east, the Diamond Harbour Road to the west and New Alipore to the south.
4. Khidirpur was a neighbourhood adjoining the village Govindapur, about three to four kilometres to the south-west from the site of the fort. At present it is located in the central-west part of the city of Kolkata and is bounded by the districts of Alipore in the east, Ekbalpore in the south, Hastings in the north, Metiabruz in the south-west and the Hughly River in the west.
5. The expression ‘grey town’ has been used by Pradip Sinha, *op.cit.* p. 7.

6. S. Chaudhuri, "The Rise and Decline of Hugli", *Bengal Past and Present*, Vol. 86, 1967.
7. The fall of Murshidabad began immediately after the battle of Palasi. In the aftermath of the grant of Diwani activities in Murshidabad dried up. Reza Khan, the Naib Nazim wrote to Maharaja Nabakrishna, the political banian of the Company: "If business in Calcutta is like a river, it is like a drop of water in Murshidabad" – *Calendar of Persian Correspondence*, Vol. 2. 1767-1769.
8. "With the rapid development of Calcutta and the growth of its population – the Maratha scare was one of the major factors in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century – and the continued decline of Hooghly and Murshidabad, the older cities, in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the great Bazar was taking on an increasingly complex and cosmopolitan character. The intensity of specialization in textiles of which the merchant weavers of Bengal – the Seths and Basaks – had a monopoly tended to decrease. And with the undoubted gravitation of mixed merchant groups to Calcutta the barriers between the intermediate town and the original Bazar fell, leading to the development of Puggeya Putty, Monohar Das Chowk, Cotton Street, Armenian Street, Radha Bazar and China bazar as distinct areas in a vast network of bazaars." – Pradip Sinha, *op.cit.* pp -- 15.
9. Pradip Sinha, *op.cit.* 15.
10. As late as the 1770s the following persons purchased land in the intermediate zone of the city: Junghoo Calassy (Khalasi, a sailor who performed menial works in the ship), Ramjahn Peon (a messenger and service-menial), Janoda Chobdar (a page), Nacoo Khidmutgar (a menial servant), Saheer serang (boatswain of a ship) – *Prods. of the Calcutta Committee of Revenue*, June 1, 1778.
11. Griffin (pseudo), *Sketches of Calcutta*, Edinburgh, 1843, p. 315.
12. Pradip Sinha, *op.cit.*, p. 16.
13. "The hectic building activity and land purchase in Calcutta from the mid-18<sup>th</sup> to the early 19<sup>th</sup> century must have stemmed from a relatively new notion of real property. The prized possessions were bazars and tenanted land (*bustee*)." – *Ibid.*
14. Londinium was founded as a civilian town by the Romans seven years after their invasion in AD 43. At that time London occupied a relatively small area, roughly equivalent to the size of Hyde Park. Prior to the coming of the Romans there were some smaller independent settlements which did not admit any common overlord. These were soon swallowed up by the might of the Roman army. The formation of a single habitation under a common authority was thus worked out. From this the character of a town was slowly formed.
15. It is said that Paris is more than 2,000 years old. Gauls (a part of the Parisii tribe) settled there between 250 and 200 BC. They founded a

- fishing village on an island in the river. This village is the present-day Ile de la Cite. It was the centre around which Paris developed.
16. The construction of Rome started 753 B.C. Modern historians, however, believe that it was 725 when the actual building of the city started.
  17. Legend says that Prince Yury Dolgoruky was once on his way from Kyiv to Vladimir. He stopped at a trading post somewhere near the confluence of the Moscow and Yauza Rivers. He was told by his ministers that the local prince being a boyar (high-ranking noble) did not pay him sufficient homage. Yury instantly put him to death and took control of the site he was the master. On this site Moscow grew. It was first mentioned in the historic chronicles of 1147. That year Yury invited his allies to a banquet saying : “Come to me, brother, please come to Moscow”. This was how the name Moscow got current. The strategic importance of the place prompted Yury to construct a moat-ringed wooden palisade on the hilltop. This was the first Kremlin. With time Moscow blossomed into an economic centre. It gradually attracted traders, artisans and merchants who rowed just outside the Kremlin walls.
  18. General Letter from the Court of Directors, January 9, 1710, Letter Book No. 13, cited in C.R. Wilson, *Old Fort William in Bengal*, Calcutta, 1906, Vol. I, pp. 78-79.
  19. *Ibid.*
  20. Jerry White, *London in the Eighteenth Century*, Bodley Head
  21. The Great fire in London took place on 2 September, 1666. There was a fire in 1633 and a follow-up fire in 1676.
  22. The loss of life in the fire was minimal. Some sources relating to the period say that only sixteen men and women perished in the fire although it continued for three days. But the magnitude of property that was consumed by fire or was destroyed in the process of extinguishing it was staggering. Historians give us the following figures for the loss London suffered. As much as 80% of the city proper amounting to 430 acres of land was destroyed. It included 13,000 houses, 89 churches, and 52 Guild Halls. A few thousands of citizens were rendered homeless. A huge number of people were financially ruined. There was also a fire in 1676. The Great Fire along with the fire of 1676 destroyed over 600 houses south of the river. Thus in the seventies and the eighties of the seventeenth century the face of London changed forever. There was, of course, one positive effect of the Great Fire. It had eradicated various miasmas and stopped the plague which had ravished London since 1665 by mass killing the plague-carrying rats in the blaze. Books for study of the fires of London in the seventeenth century are noted below.

Bell, Walter G. *The Great Fire of London in 1666*, Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1971.

- Clout, Hugh, ed. *The Times History of London*: Times Books, London, 1999
- Ellis, Peter Beresford. *The Great Fire of London An Illustrated Account*. London: New English Library, 1986;
- Lang, Jane, *Rebuilding St. Paul's after the Great Fire of London*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956.
- Poter, Stephen. *The Great Fire of London*. Gloucestershire: Sutton Publishing 1996;
- Schofield, John. *The Building of London : From the Conquest to the Great Fire*. British Museum. London 1984;
- David A. Weiss, *The Great Fire of London*. Illustrated by Joseph Papin. New York: Grown Publishers, 1968.
23. For Madras see Milburn, *Oriental Commerce*, Vol 2, 1813, p.1 and for Bombay see *Gazetteer of Bombay City and Island*, Vol. 1, p.11 and *Asiatic Journal*, May-August, 1838.
24. Pradip Sinha, *op.cit.*, pp. 8-9 .
25. C.T. Metcalfe, Esq., C.S.I., Offg. Commissioner of Police, Calcutta to The Secretary to the Government of Bengal, dated Calcutta, 13<sup>th</sup> February, 1878 *Judicial Deptt., Prodgs.* Nos. 34-35, June 1878 Letter No. 467. On March 4, 1878.
26. Colman Macaulay, Esq., Under Secretary to the Govt. of Bengal , Judicial, Political and Appointment Department to the Commissioner of Police, 4<sup>th</sup> March, 1878, *Judicial Deptt. Prdgs.* No. 38, June, 1878, Letter No. 1123.
27. *General Committee of the Fever Hospital and Municipal Improvement, Evidence taken by the Sub-Committee (1836-1838)* - April, 1837.
28. *The Lottery Committee Prodgs*, Vol. I to III are replete with such complaints.
29. "Dr. Stewart has no doubt that the miasma generated by the state of suburbs, extends to affect the salubrity of Calcutta and Chowringhee" – *Report of the General Committee of the Fever Hospital*, 1840, pp. 51-52.
30. P. Thankappan Nair, "The Growth and Development of Old Calcutta", in *Calcutta, the Living City*, Vol. I, pp. 11-18.
31. Pradip Sinha, *op.cit.*, p. 13
32. *Ibid.*
33. The First Report of the Special Committee for Town Improvement *Judicial Criminal Consultation*, 25 July, 1805, Consultation No. 23.
34. *Ibid.*
35. P. Thankappan, Nair, "Civic and Public Services in Old Calcutta", in *Calcutta the Living City*, Vol. I, p. 227.
36. "As the Urban area began to grow and spread, the component units tended to coalesce and interpenetrate, retaining at the same time elements of segregation or developing new ones. The process worked in an overall setting of dualism, basically a feature of all colonial cities, between the

white and the black town. The phenomenon of dualism, in its origin derived from the pre-colonial trading settlement pattern, reflected the concern of the Europeans with defence and security, manifested in the fort and the fence, and the concern of the ‘natives’ about maintaining their own mode of social and economic organization. In the colonial setting the fort progressively became an embellishment, retaining an accommodational function and the fence fell down. The black town shed some of its aloofness and drove wedges into the white town, especially into the intermediate zone . . .” – Pradip Sinha, *op.cit.*, p. 7

37. Pranab Kumar Chatterjee in the Introduction to Professor Atis Dasgupta ed. *Select documents On Calcutta 1800-1900*, Directorate of State Archives, Higher Education Department, Government of West Bengal, Kolkata, 2011, p. xv.
38. *Ibid.* As the black town swallowed up the ‘grey town’ the Hindu population of the north got mixed up with the general population - mix of the middle town.
39. “Another characteristic of urbanization in ‘Native’ Calcutta was that many localities carried the trade practices of dwellers. The names of Kumartuli, Suriparah, Kansaripara, Jeliapara are derived from the traditional trading activities of potters, liquor-vendors, braziers, fishermen.” – *Ibid.*
40. Thus *tola* (like *Ahiritola*, *Kolutola* or oil-pressers’ habitations), *tuli* (like *Kumartuli* or potters’ habitations), *tala* (like *Nimtala*, *Taltala* or habitations marked by the names of trees *nim* and *tal* normally available in villages), *para* (like *Kansaripara* or habitations of belmetal artisans, *Sakharipara* or the habitations of the conchshell artisans, *Darjipara* or habitations of tailors) and even the nomenclatures of pre-settlement trade localities such as *ganja* or *ganj* (like *Watganj*, later *Ballygunge* or *Tollygunge*), *bazar* (like *Shyambazar*), *hat* (like *Gariahat*) became rampant in marking the distinction of one neighbourhood from the other.
41. “Calcutta’s march to urbanization had not been the outcome of a definite pattern.” This is the opinion of one of the official commentators on Calcutta, Pranab Kumar Chatterjee (*op.cit.* p. xiv). Then he comments further: “Calcutta’s urbanization process revealed the character of a colonial city”. (p.xv)
42. This fire destroyed nearly 85 percent of the city. 13200 houses and 87 churches perished. The city was then rebuilt in extreme haste and in a very haphazard manner. As this happened there began a rapid surge in population – from 675,000 in 1750 to 900,000 in and around 1800, that is, just 50 years later. A razed city and a rising population caused enormous pressure on city planners. They rushed to get building up quickly. It is said that houses and tenements were thrown together in a slapdash manner. Little attention was paid to plans, codes and ethics of

constructions. Buildings were patched up, then divided and subdivided, and divided again to cram as many people into as little square footage as possible. The result was a jumble of narrow, muddy, airless, uneven and unlit passageways between shelters and shops, residences and shanties. Walking through these lanes was not a happy experience any time of the day and especially after sunset it was terribly risky. The convoluted pattern of streets provided shelters to criminals.

43. In 1707 the Scottish and English Parliaments merged and the Kingdom of Great Britain was born. The next year St Paul's Cathedral was completed. It was the masterpiece of architect Christopher Wren. Then came the Georgian era in England. London saw its new districts, like Mayfair which developed into wealthy and lavish West End. The Port of London expanded in the downstream direction. With it South London began to enjoy an accelerated pace of development. Prior to 1750 London Bridge happened to be the only bridge over the river Thames. That year the Westminster Bridge opened. As all these happened in the course of the eighteenth century Fleet Street got into its start as the centre of the British press. In 1762 King George III bought Buckingham House (Palace) from the duke of Buckingham and competent architects like John Nash enlarged it and turned it into a palace over the next few decades. This eventually became the main residence of the British Royal family.
44. There is a hypothesis that there was a creek that "ran along the side of the old Fort William". – Barun De, "The History of Kolkata Port and the Hooghly River and its Future." (135<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Lecture of the Port Trust). He quotes Mr. P. Thankappan Nair ["Early Days of Calcutta and the Port" in Dr. Satyesh C. Chakraborty ed. *Port of Calcutta 125 Years*, Calcutta Port Trust, Calcutta, 1995, p. 6] who said that in 1712 a dry dock was constructed which "was not equipped for warships and the Dalhousie tank was converted into a wet dock with facilities for launching vessels". This hypothesis of Mr. Nair is not supported by any evidence and may be treated as merely a conjecture.
45. The necessity of a bridge over the Hugli River was felt for a long time. The pressure of traffic over the river was increasing very fast. In the face of this a committee was appointed in 1855-56 to look into the possibilities of constructing a bridge across it. The plan, however, did not materialize. It was shelved in 1859-60 perhaps because of the Revolt of 1857. It was again revived in 1868 and two decisions were quickly reached. It was decided that a bridge should be constructed across the river and its responsibility would be entrusted on a Port Trust which would be appointed by the Government. With this purpose the Calcutta Port Trust was founded in 1870. The whole process now required necessary legislation. The Bengal Act. IX of 1871 or The Howrah Bridge Act, 1871 was thus passed. This Act empowered the Lieutenant-Governor to have

the bridge constructed with funds from the Government under the aegis of the Port Commissioners. Eventually a contract was signed with Sir Bradford Leslie to construct a pontoon bridge. The work commenced and ultimately completed in 1874. The different parts of the bridge were constructed in England and sent to Calcutta where they were assembled. This is how the bridge got into shape.

46. Professor Atis Dasgupta ed. Volume, *Select Documents on Calcutta 1800-1900* is replete with instances of this conflict.
47. This point has been analysed elsewhere. Blair Kling is of the opinion that the Empire did not allow an industrial revolution to take place in the city and places around although it was budding in the first half of the nineteenth century. The possibility of this revolution died down in the middle of that century. As a result of this the growth of the city was stunted and after the middle of the nineteenth century it remained to be a satellite of the Empir. Blair Kling's opinion will be discussed later.
48. Innumerable examples of this drive for land-acquisition are available in the section captioned 'Spatial Expansion and consolidation' in Professor Atis Dasgupta ed., *op.cit.* pp 1-93.
49. 'The First Report of the Special Committee for considering the Nuisances which exist throughout the Town of Calcutta and proposing the best means of removing them', *Judicial Criminal Consultation* No. 23, 25 July, 1805.
50. "The European Town located around the Tank square rested on highly intensive commercial activities." – Pranab Chatterjee, *op.cit.*, p.xv.
51. Pradip Sinha, *op.cit.*, p. 5
52. "Even though the spate of urbanization took a definite shape since the closing years of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, systematic town planning was yet to get serious thinking." – Pranab Chatterjee, *op.cit.*, p. xv
53. "The Black Town was a congregation of bazaars (markets)." – *Ibid.*
54. This map was published by Bailey in 1792.
55. For details read, Blair Kling, *Partner in Empire: A Study of Dwarkanath Tagore* and Amales Tripathi, *Trade and Economics in the Bengal Presidency*.
56. Here is a succinct description of the rise and achievement of this generation of capitalists in Calcutta; "in the early decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, the volume of trade multiplied. With the abolition of the East India Company's monopoly, Indian trade was thrown open to free traders. The great era of the Banians had come to an end. Ramdulal De Sarkar, Dwarkanath Tagore, Motilal Shil [Seal] achieved remarkable success as independent merchants, in the age of laissez faire. But Dwarkanath's contribution was more heroic and ushered in a corporate type of management. He showed how a zamindar could transform into a resourceful entrepreneur. In the words of Amales Tripathi, 'He was the

first Bengali entrepreneur in the true sense of the term and one of the earliest examples of native bourgeoisie breaking out of their circumscribed origin in the permanent settlement and public service.’ Even Governor-General Bentinck congratulated Dwarkanath ‘on being the first native gentleman who had set up a house of business in Calcutta on the European model’. Dwarkanath sponsored joint stock undertakings in diverse fields, including banking, coal and steamship. Calcutta Docking Company, Calcutta Steam Tug Association, the Indian General Steam navigation Company – all reflected Dwarkanath’s achievements in steamship and navigational enterprise. Apart from Dwarkanath, Ramdulal De Sarkar and Motilal Seal also achieved astounding success as traders and their own fleets for trading ventures”. --- Pranab Chatterjee, *op.cit.*, p.xvi.

57. *Judicial (Criminal) Consultation* No. 25, 25 July, 1805.

58. Sheffield is a city and metropolitan borough of South Yorkshire, England. It derives its name from Sheaf, the river which runs through the city. The city grew from its industrial roots and with times enlarged itself to encompass a wider economic base. During the time of the Industrial Revolution in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, Sheffield gained an international reputation for steel production. Many of its innovations were developed locally. These included crucible and stainless steel which became famous world-wide. The city received its municipal charter in 1843. In 1893 it became the *City of Sheffield*.

59. Lancashire, also known as Country of Lancaster, derives its name from the city of Lancaster. It is situated in the north-west of England and it is a non-metropolitan country of historic origin. The County as a commercial and industrial region emerged into prominence at the time of the Industrial Revolution. It acquired world-wide fame because it encompassed several hundred mill towns and collieries. It is said that by the end of the 1830s nearly 85% of all cotton manufactured worldwide was processed in this County.

60. In 1847 the Union Bank was closed. In the 1830s the Agency Houses which had their offices in Calcutta and which acted as money repositories of the rich men collapsed. By the middle of the nineteenth century all the business entrepreneurs fell. There was thus a black out in the capital world of Bengal. Henceforth the Bengal capitalists invested their money in purchasing real estates in Calcutta and did not risk in entrepreneurial ventures. Read N.K. Sinha, *Economic History of Bengal*, Vol.III, Firma KLM, Calcutta and Pradip Sinha, *op.cit.* Here is a small note from Pranab Chatterjee (*op.cit.*, p. xvi): “By the middle decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Indian entrepreneurship got a jolt. Though the ‘mantra’ of free trade was chanted, the British had established virtual monopoly over India’s commercial and industrial set up. As the terminal port of the sea

routes between Europe and the East was nourished by the most populous and productive area of the Indian sub-continent, Calcutta handled about half the international trade of British India. Meanwhile steam-powered industries started coming up along both sides of the river. This propelled the manufacturing interests of British investors who began to visualize Calcutta ‘the spectre of a second Lancashire on the bank of the Ganges’.” The Bengali capitalists collapsed under the enmity of British capitalists and Calcutta’s fortune was doomed along with it.

61. The University of Calcutta was founded in 1857, that is, in the year of the great revolt of 1857 when Lord Canning (1856-1862) was the Governor-General of India. The Governor General himself was the first Chancellor of the University and Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, Sir James William Colville was appointed its first Vice-Chancellor. The proposal for the establishment of the University was first tendered by Dr Fredrick John, the then education secretary to the British Government in India. His proposal was to set up one University in Calcutta along the lines of London University. The proposal did not get the necessary approval and the plan to set up a University fell through. In 1854 a new proposal came up for two universities, one in Calcutta and the other in Bombay. This proposal eventually met the approval of home authorities. Necessary actions were then taken up and an Act was drawn. The Calcutta University Act thus came into force on 24 January 1857. The University was to have a Senate consisting of 41 members which would function as the policy making body of the University. The University was to have a catchment area from Lahore to Rangoon. This was the largest jurisdiction any Indian University till date has commanded. On January 30, 1858 the Syndicate of the University started functioning.
62. The High Court of Judicature at Fort William, in common parlance the Calcutta High Court, was set up on July 1, 1862 under the High Court’s Act 1861. Its building was designed by Mr. Walter Granville, the Government Architect on the model of Stadt Haus or Cloth Hall at Ypres in Belgium. The High Court building is the exact model of Stadt Haus. When the original Stadt Haus building was consumed by fire a blue print of Granville’s Calcutta High Court had to be consulted before the another Stadt Haus could be built.
63. The 70s and 80s of the nineteenth century, it should be noted, was the period when the underground drainage and the water supply system in Calcutta were being worked out. At that time connection with Howrah became important.
64. Kilburn & Co. secured from The Indian Electric Company Limited the license of lighting Calcutta on January 7, 1897. This Company eventually changed its name into Calcutta Electric Supply Corporation Limited. The first power generating station of the Company was installed

at the Princep Ghat on the bank of the river Ganga on April 17, 1899. The installation of electric supply in the city generated enthusiasm so that at the first chance the Calcutta Tramways Company decided to discard its horse drawn carriages and switch to electricity. This was done in 1902. The demand of electricity rapidly grew and three new power generating stations were commissioned by 1906. Since 1933 the Company has been housed in the Victoria House near Esplanade.

65. For details see A.K. Ray *A Short History of Calcutta*, Ch. X.
66. The College started only with 20 students.
67. The practice of raising money for public works by means of lottery came into vogue in 1793 – A.K. Ray *A Short History of Calcutta*, p. 158.
68. By *Goudadesha* the journal meant Calcutta because in the first three decades of the nineteenth century the countryside of Bengal was in a state of collapse under the impact of the Permanent Settlement. The solvent zamindaries were breaking down. Absentee landlordism was taking its shape. Calcutta banians had profited through the purchase of broken zamindaries or their splinters. They siphoned their wealth from the districts to the city of Calcutta. The Agency Houses were in a state of collapse and indigo tensions had started brewing up in the interior. Agriculture suffered in a capital-short economy. In this situation it was not possible that capital should be forming in the villages of Bengal. So by *Gaudadesha* the journal meant the city of Calcutta.
69. The observation of *Bangadoot* is available in B.N. Bandyopadhyay, *Sambadpatre Sekaler Katha*, Vol. I, pp. 352-354.
70. The journal drew our attention to England, Spain and Poland. In England wealth increased [because of the devastation of the monasteries] during the time of Henry VIII which brought profound changes in the country ensuring the rise of the people under Cromwell. In Spain whoever amassed wealth assume the style of the king and became idle. In Poland peasants had no wealth and they were sold with land. How miserable the condition of these countries were.
71. Fever Hospital Committee was the short form of the General Committee of Fever Hospital and Municipal Improvements. In 1838 Lord Auckland appointed this Committee.
72. Among the eminent Bengalis who were consulted were Raja Kalikrishna Bahadur, Dr Madhusudan Gupta, and Dwarakanath Tagore. Dr Madhusudan Gupta (1800-1866) was the first Indian to dissect corpse. “We should also note that eminent Indians contributed to the growth of the city’s infrastructure in their own way under the supervision of the administration.” – *Select Documents*, p. 93, also see p. 99.
73. *Ibid* (p.99)
74. *Judicial Consultation*, 29 December, 1847, Nos. 26-30, Cited in *Select Documents*, p. 99

75. F.W. Simons Esq., Consulting Engineer to the Govt. of India & Director of the Railway Department to F.J. Halliday Esq., Secretary to the Govt. of Bengal, Feb 27, 1847, *Select Documents*, pp. 158-160.
76. *Select Documents*, p. 102
77. A Memorandum for the consideration of His Honor the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal, *Judicial (Judicial) Prods.*, No. 142, May, 1863, *Select Documents*, p. 223.
78. Appendix B to letter from Sir Henry Harrison, Chairman of the Corporation of the Town of Calcutta to the Secretary to the Govt. of Bengal, Municipal Deptt., Jan 27, 1888, *Municipal Prods.* No. 168-169, July 1888, *Select Documents*, p. 135.
79. Grant of land, donation of funds and other necessary advices were sought from the wealthy and influential natives of the time. Thus contribution was sought from Babu Motilal Seal, an eminent Bengali of the time for the establishment of the Medical College. He donated land on which the college building came to be erected. *Select Documents*, p. 103.
80. "The European inhabitants had begun as early as 1746 to settle at Chowringhee" – A.K. Roy, *op.cit.*, p. 151
81. *Ibid.*
82. Cited in *Select Documents*, p. 102
83. A face-lift for Maidan : Memorandum for the Consideration of His Honor the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal, *Select Documents*, pp. 223-224.
84. *Judicial Consultation* December 29, 1847, Nos. 26-30, *Select Documents*, p. 102
85. *Select Documents*, pp. 102-103.

CHAPTER 4  
 THE CITY ASSUMES POWER  
 LOOKING AT THE CITY FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF POWER

Throughout the course of the nineteenth century Calcutta underwent a metamorphosis. From a power-driven city of the empire it became a spirit motivated city of the natives. From Hastings to Bentinck there was a conscious drive on the part of the British rulers to make Calcutta the seat of an imperial rule. It was here that Calcutta had aspects of power that influenced its evolving shape as a metropolis. Clive had initiated the city's installation in power when after the battle of Palasi he allowed the new fort to come up under his auspices. Hastings gave a boost to the process when he transferred the major offices of the administration of the *subah* from Murshidabad to Calcutta. Along with the foundation of the executive authority the Supreme Court of Justice was set up in Calcutta. Sovereign status of Calcutta was thus fixed and the early beginning was thus made toward what later came to be called paramountcy. The functional supremacy of the *Nizamat*, gradually went down and the *Nawab*, the head of the *Nizamat*, stationed at Murshidabad, lost his glamour as the apex authority of the Mughal rule in the *subah*. Since the time of the battle of Palasi a new process of give and take began between the Company's administration in Calcutta and the Nawab's administration at Murshidabad. The administrative etiquette and the power protocol changed. Previously the English Governor of Calcutta or his agents visited the Nawab at Murshidabad. Now the rule of the game changed. The *Nawab* came down to Calcutta to see the Governor who was harboured in the pretension of a new-found power. There was no need from the English side to reciprocate the gesture. The gravity of power shifted from Murshidabad to Calcutta. A new culture of power based on Calcutta began to evolve. With the change in the equation of power the dynamics of the country's economy changed. Revenue was extracted from the interior of the districts and they were siphoned to Calcutta without any equivalent return to the countryside. Capital dried up in the rural world which thus went under the shadow of a money-short economy. The interior *Rajas* began to transfer their capital to Calcutta and began to purchase landed property there. Every one needed a foothold in Calcutta. This is how the districts began to rally around Calcutta, the newly emerging centre of power. The need for Calcutta to reach the interior was less than the need of the latter to build its nexus with this city which had substituted Murshidabad as the centre of power. With this the tendency began to grow a new legion of service elites both in the interior and also at the capital. The introduction of new principles of revenue extractions aimed at squeezing the

last dreg of social surplus from the interior. New revenue managers called *Supervisors* were inducted in 1769 and their in-depth penetration into the finances of the zamindars shook the stability of the interior revenue structures of the country. Everywhere there was a hunt for the hidden treasures of the land. The whole countryside, already under the stress of a capital short economy, collapsed like a house of cards. There was tremendous breakdown of *zamindari*s and *amins*, *shiqdars*, *sazawals*, *munshis*, *gomastas* – the old Mughal revenue personnel – were now formed into a class of revenue undertakers to provide the supportive platform to these ramshackle *zamindari*s. As the countryside collapsed the majesty of Calcutta grew. In the midst of surrounding destitution the glamour of Calcutta increased. This happened when the three towns of *Subah Bangla* – Dakha, Murshidabad and Hughli – had gone into eclipse. Employment and business now converged in Calcutta. With this Calcutta appropriated the functions of three important centres of activity namely those of a garrison town which Calcutta originally was, those of a port which was growing then in leaps and bounds and finally those of a seat of administration which the city had become since the administration of Warren Hastings. Thus the functions of the three rolled into one and Calcutta was thrust into the role of a \_\_\_ majesty. It was in this situation that the colonial masters contemplated that Calcutta would replicate London as the eastern centre for the east-moving Britons. As an appendage to this a power elite grew up in the city. This is how Calcutta became a model of power not only in south Asia but also in the whole of the east.

In the above observation we find the eighteenth century scene of Calcutta's rise to prominence. How did Calcutta then contrast with the other colonial towns in India? Here is an observation on the point:

“Portuguese Goa was a museum of sixteenth-century imperialism, more plentifully supplied with churches than trade and with monks than soldiers. Bombay was a British possession but as yet the heir-apparent rather than actual successor to the wealth of Surat. The British settlement of Madras and Calcutta were prosperous and populous but centres of trade rather than of political power. French Pondicherry fulfilled the same function to a lesser degree. Other European stations, such as French Chandernagar, Dutch Chinsura and Negapatam, and Danish Tranquebar, were trading posts without political significance.”<sup>1</sup>

This was the condition of the colonial towns in the middle of the eighteenth century. Calcutta's political take off started after that. In the beginning of 1757 when Clive recovered the city from the control of the *Nawab* the status of the city changed. It was now a conquered city where the English might could be stationed permanently as its base. Understanding this the new *Nawab* Mir Jafar Khan granted the whole of the 24-Parganas, the district where the city was

geographically located, to the Company as its *jagir*. Immediately with this the status of the city changed once again. It was now a gift in perpetuity in all practical terms. From a pragmatic standpoint the status of Calcutta and Bombay now became akin to each other. Bombay was a dowry-gift and Calcutta was a gift in the form of a prize for enthroning a *Nawab*. With a puppet *Nawab* at Murshidabad that city lost its old supremacy and became an appendage to the power that was growing from Calcutta.

A power-packed take-off of the city started thus. In course of the next hundred years the internal character of the city changed. The first major example of the display of power of the city was an attempt to apply English justice in the case of Maharaja Nanda Kumar, the Brahman minister of the Muhammadan *Nawab* of Bengal, Mir Jafar<sup>2</sup>. It is widely believed by historians that Nanda Kumar was implicated in a false and as Percival Spear says that “there was a miscarriage of justice for which the blame cannot be fastened on any one man.”<sup>3</sup> Sir Elijah Impey<sup>4</sup>, the first Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Judicature at Fort William, Calcutta, which was established under the Regulating Act of 1773, was a friend of Hastings and it is alleged that he acted as the instrument of the Governor General to quash the case so stoutly put up by Nanda Kumar. Spear comments:

“Historically the incident is the supreme example of the absurdity and injustice of attempting to apply English legal methods to Indian conditions. The Supreme Court wished to impress on the Indian mind the seriousness of the crime of forgery;<sup>5</sup> it actually very successfully convinced men that it was dangerous to attack the governor general.”<sup>6</sup>

The Nanda Kumar case proved beyond doubt that the Governor-General was supreme in Calcutta and the English laws practised in Calcutta had already superseded the Muslim law practised under the *Nawab* rule. The Regulating Act of 1773 which had created power as an institution had set up two organs of supremacy – first, the office of the Governor-General who was given supervisory authority over two other presidencies and was thus made the supreme authority of a unitary control over all the British possessions in India; secondly the Supreme Court which declared a *de facto* primacy of English law over the laws of the Mughal government. The directional instructions given to the first Governor-General of the British possessions of India contained large discretions. Hastings was efficient enough to make a full use of that. The Directors wrote to him.

“We now arm you with full power to make a complete reformation”<sup>7</sup>

The power to implement reformation was given to a man who was stationed in Calcutta. This, in terms of power, made Bombay and Madras satellites of Calcutta. For the east-looking Britons Calcutta was now the most coveted place

to move, a palace of pride where the British might had restored British possessions through conquest and forced the *Nawab*, the viceroy of the Mughal government at Delhi, to formalize it through a legal grant in terms of the Mughal law. There was none to challenge the position of Calcutta now. In the south Madras was still shaky vis-à-vis Haider Ali of Mysore and in the west the position of Bombay was not completely secure vis-à-vis the Marathas. Only in Calcutta the English were unchallenged since the time when the united force of the Emperor Shah Alam II, Shuja-ud-daula of Awadh and Mir Qasim of Bengal fell in the battle of Buxar in 1764. The army that had so long guarded the eastern flank of the Mughal empire now collapsed and the might of the English in Calcutta became supreme. This might was located in the garrison town of Calcutta and gave Calcutta a boost in the power balance of the country. The victory at the battle of Buxar, the new fort at Govindapur Calcutta, the Supreme Court of judicature and the Office of the Governor-General made Calcutta's position paramount. Stationed in Calcutta the British power became both an instrument for coercion and an agency for persuasion. Operating from power Hastings defined Calcutta's role anew in the power structure of the country. Calcutta now became the seat of an overlord that could claim tribute from any subordinate authority that was suspected to have money stored in secret. The field where this claim was experimented was Benares and the hapless *zamindar* on whom the coercion was applied was Raja Chait Singh. The Company was in need of money. To the expenses of the Company's external wars and internal consolidation was added the lust of the masters of the Company manifesting both in individual greed and collective desire for tribute. From Calcutta Hastings did what formerly the Bengal *Nawabs* used to do from Murshidabad – fleecing money from the local *Rajas*. All *Nawabs* from Murshid Quli Khan to Siraj-ud-daullah squeezed the European Companies whenever they got a chance to do it. Now Hastings was in the mood of revenge and retribution. The *Raja* of Benares was the first victim. *The Oxford History*<sup>8</sup> says that Hastings was 'well assured' that the Raja of Benares 'had plenty of both men and money'. This was one assurance that came mainly from power. Seated in Calcutta

“he was so assured by his own representatives, whom he had thrust out into every key position, so that the administration was becoming one vast extension of his own masterful will. There opinions were his own, and their conclusions jumped eagerly with his, even if they, sometimes slightly anticipated those which suited his policy.”<sup>9</sup>

A huge money was fleeced from the *Raja* and it was alleged that Hastings himself accepted a bribe from him. The Select Committee of 1783 remarked: “With £23,000 of the raja's money in his pocket, he persecutes him to destruction.”<sup>10</sup> We do not go into the ethics and legality of Hastings's dealings with *Raja* Chait Singh of Benares. The point we stress is that through his

dealings in the cases of *Maharaja* Nanda Kumar as well as Chait Singh Hastings was demonstrating a show of power which scared the native people in Calcutta and around and this fear and its memory provided a barrier to the unity between the ruler and the ruled in years to come. Historians say that Hastings was “lifted up with an egoism and complacency worse than those of Clive at his worst.”<sup>11</sup>

The ‘egoism’ of the Governor-General of the East Indian Company’s possessions in India made Calcutta a dreaded seat of a new power which appeared to be ruthless in imposing its own will and unfailing in aggrandizing its own jurisdiction. Hastings admitted this in open mind and flattered himself for what he had achieved for the Company and its city. His confidence in the Benares affair he expressed thus:

“I feel an uncommon degree of anxiety to receive the sentiments of my friends upon it. I have flattered myself that they will see nothing done which ought not to have been done, nor anything left undone which ought to have been done”.<sup>12</sup> At the source of his self-compliment there lay his confidence of power. He wrote: “Every power in India dreads a connexion with us . . .”<sup>13</sup>

This was the legitimate boast that came at a time when a native town was being given the boost for its conversion into an imperial city.<sup>14</sup> The power-packed character of the city was thus created. It surely was the creation of Hastings<sup>15</sup> and his own times.

In the seventeen-seventies Calcutta had become the invincible centre from where the Company’s government tried to stretch out to neighbouring Indian rulers. Hastings was the masterful mind here and his will became the will of the city. The command of the city emerged from Hastings’s position in relation to the total Indian administration of the Company.

“Hastings governed the three Presidencies for eleven years after Lord North’s Regulating Act, but he was Governor of Bengal for two years before it, and it is in the civil administration set up during those two years that the foundations of our system in India were laid. Hastings brought twenty-three years of Indian experience to the work : for those two years his hands were free; he planned, organized, and executed his own policy unhindered; it is by the action he then took that he must stand or fall. Whether the object of study be his character or the justice of our rule in India the years that follow can best be understood in the light of his original aims, for much of the legislation of the three succeeding decades was designed either to carry out those aims or to prevent their fulfilment.”<sup>16</sup>

With the power of an absolute ruler Hastings fleeced the Begums of Awadh. In removing Nanda Kumar from the political scene in Calcutta Hastings

successfully negated the most formidable leader of the power elite of the old order. Nanda Kumar represented the last vestige of the power of Murshidabad and his fall only ensured Calcutta's triumph over that Mughal city in the east. Benares was the nearest city and its Raja the most wealthy ruler in the immediate neighbourhood of Calcutta. Once they were crushed there remained no power in the vicinity of Calcutta that could stand as a barrier to the rise of the new city. Power has a tendency to radiate and Hastings made Calcutta the seat from where this radiation could direct itself to various ends in the immediate surroundings. We do not know whether Hastings wilfully did it. He was operating under financial stringency and the desperation born out of stringency propelled power to manifest itself in the most awkward political ambience of the time. In the process the Company's power crushed the primacy of men and cities that represented traditional sources of authority and affluence. It was this necessity that motivated Hastings's impingement on Awadh. The financial need of the Company was the most pertinent pretext that concealed the Company's megalomaniac and hegemonic demonstration of power. The *Nawab* of Awadh could not pay his subsidy arrears to the Company. Hastings put 'relentless pressure to keep the nawab up to the mark, exercised both on the nawab himself and on two successive British residents, (Middleton, his own nominee, and Bristow a Francis man).'<sup>17</sup> Percival Spear observes

"In February 1782 Middleton wrote 'no further rigour than that which I exerted could have been used against females in this country', and in June Bristow added the opinion of the officer commanding the troops, 'all that force could do has been done'. By these means 100 *lakhs* (£ 1 million sterling) were eventually secured, the nawab's debt paid and the Company's finances restored".<sup>18</sup>

One may argue that Hastings could do this because the power of the Mughals had sunk. From a deeper understanding it may be said that the English could do it because they had consolidated their base of power in Calcutta. The whole series of the traditional cities, bases of Indo-Islamic power, had gone down. Dakha, Murshidabad, Hughli, Malda (where during the time of Murshid Quli Khan the *zamindars* were mobilized to move against the English), Benares, Patna and Monghyr (a temporary escape resort of Mir Qasim in his conflict with the English) that could cordon the supremacy of Calcutta had become degraded centres of native power, almost satellites to the rule of a city that had suddenly raised its head. From this situation a power was assumed whereby the ambition of a city was blown into a majesty cloaked under an overlord's right to intervene. The self-assumed power to swoop down upon the interior of the household of a native prince marked an impropriety of action unparalleled in the whole annals of the British rule in India.<sup>19</sup> It was deliberately demonstrated as a manifestation of a boast of power that was housed in the Fort William in Calcutta, a city now invested with pretension and pride to mark its supremacy as

a centre of an upcoming empire in India. Hastings believed that the Indian institutions were still valid to be the basis for a British empire<sup>20</sup> but all institutions, he thought, should be subordinate to the will of Calcutta, the city that housed the Fort William and its Council. – the citadel of English power in India. He was impeached, three years after his retirement in 1785 on twenty charges arising from his activities in office but one thing was sure about the way he functioned. He grasped very quickly while others of his community could not, the implications of assuming a hegemonic power that was to rest in a city. He gave lead in contemplating the idea that the British possessions in India could not be ruled from a merchant's emporium but from a majestic city – a feeling that eventually manifested in full bloom in Lord Wellesley's declarations of 1803. It should not be thought that Hasting's achievement in transforming Calcutta into a seat of power was a feat of individual prowess. Rather it was a part of a process that began with the hatching of the conspiracy against Sirajuddaullah, the *Nawab* of Bengal which set the Bengal revolution in 1756. It was this conspiracy that led to two things – first, a series of revolutions beginning with the battle of Palasi in 1757 and ending with the assumption of power by the Company in 1772 – a natural follow-up of the grant of the *diwani* in 1765. The second one was the eclipse of the *nizamat* and the emergence of the Calcutta Council as the superintending authority in the governance in the east. Clive was its master because it was his masterly intervention in Bengal politics<sup>21</sup> which had dwarfed the *Nawab*, the Mughal ruling icon at Murshidabad who lent charm to this seat of power in the eastern flank of the Mughal empire. What is significant to note is that Clive was not the first European to intervene in Bengal politics. The Portuguese had done it before him. But they had not earned a position for themselves by which they could participate in power. Calcutta owed her emergence to this situation of transforming Bengal politics where participation in power by the Company was made possible by Clive. A mercantile body situated in Calcutta suddenly became a partner in power not because it had a command in commerce but because it had a command over military might. Clive was invested with the title *Sabat jang* – 'the tried in battle' – a title which Mir Jafar himself procured for him from the Emperor.<sup>22</sup> The district of 24 Parganas where the Company was made the *zamindar* was assigned to Clive as his *jagir*. *Sabat jang*, the wielder of sword, was now the supreme master of the district in which Calcutta was situated. A *jagir* denoted both revenue and rank and Calcutta now became the seat of a defined position in which Mughal rank and revenue combined to highlight the dignity of a mercantile Company. The construction of a fort that was envisaged long ago was made possible in this context of transfer of power from Murshidabad to Calcutta. The territorial dynamism of the city which was arrested so long was now released and the city expanded up to Kulpi at the fringe of the sea. Calcutta suddenly seemed to have been lifted into glamour which it lacked earlier. This glamour was not so much an outcome of a growing

port that Calcutta seemed to be but of a conquered city where the *de facto* authority of a Company had overshadowed the *de jure* sovereignty of the *Nawab*. All *Nawabs* from Mir Jafar onwards lived in Murshidabad by mortgaging their fortunes to the Company in Calcutta. A huge drain of wealth flowed from Murshidabad to Calcutta so much so that the officers of the Company here acquired and exercised a new power based on their new-found wealth. Calcutta flourished at the cost of Murshidabad.

The process that led to this destiny of Calcutta was ushered in in 1756. When Calcutta was captured by the *Nawab* that year the Madras Council decided to temporarily withdraw from their involvements in the Deccan politics and concentrate their efforts in Bengal. "Had we been finally committed to the Deccan expedition when Calcutta was lost", writes Henry Dodwell, "Clive could not have sailed for its recovery and the course of events in Bengal might have been widely different".<sup>23</sup> Dodwell adds: "The Deccan could never have afforded the resources which, derived from Bengal, permitted to the capture of Pondichery in 1761."<sup>24</sup> Calcutta thus became the resource-providing centre from where conquests could be planned. In this it was not Bombay but Calcutta which became the associate of Madras in working out the strategies of an emerging empire. This was long before Hastings took over the reins of administration as Governor General over the British possessions in India. Calcutta became the source of a new military strength for the English fighting their battles against the French over the Carnatic in the south. Dodwell was the first historian to understand Calcutta's position in the geopolitics of the time. He wrote: "Clive dispatched an expedition from Calcutta under Colonel Forde, who defeated the French in the field, captured Masulipatam, held it under great difficulties, and obtained from the deserted Salabat Jang, without any obligation of service in return, the cession of the provinces which the French formerly had held."<sup>25</sup> Calcutta had thus been commissioned into its all India career as a stronghold of the English might that could step in to safeguard the ramshackle position which Madras was presenting at the time. This position Calcutta gained not through the renovation of the old fort or through the mending of the garrison there. This resulted from the removal of the watchful eye of the *Nawab* on Calcutta and the disappearance of the *Nawabi* cordon around Calcutta that was effected through the *Nawabi* stations at Hughli, Malda, Chitpur and Dumdum. A part of it was due to the collapse of Chandernagore from where the French maintained their watchful eye on Calcutta. The extraction of huge money from the *Nawab* Mir Jafar added to the self-confidence of the English. Calcutta in the immediate aftermath of the Palasi did not cease to be a old world city but its spirit had undergone a change. Clive's arrival in the city had always been a source of confidence for not only the English but also of the natives as well. His arrival at Calcutta for the second time on May 3, 1765 was hailed by all with exuberance.<sup>26</sup> The confidence necessary to consolidate an achievement had

gone with the departure of Clive after the battle of Palasi. This confidence returned now. Calcutta was now confident of a good governance and good governance was the real source of its power. Historians have seldom, taken into account the fact that Clive's administrative and political achievement had gone a long way toward the consolidation of Calcutta's status as an overmighty city that could defy frowning of the superior. Clive had given Calcutta the confidence to do this. Dodwell thus defines Clive's role in this:

“His (Clive's) mission had a double purpose. He was to establish with the country powers such relations as should not in themselves offer occasion for ceaseless revolutions; he was further to put an end to that insubordination which had recently pervaded all branches of the Company's government, refusing obedience to orders from home, or resolutions of the Council whenever these seemed to threaten pecuniary loss, and almost establishing private interests as the criterion of public policy.”<sup>27</sup>

This courage to sustain the worth of his political and administrative settlement against opposition from superior authorities gave Calcutta the political glamour it needed to become in future the seat of an empire. At the head of this courage came the decision that the Fort William would be relocated on a more convenient site. This was a remarkable decision taken in 1766<sup>28</sup> which eventually buttressed Calcutta's position as a city rallying around a fort not only for its own defence but also for the defence of the whole protectorate of which it had become the core. This was the protectorate of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa, the eastern *subahs* of the Mughal empire which served as the perennial source of revenue to the Mughals. In true sense of the term, Calcutta now became a garrisoned town and its strength was now equivalent to that of Madras. The removal of the *Nawabi* vigilance and the new fortification of the town ushered in a new age of hope and aspiration for Calcutta. The southern stations of the English were more or less free from the intervention of the *subahdar*<sup>29</sup> there.<sup>30</sup> Vis-à-vis these Calcutta suffered from *Nawabi* stringency. In the past Calcutta did not compare with Madras in terms of wealth and power.<sup>31</sup> Now because of the *Plassey Plunder*<sup>32</sup> a huge wealth was extracted from the *Nawab* of Murshidabad and in various ways that city had drained its wealth to Calcutta. Calcutta had become rich by the time Clive ended his second term of office in that city. Calcutta had been a developing city for many years but the Fort William was in a wretched state. Dodwell says that when the *Nawab* invaded Calcutta in 1756 “. . . Fort William was in a wretched a state as was Madras in 1746.”<sup>33</sup> From the position of a conquered and a defeated stronghold in 1756 Calcutta in ten years' time had become a centre of strength from where military reinforcements could be sent to the south to vindicate the British position there. On the basis of this military might a political status was conjured up. Clive while instituting his first government invited the *Nawab* to Calcutta. It was almost a conqueror's advice to the conquered and in doing this Clive was in

effect creating a new balance of power not only between the *Nawab* and the President of the Council at Fort William, but also between Murshidabad as the capital of a *subah* and Calcutta as the seat of power of an emerging empire. Clive wrote to Watts: “ I need not hint to you how many good purposes the nabob’s presence will answer.”<sup>34</sup> He was thus initiating a process whereby the centrality of Murshidabad as the seat of Mughal power in Bengal was being surrendered to the rising authority of another city which had of late burst out of its fetters created and imposed so long by the vigilance of the *Nawabi* rule. The radiance of Mughal glory had dimmed after the battle of Palasi and Clive was now undertaking an effort to regularize a process in which the dimming of the legitimacy of the *Nawabi* rule would seem to be a part of the consciously driven project of the English.

Notes :

1. Percival Spear in Percival Spear ed. *The Oxford History of India* by the late Vincent A. Smith C.I.E., Part III pp. 452-453.
2. “In March 1775 Nanda Kumar accused Hastings of accepting a large bribe from Munni Begam in return for her appointment as guardian of the young Nawab Mubarak-ud-daula. The charge was welcomed by the majority, who immediately resolved ‘that there is no species of speculation from which the governor-general has thought it reasonable to abstain’. Hastings refused to meet his accuser in council and dissolved the meeting, whereupon the majority ordered him to repay the amount into the Company’s treasury. Hastings now brought a charge of conspiracy against Nanda Kumar. While this was pending Nanda Kumar was arrested at the instance of a Calcutta merchant on a charge of forgery unconnected with the previous controversy. He was tried before the new Supreme Court, found guilty, and executed. Thereafter the charges against Hastings were dropped and never revived.” Spear, *op.cit.*, pp 505-6
3. Spear, *op.cit.*, p. 506 Elijah Impey, it should be noted, was a class-friend of Warren Hastings at Westminster and at Calcutta their relationship got more cordial.
4. For Sir Elijah Impey read Elijah Barwell Impey (1780-1849), *Memoirs of Sir Elijah Impey, Knt.: first chief justice of the Supreme court of judicature, at Fort William, Bengal*, London: Batten, Simpkin, Marshall, 1857.
5. “Forgery was not a crime punishable by death in the current criminal law of Bengal derived from the Muslim code, and the application of English penalties in Indian cases was opposed to a well-established Indian legal tradition.” – Percival Spear, *op.cit.*, p. 506.

6. *Ibid.*
7. Cited in Spear, *op.cit.*, p. 502.
8. Vincent Smith, *Oxford History of India*, p. 537. This old book of Vincent Smith was one of the four major standard British interpretations of Indian history of the time, the three others being the old several-volume *Cambridge History of India*, Mr. P.E. Roberts's *History of British India*, Professor H.H. Dodwell's *British India*.
9. Edward Thompson and G.T. Garratt, *Rise and Fulfilment of British Rule in India*, Central Book Depot, Allahabad, 1962, p. 159.
10. The select Committee said: "The complication of cruelty and fraud in the transaction admits of few parallels. Mr. Hastings . . . displays himself as a zealous servant of the Company, bountifully giving from his own fortune . . . from the gift of a man whom he treats with the utmost severity, . . ." Most of the British historians write in defence of Hastings and try to exonerate him from the charges which were levelled against him. Read Spear, *op.cit.*, pp. 515-16 and Thompson and Garratt, *op.cit.*, pp. 159-60.
11. Thompson and Garratt, *op.cit.*, p. 161.
12. Cited in Thomson and Garratt, *op.cit.*, p. 162.
13. Cited in Thompson and Garratt, p. 161.
14. The real beginning of Calcutta's becoming an imperial city started only in the 1770s when the Company decided to stand forth as a *Dewan*.
15. In the regime of Clive Calcutta learnt self-defence through war, army-mobilization and a construction of a fort. Under the regime of Hastings Calcutta was projected as a centre of power in the geo-politics of the time.
16. M.E. Moncton Jones, *Warren Hastings in Bengal 1772-1774*, Oxford University Press, Preface.
17. Percival Spear, *op.cit.*, p. 516 British troops were sent to the house of the *Nawab* and the eunuch stewards of the Begams of the interior household were tortured, imprisoned, and subjected to fetters, starvation, and the threat of the lash.' – *Ibid.*
18. *Ibid.*
19. "The Begums were not left penniless, or even uncomfortable. Nor was their title to their riches quite certain. *But there is no doubt that faith was broken*, that the Company's government interfered in what was essentially a domestic and intimate situation in the nawab's own household, that the begums were severely treated and their dependants bullied and ill-used. *There also seems no doubt that Hastings's was the moving spirit egging on reluctant British residents and officers.* When due allowance has been made for the dire necessities of Hastings's position at the time and the strains to which he was subjected, the fact remains that in *both these cases (Benares and Awadh) Hastings sank*

- below not only modern codes of conduct but the accepted Indian standards of the time.*” (Italics ours) – Percival Spear, *op.cit.*, p. 516.
20. “The first governor-general, Warren Hastings, appointed under the first Parliamentary Regulating Act for India of 1773, took up his position with the view that the historical institutions already developed in India provided the best basis for British rule.” -- Burton Stein, *A History of India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1998, p. 212.
  21. Clive’s intervention did not immediately change the old order. Spear writes: “Legally and to most outward appearance the old order continued. There had been revolutions before and the assistance of foreigners was well understood. The English were not even the first Europeans to interfere in Bengal politics, for the Portuguese had done it long before them.” – Percival Spear, *op.cit.* p. 468
  22. Percival Spear, *op.cit.* p. 469 note.
  23. Henry Dodwell, *Dupleix and Clive The Beginning of Empire*, (1920, Methuen & Co. Ltd., London), Vishwavidyalaya Prakashan, Gorakhpur, reprint, 1962, p. 107
  24. Dodwell, *op.cit.*, p. 108
  25. Dodwell, *op.cit.*, p. 110
  26. Dodwell writes (*op.cit.* p. 266) : “His advent was hailed with an outburst of Oriental rhetoric. ‘The flower of our wishes is blossomed in the garden of hope, wrote one; to another his coming was ‘as rain upon the parched earth.’ And these expressions represented something more than mere compliment. Save those who feared punishment for their misdeeds, there was not a man, of any race or creed, in Calcutta, but felt the safer for Clive’s coming.”
  27. Dodwell, *op.cit.*, p. 267
  28. “Only in 1766 was it decided not to complete the fort on its original plan, since if ever the English were cooped up within its walls their affairs might not be regarded as irrevocably ruined. This change of policy is deeply significant. It marks emphatically the point to which the force of circumstances had driven the English, and to which all had ignorantly contributed – Clive by his military success, Vansittart by his policy of re-establishing the Nawab’s power, thus hastening the *denouement* of the piece, the company’s servants by their trade and the disputes occasioned thereby, until Clive returned to reap the harvest in whose sowing he had played so considerable part.” – Dodwell, *op.cit.*, pp. 272-273.
  29. The Nizam of Hyderabad was the *subahdar*.
  30. Dodwell writes (*op.cit.*, p. 113); “Before the exploits of Dupleix and Bussy had produced their natural consequences, the position of Europeans in India had varied much. In the north they were at the uncertain mercy of the local Governors. At Calcutta, for example the Council feared to condemn a Muhammdan to death; and neither French

nor English were allowed to strengthen or enlarge their fortifications. But the government of Bengal under Alivardi Khan was comparatively vigorous and subordinate officials were closely watched. The governments dependent on the Subahdar of the Deccan, however, were much less strictly supervised during the later years of Nizam-ul-Mulk. He had adopted the custom of letting out the various offices for short terms to the highest bidder; and the local Nawabs were at liberty to recoup themselves as best as they could.”

31. “Madras was a place of considerable wealth, a centre of trade and banking, not lightly to be meddled with, and there the English privileges were jealously upheld. When in 1744 a Shroff, instead of applying to the English courts, dared to seek the aid of the amildar of St. Thome to procure payment from an English debtor, he was promptly fined 500 pagodas, and such representations were made to the offending amildar that he promptly offered apologies, explaining that he had but recently come from a remote part of India and knew nothing of English privileges.” – Dodwell, *op.cit.*, pp. 113-114.
32. For the details of the *Plassey Plunder* see N.K. Sinha, *The Economic History of Bengal*, Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyaya, Calcutta, 1965, pp. 12,78,102,152, ??
33. Dodwell, *op.cit.*, p. 130.
34. Cited in Dodwell, *op.cit.*, p. 158.

## CHAPTER 5

**Calcutta Becomes a City of Palaces :  
Looking at the City from the Perspective of Morphology**

In the colonial age Calcutta was called *The City of Palaces*. In the twentieth century it was termed *The City of Joy*. Between these two appellations the city acquired a third epithet when Rudyard Kipling towards the end of the nineteenth century designated it as *The City of Dreadful Night*. In this chapter we shall discuss how Calcutta acquired its first title *The City of Palaces*.

Between 1770 and 1830 Calcutta played a host to a good number of foreigners who came to the city in various capacities – travellers, merchants, administrators, artists, soldiers, tamps, missionaries and people of diverse other callings. That was when Calcutta was just being built. To the eyes of these strangers Calcutta was a new-found-land where the seeds of imperialism were being sown and the civilization of the west had just started driving its roots, although somewhat hesitatingly. On a very passive and inoffensive base of an eastern civilization the aggressive culture of the west was slowly implanting itself. The city was gradually emerging as the eastern-halt of the east-moving Britons. New edifices were coming up in the city and these seemed to be symbols of glory for the conquerors. Thus those who came to the city were moved by the congenial flow of pride and with visions enthralled with the glamour of achievements and expectations. The painters, artists and those who left their sketches of the city and the way of life of the people inhabiting it were dazzled by the splendid mansions that had come up in the city. But behind the row of these mansions were the huts of the natives, thatched, congested, clustered with sheds that conveyed to the strangers a bleak perspective against which the structures of the white towns expressed their own majesty. There was an adventure in planting a new civilization on an alien soil. That adventure manifested itself with a sense of thrill when as brethren of the rulers the artists drew the sketches of the city. Their confidence in their own tastes, their strength, their superiority and their appreciation of their own feat all gathered momentum when their spirit of creation was unleashed in their own drawings of the city. The paintings revealed the city not in the mood with which a native would have looked at the city. They betrayed the ecstasy with which rulers' kins would have gazed at the splendour and magnificence of their own achievements or the amazement and disdain with which they would look at the squalid and wretched life of the subjects. The experiences of the artists were varied and from the womb of

these experiences the new phrase 'City of Palaces' became current in no time. This phrase summed all expressions of city in one frame.

The word 'palaces' is available in the eighteenth century literature. But we are still uncertain as to when the phrase 'City of Palaces' came into vogue. One view, authored by J.P. Losty, dates back its origin to 1824 in which year, it is said, it was used as the title of a poem written by James Atkinson. The poem, writes Losty, 'sums up feelings expressed by many at this time.'<sup>1</sup> The poem cited by Losty is reproduced here to show how imperial flavour touched the minds of English writers who were mesmerized by the achievements of the English in the East. The mesmerism that had perhaps the first visible expression in Atkinson found its climax in Rudyard Kipling who imagined Calcutta as a 'chance-erected chance directed city', a city founded and developed in a state of absent-mindedness.

But we here behold  
 A prodigy of power, transcending all  
 The conquests, and the governments of old.  
 An Empire of the Sun, a gorgeous realm of gold.

For us in half a century, India blooms  
 The garden of Hesperides, and we  
 Placed in its porch, Calcutta, with its tombs  
 And dazzling splendors, towering peerlessly,  
 May tastes its sweets, yet bitters too there be  
 Under attractive seeming. Drink again  
 The frothy draught, and revel joyously;  
 From the gay round of pleasure, why refrain !  
 Thou'rt on the brink of death, luxuriate on thy bane.

I stood a wandering stranger at the *Ghaut*,  
 And, gazing round, beheld the pomp of spires  
 And palaces, to view like magic brought;  
 All glittering in the sun-beam . . . .

The first and third stanzas of this cited verse are suggestive. In these lines the poet describes a magnificent system of rule called 'A prodigy of power' which surpassed all conquests and all governances of the past and was enshrined in a sun-blessed empire which had grown into a territory of grandeur and gold. In such a kingdom a stranger stood at the riverbank on a flight of stairs. He cast his gaze all around. He saw the towers and the mansions. He bethought

himself that by magic lofty edifices suddenly appeared before him. They shone washed by the sun.

This was a viewer's appreciation of a city that was supposed to be built by the Westerners. "Atkinson goes on", Lofty reminds us, "to compare the glittering European city with the surrounding squalor of the Bengali town, a contrast which became ever more obvious as the 19<sup>th</sup> century progressed."<sup>2</sup> The glory that Calcutta presented to the viewer at the 'Ghaut' was manufactured in course of the six decades that intervened between the rule of Warren Hastings and Lord Bentinck. This was the time when British emigrants and other travellers from the West arrived at Calcutta in batches and they brought with them their own notions about the east, often fanciful and concocted. But on arrival they were amazed to see that London almost had its parallel in the east. This was their moment of discovery and as such also a moment of enchantment. Every description of the *City of Palaces* was thus wrapped in enchantment.<sup>3</sup>

Two perceptions made up this enchantment. One was the fascinated belief that the empire had epitomized the conquest of the orient. The other was a confidence that the superior heritage of the West could now be transplanted in the East. This superiority was revealed in the contrast between the aesthetics of the new city and the clumsy settlements of the natives in the background. As the nineteenth century progressed this contrast grew bold and the native settlements developed into inextricable fences around the white town. The latter right from the beginning of the eighteenth century had maintained its detached identity and had allowed the visitors from the West to contemplate the 'City of Palaces' as a city that had the introvert spirit of the West. Up till the time of Hastings the architectural aesthetics of the West and its introvert identity were not given a graphic form. The city figured in the graphics only from the time of Hastings and Cornwallis for that was the time it had in practice started substituting Murshidabad as the capital of Bengal. That was also the time when the achievement of 1757 had consolidated in the British mind and there was now the mood to regard the city as an absolute possession of the British. In 1757 Bengal had turned into a British protectorate. In the next decade with the construction of the new fort Calcutta was consolidated as the seat of power from where the imperial supremacy could radiate. The transfer of the major administrative institutions from Murshidabad took place in the following decade and Calcutta overshadowed Murshidabad as the capital of Bengal. The Supreme Court in Calcutta was established in the immediate aftermath of it and the city acquired its exclusive

jurisdiction free from the *de facto* control of the Nawabs. All these happened in quick succession and Calcutta developed its own ambience to grow as a City of Palaces. Warren Hastings had initiated the process. Lord Cornwallis supervised it. And finally Lord Wellesley took upon himself to preside over the making of the city into the Capital of the British possession in India.

This process of growth attracted quite a good number of artists, both professional and amateur, to Calcutta. While in Calcutta their first attraction was the white town but the native quarters of the town did not escape their notice.<sup>4</sup> It was their sketches from which Calcutta acquired its first graphic forms. Calcutta was thus artistically presented before it was administratively defined. Most of the artists who did it were inspired by the stories of the wealth of Bengal and its appropriation by the officials of the Company which were widely circulated in different countries of the West. Adventurers of the West were moved by a desire to tap the treasure of this El Dorado and made their fortune in the East. Their arrival synchronized with the time when constructions of marvellous mansions in Calcutta had begun. These constructions were one medium through which the ego of the rulers and the pride of the builders could manifest. Most of these buildings were constructed by military engineers and their assistants supported by varied artisans drawn from the general manpower resources of the country. Amateur planners and novice apprentices were also in their company. Up-to-date and sophisticated manuals of construction and articulated books of architecture were not available to them. They utilized whatever was ready at hand such as *Vitruvius Britannicus* or the *Book of Architecture* by James Gibb.<sup>5</sup> Those who built the modern structures in Calcutta possessed great knowledge and was guided by a refined taste and culture befitting the majesty of the Empire. They carried with them the Renaissance enlightenment and in their conception, therefore, they had imbibed the architectural heritage of ancient Rome and Greece. The classical architectural fashion of Europe and its aesthetic excellence thus found their expression in the city's constructions in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. This tendency to internalize the classical European forms and aesthetics in the city's architecture was not a feat of absentmindedness. It was an outcome of deep thinking and a deliberate planning. The values of the Western civilization that had links with its classical past were now sought to be instilled in the culture of a progressive empire. Admitting this Philip Davies writes: "These allusions to classical antiquity were deliberate an attempt to identify the expanding British presence in India with the civilizing values of the ancient world."<sup>6</sup> The architects who built structures and the artists who drew portraits of the city were in a sense instruments of history. They were the identified agents of the British Empire at the time of both its expansion and

consolidation. Daniels, Fraser, D'Oyly, Solvyns, Chinnery, Devies, Lear were some of those who made the city graphically represented in its variety. Apart from the edifices of the white town and the men and women of the ruling race these artists drew portraits of the native folk, their attires, their professional engagements, the bazaars, *ghats*, river-banks, their houses, dancing girls, *banians*, servants of the Company's officers, roads and occasionally the suburbs of the city. D'Oyly drew the suspension bridge on the Tolly's *Nullah*, at Alipur.<sup>7</sup> This was considered to be 'one of the most romantic' sketches of the city's environment of the time .

What was thus meant by *City of Palaces* in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century was essentially the white town of the city. The 'native quarters' or the 'black town' of the city did not get much reference in the graphic representation of contemporary Calcutta. As a result the detailed shades of ethnic Calcutta remained mostly unrepresented in British art forms about the orient.<sup>8</sup> One reason for this was that Calcutta did not assume its proper shape before the decade of 1790<sup>9</sup> and, therefore, the artists had no idea as to where they should station themselves properly. They were adventurers and they came here to try their luck. The sketches they drew about Calcutta were not supposed to fetch a handsome price in the native part of the city. Hence their attention had always been to keep their gaze fixed on the white town where they found their spirit congenially set. Until the 1780s no artist from abroad set his foot on Calcutta.<sup>10</sup> When in the early 1790s they started coming to the city they found the town bustling with activities mostly revolving around the name and activities of Warren Hastings. The age of Clive and the masked performance as rulers were over and now the enthusiasm of a direct take-over had been creating a sensation all around. In comparison to this the native town had little to attract and offer the visitors from abroad. Hence the 'black town' had never been included in the concept of the *City of Palaces*.

It is not true that the images of Calcutta were drawn only in the decade of the 1790s and afterwards. There were also sketches drawn before. But those were mostly sketches of an undeveloped town and were meant to satisfy the curiosity of the people in the West. Such curiosities were often fed by unfamiliar images of the East. Tangible portraits began to come out only in the decades following 1790.

Our early eighteenth century view of Calcutta was mostly derived from pictures drawn in Britain.

“Pictures were painted in Britain”, writes our commentator, “however, showing the chief settlements of the Company in India. A well-known series of oils by George Lambert and Samuel Scott, *circa* 1730, includes a view of Fort William from the river. Less familiar, is another impressive oil-painting by a contemporary of Lambert and Scott providing a view of the fort from the other direction, and including the church of St. Anne in the foreground. The large building that seems to occupy much of the fort, served as the Company’s offices as well as the governor’s official residence.”<sup>10</sup>

Thus the Ambience necessary for the growth of a City of Palaces was already taking shape by the third decade of the eighteenth century. That was the time when the *Nawabi* rule was still in power and the British fear of being overshadowed by it had been a serious setback for the growth of the town. In the midst of this Calcutta had developed its own genre as a noticeable town which in course of the time between Clive and Wellesley via Hastings had acquired its spectacular glamour as an imperial town bent on being the seat of a new power in India. At the school of indigenous painting called the *Kalighat School* had not developed at that time. The *Kalighat patuas* – local artists of the region who hung around Kalighat and drew on earthen plates on their own indigenous style – flourished only in the nineteenth century.<sup>11</sup>

Some images of Calcutta were available in the plates by the artists of Kalighat. These were later drawings and were much inferior to the glittering pieces of art left by the European artists. But they were drawn in their own innovative fashion with interesting images of the native life in Calcutta. The Kalighat paintings that give us visual images about the life of contemporary Calcutta were supplemented by the drawings left by some Indian artists – Zain al-Din, Karraya, Muhammad Amir – who had great skills in the Mughal school but made themselves susceptible to British techniques so as to get patronage from the rulers. The sketches of the Calcutta life which they left provide us with a very big source of information about Calcutta. Our other source about Calcutta consists of the accounts of the foreign travellers who visited the city about the same time.

One account which has served to be a very circulating source of information about the *City of Palaces* was Leopold Von Orlich’s narrative, *Travels in India* published in 1845. He saw the city from the river and wrote :

“Viewed from the Hooghly Calcutta has the appearance of a city of palaces. A row of large superb buildings extend from the princely residence of the Governor-General, along the Esplanade and produce a remarkable striking effect.”<sup>12</sup>

This description of Calcutta may be termed as one of the last specimens of eulogies showered on city during the formative phase of its growth. It was in the time of Clive that the pretension was hatched to make Calcutta an imperial city with power installed in it. The construction of the new fort was its great sign and a perfect symbol. Yet that was the time when the mercantile mentality of the Company still possessed its orientations. This mentality was shed when under Warren Hastings a ruler's pretension was imposed in the outlook of the Company. The city then began to acquire the glamour of institutions robbed mostly from Murshidabad. As Lord Wellesley arrived in Calcutta as Governor-General the pretension turned into an ambition which subsequent Governor sustained. Wellesley gave the dictum that an impending empire must be ruled not from the emporia of merchants but from a city that would have the shape of a capital. Lord Clive underlined the fact that the Company's presence must be stationed in power represented by a fort. Wellesley preached the view that the power was to be installed into a city that would burgeon under the combination of a port and a seat of power. By the time Calcutta blossomed into the period of Lord William Bentinck the city assumed an air of imperial majesty which the Company had successfully implanted on the entire subcontinent. It was in this imperial ambience that Lord Bentinck urged his administration to prevail upon the ruling and aristocratic families to visit Calcutta and enjoy their stay in the city for some time. He said :

“A twelve months' sojourn of such persons at our seat of government, viewing our arts and arms, the arrangement and magnificence of our buildings, the order and suitableness of our business establishments, our institutions for education, the ingenuity displayed in such machinery as has reached the east, and the ships carrying on our commerce, would do more to diffuse just notions of our power and our resources of the importance of our alliance than any measures we can pursue. By such means we should have a chance of becoming truly known throughout this great empire as the powerful people we in fact are.”

“Seeing all these things too with their own eyes, it would be reasonable to expect that visitors would return to their homes improved both in knowledge and feelings, and therefore, better qualified to discharge those duties for which providence has destined them.”<sup>13</sup>

This, one may say, represents the City of Palaces at its culmination. It was the city where power and aesthetics – ‘arts and arms’ – had been combined into solemn realization of imperial dreams. The city grew within a time-frame of six decades, from the 1770s to the 1830s. The mission of its making was complete

and Calcutta could now parade the message of a megalomaniac boast underlying the statement: 'powerful people we in fact are.' This came only one and a half decades after the fall of the Peshwa in 1818 when the last Indian resistance was beaten to the soil. The paradigm of supremacy had just begun to emerge. It was by now that Calcutta had completed its career as a *City of Palaces*. Almost all important edifices were built by the time Bentinck arrived here and the government henceforth undertook to patronize social reform so as to rescue an exhausted society from anarchy.

*The City of Palaces* was built at a time when the Indian part of the subcontinent did not show any sign of architectural flourish. Calcutta glittered in the background of this. A vast territory and a huge mass of mankind in the subcontinent were lost in the malaise of barrenness.

"The arts of life suffered", a historian writes, "in the general malaise. Architecture, like learning, could not thrive without patrons. Temples and Mosques gave place to forts. No great and few good buildings were erected after 1750. In Delhi the decline can be traced from the great mosque of Shahjahan through the decadent but still imposing tomb of Safdar Jang (1756) to the insubstantial and uninspired buildings of the nineteenth century. Only in Oudh was the building tradition maintained, and here confusion of styles and elaboration of repetitive detail betrayed confusion of mind and loss of inspiration."<sup>14</sup>

The last phase of architectural spree in Bengal was seen in Murshidabad during the time of Shujauddin, the extravagant son-in-law of Murshid Quli Khan. But that was haphazard, unplanned responses to challenges which Murshid Quli Khan ignored. The shift of Capital from Dakha to Murshidabad necessitated construction of new architectural structures that would satisfy the needs of administration. Murshid Quli Khan's frugality in this case provided the necessary capital on which all architectural projects could be anchored. Shujauddin who had little business in consolidating his regime which was already done by his father-in-law, was now out in a glee to provide the new capital with embellishments. He did in twelve years in Murshidabad what the English took not less than six decades to emulate in Calcutta.

"Fond of pomp and splendour, Shuja-ud-din", writes Jadunath Sarkar, "considered the buildings erected in the time of his predecessor, unsuitable for state-offices. So having demolished these, he caused some magnificent edifices to be constructed at Murshidabad, such as a Palace, an Arsenal, a high gateway, Revenue-court (*diwan-khana*), a Public Audience – Hall, a Private chamber (*Khilwat khana*), a *farman-bari*, and a Court of Exchequer (*Khalsa-*

*Kachari*). In the village of Dahapara, on the west bank of the river Bhagirathi Nazir Ahmad, an agent of Murshid Quli Jafar Khan, had left unfinished the building of a mosque in the compound of an extensive garden. After his execution, Shuja-ud-din completed the mosque in a superb style, and laid out the garden most beautifully with a large reservoir of water, running canals, artificial springs, flower-beds and fruit trees. He gave the garden the name of *Farahbag* or the Garden of Joy.”<sup>15</sup>

This was a dream speedily articulated into the aesthetics of architecture. This articulation had no mission save the promotion of the majesty of a new capital and that too in line with Islam. In case of Calcutta all articulations had different dreams, namely to transplant the values of the West in the East, to manifest in the form of fusion victors’ pride and rulers’ ego and finally to implant the morality of the Christian world on the rugged sensibilities of Indo-Islamic culture. *The City of Palaces* overshadowed the architectural remnants of this Indo-Islamic culture held out stubbornly in Murshidabad and ushered in a new culture in the ambience of which a western-type renaissance could flourish in Bengal.

When Murshidabad was bedecked with innovative architecture Calcutta had no opportunity to be in the race. The white Calcutta was cramped in the complex of the fort. Between 1698 and 1757 Calcutta had no great chance of special expansion. The fort was the centre where the city anchored itself.

“In the early eighteenth century”, Philip Davies observes, “most of the principal buildings were concentrated within the old Fort William, including the governor’s house, barracks, godowns, and the factors’ quarters, but gradually a few houses were built outside the walls. Many were crude, *cutcha* structures but some resembled English town houses with panelled doors, rectangular windows, and balustrated roofs, the only concession to the climate being the use of cane rather than glass in the windows.”<sup>16</sup>

This was the period of quiet consolidation for Calcutta.<sup>17</sup> In the midst of all conflicts with the Nawabs the city maintained its stature. The real change in its stature came in the immediate aftermath of the Palasi. After the recapture of the city of Robert Clive in early 1757 and more particularly after the defeat of the Nawab at the Palasi the white town developed its confidence to come out of the fort, its cramped shell, and sprawl around. Movements towards Chaowringhee in search of habitations began just about the same time although the tendency was to cover up the land between the fort and the creek that moved through Sutanati. Philp Davies analysing the situation observes :

“With the resumption of British control, a major change occurred in the form and pattern of the European settlement. A huge new fort was built, but unlike the old Fort William where the principal buildings were concentrated within the walls, *the city now developed outside beneath the protective ramparts of the most impressive European fortifications in the East.* The static form of development which characterized early European settlements gave way to a more dynamic form of dispersed settlement, one more conducive to unrestricted growth and expansion.”<sup>18</sup>

Territory was not available in and around the fort in Calcutta but the will to spread out burst as a new force in the settlement. In the immediate aftermath of the Palasi there was an acute shortage of accommodation in the white town. Quarters were needed for junior servants and officers of the Company. Since the Company’s resources were drawn for the construction of the new fort at Govindapur and since a wide territory was already appropriated for that purpose housing became an acute problem with the Company. Under stress, therefore, direction was given to the surveyor of Calcutta lands ‘to build Matt bunguloes on the long Row and Cottah Godowns in the factory’.<sup>19</sup> Two weeks before that the Fort William Council ordered the ‘Engineer Surveyor and Master Attendant’ of the Company to survey ‘the Company’s Buildings in Calcutta and estimate their present value.’<sup>20</sup> Twenty-two days later came the following report:<sup>21</sup>

“By Calcutta Buildings we mean at present the Old Fort and it’s interior Building which we estimate to have been worth at that Time.

Current Rupees	....	....	....	120,000
The Hospital	....	....	....	12,000
The stables	....	....	....	4,000
The Goal (Jail?)	....	....	....	7,000
Salt Petre Godowns	....	....	....	7,000
Cutcherry	....	....	....	1,500
Catwal (Kotwal)....	....	....	....	1,000
Bridgws Two	....	....	....	2,000
Chint’s Printer’s House	....	....	....	6,000
Elephant Ground	....	....	....	1,500
Magazine	....	....	....	6,925
Dockhead Slip and Buildings	....	....	....	7,000
New Cottah Godowns	....	....	....	25,000
New Works	....	....	....	21,099”

What is significant in the list is that there is no reference to any stately building which might be considered as an early symbol of the *City of Palaces*. Thus in the immediate aftermath of the battle of Palasi the European Calcutta was as shabby as the native part of it. The real beginning of white Calcutta started with the construction of the new fort which was inspired not so much by any plan of uplift of the settlement as by necessity driven by fear. Immediately after the battle of Palasi the English were scared that the French or any other European power might attack Calcutta for the city had no defence against onslaughts from outside. Clive from Murshidabad in 1757 made two recommendations to the President and Council at Fort William – that Calcutta was to be fortified immediately and ships of war should be kept ready for Calcutta after necessary overhaul.<sup>22</sup> The plan was therefore for a military construction and civic building necessities were subordinated under a pressing military situation. This held good for the entire period Clive and his immediate successors were in the helm of affairs in Calcutta. War ships were to be kept ready around Calcutta so that no attack could be organized from outside.<sup>23</sup> Being under security surveillance Calcutta had little scope to grow on civic lines. Immediately after the battle of Palasi efforts were made in right earnest to go for a new fort. An advertisement was made for huge building materials – ‘chunam, bricks, jaggaree’ etc.<sup>24</sup> What were most needed in Calcutta in the territories around the fort about this time were army barracks and residential quarters for the Company’s servants and officers. For this no broad civic constructions were planned. In later years necessity arose to provide office accommodation to the writers of the Company and as late as 1891 “all the buildings between the General Post Office and the Custom House were pulled down and the ground dug up for the purpose of laying the foundations of the new Government Offices, Dalhousie Square.”<sup>25</sup> Thus the heart of the later day Calcutta, the office hub of the city, was constructed two hundred years after Charnock’s midday halt in the city. In any case the first concern of the Company after the battle of Palasi was to find out an adequate site for the new fort. Govindapur was already selected for this purpose and its inhabitants were shifted to Simla areas of Sutanati.<sup>26</sup> This process of selection of site, acquiring territory, and shifting of population from the site of construction was the first major step in making the city an imperial town. Why was Govindapur selected as the site of the new fort? There were several reasons of which three were most important : first, the site was “the highest and consequently the most wholesome part near the Town . . . .” ; “Secondly it may be erected at such a Convenient Distance from the River that no Ships whatever will be able to Batten or even hurt the walls and yet be of no Detriment to the Expedition of Business as a canal may be brought from the River close to the Fort . . . .” ;

“Thirdly it will by being placed in the Centre of the town retain all the Advantages the old Fort had . . . .”;<sup>27</sup>

Thus secured the territory of Calcutta became free from township growth – a freedom born essentially of a military security of the post-Palasi era. Yet town-building was not yet a part of civic planning. Military needs still got upper hand over civic necessities. As the construction of the fort progressed it was found that civic construction in Calcutta was difficult. The problems caused by the shortage of labour and materials and by the dearth of masons were compounded by the machination of the buxey (the native paymaster) and the banian (the native supplier and the overseer) whom the officers of the Company could not take into confidence.<sup>28</sup> We do not know whether a cold war was going between the native agents engaged in the construction of the fort and the English supervisors of the work. At least the following excerpt from the letter of Captain Barker, May 16, 1757 leaves us with a suspicion in this regard.

“I found a great many Inconveniences arise from the Buxey’s People sending materials which were not necessary, and omitting those which were as for instance: when I wanted Coddaly’s (spade) I generally had a Quantity of Baskets sent in; and when I wanted Baskets they seldom neglected to send in Coddaly’s. By this means the necessary Work was retarded for two or three Days, and in order to avail this, I proposed as is customary in the Engineering Branch, to indent for such things as are requisite. . .”<sup>29</sup>

As the new fort came up the Company’s offices, residences and the workshops and factories – all needed to be rearranged. The white population of Calcutta was slowly increasing. With security ensured the white city could now be spared of a circumscribed living within the fort. The spirit to be sprawling was now impelled by some compelling necessities. The gun-powder factory of the Company caught fire and suffered a blast. The fire came from the thatched houses of the natives around. Instantly direction went that the natives should cover their thatches with mud.<sup>30</sup> The gun powder factory was to be reconstructed. For this purpose the garden of Pitambar seth was rented near Perin’s garden on the other side of the creek at Rupees 250 per annum.<sup>31</sup> Further private accommodations were purchased and converted into new purposes. Such conversions were rough and ready arrangements and served the immediate requirements of the Company. Here we have a short list of property and their conversion into utility purposes in 1759 :

<u>Purchased</u>	<u>Converted into</u>
Mr. Court's House	Offices of the Company and a room for holding consultation
Mr. Drake's House	Import Warehouse
Mr. Boddam's House	A Marine House
Mr. Gray's House	A Hospital All for Rs. 14000
Mr. Holwell's House purchased at 9,500 Arcot Rupees	A warehouse necessary for The Customs House. <sup>32</sup>
Intending to purchase Mr. Carvallo's House	to be converted into Lt. Col. Eyre Coote's residence A Gunpowder Factory <sup>33</sup>
A garden house which originally belonged to Mr. Frankland	To be converted into the Residence of the Governor on his retirement. <sup>34</sup>

In the years following the Palasi the Company was rearranging its own house. The construction of the fort, the resetting of offices and residential quarters and finally the renovating and relocating their factories were things that remained replete in the official literature of the time. In 1758 the construction of the fort was in full swing and a satisfactory progress was reported to Clive.<sup>35</sup> In the midst of distress security seemed to be the main goal before the rulers of the city. Once distress was hemmed within a proper security system complacency began to burgeon. The journey to compliance was facilitated by the sudden availability of two things: land necessary for the sprawling township and capital for building houses therein. Land was again made available by recourse to a double stratagem. First, whenever there was necessity thatched houses were ordered to be pulled down and eviction was compensated by distribution of land in Sutanati or in the area skirting that place. Secondly, the Company pounced upon lands of the fallen zamindars, merchants and rich men of the ancient regime.<sup>36</sup>

Thus when the families of Vishnudas Seth and Pitambar Seth fell into bad days they mortgaged their vast land and gardens to Omi Chand. Proposals were raised to purchase the gardens of the two families. Once garden measuring 66 *bighas* was valued at 25000 Arcot Rupees. Another garden covering 16 *bighas* was valued at 500 Arcot Rupees. This last one belonged to Pitambar Seth and the former one earmarked for 'Religious Uses' was held between Vishnudas

Seth's 2 sons and Petumber Seth in equal moiety.<sup>37</sup> It was feared that if the land was sold to the Company the entire money would be grabbed by Omichand, the mortgagee of the whole land and the distressed families would not benefit out of it. To avoid this the proposal was to take the bigger garden in a long lease at the rate of 230 Arcot Rupees per annum and the other of 16 *bighas* was to be purchased at 500 Arcot Rupees or rented at 50 Rupees per annum.<sup>38</sup>

While restructuring the city it was necessary to clear roads and open new thoroughfares for the town. Accordingly orders were given to pull down the buildings that obstructed streets.<sup>39</sup> Civic congestion was to be prevented so that it did not obstruct business. For this purpose three steps were adopted. First, Mr. Richard Becher was appointed Sea and Land Custom Master under an order dated March 3, 1758 and he was to supervise the incoming trade from the river. Secondly, Mr. Holwell's house contiguous to the creek<sup>40</sup> was purchased with the intention to convert it into a warehouse. Thirdly, new routes were charted for the reception of the boats that brought goods from the sea. The 'Old Ditch' – the creek – was to be cleared for this purpose. All goods brought by water carriages should be entered at that Custom House. After proper examination the Custom Master would permit the goods to be landed at any one of the three following *Ghats* as might be convenient for the proprietors.

The *Ghat* commonly called the Jackson's *ghat* northward of the fort.

The *Ghat* near the old fort at the centre.

The *Ghat* called the Minghabibi's *Ghat* south ward of the fort.<sup>41</sup>

When the city's commerce was thus geared to necessary restructuring what was needed most at the time was new construction for both civil and military purposes. New battalions were raised and they were to be housed. Writers of the Company were waiting for their new office accommodations. Officers and other employees of the Company had to be provided with shelters. The men of the Company had outlived their cramped existence within the fort. There was no longer any fear of the onslaught from the *Nawab*. The spirit to sprawl out in the open had possessed the officers of the Company. A vast space for accommodation was now required. The Company's settlement was suddenly in crisis because space for sprawling was not available. This was the time when the Company's officers started looking at moving beyond the precincts of the old fort-centric Calcutta. The challenge was at hand and to meet the situation the authorities directed the Surveyor of the Company's territory to build 'Slight

Appartments' which were barrack-like accommodations in a row that involved no brick work.<sup>42</sup> As the whole settlement was under renovation the church needed to be overhauled or rebuilt. The need of the time was clearly defined. Because of the 'unwholesomeness and dampness of the church' A Chapel was to be made by the Fort gate.' The existing church was hired from the Portuguese and it was now to be restored to them. A place of worship was a necessary community rallying point and at a time when because of its suddenly acquired sprawling character dissipation was creeping in the settlement the church was an essential service centre that could ensure the upkeep of the community spirit of the settlement. Calcutta was thus assuming its expansive form which was reared in contrast with the spirit and situation of a crumbling Murshidabad. Up till the 1760s Calcutta had no pretension for a general take off for being an imperial city but its spirit of independence and freedom from the scare of the Nawab provided a kind of momentum with which it could begin its new journey in future.

One constraint on town-building in the 1750s and 1760s was shortage of labour and skilled technicians – masons, carpenters and other artificers. In 1763 carpenters were imported from England.<sup>43</sup> Compulsive labour recruitments were taken recourse to.<sup>44</sup> New civil offices were in the need and the Company's administration was slowly responding to it. In 1764 the plan of a new council room was mooted<sup>45</sup> and ramshackle structures were ordered to be pulled down. There was certainly no scheme for constructing massive buildings at this time but small-scale civic constructions were undertaken. Bridges, culverts and water courses became parts of regular civic engineering in the city in the 1760s.<sup>46</sup> This was the time when the city was preparing itself for its transition to its higher stature designated as the *City of Palaces*. What was required now was the adjustment between the new and old constructions and this was done on a utility-benefit basis and was made through an expense-specific approach. This was likely in a situation of fiscal stringency when parsimony was advised in all sectors. When the old fort was substituted by the new one there was deliberation as to what would be done with the deserted structure. Quick came the answer that it was to be converted into a Custom House.<sup>47</sup> These were smaller renovations compared to the bigger later day constructions and in many cases they required brick works. Walls, pillars, terraces etc. in the oriental style were now coming into vogue in these quickly made commercial structures in the city.

The sixties and the seventies of the eighteenth century saw a boom in civil construction in the city complex of Sutanati, Kolkata and Govindapur. Mud-built huts, thatched roofs, wooden and bamboo structures with mat covers

were slowly giving place to brick constructions. This was because of three things. First, fire was rampant in the city in the middle of the eighteenth century. In many areas thatched huts were adjacent to Company's factories and once they caught fire the neighbourhood also suffered in the flames. There were repeated directions from the Company to remove straw huts or cover them with mud and discard wooden and bamboo structures. Secondly, because of mud huts the city was infested with rats, white ants and other formidable pests. They damaged the Company's papers and caused irreparable loss to the records of the government.

To prevent this damage mud huts were advised to be converted into *pucka* structures.<sup>48</sup> since there was no stone available anywhere in the immediate neighbourhood of Calcutta the invariable alternative to mud, straw and wood would be brick. Brick was also becoming scarce because burning of bricks was getting difficult owing to shortage of wood. All forests in the city and its neighbourhood were being systematically cleared. This was the period when a phase of private construction of civic buildings was unleashed. Between the Palasi and the enunciation of the Permanent Settlement such construction was booming in the city. There was a race between private constructors and the Company to get hold of bricklayers who ran away from the Company's service and flocked into the shelters of the private agents for higher wages and regular pay. For the procurement of bricklayers the Company had to depend upon its Indian agents, the *buxeyes*, the *banians*, the *gomastas* etc. whose loyalty was always a suspect in the Company's circles. Sometimes in 1766 on representation from the Company's engineer that public works suffered because of the want of bricklayers and carpenters the authorities in Calcutta decided to build up their necessary workforce through an instrument called registration. It was a brainchild of the Committee of Works<sup>49</sup> which presented seven-point recommendations<sup>50</sup> to the Council at Fort William.<sup>50</sup> These recommendations contained harsh measures bordering on regimentation and they were sought to be clamped on the workers and artisans of the country. Under statutory compulsions the entire workforce of the country was now to be registered in the Company's book and their wages were to be fixed by the Company to which there would be no competition from outside. As per the advice of the Committee of Works every individual worker and artificer was to register himself with the Company. His wage was to be fixed by a single master – the Company. He would have a certificate in the nature of a permit which would be his identity document. Under necessary condition penal measures in the form of wage-cut might be applied by the Company. This control of the Company was to be absolute and there would be no force from outside that could influence it.

The net result of this was to institute a monopolistic control over labour. This was catastrophic for this would depress the wage of workers and ban their mobility in the free market. Workers were to move with permits issued by the Company and they would be functioning under stringent service rules in which privilege of absenting as a leave from work was coerced as dereliction of duty in the form of non-attendance. This shows that from the labour point of view there was non-cooperation with the Company and naturally administrative force was used to coerce them into submission. This was when the new fort was coming up and there was a massive need of workers completely unavailable in a country ravaged by the Maratha invasions two decades ago.

We do not know whether these rules were enforced or not but the very advice that it needed to be implemented in view of situations sufficed enough to prove that the Company's affairs in Calcutta were really in distress. The Company had gone for renovation of old structures, erecting new buildings, purchasing new houses and acquiring new gardens to satisfy their need for space that had become pressing because of the expansion of commerce and arrival of new military forces in the city.<sup>51</sup> Vast business was at hand and vast money was required to follow it up. The authorities at home were sceptic about undertaking big projects and advised frugality in place of extravagance.<sup>52</sup> This had affected the manoeuvrability of their men on the spot. Those who were making the city here in Calcutta had the knowledge as to what would be the requisite accommodation and space they would go in for. Their pragmatic experience was not shared by the authorities at home. This had created problems for the construction of the city.

These were the immediate antecedents of the coming into existence of the *city of palaces*. A new season of activities was ushered in. The Home authorities wanted that all space requirements should be accommodated in the new fort. But many of the Company's old offices had become extremely dilapidated and could not go without renovation or wait till the time the construction of the fort was complete. Taking advantage of the crisis in accommodation some leading officers of the Company were trying to sell out their property to the Company.<sup>53</sup> Necessity sometimes developed because of the change in the emphasis of offices and also because of a change in the orientation of the official mind.

“The present Council room”, goes a record, “being from its situation greatly exposed to the heat of the Weather and from the Vicinity to the publick Office very ill calculated for conducting Business of the Board with that privacy which is often requisite.

It is agreed to build a new Council room at a Convenient Distance from the Offices. . .”<sup>54</sup>

When accommodation was short and buildings were sparse population kept on increasing with leaps and bounds. This was particularly true of the European population in the city. Here is a report:

“The Chaplains and Church Wardens send in a Letter representing that the Number of Inhabitants is so greatly increased<sup>55</sup> that there is not room in the Chappel for one half of them to attend Divine Service and therefore requesting we will direct the Church in the New Fort to be built with all Expedition.”<sup>56</sup>

As population rose there was a need for a bigger and better hospital. The old hospital was in ruins and a new hospital was to be built. Mr. Gray’s house was proposed to be acquired for this purpose but the civil architect Mr. Fortnom reported that this house “is so much out of repair that it will be necessary to rebuild the whole Virando (verandah) and great part of the House.”<sup>57</sup> There was now an effort in the European part of Calcutta to come out of the cramped existence of the old fort. Naturally the city was getting a facelift. The city architect was a little anxious to keep the city properly fenced so that it could remain clearly demarcated from the new extension of the city toward Chowringhee in the east. Hence his plan was to put up railings around Esplanade so as to keep the fort and the administrative area of the city in effective seclusion that was needed.<sup>58</sup> The mood of the city planners in Calcutta was possessed with an outstanding haste to finish up jobs very quickly. The buoyancy born out of the victory over the Nawab and the anxiety and optimism resulting from the acquisition of the *diwani* created a spirit of a new take off for which the authorities at home was not at all prepared. Their response to the city-planners’ demands in Calcutta was straight and curt. “we would have postpone,” they wrote to their men in Calcutta, “building the Chruch at your Presidency ‘till the accommodation for the Servants, barracks for the Soldiers and every other Building of consequence is completed.”<sup>59</sup>

The Court’s emphasis was not on embellishment but on business of consequence. They further added:

“We do not conceive the Propriety of erecting a new Council Room as the New Buildings in the Fort, where all the Company’s Business is to be carried on must soon be built. The Objection you make to the present Room for its being contiguous to the Publick Office appears very singular, as in Our

Opinion it should be in the centre of the Offices that recourse may be had to the Papers more readily.”<sup>60</sup>

The home authorities did not approve of the Company’s purchase of a new house for the *Nawab* and their direction had a tone of explicit disapproval. “. . . you give us Your Reasons for this extraordinary Expence . . . .” they wrote. Their mandate ran in the same prohibitive line : “(We) direct that you buy no more Houses for the Company as we suppose the Buildings in the New Fort will soon be ready.”<sup>61</sup> Did the authorities at home think that the new fort would be a sprawling city providing enough space where the total business activities of the Company, its soldiers and finally its administration, in a word the entire European settlement would be housed? The local administration was not as optimistic as their masters at home and looking beyond the squeezed existence in the old fort life they envisaged a sprawling life outside the fort. The leading Englishmen in the city were trying to renew their wealth by disposing off their dilapidated property and switch over to an exuberant lifestyle that resembled that of the ‘*Nabobs*’. They found the Company bubbling with new aspirations and rich with the new-found wealth gained both from spoliation and business as their ready customer. This private-public understanding of give-and-take was a new kind of activity in the city which caused enthusiasm for a change over to a new life for both the Company and its officers. This was where the Company’s superiors in London set their feet and disallowed the show of affluence by their subordinates in the east. Thus the executive will that could have presided over the growth of the city was split. The construction of magnificent edifices in the city was therefore postponed and the birth of a *City of Palaces* had to wait for two or three decades more.

In any case the first two decades after the battle of Palasi were marked by some hectic building activities in the city. This was the period when the transition from the old fort-based city in white Calcutta to the forth-coming *City of Palaces* was effected. This was done under restraints imposed from the Company’s guardian authority in England.<sup>62</sup> Yet it was the enthusiasm of the local authorities in Calcutta that propelled the city toward its destination of being next to London as the second city of the empire. In the sixties of the eighteenth century the preliminary part of this transformation of Calcutta into an imperial city was completed. But this completion came under strict supervision of authorities of the Company here and in London. This supervision was done with an eye of censure with two-fold outlooks. One was that all new projects were unnecessary exercise in extravagance and that there would be squandering of money if projects of renovation were indulged in. Since money

was required for new projects a new drive was undertaken to promote revenue in Calcutta. Thus economy and revenue-promotion were both combined into a new outlook for the creation of a new city. Side by side with this a very careful watch was kept over the activities of the Indian workmen and their native superintendents so that time and money were not wasted. This second outlook eventually became a functioning rigour with which the new fort and the new buildings in the city were constructed. Revenue promotion and strict vigilance on public works were combined and epitomized in a policy assessment by Lord Clive in 1767.

Clive's first contention in this policy assessment was an accusation that the Calcutta lands had been let out in under-value.<sup>63</sup> This was either through corruption on the part of the officers of the Company or utter negligence in revenue management. When the rent per *bigha* of land was normally 2 Rupees and 4 annas to 2 Rupees 12 Annas, the banians of the Company's gentlemen were allowed to hold their land at the rate of 8 to 12 annas per *bigha*. Clive wrote :

"From the best information I can get, I find that the Calcutta lands may in an short time be made capable of yielding to the Company between fourteen and fifteen lakhs of rupees per annum. Should that be the case, how reprehensible is the conduct of those gentlemen who so shamefully neglected the interest of their employers."<sup>64</sup>

This vigilance and censure exercised from the top created a milieu of stringency in which urbanization of Calcutta was sought to be effected. Clive's vituperation was directed against the way the new works were carried through. The top officers of the company had distrust for the native work-force employed in the construction of the fort and other works. In a tropical country 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. Clive was one who proved to be a very hard task-master. His censure was both for the Indian labour and its European management.

"I cannot avoid remonstrating most strenuously", wrote Clive, "against the present method of carrying on the new works, and indeed all public buildings; a method big with many evils, and which if continued, must bring destruction upon the Company, for I am convinced the fortifications will not, in the manner they been hitherto been conducted, be completely finished so long as any money remains in the treasury. *The people are in fact paid for idling away their time and standing still, instead of working; nor is it likely they will become assiduous, unless you can encourage them to work by contract.*"<sup>65</sup>

If some means be not speedily devised to make the business done adequate to the money paid, I think the enormous expense should be stopped and the fort remains in its present state.” (Italics ours).

In 1757-58 Clive was the original exponent for the construction of a new fort. In 1767 he was threatening to stop the work of construction if the work was not expedited. This shows the change in mood in a transforming time. The aftermath of the Palasi saw the English possessed with a fear that the French or any other European power would invade Calcutta. Hence Calcutta’s fortification was of immediate necessity. That necessity was gone in 1767. The *diwani* had been acquired. The 24 Parganas had been under direct possession of the Company as its *zamindari*. Clive’s so called *double government* had been instituted as the form of governance in the country. The fear of foreign invasion was gone. Now was the time to take care of the revenue management of the country. Two years later British Supervisors were sent to the districts to explore the hidden revenue wealth of the *zamindars*. The administration was now to be reshuffled. A new infrastructure was to be built now to accommodate changes in the administration. In a word a new age was blooming before the eyes of the Company. In this situation keeping oneself tied with recurring and old jobs did not sound meaningful to Clive. The one whose mind was possessed with the idea that resources which could have otherwise gone to the coffers of the Company were being wasted because of inefficient land management could not be the one who could endure prevarications and procrastination. On the one hand the administration in Calcutta was envisaging a thorough change in the administrative infrastructure of the city and on the other the higher authorities in the administration were betraying signs of impatience to bring out change in the right direction and through proper methods. The mood of a changing era was now manifest in the air.

In a situation where expectation and impatience go hand in hand rancour, misgivings and violence might erupt as a logical sequence to things. Clive was aware of that and was cautious not to spread any discontent in the settlement. Therefore, he left an explicit advice to his colleagues to keep the peace of the settlement intact. The mood of change and the aspirations for the new must not be vitiated by any violent distemper at any level of the administration.

“If disputes or dissensions should ever arise”, Clive declared, “let them terminate with the business at the Board; suffer them not to transpire throughout the Settlement, nor to appear anywhere but upon the books of your Consultations. Be assured that, by these means, much of the real dignity

of your stations will be preserved, and affairs of moment be conducted with coolness, candour and decorum.”<sup>66</sup>

The peace of the settlement was a necessary condition for the *City of Palaces* to come up. But the city in its intrinsic pattern of growth up till then was dragging on its old order. At the core of white town expectations of change were slowly creeping in but its fringe was still being laced by the creeping elements of the old order. Just at the time when Clive was urging his administration to spur their actions into effective channels the Collector General of the city, Mr. Russell, reported to the administration how the river-side of the town was being encroached with unwanted structures. Mr. Russell reported :

“ . . . that of late years the street by the river side to northward of the Custom House has been greatly encroached upon by a number of golahs (godowns), little straw huts and boutiques that have been indiscriminately reared.”

He further proposed “that no golahs whatever should be suffered to remain to the southward of this spot, which will relieve the inhabitants from the apprehensions of fire, and of their houses being entirely undermined by rats.” “The straw huts, everywhere dispersed throughout the white town,” the administration noted, “is another grievance, and an innovation of very late . . .”<sup>67</sup>

Mud huts were not unknown to the region around Calcutta. What has been considered as ‘an innovation of very late’ was their encroachment on the fringe of the white town. It was obvious that native habitation around Sutanati was swelling with time. The area around the Customs House contained the hub of the white city’s commerce where as the hub of the commerce of the black town was around the Burrabazar. The area defined as ‘northward of the Custom House’ was the buffer between these two commercial hubs of the city. Lanes and bye lanes were coming up in this region providing new passages to the river. Clusters of shops and crowds of men provided a barrier to the northward expansion of the white town if such expansion was ever possible at all. The Company’s concern about this time was revenue which would provide sinews of commerce and finance the renovations. A meagre humanity could not be a revenue-paying mankind. It was here that the growth of the native settlements near the Customs House had pinched the Company. Hoping for a new age the Company was looking for a new humanity to provide a new and effective man power base to its own take off into the new age. That age had

already set in. its resplendence was seen in the next decade with Hastings at the helm of affairs.

## Notes

1. J.P. Losty, *Calcutta City of Palaces A Survey of the City in the Days of the East India Company 1690-1858*, The British Library, Arnold Publishers, 1990, pp. 7-8.
2. Lofty, *op.cit.*, p.8
3. "It should be noted though that the Calcutta that glows in the prints and pictures of the European artists of this period is essentially the city of the sahibs". – Pratapaditya Pal ed., *Changing Visions, Lasting Images Calcutta through 300 years*, Marg Publications, 1990, p.x.
4. Baltazard Solvyns was the one artist who depicted the native part of Calcutta in a variety of portraits drawn between 1791 and 1804. For details on Solvyns see Robert L. Hardgrave, Jr. "A Portrait of Black Town Baltazard Solvyns in Calcutta 1791-1804" in Pratapaditya Pal ed. *op.cit.*
5. Philip Davies "Capital of the Raj" in Pratapaditya Pal, *op.cit.* pp. 2-3
6. Philip Davies, "Capital of the Raj in Pratapaditya Pal, *op.cit.* p. 3.
7. Pratapaditya Pal, *op.cit.* p.x
8. "While most visitors to the city are familiar with the British structures, very little literature is easily available about the diverse and rich ethnic heritage of the city." – Pratapaditya Pal, *op.cit.*, p X.
9. The boundaries of Calcutta was defined only in 1793
10. "Until the 1780s, no artists, either native or foreign, are known to have visited Job Charnock's midday halt." Pratapaditya Pal, *op.cit.*, p.x.
11. "Although they [the English] were responsible for her [for kali] from the site of the present Fort William to Kalighat, they did build the roads that made it safe for even the most timid of pilgrims to visit her shrine. Thereafter, apart from serving as the principal religious establishment of the city, the temple achieved the unique distinction of becoming the centre of a vigorous school of painting that is now widely known as the Kalighat School. The School flourished for a little over a century from about 1800 to the 1930s, and has earned a distinct place in the history of Indian art for its innovative technique and original subject matter. It provides us with vignettes of nineteenth-century Calcutta society in a lively and witty fashion unparalleled in the art of any other British settlement in India." Pratapaditya Pal, *op.cit.*, Introduction, p.xii.

12. "Leopold von Orlich's portrayal of the 'City of Palaces' in the 1840s was already a fairly conventional description of the capital of British India. This impression of civic splendour persisted until the late nineteenth century when darker perceptions began to prevail – Kipling's City of Dreadful Night". – Philip Davies 'Capital of the Raj' in Pratapaditya Pal, *op.cit.*, p. 1.
13. Lord William Bentinck's, *Correspondence*, p. 861, Minute dated 5 August 1833.
14. Percival Spear, *The Oxford History of India*, Third Edition, Part III, Oxford, the Clarendon Press (1958), Reprinted 1961, 576.
15. Sir Jadunath Sarkar ed. *The History of Bengal*, Vol. II Muslim Period 1200-1757, The University of Dacca, (1948), Second impression, 1972, pp. 424-425.
16. Philip Davies, "*Capital of the Raj*" in Pratapaditya Pal, *op.cit.*, pp 1-2.
17. Philip Davies considers it as the 'period of quiet consolidation and expansion', but truly speaking no expansion took place about this time. *Ibid.*
18. Philip Davies, *op.cit.*, p. 2
19. The report was dated October 4, 1759. C.R. Wilson, *Old Fort William in Bengal*, Vol. II, 1906, p. 151
20. The order was given on 20 September, 1759, *Ibid.*
21. Report of the Company's Buildings in Calcutta delivered by Messrs. Brohier, Plaisted and Sctt to Robert Clive dated Oct., 8, 1759, Wilson, *op.cit.* pp 151-152.
22. "It is with great concern that we understand no steps are yet taken towards fortifying Calcutta, We must beg leave to represent to you the absolute necessity of commencing the fortifications while every circumstance is so favourable for it, and though you may not immediately be able to fix on what plan to go, yet all materials should be collected, and necessary preparations made to execute without loss of time, whatever plan may be determined on." – Messrs. Clive, Watts and Macket from Murshidabad to the President and Council at Fort Willaim, Sept. 6, 1757, *Orme Collection, O.V. 170* cited in C.R. Wilson, *op.cit.*, p. 131. At the same time the "Select Committee ask the ships of war in need of Repairs may be sent to Calcutta as a Protection ." *Prods. of the Bengal Select Committee*, Fort William, Wednesday, a Sept. 14, 1757, Wilson, *op.cit.*, p. 131.
23. The President and Council in response to Clive's appeal noted above made the following decision: "Agreed we apply to admiral Pocock and Request him to order such of the ships expected out of Europe this

Season as are not necessitated to proceed to Bombay for Repairs to come down to Bengal for Refreshments which we are of opinion will be a great security to this Settlement." *Ibid.*

24. *Bengal Public Consultation*, Fort William, March 31, 1757
25. C.R. Wilson, *op.cit.* p.229. "As before in 1883, so now, the excavations revealed remains of the strangely fashioned walls of thin brickwork which had once formed part of the old fort" – *Ibid.*
26. For the construction of the new fort a *gunge* and a good number of native huts were removed. They were given compensation and land near 'Simileah' in Sutanati. *Bengal Public Consultation*, Fort William, Oct. 17, 1757, Range I, Vol. XXIX, cited in C.R. Wilson, *op.cit.*, p. 132.
27. C.R. Wilson, *op.cit.*, p. 115.
28. Colonel Scott who was in charge of the important work of fortifying Fort William died suddenly in 1757. This caused great setback for the construction. In his place Capt. John Brohier, the engineer at the coast of Coromandel was brought into Calcutta. But this did not solve the problem. The construction work was retarded by shortage of labour, materials and masons. For example there was acute shortage of spade and basket. When 40 to 50 masons were required only 17 or 18 were available and when a 'mestry' (mistry) under promise of payment gathered a substantial number of mason it was found that at the end of the month they were not paid their dues and they ran off. Thereafter it was found that more bricklayers were in service of a native gentleman's house than in the construction of the bastion of the fort. This was thought to be due to the machinations of the buxey and the banian who were supervising the construction of the fort – C.R. Wilson, *op.cit.*, p. 125.
29. Captain Brohier's letter to the Council at Fort William, May 16, 1757, Wilson, *op.cit.* pp. 122-124.
30. The Council at Fort William ordered that 'the proprietors of the Straw houses be directed to cover the Thatches with Mudd." C.R. Wilson, *op.cit.*, p. 155.
31. General letter from Bengal to the Court, Fort William, Dec. 29, 1757 Bengal Letters Received, 'Report to the Court of Buildings in 1759'. Wilson, *op.cit.* p. 154
32. Wilson, *op.cit.*, p. 146
33. Wilson, *op.cit.*, p. 149.
34. "There being no Garden House for the Refreshment of the Governor when the Lord of Business will permit him to retire . . . ." "Agreed we purchase the garden House formerly belonging to Mr. Frankland for that

- use at the price of 10,000 Arcot Rupees which we esteem is very well worth." Bengal Public Consultation, January 5, 1781, Wilson *op.cit.*, p. 160. On this Wilson provided the following editorial note: "the title deeds of the present Loreto Convent in Middleton Row show that it was the garden house of Mr. Vansittart. This extract shows that it belonged to Frankland before it came to Vansittart. It is shown in Orme's plan of the territory of Calcutta in 1757. The garden belonged to Mr. Frankland as early as 1749. The same house was afterwards occupied by Sir Elijah Impey and by Bishop Heber." Wilson, *op.cit.*, p. 160.
35. The report in 1758 was this: "Our Works are now Carried on with great vigour and dispatch, many Thousand people being at work." Select Committee at Fort William to Robert Clive and William Watts, January 28, 1758, *Bengal Select Committee Consultations*, Cited in C.R. Wilson, *op.cit.* p. 137.
  36. Captain Fenwick's garden was taken over by the Company for its 'New Works'. He was paid 1500 Arcot Rupees as compensation. Wilson, *op.cit.*, p. 157.
  37. C.R. Wilson, *op.cit.*, p. 152.
  38. Messrs. Brohier and Plaisted to the Council of Fort William Oct. 22, 1759, Wilson, *op.cit.*, pp. 152-53.
  39. Nov 1, 1759 : "orederd publick Notice be given that we have authorized Mr. Bartholomew Plaisted to pull down all Buildings that obstruct the Streets or Publick Roads." Wilson, *op.cit.*, p. 153.
  40. Wilson identified the creek as this: "the creek which ran up the line of Hasting's Street along the south side of the burying ground." Wilson, *op.cit.*, p. 154, note.
  41. Wilson, *op.cit.*, p. 154.
  42. "There being a very great Scarcity of houses in the Settlement, insufficient even for the present inhabitants, We have directed Mr. Bartholomew Plaisted our Surveyor to Build Slight Appartments on the Cottah Godowns and on the long row in the old ffactory for the reception of the Officers of Colonel Cootes battalion, and for the Reception of as many Writers as can conveniently, be accommodated there the expence of this Work will be but trifling as the apartments are to be cover'd with Thatch and there will be but very little brick Work." *Bengal Public Prodgs*, Fort William January 11, 14, 28 & 31, 1769 Range I, Vol. XXXII, cited in Wilson, *op.cit.*, pp 155-56.
  43. "It appearing by Mr. Amphlett's letter that European artificers are much wanted, we send youthree carpenters who have been well recommended to us, with Mr. Fortnom by the Ship Lord Clive, viz.,

Abraham Hathaway, Thomas Lyon., and John Faux. We have entertained them to serve the Company five years at the rate of ninety pounds a year, to commence on their arrival, which is to be in full for wages, diet money and all other allowances whatsoever". – Letter from the Court March 9, 1763, para 124.

44. In Dakha imprisoned *fakirs* 'were employed as coolies in the repair of the factory.' Reverend James Long, *Selections From Unpublished Records*, ed. by M.P. Saha Entry No. 690, p. 455.
45. "The present Council Room being from its situation greatly exposed to the heat of the weather and from its vicinity to the Public office very ill-calculated for conducting the business of the Board a new Council room at a convenient distance from the offices, and that it shall be done under the inspection of Mr. Fortnom, the Civil Architect." Long, *Selections*, Entry No. 764, p. 510.
46. The following is a chart of work undertaken in 1766.

Arcot Rupees

To take down the old hospital and clear away the rubbish, &c	500
To make 2 water courses in the Sambazar road	250
Do 2 bridges in the Dullendaw road	1000
Do 2 water courses in the Manickchurn road	250
Do 1 bridge in the Gopalnuggar road	1,500
Do 1 waster course in the Chitpore road	125
Do 1 new bridge at Bankabazar	2000
Do 2 new bridges in the Dumduma road	1,500
Do 2 new bridges in the Baraset Road	1,500 0 0
Do 3 new bridges in the Bellegutta road	1,800 0 0
Do 1 water course in the Chowringhee road	1250 0
Do 28 small bridges and water courses in Calcutta	1000 0 0

Prodgs. of the Council at Fort Willaim, 31 March, 1766 Long, *Ibid*, entry No. 846, pp. 576-77

47. "In consequence of the proposal made by the Committee in their Proceedings of the 4<sup>th</sup> April for converting the old Fort into a Custom House, Orders have already been given for the erecting of Pier there for the greater convenience of landing and shipping of merchandize conformably therefore to what the Committee now propose in prosecution of that plan. Ordered that the Civil Architect be directed to form a calculate of the expense of building Gateways from the points of the North-West and South-West Bastions of the Fort to prevent goods from being clandestinely taken away before they have been passed by

the Custom Master, and of a substantial shed to be run up the whole length of the curtain with brick pillars and a slight terrace covering for the conveniency of sucuring the goods in case of rain." Long, *Selections*, entry No. 852, p 580

48. *Pucka* structure meant structures made of bricks, stones, brick-dust, morars etc.
49. The Committee of Works consisted of five men: J. Fortnam, Charles Bentley, Claud Russell, Charles Floyer and Thomas French.
50. "The Engineer representing the great loss he is at for want of Bricklayers and Carpenters to carry on the public works, owing to their being employed by the inhabitants of its place, and upon enquiry it appearing to us, that of 800 or 1000 Bricklayers formerly in the Company's pay, all but 23 have been seduced into private employ by higher pay than is allowed by the Company; to prevent this growing evil we have resolved upon the following Regulations which we now lay before you for your approval and the sanction of your authority to have them put in execution.

1<sup>st</sup>, – That the price of labour in general shall be determined by what the Company pay, and no private person be suffered to exceed it, on pain of forfeiting the Company's protection.

2<sup>nd</sup>, -- That all Carpenters, Smiths, Bricklayers, and Artificers of every denomination residing within the limits of Calcutta be obliged to register themselves in an office to be appointed for that purpose, on or before the 15<sup>th</sup> of June.

3<sup>rd</sup>, -- That a certificate of the name, employment and the number each Artificer stands on the Register Book be delivered to each, and such as may be found after the appointed time at work without it a Certificate shall be severely punished, and obliges to work on the Fortifications for five days for half pay.

4<sup>th</sup>, -- That when the number in the place is thus ascertained no private person shall be suffered to employ any Artificers without special permission from the Committee, but must regularly indent for what they may have occasion for, and agreeable to those Indents an equitable distribution shall be made by the Committee of all that can possibly be spared from the work and a certificate given with them to prevent disputes.

5<sup>th</sup>, -- That these indents be made weekly and a number of the whole be taken monthly, when such as cannot produce their certificates shall be severely punished.

6<sup>th</sup> , - that such inhabitants as may be desirous of sending for Artificers from inland parts for their own service shall, when they arrive, send them with a Note to be registered and have a Certificate distinguishing them to be country ones, and specifying in whose service they are permitted to work.

7<sup>th</sup> , -- The Register with a Return of the weekly distribution of the Artificers in private employ to be laid before the Committee at every meeting for their inspection. And as these Regulations must greatly increase the business of the Clerk, we take the liberty to recommend that one or two assistants be appointed under him with a proper apartment for an office, and that he likewise be allowed a Sircar and a mate to keep a Register in Bengali, with a certain number of Peons with distinguishing badges, to be employed occasionally when a search is necessary.

Committee of Works  
The 14<sup>th</sup> may, 1766

J. Fortnam  
Chasss. Bentley  
Claud Russel  
Charles Floyer  
Thos. French"

Long, *Selections*, No. 853, pp. 580-582.

51. Here are some examples of the Company's hectic building activities of the time. The original building of the Sea Custom House had suffered due to the rains of 1759. The structure was already dilapidated and could not be repaired. Hence it was sold in the 'outcry' at Rupees 8051. In its place the house of Huzurimull 'which Collonel Clive possess'd' was rented 'as it answers in all respects for the Custom House.'

"The house purchased of Mr. Carvallo being the most Convenient for the Governor, Mr. Vansittart now possess it, and there being great Occasion for a House for the Commanding Officer of your Troops in Bengall, near the Fort and barracks we purchased that belonging to Mr. Holmes as being extremely proper for that purpose for Current rupees 20,000 the lowest price stipulated bythat Gentleman to his Attorneys in Bengall."

Later the Court of Directors objected to the acquiring of Vansittart's quarters with Company's money for which Vansittart paid the sum from his own pocket and purchased it himself.

Bridges at Perrings and Cow Cross and Straw Buildings were to be repaired as parts of the projects for making gun powder.

“There being a want of Godowns for the Company’s Export Goods, those in the Old Fort being taken up in accommodating the troops, and a large Godown being offer’d near the export Ware House” the Surveyor was ordered to take necessary action in the matter. He subsequently reported that the Godown he surveyed was fit for a warehouse and its rent was Rs. 30 a month.

“ . . . excepting this new Fort and the old Fort in the middle of the Town, We have no other Fortifications in bengall [Bengal] unless the old factor at Cossimbazar may be called so . . . ”

This was to be taken note of.

The following were necessary and urgently so:

The condition of the hospital was such as to fall any time and 600 maunds of chunam were required for repairing it.

“The Salt Peter Godown ought to be pull’d down and rebuilt.”

This proposal was negitived because saltpetre was stored in the godown only for 3 to 4 months. A godown might be hired ‘until we have proper buildings in the new Ffort.’

“Agreed till such Time as the Hospitals can be built in the New Fort, that we build one near to Surmans with fell trees and cover’d with straw . . . ”

*Report of Buildings in 1760* in C.R. Wilson, *op.cit.* pp. 161-168

What is writ large in the above statement is the acute financial stringency of the Company. While it was undertaking a drive to demolish all the thatched mud huts in the city it itself now was going for straw-built huts as its hospital.

52. The Court of Directors disapproved the expenses recently incurred or proposed to be incurred for purchasing and renting buildings in the city. Letter from the Court Feb. 19, 1762, *Bengal Despatches*, Vol. II,
53. Mr. Hastings’ house was agreed to be purchased at 16000 Arcot Rupees. *BPC*, March 31, 1764 cited in Wilson, *op.cit.*, p.172
54. *BPC* Oct. 15, 1764, Cited in Wilson, *op.cit.*, p 173.
55. In 1701 the total population in Calcutta was 10,000. In 1710 Captain Hamilton estimated it as 12,000. According to Holwell’s estimate in 1752 it wa 409,000. Finally in 1800 the Police Committee estimated it to be 5000,000. *Calcutta – A Quest for* : Project Organised by Network Research Bureau, Best Books, College Row, Calcutta 1988, p.9
56. *Ibid.*
57. Mr. Fortnom to the Council March 3, 1766, *BPC* March 31, 1766 Cited in Wilson, *op.cit.*, p. 76.

58. Mr. Fortnom asked for ‘a remittance to enable me to go on with the riling round the Old esplanade, as I have advanced near 5000 Rupees on this work . . .” *Ibid.* The Fort William Council was a little hesitant to sanction any sum of money for any of the above-mentioned project. Hence the resolution went thus: “Agreed before we come to any Resolution thereon, that he (the civil architect Mr. Fortnon) be directed to deliver into the Board an estimate of the expense of each Work to be undertaken.” *Ibid.* Wilson, p. 176.
59. Letter from the Court to Bengal, London Dec. 24, 1765, *Bengal Despatches*, Vol. VIII, cited in Wilson, *op.cit.*, p 175.
60. *Ibid.*
61. *Ibid.*
62. How effective the advice of restraint from the guardian authority in England can be understood from some of the decisions taken by the Company in March, 1766. Here are they:  
 “Agreed that the Companys Old Hospital the small House for the Assistant Surgeon and the Houses lately occupied by Mr. Gray be sold.”  
 “ the Board defers passing orders on the other parts of Mr. Fortnom’s Letter until the Engineer can prepare and deliver in the Plan of the Town and of the Drainshemay think necessary to be made to keep it dry and passable at all times of the year . . .”  
*BPC* Monday, march 31, 1766, Range I, Vol. XXXI, Wilson, *op.cit.*, p.177  
 “Agreed that the Old Council House be appropriated to the use of the military Pay Master General where the Office of his Employ is always to be kept in future.” *BPC*, June 2, 1766, Wilson *op.cit.*, p.180  
 “Ordered that the Appartments lately occupied by the Fort Major be appropriated to the use of the Custom Master.” *Ibid.*  
 “Ordered also that the Corner Rooms in the long Row to the Eastward (be appropriated) to the use of the Surgeons.” *Ibid.*
63. “With regard to the Company’s own, or Calcutta lands, I have but too much reason to believe that great injustice has been done to the Company in the collection of those revenues. The select Committee had in consideration a thorough enquiry into their nature and value, but could not obtain the necessary insight, nor detect the frauds committed, until the expiration of the terms for which the lands were rented to the late farmers, which was on the 1<sup>st</sup> November last. These lands now come under the department of the Board, and your utmost endeavours will not, I trust, be wanting to ascertain their real value. If the gentlemen who formerly parcelled out the pergunnahs amongst themselves did not

acquire large advantages, it is certain that the servants acting under them did; for I am well informed that the banians of those gentlemen, as well as others, hold lands at the rate of 8 to 12 annas per beegah, while other tenants pay from Rs. 2-4 to 2-12." Clive on Calcutta lands; Public Works; Harmony: Proceedings of the Council at Fort William, January 19, 1767. Long, *Selections*, Entry No. 941, pp 646-647.

64.*Ibid.*

65.*Ibid.*

66.*Ibid.*

67. Prods. of the Council at fort William, April 27, 1767, Long, *Selections*, entry No. 945, p.659.

Appendix to Chapter 5 *The City of Palaces*

The following were, A.K. Ray says, some important buildings which may be called the leaders in civil construction in the city of Calcutta built in the colonial period.

Excerpts from A.K. Ray, *A Short History of Calcutta Town and Suburbs, Census of India, 1901, Vol. VII, Part I, Chapter XI, Localities and Buildings.*

The most important modern buildings of the town are : (1) The High Court with its lofty spires, erected in 1872; (2) the Writers' Buildings with equally high spires, erected in 1879 – 84 ; (3) the Imperial Secretariat and Treasury Buildings 1877-82; (4) the new Customs House on the site of the old, 1899; (5) the General Post Office with its oval dome; (6) the Port Commissioners' Building, 1871; (7) St. Paul's Cathedral; (8) St. James's Church; (9) the Bank of Bengal, 1809; (10) the Mint, 1832; (11) the various mercantile offices and commercial buildings in Clive Street, Clive Row, Strand Road, Old Court House Street and Chowringhee, amongst which Gillander House, belonging to the Maharajah of Burdwan, the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank, Hamilton House, Mathewson's, the Great Eastern Hotel, the Grand Hotel, and the Army and Navy Stores, besides the National Bank of India, are the most notable; (12) the Asiatic Museum including the Art Gallery; (13) the General Hospital, 1895-98; (14) the Medical College Hospital and its adjacent branches, inclusive of the Eden Hospital built in 1882, the Ezra Hospital, the Eye Infirmary, the Students' Boarding House; (15) the Lady Dufferin Hospital, 1897; (16) the Senate House; (17) the old Hindu School and the Sanskrit College and the Presidency College, 1854; (18) the Government Telegraph office ; (19) the Royal Insurance Company's House; (20) the East Indian Railway Company's offices at Fairlie Place, and (21) the Calcutta Public Library.

Of the house owned by native Indians, the following are noteworthy, besides those already mentioned :-

1. The Prasad, and the Castle belonging to Maharaja Sir Jotindra Mohan Tagore at Pathuriaghata;
2. Maharaja Doorga Churn Laha's house in Cornwallis Street, formerly owned by the Palit family, of which Messers T. Palit and L. Palit, father and son of the High Court Bar and Indian Civil Service respectively, are the best-known representatives;
3. Raja Rajendra Mullick's palace at Chorebagan;
4. The Dighapatiya Raja's house in Circular Road;

5. Raj Chandra Dass's house in Jaunbazar Street, known as the Rani Rashmony's house;
6. Rajah Digambar Mitter's house at Jhamapooker;
7. The temple of Pareshnath at Gouriberh;
8. The late Dwarka Nath Tagore's house at Jorasanko;
9. Rajah Sreekissen Mullick's house at Jorasanko where the Normal School used formerly to be located;
10. Ram Mohan Roy's house in Amherst Street;
11. The Woodlands, the residence of the Maharaja of Kuch Bihar at Alipore;
12. The Burdwan Maharaja's house in the same locality;
13. The Tollygunj Nawab's house; and
14. The late Mirza Mehendi's house on the Lower Chitpore Road.

## CHAPTER 6

History, Heritage and Identity  
The City in Decline

The rise of Calcutta took place in the first century of the British rule in India. But before the second century could get into a start Calcutta began to decline. In 1912 capital was shifted from Calcutta to Delhi – just one hundred and fifty five years after the battle of Palasi. The fort-centric life of the English ended in the year of Palasi in 1757 and the white town sprang up within a few years after that. With the march of time the city flourished and along with it three outstanding events took place. The first was a new cultural renaissance which burst into life with the age of reason enunciated by Rammohan Ray. This eventually culminated in what is called the Bengal Renaissance. This in its turn gave rise to a civil society with public opinion as the major social force, a metropolitan Bengali mind which as time went on gathered from the West the spirit of nationalism and a competent middle class that appeared with the progress of the University age. The second event was the crushing down of the industrial revolution that was burgeoning around Budge Budge near Calcutta. The third event was the collapse of the Bengali capitalist class then available in Calcutta which took place as a sequel to the collapse of the Union Bank in 1848. Henceforth Calcutta lost its economic sovereignty and became a satellite of the British Empire. The decline of the city involved its identity, heritage and culture. This fall of the composite existence of the city we now proceed to analyse.

All modern literature on Calcutta is concerned with one thing: its decline. A host of scholars from historians to sociologists and economists, and even literary persons, are concerned with the decline of the city. The debate on its decline is mostly a post-colonial phenomenon although its early beginning may be traced to a good number of pieces of colonial literature. Between these two polar points, the emergence and the decline of the city, however, there is a third aspect, a question, currently relevant : if it is a decline, then why had it set in so early? Was it because Calcutta didn't grow the way it should have grown? Was it because there were flaws in the nature and structure of its growth so that it had to experience a decline early in comparison with the other contemporary cities of the world ?

These are the three basic questions with regard to Calcutta which have concerned the historians of present generations here in India and elsewhere. The process of urbanization is an aspect which relates to any of these basic questions and thus does not merit a separate study in our context.

Out of these three questions I shall take up the second and third questions first. How did Calcutta figure in the days under the Empire ? Was its growth really stunted ? Was it the fact that it did not go through a right process of growth so that it had to experience an early decline? These questions will provide the context in which the city will present itself manifesting many of its other historical aspects noted above in a comprehensive way.

A couple of years ago, I wrote a book titled *A Stagnating City: Calcutta in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century*. The title itself suggests that its author is prone to believe that right from the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Calcutta had been stagnating. My question then was simple: why was Calcutta stagnating? Was it because of the failures of the masters themselves to provide a political will and an adequate financial support with a proper urban planning? Or was it because of some kind of institutional insufficiency that was commensurate with any fault in the Islamic heritage of town-planning? My answer is very clear. Both these factors were responsible for its awkward growth. An acute shortage of capital bottled up the growth of the city.

Why do we talk of capital? Because at no time in the history of the city was capital available in plenty for a well-defined policy of urbanization. The city and its periphery suffered. Capital was not there because the government was somewhat miserly – miserly because it had financial constraints, because it was perpetually under pressure from the home government to maintain frugality, also because it had no mind to divert any part of territorial revenue from commerce to the wellbeing of the city and finally because a substantial part of territorial wealth of the country was appropriated by the first generation of Company's administrators in Calcutta and elsewhere who getting fat with oriental wealth returned to England as *Nabobs*. Early spoliation of the country's wealth led to shortage of public capital in the city. The result was that neither the some government nor the city fathers in Calcutta did allow funds to be liberally invested in the making of the city. It diverted its capital to commerce – the main pursuit of a commercial company of the West in its Asiatic existence. The earliest meaningful beginning in urbanization in the city was made with capital derived from lottery – the bounty the people, both Europeans and the natives, displayed as a mark of contrast vis-à-vis the parsimony of the government.

Given this it follows that Calcutta did not have a very powerful, adequately competent Bengali merchant community who could infuse capital into the city for the growth of the basic infrastructure of the town. This is one setback which beset its growth and eventually hastened its stagnation. This is,

however, only one factor among many that had acted as a brake on its becoming an imperial city comparable to London.

There were Bengali merchants – the Seths and Basaks – who had potentialities for growth. But they had exhausted themselves in the eighteenth century – long before the battle of Palasi. There were *banians*, a powerful capitalist class, who wasted themselves by providing credit and capital to the English and thus could not fulfil their entrepreneurial potentialities in schemes of sovereign uplift. *The Cambridge Economic History of India, Volume II* informs us that they were operative till the middle of the nineteenth century after which they disappeared from all economic activities of the country. If we look at the growth of the cities in the west, we see that the merchant communities there played a very important role between the tenth and twelfth centuries when cities were breaking out of the manorial system and coming out of the fetters of feudalism. The merchants clustered themselves in a city; they put up their own charter of demands to the lords and showed all signs of independence; they had their own programmes of promoting their own city into a very powerful organism. That wasn't there so far as Calcutta was concerned. There was no body of merchants, no group of industrialists and no trading communities that could stand up and act as the undertakers of the city. The government consisted of traders and they had little interest in indulging in grand schemes of urban promotions. For example in the immediate aftermath of the Palasi the Company's administration here invested their capital in building up a fort instead of promoting drainage of the city and the construction of roads. For this the city had to wait till the time of Lord Wellesley when with the turn of the nineteenth century rudiments of urban efforts were undertaken mostly with the money raised from the people through lotteries.

Calcutta in the eighteenth century suffered two major disasters from which it was difficult to recover. One was the triple catastrophe struck in one sudden moment – a cyclone, a flood and an earthquake – all taking place together on 11 October, 1737. Nineteen years later visited the second vicissitude namely the capture of the city by Sirajuddaullah who razed to ground all available structures of the white town. Thus in two decades' time Calcutta was devastated twice and there was no effort to rebuild the city on any systematic urban planning. Up to the time of Sirajuddaullah's invasion the white town had not grown up properly. Every structure of the white town then was fort-centric and the Company's officers and other employees lived a clustered life in and around the fort. Sirajuddaullah destroyed the fort and all structures adjunct to it. The black town was spared. But the disasters of 1737 led to a

massive destruction of all quarters of the city including the thatched huts and cottages inside the black town. Life there limped back to normal only when because of the Maratha invasions in the 1740s a huge population from the neighbouring districts poured into the city. But the white town had no incentive for growth and did not show much sign of recovery till such time as the Company's administration was completely saddled in power – that is the sixties and the seventies of the eighteenth century when the *Nawabi* administration had set into decline. It bursts into life only in the time of Hastings when the three settlements were bracketed as one territorial possession of the Company in India with the centre of its leadership situated in Calcutta. Now Calcutta could comfortably set aside its circumscribed status as a local station of a commercial factory and the seat of a small *talukdar* or *zamindar* and began to prepare its early rudiments as an imperial town. The battles of Palasi and Buxar had truly set Calcutta in a new career with global perspectives – an identity which no other Indian town could enjoy.

In the aftermath of the battle of Palasi the English settlers, the men of the Company and others, began to come out of their clustered shelters in the fort. Losty informs us that it was only then that the English for the first time began to experience an existence outside the cramped life within the fort. There they began to spread out in the sprawling territory reaching as far as the present Chowringhee in the east. This is how the civil line of the whites in Calcutta was born. The true nucleus of the city of palaces began to take shape now. During the two decades since the battle of Palasi a period of internal adjustment for the Company began. Old offices, go-downs, army barracks, officers' residences, doctors' apartments, gun-powder factories, the hospital (the only hospital which was inside the fort then), the council rooms, sailors' lounges, merchants' corners – all were renovated, rearranged, readjusted. This was the first phase of transition from the Mughal to the colonial rule. Calcutta presided over this mammoth transition in history. Bengal was becoming a protectorate under the leadership of Calcutta. Some of the important offices were transferred from Murshidabad to Calcutta. The Governor of Calcutta and after 1773 the Governor General of the British possessions in India, was becoming the symbol of highest authority superseding those of Bombay and Madras. It was stationed in Calcutta. With the rise of this new authority of the city the diplomatic protocol also changed. The English governor and his council in Calcutta had no need to go to Murshidabad and wait there on the Nawab. The reverse now happened. The Nawab sent his agents to meet the governor in Calcutta. It was the period of the transformation of political power. The Bengali collaborators adjusted and allied themselves with this transformation. Trade and commerce for the Bengalis now slipped into a secondary position.

There was seldom any chance for a merchant community to grow in this condition of political up-gradation of the city. The mercantile dimension of the city was now subordinate to its political role. With the institutional backing from the office of the Governor General now firmly seated in Calcutta, with the undisputed judicial supremacy and jurisdictional support provided by the Supreme Court situated in the city and finally with the confidence born of a military force stationed at the fort, Calcutta was more prone to grow politically than in any of its mercantile form and dimension. It was a blooming entity with the resplendence of power. Within this frame of development the Bengalis had no scope for growth as a mercantile community. The mercantile potentiality it had in the past was now a part of history. The genre of merchant capitalism acquired through collaboration as *banians* was a recent acquisition with very little of free outlets. It had a collaborative role aspiring to be sovereign but it had no ultimate fulfilment of its own cause and reached no maturity at the end.

Why was this and how did this happen is clear to understand. Calcutta was a dependent city – dependent on the Empire. Till the middle of the nineteenth century – precisely till the fall of the Union Bank Calcutta in 1848 – it had some elements of a sovereign growth. Men like Ram Dulal Dey (1752-1825) Dwarkanath Tagore, Motilal Seal (1794-1846) and others controlled the economics of trade and commerce in the city acted as the source of finance for production. The indigo production subsisted entirely on native capital from the city. An industrial revolution, Blair Kling says, seemed to be offing around the city. All these were crushed and stifled by the middle of the nineteenth century. The native masters of Bengal finance fell to the dust when the Union Bank collapsed. Blair Kling says that when the burgeoning industrial revolution around Calcutta was crushed the city lost the sovereignty of its economy and became a satellite of the Empire. The native merchants and capitalists withdrew from the economy and Calcutta became a field for British investment and enterprise. It was their sole field without any competition from the native entrepreneurs of business.

From the above it is clear that the growth of Calcutta suffered because the city could not produce an indigenous Bengali merchant community who could take a lead over the colonial masters. This was a point worthy of note. Whoever came here, traded in this city, built up capital and siphoned it to some other place, so much so that there wasn't enough capital, enough economic concern, and enough economic means for the city itself.

The result was that throughout the course of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Calcutta had a very ramshackle growth. A shabby state of affairs continued until 1803 when Lord Wellesley's opinion about Calcutta was recorded in a memorable minute.

The mind of the Governor General that carried the majesty of a burgeoning empire was infused with the idea that the British territory in India could not be ruled from an emporium of a company. It must have a city, a seat of power, which will commensurate with the changed status of the English. Unless there was an imperial seat of power, there was no meaning in saying that the British Empire had outgrown its scattered and disjointed possessions in India. Wellesley, therefore, said that the city had to be properly dressed. Its drainage had to be improved, roads had to be made and its infrastructure had to be built. So this is for the first time that political will was infused into the making of the city itself. Prior to that, neither Hastings nor Clive nor Cornwallis did this. It was Lord Wellesley who for the first time took interest for the city. One may say that it was from the beginning of the nineteenth century, from the time of Lord Wellesley, that the city found itself in the presentable role that could compare itself to that of London.

Keeping this in mind, it will be proper to discuss how the absence of a merchant community in Calcutta made it impossible for the city to grow.

It is a commonplace in historical observation that the Bengalis are not a business minded community. Sushil Choudhury who wrote the business history of Bengal for the 17<sup>th</sup> & early 18<sup>th</sup> century did not find any Bengali name that could be compared to Kehmchand & Chintaman, Chaturmull or Mathuradas, or as a matter of fact any other merchant from Gujarat or Rajasthan present in Bengal. He mentioned one Gubal Ray who Choudhury says, was mainly a *saraf* or moneychanger. This was a time when Calcutta did not emerge as a prominent place of business activities. Even Murshidabad was not in the offing. The supremacy of Dhaka as the capital and a place of business in Eastern India was still a reigning phenomenon. The European East India Companies had not yet built up their mastery in business enterprise. The 17<sup>th</sup> & early 18<sup>th</sup> century world in Bengal was essentially a Mughal where the profession of a soldier was still adjudged a more dignified profession than that of a merchant for whom profit remains the primary motive and capital the guardian of enterprise.

The Company's council in Calcutta in the late 17<sup>th</sup> & early 18<sup>th</sup> centuries dreaded not the Bengali merchants but the business-cordon maintained by the Armenian and the power and administrative-cordon imposed by the *Nawabs* of Bengal. The Armenians resided in Calcutta much before the English had stepped in there. Those who deny the colonial beginning of Calcutta are prone to believe that it was the Armenians who gave an early start to the city. This assertion is mostly conjectural. The Calcutta we see to-day grew out of the need of an Empire configured by industrial revolution and global trade. In this sense the city was essentially a colonial construct just the way many other

cities of the world were the outcome of the spread of the British Empire over four continents across the world. If we can borrow a phrase from Fisher's history of Europe we can say that London grew while Prussia was manufactured. Calcutta did not grow the way London grew and it is our belief that Calcutta as a colonial city was manufactured by the English although it had roots in the past. In saying this we do not make Calcutta's origins synonymous with Job Charnock's setting his feet here. We only say that Calcutta's origin is shrouded in mystery and the traceable part of its beginning can be pre-colonial only in a rudimentary way. Its assuming the formation of an urbanized centre of habitation was shaped by the geo-politics of the early colonial era when Western capitalism was coming in the garb of an Empire and the indigenous system of rule, its banking, its structure of power, its system of politics, its administrative controls and its military man-power – all were giving way to change. Thus from all our research for the last twenty years, we cannot go beyond the point that this city of Calcutta as a source of history, as history itself, is totally associated with the history of the empire. This was more so because the Empire of the Company originated from within the Mughal constitution, first as a *talukdar* of the three villages, then as the *zamindar* [of the Twenty Four *Parganas*] and finally as the *diwan* [of the whole province] so much so that even their citadel of power, this city, was metamorphosed from a simple *talukdar* grant at the time of the purchase of three villages in 1698 to a site of a conquered base in the beginning of 1757. This metamorphosis was not a slow transitional process spanning over time but a quick and unanticipated event born of a daring feat of Clive and the Company.

Trade and territory, a garrison and a port and entitlement to power and revenue guaranteed by Mughal constitution were really the source from which the history of the city arose. Trade was the artery of money and money was the base of power. Power was applied in jurisdiction and jurisdiction was protected by law institutionalized in manifest from the Mayor's Court to the Supreme Court, the most protective institution built in the regime of Hastings, the first British Governor General in India. In between these two there was a third agency that claimed jurisdiction and power, namely the office of the Governor General and the Council he presided upon.

Law emanating from the Governor General in Council was enforced by the application of might accumulated through stages, particularly through successive victories – first against Siraj-ud-daullah at the beginning of 1757, the second at the field of Palasi and the third one, the really decisive one, at the field of Buxar in 1764. The last battle was a landmark because with it was destroyed the army that guarded the eastern flank of the Mughal Empire. The

city was the outcome of these events which defined its status as the base of a military power that left no scope for competition and challenge. From this base of power in future army was sent to keep the neighbourhood into submission so that supremacy could gradually be defined territorially. This supremacy of Calcutta was eventually translated into policies of expansion under various nomenclatures, graduating from a *subsidiary alliance* to a *doctrine of lapse*.

Thus in the middle of the nineteenth century four things combined to create the world of colonial Calcutta. It became the base of the military supremacy of the English. As this base was created its periphery was stripped of its potentialities of an industrial revolution. Throughout the second half of the eighteenth century the countryside of Bengal was disarmed. *Zamindars* were stripped of their armed retinues so that only Calcutta could stay as the source of military power. Military supremacy and political mastery were combined to build up the Company's command over the economy of the country. As this happened, a new situation synchronized with it. The indigenous capital of Bengal collapsed in the middle of the nineteenth century. In the vacuum that was created because of this the British capital penetrated. Three things now combined at the end of the first century of British rule – military supremacy, political mastery and a complete command over the economy. The last vestige of economic independence of the native capital was lost. Calcutta now became the gate through which western capitalism entered the country in full blast.

To make the city the eastern seat of western capitalism the English did two things at the outset. They allied themselves with the disaffected elements of power in the *Nawabi* administration and helped grow a class of comprador merchants, the *banians*, who functioned as the early collaborators of a new Empire. An alliance with the break-away elements at the core of power helped to build their links with the controllers of the army like Mir Jafar on the one hand and the regulators of the finances of the state, like the Jagat Seths on the other. The *banians* provided capital to English traders and offered to act as a source of collaborative man-power who helped to open the source of the interior wealth of the country. Calcutta thus became the base for a new conjunction between the power elite of the vanishing age and the money elite of the new times. As time went on the old power elite dwindled and its ultimate demise was signified by the fall of the twin pillars of the old order, Maharaja Nanda Kumar and Muhammad Reza Khan. This happened during the rule of the first Governor General in India, Warren Hastings. In the regime thus instituted by Hastings new men flourished with the capital at their command earned from entirely from collaboration. It was these men who carried collaboration across nineteenth century and created conditions in which a

Rammohan Roy and a Dwarkanath Tagore could flourish. With the coming of the Asiatic Society in 1784 the base of a new culture was created. This culture was taken to culmination by Macaulay who in his minutes envisaged the consolidation of the new men who would be Indian in complexion but British in culture and etiquette. The city was thus graced with two things – new men in culture and a new age of collaboration. Three institutions symbolized the transformation of a new era – the Asiatic Society, the Hindu College and the University of Calcutta. The history of Bengal was thus created anew out of the beaten track of chaos and degeneration of the Mughal Empire. Within the precincts of this new history of the city in particular and the country at large rebellions and revolts did not fit in. Hence it was natural that Bengal would opt out of civil uprisings of 1857.

All these were possible because the Company was the most dominant body of merchants in the country. It brought capital from outside and the entire economy of the country in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries depended on the bullion brought by the European Companies. With this bullion money was minted and in a country where economy was intrinsically capital-short and the metallic reserve was low the capital imported by the English and other Europeans seemed to be perennially the only source from which the economy of Bengal derived its sustenance. During the time of Murshid Quli Khan, Jadunath Sarkar informs us, a tribute of one crore and forty lakhs of Rupees was sent to Delhi every year in an average and the bulk of this tribute was sent in gold and silver coins so that the volume of this metallic money-media sank to the nadir and the country had to wait for the arrival of the next ship of the Europeans which brought a new consignment of bullion necessary for minting money. Till such time as this markets remained dry and the economic activities of the country almost came to a standstill because of the lack of capital. From the seventeenth century the Europeans all over India brought not only bullion but also a huge supply of non-metallic media of money – *cowries*. No other merchant or the community of merchants in the country could perform this task of keeping the economy financially lubricated.

This picture was idyllic from one point of view – that it kept the economy going. But it had its own paradox. No part of the money provided by the English was spent for the promotion of the settlement where they intended building up their nest of power. So the settlement suffered from the beginning and it continued to suffer when it turned into a mammoth habitation initiating a new history for both the settlement and the region around. What is significant was that no merchant or a body of merchants emerged from the Indian society that could offer a parallel source for the supply of bullion. The

Jagat Seths were the bankers of the state and controlled the entire bullion market of Murshidabad during the time of Murshid Quli Khan. They supplied credit to the *zamindars* and also to the European Companies in their time of need. But they were not importer of bullion from outside. In later years the *banians*, the Bengali capitalists, built up their wealth by hovering around the foreign Companies to whom they were welcome as collaborators. But none had the control over bullion which the English had. The English did not allow the native banking institutions, the Seths and the *sarrafs* (the money-changers), to transfer their business from Murshidabad to Calcutta as they did when capital was transferred from Dakha to Murshidabad in the early years of the eighteenth century. When the English came to power they stopped importing bullion. This they did after 1765 when because of the grant of the *diwani* they found the whole of the territorial revenue of the country at their command. Publicly the Company's administration depended on the territorial revenue of the country. Privately the English traders and the Company's officers fell back upon the capital of the banians. This was the tragedy of the city. It was not allowed to develop its own spring of wealth necessary for its own growth. At the time when it became free from the vicissitudes of conflict between the Company and the *Nawabs* which had vitiated its early growth in the first half of the eighteenth century it came to be starved of finance. The Company was so much short of money that in no time it had to apply to the Parliament for loan. Calcutta's autonomy gained by staging political revolutions in the middle of the eighteenth century had thus become a staggered phenomenon. It became an event subdued under financial constraints of the time.

In the context of this we have to understand the history of Calcutta during the first century of British rule in India. From the beginning this settlement built upon the amalgamation of three villages of Sutanati, Govindapur and Kalikata had an acute dearth of public capital which was necessary for promoting the wellbeing of the city. In the absence of a powerful class of merchants the entrepreneurial spirit of the settlement did not grow and wherever the Indian genre threw up a little effort of entrepreneurship the unequal competition from the ruling race, the English as masters, stifled the sprouting of all signs of Indian enterprise. A country built upon the vast terrain of deltaic alluvium did not enthuse its people for enterprise with a spirit of adventure. The lack of the mercantile genius of the Bengalis did not allow the settlement to grow with capitalistic adventures so that when in the years 1847-48 an industrial and banking slum overshadowed Bengal the Bengali merchants and capitalists lost their avenues of investment and fell to the dust. As the Union Bank collapsed in the said years the whole world of Bengali capitalists, then concentrated in

Calcutta, shrank into a state of destitution. Henceforth, whatever little capital the well-to-do Bengalis had was invested in land and not in trade. This inertia of the world of Bengali capital allowed British capital to come in and take over the investment avenues in this part of the country. Foreign capital had no desire to promote the settlement developed on clustered villages in an alien world and, therefore, the habitation did not grow admirably beyond the point where it had reached during the first three decades of the nineteenth century with the help of native capital drawn through lottery. By this time the settlement reached a huge shape and it had no means to sustain itself. The tragedy of the settlement was by now complete. This was also the time, Blair Kling noted, when the flare of an industrial revolution around Calcutta was extinguished as a mark of stifling a competitor of the industrial revolution of England. This had crushed once for all the chances of a sovereign growth of an urban settlement and it became forever a satellite of the Empire itself. Its history became a subordinate story beneath the conspicuous history of the Empire.

Now the question arises: if the city was afflicted with capital shortage at the level of the government then how was it that capital enough for initiating the beginning of urbanization in the first half of the nineteenth century surfaced through lottery? Four things accounted for this flow of money in the city. First, the collaboration with the foreign Companies provided a source of money-making for a good number of people in the society. The English in Calcutta, the French in Chandernagore and the Dutch in Chinsurah kept their doors open for Indian collaboration. The centre of gravity in business had been shifting throughout the course of the eighteenth century from Murshidabad to the west toward Hughli and the European settlements on the bank of the river. By the side of the Setts, Basaks and Malliks, the ancient traders of the city, now emerged a new class, comprador in nature, who veered not around the Burra Bazar but around the factories and *aurangs*, trading marts and emporia of the European traders. Jadunath Sarkar found these men in the offing even during the time of Murshid Quli Khan. The network of collaboration was so profound that in the 1760s, in the aftermath of the Palasi and Buxar, Mummad Reza Khan lamented that while in Calcutta commerce was like a river it was like a drop of water in Murshidabad. Thus even after 1765 when bullion shortage affected the building of infrastructure in the city cash liquidity was ensured by a moneyed class that had grown out of the benefits of a changed time. The second source of capital in the city was a steady drain of wealth from the interior into the city. Scrafton said that one important phenomenon adjunct to the rise of the city was that since the middle of the eighteenth century the *zamindars* in the countryside began to send a part of their fortune to Calcutta

so that their foothold in the emerging centre of power could be maintained. There was a spree of purchasing property in and around Calcutta and with this capital began to accumulate slowly beyond the notice of the government. The third source of capital was the money extracted by the Company and its officers from the Bengal *Nawabs* after the battle of Palasi. Brijen Gupta's survey of this open and clandestine extraction shows that it was a loot – better known by the term *Plassy Plunder* – which went mostly to build up the personal fortunes of the officers. The fourth and final source of capital in the city was the hidden wealth unearthed slowly after the battle of Palasi when Calcutta provided a secured habitation to people. Previously, Somendra Chandra Nundy informs us, money was not safe under the rule of the *Nawabs*. Therefore, the inclination of the people was to bury their treasures under the soil. When the Company's rule came to be established in the country people felt safe to unearth their wealth and invest it in productive enterprises. Kidnapping of girls were rampant in the *Nawabi* age. When Calcutta offered the prospect for safe living well-to-do families began to shift to Calcutta for a settled life and in the process they transferred their wealth to the city. This is how Calcutta became a treasure house of wealth thus giving rise to the concept *Kalikata Kamalalaya* -- Calcutta the abode of the goddess of wealth, Lakshmi. In spite of this accumulation of wealth there was no manifestation of trade as the general pursuit of the people. One or two merchants like Ramdulal De or Motilal Sil were exceptions to this common rule of Bengali inertia. The Permanent Settlement opened a new vista of investment. The concept of property was first ensured in its utmost legal form. It was defined as an asset alienable by the will of the owner. This had diverted the path of native capital from industry and commerce to land. When big *zamindaris* broke into splinters attention came to be riveted on them and commerce became an insignificant pursuit compared to the profits of a *zamindari*. New men of wealth purchased *zamindaris* and settled in Calcutta thus bringing into force the evil known as absentee landlordism. Calcutta absorbed rich men and men of talents and the interior of the country came to be denuded of talents and wealth. Calcutta for all practical senses became an indulging resort for absentee landlords and estate management in the interior suffered because of this. It was these men, the landlords and the *banians*, who financed the renaissance of the nineteenth century, the most abiding achievement of Calcutta as the city of the new age.

Given this the thrust of our contention is clear. The mercantile activities of the Bengalis did not blossom into a manifest social programme in the heyday of the Empire and merchants as a class did not grow to become in any sense movers and ultimately saviours of the city. The city had a port with more than

thousand miles of hinterland but it never had a chance to respond to the mercantile demands of the Bengalis – and seldom Indians. As time went on the Bengalis had developed subsidiary interests around the port and were taken into partnership by the foreigners as stevedores, boat operators and men in steamship operations or at best as managerial mankind stationed on the shore. It is true that blooming of talents was not possible under foreign impingement but even under the *Nawabs* trade did not seem to be a preferred field of the Bengalis. The Gujratis, the Marwaris, the Armenians and the Europeans jostled to get primacy in the trade sector but not the Bengalis. One reason for this was that for a long time the trade corridor through the Bengal seaboard was controlled by the Portuguese. The coastal part of south Bengal was infested with the *Mags* and Arakanese so that long distance trade venture found no place in the mental world of the Bengalis. When Shahjahan, the Mughal Emperor, drove the Portuguese out the Bengal seas in 1632 the English from Madras moved quickly to dominate the vacant seaboard and this helped Calcutta to grow eventually as an insulated spot of British power. It was because of this control over the seaboard with Madras as a base in the rear area that Clive could recapture Calcutta in the beginning of 1757. The Calcutta-Madras axis over the Bengal seaboard eventually helped Calcutta to grow as a part of the British imperial pretensions vis-à-vis the declining Mughal power structure operated from Murshidabad. The conflict between the rising British Empire from Calcutta and the declining regime of the Mughals shrunk into a confined rule in Murshidabad after 1757 cleft the Bengali entity into two parts. The generation of the Bengalis who flourished under the Muslim rulers in Bengal – the Sultans and the Mughals alike – as administrative personnels attached to the offices of governance now came to be confronted with a rising generation of Bengalis who found new professions in the collaborations with the Europeans. The conspiracy which was hatched at Murshidabad and Calcutta against Sirajuddaullah was a last-moment effort toward a compromise between the old guards of Mughal sovereignty and the rising community of traders from outside commissioned by history into a new role. The tradition of *diwans* from Alamchand in the time of Murshid Quli Khan to Rajballabh under Sirajuddaullah was a trend capsized with the flight of Krishnadas with a huge *Nawabi* wealth to Calcutta in 1756. Even in the ultimate stage of *Nawabi* decline this tradition of the old order was sought to be maintained, of course, in a very ramshackle way, by one Maharaja Nanda Kumar or a Reza Khan. But history had already sounded the death knell of their age and they were confronted by one Raja Nabakrishna, Krishna Kanta Nadi, Ganga Govinda Sinha, Jainarain Ghoshal and men of their like. What Mir Jafar, the Jagat Setts, Maharaja Krishnachandra of Nadia, Umichand, Rai Durlabh

and all men in their fraternity tried to do was to save the Mughal Empire from imminent collapse which was made almost certain by its exhaustion from within. The excessive revenue extraction from peasants, the insurrection of the Afghans, the Maratha incursions, palace intrigues and the unorthodox life of a juvenile ruler all created a chaos in which the norms of sober governance set up by Murshid Quli Khan were completely destroyed. The Pre-Palasi conspiracy was one way toward inducting the English in the partnership of governance in which people of diverse communities, races and religion had participated. The Mughal rule here and elsewhere provided a platform for a variety of mankind to prepare them for a joint system of rule. In this sense the aspirations which the English raised from Calcutta did not seem to be out of tune with the Mughal tradition to accommodate local pretensions whenever they raised their head against the state. But the difference in the present case was that the pretension raised from Calcutta had a territorial ambition which was difficult to rule out. The new generation of Bengalis came to be allied with this pretension that had aspirations both in trajectories in commerce and partnership in governance. From the middle of the eighteenth century Calcutta became the stronghold of this rising generation that provided the human base from which the take-off of the Empire could take place. As subordinate agents of this mercantile community taking off to a higher pitch of sovereignty the Bengalis seldom had a chance to promote themselves as a community in trade. The result was that a powerful merchant class was never born in Calcutta and throughout the course of the Empire, except for a short period, it remained non-existent as a dominating factor in the economy.

The absence of merchants as a class with solidarity of interests was long in the tradition of Bengal. Sushil Choudhury, while working on 17<sup>th</sup> century and early 18<sup>th</sup> century records, on the trade history of Bengal found no single Bengali merchant available in the field. This is significant. Blair Kling says that the Bengali merchants lost their attachment to the coastal and oceanic trade to the Gujratis & Rajasthanis in the seventeenth century. It was from them that the English took over the trade in the eighteenth century. Much prior to this the Bengalis had started growing themselves as a community in a different direction. It was not on commercial lines but on lines of service in governance. The need of the Muslim rulers for a service man-power was so pressing that the Bengalis were taken into partnership with the state early in the days of the Bengal sultans. With this induction into partnership with rulers their vision was removed from trade to administration and the charm of adventure in trade eluded them. With roots in governance the configurations of their community began to grow. Jadunath Sarkar says that this happened much before the coming of the Mughals in Bengal – since the time of the Muslim sultans, from

Hussain Shah and Iliyas Shah and continued down till the end of the Mughal rule in Bengal. The Bengalis rose into prominence because the flow of Muslim talents to Bengal from central and west Asia stopped with the passage of time. The sultans of Bengal suffered because of the dearth of necessary human elements with which they could man the administration. They didn't have in their possession adequate talents because the indigenous Muslim population that came mostly from the peasants had little acumen for governance – a business which the up-country Muslims had completely monopolized. The Sultans had no other choice but to depend upon the indigenous, Bengali-speaking Hindu population here. The Bengalis are very capable in taking over the culture of others. In one of my books *Property, Aristocracy & the Raj*, I have shown this, that the basic elements of Bengali culture are mostly borrowed; they have a fine faculty to borrow elements of others' cultures and internalize them so that at one point of time they become their own. When the Bengal Sultans began to hobnob with the indigenous people, the latter took up the study of Arabic & Persian and became very prominent in the etiquette of their masters and their language. They became very capable as administrators, so much so that before the colonial adventurers – the English, the French, the Dutch – came to Bengal, the Bengali Hindu community was already grown into a very powerful stock of mankind much adept in language, etiquette and administration. Vis-à-vis this community, the Muslims suffered. They did not grow as a community adept in public affairs. This is the basic proposition Jadunath Sarkar makes in his discourse on Murshid Quli Khan in *History of Bengal Vol. II*. When the English came here, they needed a powerful body of collaborators, a powerful base of human support with which they could drive the chariot of empire and they found them readily available in the Hindu Bengalis in Calcutta and regions around, so much so that the English masters seldom went to the Muslims for learning Persian or Arabic. Clive's mentor was Raja Nabakrishna, Hastings' mentor was Kanto Babu and so on. It was these people who taught them their first lessons in Arabic and Persian.

The community of the Hindu Bengalis was thus formed. Once the English accepted the Bengalis as their partners, the imperial take-off started. A very remarkable thing now began to take place. On the one hand a new imperial state was taking its form based on Calcutta and on the other underneath it a new community had begun to grow in the city. There was now a union between a state and a community in eastern India. The techniques of managing the geopolitics of the new age were worked out from Calcutta and the Bengali assistance in this was of great help to the English.

When this was taking place, a small section of Bengalis took to commerce. But that was a short-lived and temporary affair. N.K. Sinha says in his *Economic History of Bengal*, Volume III, that with the fall of the Union Bank in 1848 the entire structure of trade by the Bengalis collapsed. Capital slipped out of native control. The agency houses suffered a fall between 1790s & 1840s. There were no big avenues where the Bengalis could invest their capital. The result was that they steadily withdrew from investments in sectors they were engaged in during the previous 100 years. Away from trade and industry the Bengalis took to agitation as their community politics between 1860s and 1905. Calcutta which had produced the renaissance now turned its face to agitation. Between the foundation of the Hindu College and that of Calcutta University, this community had become very competent in terms of education, developing their language tools and adapting the ethos of the west; they built up their communal integrity and all prominent leaders came from this Bengali community and all were mostly based in Calcutta. There was even a kind of a very effective partnership between the state and the community itself. Unless this partnership had existed, there would not have been a Rammohan Roy, a Vidyasagar, and a Keshab Chandra Sen, a Rabindranath, a Vivekananda or an Aurobindo. But unfortunately in 1905, this partnership suffered a breakdown; the Bengal Partition was made effective. This was the first shock that the Bengali community experienced.

So our findings are complete – that from the fall of the Union Bank in 1848 to 1905 there was a total vacuum in the economy of the country itself. And there was no possibility whatsoever on the part of anyone in the Bengali community who could take to trade and commerce. The result was catastrophic: that in Calcutta a Renaissance was coming up but there was economic vacuum. One will wonder how it was possible that a cultural renaissance was coming up under the protective wing of the English with Western education, western culture, western ethos stimulating the people here, but there was total internal vacuum so far as the economy of the country was concerned. The Bengali capital and its own world of economic predominance were ruined leaving a wide field open for British capital. From 1850s all avenues of investment were filled by British capital. From Jute to Railways, from tramways to steamship and electricity the British capital was in command. The city became an appendage to the capitalist introduction from the west. It lost its own genius of growth. Bengal's economy was thus internally choked. Yet overriding this inner collapse a cultural renaissance seemed to have been going on. This was one of the strangest phenomena ever to have taken place in history.

The result of this anomaly, the disharmony between its economic growth and its cultural resurgence, a strange situation arose. There was a tremendous middle class discontent. The age of a new intelligentsia was ushered in with the foundations of the Hindu college in 1817. The foundation of the University of Calcutta in 1857 gave a new momentum to it. The social reforms ensured free thinking. A middle class emerged. But in the post mutiny era an economy of no outlet caused both by an incoming capitalism and colonial exploitation, had shattered their dreams. With knowledge, ambition and aspiration they were stuck in wilderness. Out of grief, anger and disappointment they took to agitation. A politics of agitation emerged in Bengal and the partnership between the state and the society was broken. From this agitation two things happened: first, the partition of 1905 and the second, the withdrawal of capital from Calcutta in 1912. Calcutta lost its glamour. The umbrella of the Empire was no more there for it. It fell into misery. Meanwhile its urban growth did not stop altogether. London was growing in speed at the same time. Following the metropolis Calcutta also grew. It was a massive growth – a new experience for the city. The railways around and the tramways within buttressed by gaslight and electricity Calcutta was now backed by a rim of new suburbs just the way ‘tube’ had allowed people in London to have a spread out living. It was a massive growth but within the pattern of growth itself there was the nucleus of its fall so that from 1870 onwards, Bengal, under the leadership of Calcutta took up the politics of agitation. Once agitation became the basic political ethos of the community, the government withdrew its hand. There was no support to the people, and the city started suffering. Paris was the seat of revolutions in the West; Bengal was a seat of commotion in the East – a centre of agitation and not revolutions. In 1906, Gokhale came to Calcutta. On his return to Bombay in a Press Conference, he said that Calcutta was a city of chaos. So, throughout the course of the 18<sup>th</sup> & 19<sup>th</sup> century, Calcutta had to experience this kind of dichotomy within itself and, with the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there were a series of bad experiences that retarded its growth; first, in 1905 came the Bengal Partition. Then in 1912 the capital was transferred from here. Since that time up to the rise of C R Das, there was no man of any great political importance who could take over the leadership of the city. We had S. N. Banerjee, an aging man; we had Bipin Chandra Pal, a man of agitation. They were in conflict with each other. We had Aurobindo Ghosh who left politics for religion. Revolutionary terror emerged from 1906 and the city became the hub of terror. We learn from Leonard Gordon that once S.N. Banerjee and Bipin Chandra Pal met the Viceroy at the same time. On their departure the Viceroy wrote a letter to the Home Government, saying that there were two prominent leaders of Bengal sitting in his parlour and

fighting each other and no one was willing to take any responsibility either for the city or for the country itself. So what happened in Bengal and Calcutta in particular is this: because of an inner economic exhaustion and because of a peculiar political mindset shaped by ethos of a hybrid culture, the Bengalis could not grow the proper psychology, proper mentality, which was required for the welfare of the city itself, and the city suffered.

This was Calcutta's history, its heritage and identity that grew in course of its existence under the Empire. Its misfortune was that from the beginning it had no undertaker. In its early years the Seths and Basaks who had migrated to the marshy zone of Govindapur, Kalikata and Sutanati lost their time in a fight for existence vis-à-vis a hostile jungle ridden habitations on the one hand and on the other a competition in their domestic as well as in their coastal trade posed by the up-country-merchants and the European Companies operating from their river bank settlements. Once the English got their foothold in the city they were locked in a bitter struggle for survival with the *Nawabs* finally accepting defeat at the hands of the Bengal *Nawab* in 1756. The defence of the city was shattered and its goodwill as sanctuary for defenceless people earned so dearly at the time of the Maratha invasion in the 1740s collapsed in a moment's crisis. When the city was recovered it became a conquered base of the English superseding its previous status as a purchased territory under sanctions from the ruler. A new fort was quickly raised to consolidate its conquest and the city was turned into a nucleus of a garrison town. From the time of Hastings under the terms of the Regulating Act of 1773 the city became the seat for the new Governor General with a Supreme Court set up here to consolidate the jurisdiction and authority of a mercantile Company. Side by side with this Calcutta cast its shadow on the working of the territorial revenue of the interior so that the social surplus of the countryside could be properly extracted to provide the sinews of the Asiatic commerce of the English. Bullion import was stopped after 1765 and the drain of wealth from the city began in innumerable ways. The greatest of such drains were the imperial wars, tribute to the home government and the cost of running the administration in Calcutta, investment in opium and so on. Up to the 1790s there was no money to finance the urbanization of the city so much so that money had to be raised through lottery. While public investment was short of requirement private investment for the promotion of the city seemed to be equally inadequate. Although with the money raised from lottery some roads were built in the black town of the city there was no effort to make the native part of the town equal to the white town. As time went on the glamour of an imperial city was

appropriated by the white town and the concept was slowly raised that Calcutta was a 'City of Palaces'. Stately buildings raised in the white town were cordoned by dismal huts and lustreless cottages in the native neighbourhood and there had never been an attempt to strike a balance between the two – the white town and the black town not juxtaposed as a contrast but as a complement of the one for the other. The segregation between the two was a persistent feature which provided a distinctive character to the second city of the Empire. The epitome of the occident – the white town – became a point of pride for those who visited Calcutta from the time of Hastings to the time of Dalhousie. Their pride was that the elements of dignity and classical values of European antiquity were now implanted in Calcutta --- a city that resembled London and acted as a halting station for the east-moving Britons. The Calcutta of the natives remained in the dark maintaining its shadowy existence behind the resplendence of the white city that enjoyed a mixed status of a port, a garrison town and a seat of power. This mixture of glamour and shadow henceforth became the fate of Calcutta.

## CHAPTER 7

### THE ECONOMIC MILIEU IN WHICH THE CITY GREW

A city grows in direct relation to the growth of its industry. As early as the beginning of the twentieth century economists argued that the greatest index of industrialization of a country was the growth of towns<sup>1</sup>. Thus a town and an industry are involved intrinsically in their own growth patterns. Calcutta in the first half of the nineteenth century was a growing town not because industries around Calcutta showed signs of growth but because capital from various sources accumulated in the city. Bengal had always been an industrially rich country and its commerce therefore, flourished.<sup>2</sup> But from end of the eighteenth century it began to go through a process of deindustrialization because its traditional artisan and handicraft industries collapsed under a rude imperialistic pressure from the top and competition, mostly unfair, from outside.<sup>3</sup>

Imperial interference in Indian industry was marked from the beginning. The nature of this interference may be comprehended from the following observation:

“At the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, great quantities of cheap and graceful Indian calicoes, muslins and chintzes were imported into England and they found such favour that the woollen and silk manufacturers were seriously alarmed. Acts of Parliament were accordingly passed in 1700 and 1721 absolutely prohibiting, with a very few special exceptions, the employment of printed to dyed calicoes in England either in dress or in furniture and the use of any printed or dyed goods of which cotton formed any part.”<sup>4</sup>

In this context of practical imperial ban on Indian commerce<sup>5</sup> and a general breakdown of Indian industry Calcutta grew. It grew only under influence of capital that favoured its growth as a city. The Calcutta based growth of the economy of Bengal in the first half of the nineteenth century was quite phenomenal. A composite Bengali society, mostly formed by the Hindus, had grown up in the city and its radiations were felt even in the interior towns of the country. Blair Kling is specific on the point that a cultural awakening was concomitant to the economic growth of the city.

“In terms of the total production of Bengal its industrial activity was probably not of great significance. Its importance, instead, must have been in its effect on the intellectual and moral climate of the city, in awakening a pride of citizenship. Calcutta appeared to be moving inexorably toward

industrialization, and a sense of progress pervaded the city. Indian participation in the modern sector of the economy was on upward trend, and the Bengali elite must have participated in the prevailing pride of citizenship and sense of progress.”<sup>6</sup>

Throughout the first half of the nineteenth century the needs of the British empire called for economic development in India. The Empire needed revenue and given the poverty of peasants the rulers of the empire had to look for alternative sources of wealth. Thus they favoured economic development including industrialization in a limited scale. In Bengal developments had to be mostly on the banks of the Ganga so as to ensure the blooming of its sea-going trade from Calcutta. “The Governors-general – Bentinck, Auckland, Ellenborough, and Hardinge – “Kling observes, “were expected to balance the budget and remit the home charges in the face of rising expenses and the prevailing poverty of the peasantry.”<sup>7</sup>

With the turn of the nineteenth century a new lobby emerged in England that advocated welfare measures for India. The free-traders, men of this lobby, urged the Government to abolish the Company’s monopoly of trade between India and Europe. This monopoly had become economically redundant and gravely injurious to the economy of Bengal. By 1813 the sale of Indian piece-goods in England had fallen and the command over territorial revenue acquired by the English in 1757 solved the problem of Company’s finance. With the turn of the nineteenth century the Company was essentially a military and administrative power that sought to combine two irreconcilable functions of trade and governance. This had taken a terrific toll on the wealth of the country. The surplus of the economy extracted as tribute and siphoned to England had denuded the country. The Indian economy was emaciated in the process and poverty was strapped on the people. India thus lost its promise as the potential market for the industrial goods for England. How would the people of India purchase the industrial products of England if they were squeezed tight against subsistence and their wealth was used as the sinews of the Company’s commerce ?<sup>8</sup>

The Company’s rule meant draining of India’s wealth and the free-traders were against it. It meant that there emerged a school of thought in England who wanted to promote India’s solvency, if not its affluence. India’s solvency would come not alone from territorial revenue extracted from a moribund peasant economy, not even from trade in which India was experiencing a losing balance but from industry. It was in this logic that some semblance of industry was sought to be built in lower Bengal. Industry came as a result of private enterprise. But the support of the government was there at the background.

Money was accumulating in the hands of the private traders since the last quarter of the eighteenth century. Money was also there in the hands of the Calcutta banians. Even the officers of the Company and its army were building up their own surplus. These mobilizers of capital were all stationed in the city and the Agency houses which sprang up in the city to provide channels of investment to this new-found wealth of an upstart class were eager to invest in industry. In this situation the rulers got a chance to turn away their gaze from peasantry and innovate some new sources of revenue. Thus the question as to how the government would balance rising expenses and the poverty of the rural masses was resolved. To this question, Kling writes

“The obvious answer was to find new sources of revenue. Lord Bentinck’s minute favouring European colonization aroused opposition from the manufacturing interests of Britain, who ‘saw in colonization the spectre of a second Lancashire on the bank of the Ganges, which could beat the original with cheap Indian labour and raw material’. But evidently Bentinck anticipated no conflict between British and Indian economic interests”.<sup>9</sup>

The paradox of the empire lies here. On the one hand the government favoured the coming of industry in Bengal and on the other the British industrial lobby in England opposed developments in India on industrial lines. To resolve this conflict the utilitarian philosophy was brought into force. The main contention of the philosophy was that the blessings of the institutions of the west must be transmitted to India and the civilizing missions of the Empire must be fulfilled. Bentinck, a disciple of Bentham, was the greatest champion of this philosophy. He, therefore, took upon himself the task of replying to the criticism of the British industrial lobby.

“After leaving office he testified that he had supported steam communication with India on grounds that it would facilitate the education of Indian students in England, from which they would return with technological knowledge, the key to progress in India. It would also facilitate the influx of British businessmen, who had done much for Indian economic development. And along with plantation industries he unabashedly cited with approval the Gloster mills, the iron foundries, and the coal mines, all of which competed with British products.”<sup>10</sup>

Two things accounted for the nascent industrial beginnings in Bengal : the emergence of a capitalist class in Calcutta and the need of the British empire to promote new sources of revenue in order to adjust the lopsided parts of the Indian budget. The free-traders’ critique of the Company’s rule in India came as an additional spur to the government’s urge to utilize the wealth of the

Calcutta capitalists in new directions. Calcutta was favoured at this time with its new destiny. William Bentinck became the Governor General and he came as the messenger of change at a turn of time. "He was", writes Percival Spear, "an advanced Whig in politics, a supporter of reform, and a disciple of Bentham".<sup>11</sup> He favoured the growth of Calcutta and blessed all signs of industrialization in the country. He was, in his turn, favoured by a rare kindness of his own destiny. His critic Wellington's Prime Ministership was replaced by that of Lord Grey in 1830 – immediately after his arrival in India. Grey's ministry, known as the reform ministry, provided him with a steady support in all directions. This helped Bentinck to promote Calcutta as a new destination for the east moving British capital. During his rule he practised economy and gained the confidence of the Directors at home. Spear writes:

"In all he saved £ 1 ½ million by economies in the civil and military service and left the treasury which he had found with a deficit of £ 1 million a year with a surplus of £ 1 ½ million. Thus far he had the directors enthusiastic support, but when he wished to use this surplus for Indian welfare, their ardour cooled."<sup>12</sup>

Bentinck was, however, steadfast in his support to Calcutta. In 1833 he "urged his administration to encourage members of ruling and influential families to visit the city and spend some time there".<sup>13</sup> By the end of the 1820s the city had taken a definite shape. Thanks to the support from the Lottery Committee roads were built and Calcutta was gradually assuming the grandeur of a 'City of Palaces'. In this context Bentinck was dreaming of making Calcutta the rendezvous of the rich, a place of the aristocrats, a centre where dignities of royal majesties could converge.

"A twelve months' sojourn of such persons at our seat of government", Bentinck spoke in one of his minutes, "viewing our arts and arms, the arrangement and magnificence of our buildings, the order and suitableness of our business establishments, our institutions for education, the ingenuity displayed in such machinery as has reached the east, and the ships carrying on our commerce, would do more to diffuse just notions of our power and resources, of the importance of our alliance than any measures we can pursue. By such means one should have a chance of becoming truly known throughout the great empire as the powerful people we in fact are."<sup>14</sup>

Bentinck was ushering in the majesty of the city. "Calcutta was the very epitome of Bentinck's power in the East". – Ranajit Guha commented.<sup>15</sup> The city here assumes an entity which contains the pride of the Empire. This eulogy for the city came when the economic crisis of the city was at its peak. The

Agency houses were collapsing one after another and there was a run on every house that had invested in Indigo.<sup>16</sup> Calcutta needed influx of capital and Bentinck who was inspiring native capitalists and entrepreneurs like Dwarkanath Tagore to take bold steps in trade and industrial ventures was now inviting the attention of the indigenous capitalists outside Bengal to turn their face to Calcutta. In doing this he was not only promoting the cause of Calcutta as such, he was also trying to give a boost to patterns of Indian growth in general terms. In the first half of the nineteenth century the whole development of north India came to be linked with the metropolitan economy of Calcutta.<sup>17</sup> The fall of the Agency houses in the end of the 1820s and the beginning of the 1830s had created concern in government circles and, therefore, there were new efforts to find out alternative means by which new capital could be introduced into Calcutta. Ranajit Guha believed that Bentinck was keen on demonstrating the paramountcy of the British Raj. "Everything it (Calcutta) had to show – its arts, arms, and education, its business, transport, and technology – was governmental, and stamped 'ours' . . ." – writes Guha.<sup>18</sup> The importance of the Raj 'as rulers and proprietors' is manifest in the expression 'the powerful people we in fact are'.<sup>19</sup> Behind this apparent demonstration of pomp and grandeur of the city lay the surreptitious design of attracting native capital to the city. From the beginning the participation of native capital in the Agency houses was in all practical sense unsteady. The Cambridge economic historian writes:

"The participation of native capital in the Agency Houses cannot be quantified. But there is enough evidence that at each crisis the Agency Houses suffered severely as a result of the withdrawal of indigenous capitalists' loans to them. Thus in 1811, 1814, 1825, 1827 and 1830 the European Agency Houses complained that the native capitalists were withholding funds from the money market causing distress to the agencies."<sup>20</sup> The withdrawal of native capital was not due to any distrust on the functioning of the Agency houses. It was mainly due to the nature of its own investments. "Indigenous capital was usually obtained", our historian notes, "mainly in short term loans (which could be renewed from time to time to effectively convert them into long term loans) as distinguished from the Europeans' investments on a partnership basis. At the least sign of crisis, indigenous capital was withdrawn or was made available only at a much higher rate of interest".<sup>21</sup>

It was in this condition of a shaky capital market in Bengal that Calcutta grew. Throughout the course of the nineteenth century two things happened in Bengal in the context of which the growth of Calcutta was effected. The first was the acceptance of a policy by several Governors – General that India

should industrialize. This meant that development was contemplated as a goal of the government. When development was being declared as a necessary programme of the state there was the need to be a joint enterprise of British and Indian capital in terms of functional equity. This did not happen. Native capital became subordinate to British capital. As a result native capital became shy and apprehensive of risks and a doom in adventurous investments. After the fall of the Union Bank in 1848 all rich men of Calcutta met a sudden crash. Since then the indigenous capitalists move away from enterprise and turned their face to land. Capital thus shut up in real estates. The value of land in Calcutta increased.

Just when indigenous capital was becoming subordinate to British capital the apex authorities of the Empire – the Governors-General and his Council – were making efforts to promote Indian industry. Lord Auckland, writes Blair Kling, “favoured both the revival of Heath’s modern steel mill in Madras and cast-iron manufacturing among the primitive hill tribes of Assam. Auckland directed the Cossipore foundry to supply the government’s needs for suspension bridges and iron boats and instructed the Coal Committee to expand its activities to locating the best ores and fluxes available in India as the foundation for a local steel industry. He promoted experiments for the improvement of cotton, the processing of hemp, the manufacture of pottery and porcelain, and the growing of nutmeg, pepper plants, and cochineal insects. Moreover, he looked forward to the development of Assam, ‘a country of vast promise’ by the application of both European and Indian capital.”<sup>22</sup>

It was an economic forward march which was not entirely given up by Auckland’s successors Ellenborough ( 1842-1844) and Hardinge (1844-1848). They had minds for internal development but had little money to sustain their dreams. They were engrossed in wars and therefore, lacked peace and means of governance. Yet they thought of welfare as the goal of their rule in India. In 1828 Ellenborough as President of the Board of Control encouraged a policy of import substitution that saved money for the government of India. This he did in the teeth of opposition from the private trade interests in Court of Directors. As the Governor General he directed his efforts for public works and tried to set up experimental cotton farms. But short of funds sapped his efforts.<sup>23</sup> In any case the need of the Empire was vast. Raw materials had to be transported to the ports from the interior. For this railways were necessary. In response to this demand “Hardinge encouraged the early planning of railways building.”<sup>24</sup> He was conscious of the non-developmental nature of British rule in India. “ ‘Our rule’, he wrote Hobhouse on the subject of railways, ‘has been distinguished by building large prisons; and the contrast with the Mogul

Emperors, in the respect of public works, is not to our advantage’.”<sup>25</sup>To the students of Calcutta he talked about ‘the magic powers of steam and electricity’.<sup>26</sup>

Clearly there was an anticipation of a new take off in the country’s economy. This anticipation was planned and made in Calcutta. It was likely that Calcutta would experience some radiations of an anticipated change in the economy of the country. But unfortunately the Governor-Generalship of Ellenborough and Hardinge was marked by warfare. Naturally there was not enough money in the hands of the government to promote urbanization of Calcutta. In the previous decades Calcutta witnessed a massive spate of urbanization with the help of money raised by the Lottery Committee. The capital the Lottery Committee could mobilize was the money of the native people who were eager to promote their own habitat. This inflow of native capital in the matters of urbanization was possible because there was peace in the country and expectations of new developments were in the air.<sup>27</sup> Behind all new developments in Indian economy in the pre-mutiny days there were two basic urges that moved the government. These were the urges to facilitate commodity movement on the one hand and the movement of army on the other. In an all India perspective roads were not built up to the middle of the nineteenth century. “There were almost no roads and bridges in Bengal”, wrote R.C. majumdar.<sup>28</sup> There was dearth of money and civic planning suffered because of this. Lord William Bentinck who had some concern for the growth of Calcutta felt that for the development of the city the overland link between Calcutta and North India must be developed. Hence he planned a new trunk road connecting Calcutta with Upper Provinces. This was a peace-time planning which was given effect later during the period of tensions and disturbances.<sup>29</sup>

The old Cambridge historians have drawn our attention to the backward state or roads in the Bengal Presidency. One such observation states: “Some idea of the backward state of communications may be formed from the facts that even in 1855-6 four streams on the Grand Trunk Road (from Calcutta to North-Western India) remained to be bridged, and that only then was a project for bridging the Hughli at or near Calcutta considered.”<sup>30</sup>

Given this, it becomes clear that Calcutta’s road-links with its hinterlands were weak. The urbanization of the city, therefore, depended mainly on the incentives it could secure from its port. In Bengal river was the main channel of communication and rivers being plentiful long-distance trade depended mainly on rivers. The necessity of inland transport was not great and hence the needs for urbanized road systems as links between Calcutta and its districts were not

urgently necessary either. For the promotion of internal roads and other parameters of urbanization Calcutta had to depend on the patterns of its population growth and the utilization of lands for habitation purpose. The increasing congestion in the city in the first half of the nineteenth century created situations in which civic planning seemed to be a necessity. Trade demands increasing with the progress of time required that the river banks be taken up as special zones for urban growth in the first half of the nineteenth century. The eighteenth century was passed in arranging Calcutta vis-à-vis Murshidabad. The nineteenth century was, therefore, the period when Calcutta could experience its own growth. The all India milieu did not favour such growth but Calcutta grew on its own momentum.

## NOTES

1. J.H. Clapham, *Economic Development of France and Germany, 1815 – 1914*, 1921, p. 53. On the basis of Clapham's observation D.R. Gadgil writes: "Dr. Clapham says the best general test of the industrialization of a nation's life under modern conditions is the rate and character of the growth of towns." – D. R. Gadgil, *The Industrial Evolution of India in Recent Times*, Oxford University Press, Fourth Edition, Seventh Impression, 1959, p. 134.
2. "in the evolution of Indian Commerce, Bengal in the past had always been a major contributor. Articles manufactured in Bengal found their ways to the near and distant lands in the east and the west. While other countries had little to export other than gold and silver, goods manufactured in this country were imported by them in exchange of precious metals particularly." – DR. Chittabrata Palit, *Growth of Commerce & Industry in Bengal*, Bengal National Chamber of Commerce & Industry, Calcutta, 1999, p. XIII. At another place DR. Palit writes : "Bengal had been a forerunner in the evolution of commerce and Industry of India. Bengal's produce not only met home consumption but also commanded foreign markets stretching from the coast of Coromandel and Malabar, to the Gulf of Persia and the Red Sea, even to Manila, China and the Coast of Africa." – Palit, *op.cit.*, p. 1
3. Amal Tripathi makes the following observation on the collapse of Indian industry.  
 "The school of Indian historians like R.C. Dutt, influenced by Friedrich List (who badly wanted an Industrial Revolution in Germany), blamed the British government for stifling the possibilities of an Indian Industrial Revolution. It had favoured *laissez faire* when the going was

good, turned to preference at the first breath of competition, and always sacrificed Indian industries at the altar of her own. The Marxist (like Baran) accounts for the slow and uneven tempo of growth by referring to the classic picture of a colonial economy under an alien capitalism. Others try to explain it by social and psychological drawbacks, which retard progress as much as adverse economic condition and lack of technological skill.” – R.C. Majumdar ed. *The History and Culture of the Indian people : British Paramountcy and Indian Renaissance*, Part I, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay (1963), p. 1095.

4. B.D. Basu, *Ruin of Indian Trade* cited in R.P. Dutt *India Today*, Bombay, 1947, p. 4.
5. There was a practical ban on the employment of India-built ships for conveyance of goods to London. The shipping interests in England feared that Indian shipping was their greatest competitor and it must not be allowed to function. The Agency Houses in Calcutta continuously fought against this discrimination but with little success. Occasionally a ban on Indian shipping was temporarily withdrawn and that was only in an emergency when British ships were not available to carry goods and foodstuff to England to meet any urgent situation and domestic crisis. Proceedings of the Board of Trade (Commercial) preserved at the West Bengal State Archive, Kolkata, show in what way the imperial interference on Indian commerce was imposed. For example on one occasion India-built ships were allowed to carry goods to England on the express condition that two-thirds of the crew employed in every ship must be European – *Prodgs of the Bengal Board of Trade (Commercial )* 16 Nov. 1801, vol. 162. See S.B. Singh, *European Agency Houses in Bengal*, Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyay, Calcutta, 1966, Ch. IV and Chittabrata Palit, *op.cit.*, pp. 4-5
6. Blair B. Kling, “Economic Foundations of the Bengal Renaissance” in Rechel Van M. Baumer, *Aspects of Bengali History and Society*, Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd. , New Delhi, 1975, p. 31.
7. *Ibid.*
8. The logic of the free traders has thus been summed up by Eric Stokes: “The Indian trade in itself had ceased to be of first importance after the Company won the command of the revenues of the Bengal territories in 1757. Henceforward the annual investment of Indian piece-goods was considered mainly as a means of transmitting the surplus revenues of Bengal to provide for the dividends of the Company in London.” – Eric Stokes, *The English Utilitarians and India*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1959, p. 37. This in all practical terms meant that Company’s trade

was the channel through which the country's wealth was drained out. Stokes added: "in practice, however, Wellesley's conquests had piled up a debt burden which made it impossible to realize. By 1813 the Company had no case for maintaining its monopoly of trade between India and Europe. The sale of Indian piece-goods in Europe had fallen away almost completely; and the British territories no longer afforded a surplus of revenue after the Company's administrative and debt charges had been met." Stokes, *op.cit.* pp. 37. Stokes says further : "The Company in India had become a purely military and administrative power . . ." (p.38). In this situation The Company's rule in India had become exploitative. "The fact that territorial dominion had proved itself to be without profit for the Company and Great Britain was quickly seized upon by the free traders. Not only was the Company's rule without benefit to itself, but it was, they argued, positively ruinous to India. The notion of tribute meant draining the country of wealth and impairing its power to purchase British goods. The Company was uninterested in finding a market for British goods in India, and, in any case, had neither the capital, the skill, nor incentive, to develop its vast monopoly trading area . . ." *Ibid.*

9. Blair B. Kling, *op.cit.*, p. 31. The quotation in the excerpt is from Amales Tripathi. *op.cit.*, p. 228.
10. Blair B. Kling, *op.cit.*, pp. 31-32.
11. Percival Spear, ed. *The Oxford History of India By The Late Vincent A. Smith*, Part I, Third edn., Oxford at the Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1958, p. 586.
12. Spear, *op.cit.*, p. 587.
13. Ranajit Guha, "A Colonial City and its Time(s)" in his *The Small Voice of History* ed. by Partha Chatterjee, Permanent Black, 2009, p. 431.
14. Bentinck's minute of 5 August, 1853. *Correspondence*, p. 861 cited in Ranajit Guha, *op.cit.*, pp. 431-432.
15. *Ibid.*
16. For the fall of the Agency Houses see S.B. Singh, *op.cit.*, Ch. VIII; Amales Tripathi, *Trade and Finance in the Bengal Presidency*, Calcutta Oxford University Press, 1979, pp. 164, 165, 170, 187, 193, 194 – 96 and ch. 5.
17. "The period 1757 – 1857 saw important developments in north India as a consequence of its linking into the metropolitan economy via Calcutta and the Ganges river system." "Since the stimulus which makes the period distinctive came from the demand for export crops, changes in north India's economy were closely associated with the river, and were oriented toward Calcutta." – These are the views of Tom G. Kessinger in

Dharma Kumar ed., *The Cambridge Economic History of India, vol. 2, c. 1757- c. 1970*, Orient Longman in Association with Cambridge University Press, (1982), The First Indian Edn. 1982, p. 266.

18. Ranajit Guha, *op.cit.*, p. 432

19. *Ibid.*

20. S. Bhattacharya in Dharma Kumar ed., *op.cit.*, p. 294.

21. *Ibid.*

22. Blair B. Kling, *op.cit.*, p. 32.

23. *Ibid.*

24. *Ibid.*

25. Cited by Blair B. Kling, *Ibid.*

26. *Ibid.*

27. Percival Spear writes : "From 1818 to 1839 India was substantially at peace. Only one war of importance occurred beyond her borders, and that was demonstrably forced upon the government. Internally disturbances had been occasional and limited in character; the key note of the period was peace, retrenchment, and reform. During these years the foundations of modern India were being laid and the seeds were being sown of that Indo-British cultural synthesis which later provided the inner force of the Indian national movement." – Spear ed. *Oxford History*, Third Edn., p. 591.

28. R.C. Majumdar in *British Paramountcy and Indian Renaissance*, p. 385.

29. "Lord William Bentinck conceived the idea of a new trunk road connecting Calcutta with the Upper Provinces, and this project was pushed forward by Mr. Thomason, Lieutenant Governor of North-Western Provinces from 1843 to 1853" – R.C. Majumdar, *op.cit.*, p. 386.

30. *Cambridge History of India*, vol. VI, p. 32.

CHAPTER 8  
THE AMBIENCE OF CITY-GROWTH  
DE-INDUSTRIALIZATION, DE-URBANIZATION AND THE ADVENT OF BRITISH  
CAPITAL

The urbanization of Calcutta took place at a time when two major cities of Bengal showed signs of decline. “Between 1830 and 1872 (when the population was 68,595) Dacca seems to have stagnated”.<sup>1</sup> Murshidabad followed suit so that the fall of these two cities became the subject of much comment in the nineteenth century.<sup>2</sup> The population of Burdwan and Chandernagore also declined and the decline was “of the order of about 40 percent by the 1872 census”.<sup>3</sup> This decline came in the first century of the British rule in India. Murshidabad was very populous in the middle of the eighteenth century and we know that the city at the time of Clive was ‘more populous than London.’<sup>4</sup>

The decline of population in urban settlements in the nineteenth century was an all-India phenomenon. Gadgil comments :

“Again, we have no reason to suppose that the urban population of India was in any way growing between 1800 and 1872. The only cities to which any growth at this time can be definitely ascribed were the ports of Calcutta, Bombay and Madras, and a few places in the interior, like Cawnpore; but on the other hand, there was certainly a great decrease to be accounted for in the population of a larger number of old capital towns, e.g., Dacca, Murshidabad, Lucknow, Tanjore etc.”<sup>5</sup>

Calcutta, Bombay and Madras grew because they were port towns. The British Empire promoted trade centres through which port-bound materials necessary for British industries could get their proper transit. Many of the old towns of India decayed because of two things: the collapse of traditional handicraft industries and a change in the class structure of the society. The industries of the old Indian towns which suffered a decline were in the main luxury and art industry. They were not machine-based industry and were pursued by craftsmen from generation to generation. They were sustained by demands from nobles and aristocratic classes. With the rise of the British Empire Indian feudalism died in many respects. The society of nobles and their courts declined. In the absence of effective demand from nobles craft industries suffered. Meanwhile under the British rule a new middle class – a new bourgeoisie – emerged. They developed tastes for machine-made goods from

England. Naturally craft industry and such other industries as based on towns lost their source of sustenance and they declined.

It was in this situation that Calcutta emerged. In the whole area of the Indo-Gangetic basin there were a few towns which could escape collapse and those that did it did by promoting new and alternative industry. One such town was Amritsar which after the decay of the shawl industry switched over to carpet industry. Unfortunately the carpet industry had no sound basis and suffered a setback within a short time.<sup>6</sup>

The greatest example of recovery through alternative industry was afforded by Dakha. With the fall of the Dakha Nawabs, their courts and associate community of nobles the muslin industry of Dakha and its ancillary handicrafts collapsed. Some years later in the wake of this collapse jute became popular in East Bengal and numerous jute presses were set up in and around Dakha. "With this added trade and industry", writes Gadgil, "Dacca regained its importance, and has been increasing steadily during the last fifty years."<sup>7</sup> Besides Dakha no other Bengal towns could take advantage of this. Murshidabad, Malda, Santipur – all collapsed.

"Contrasted with the case of Dacca", Gadgil observes, "is the case of Murshidabad – a city which in Clive's time was considered superior to London, but which, since the time of the annexation, has been steadily declining; or take Malda, with its old silk industry, or Santipur, with its muslin industry, whose products were inferior only to Dacca. These cases are cited only from Bengal, but like instances could be produced from any part of India. For the story is the same whether at Mandalay in Burma or at Paithan in the Deccan."<sup>8</sup>

Here we have to take care of two points. First, with the fall of traditional industries some of the old towns of Bengal suffered. It means that along with de-industrialization there were signs of de-urbanization as well. In this context of closing animation it was only Dakha and Calcutta which could present signs of rejuvenation. Our second point lies here. Calcutta like Dakha benefited from jute industry and became an industrial town on account of jute. Jute provided the factory system of industry and the banks of the Ganga were studded with jute mills. It was the labourers, the work force of the jute mills, which in later years provided the Indian communists to build up their base of operations. Because of these urban bases the Bengal Communists operating from Calcutta failed to 'go rural' and eventually had to pay the price for its failure to become rural in a country of villages.

The rejuvenation of Calcutta did come after a period of decline which also happened in the case of Dakha. The cotton textile and muslin industry of Dakha fell because of the hostility of the Lancashire lobby prevailing over the Court of Directors of the Company. This collapse of the textile industry had adversely affected the stability of Dakha as one of the premier urban centres of India. Calcutta had also undergone one such experience. Its experience was of course a little different. There was a possibility of a kind of industrial revolution in and around Calcutta. That possibility was scuttled and the chances of a self-sustained sovereign growth of the city was lost. The city became a satellite of the Empire.<sup>10</sup> The collapse of the promises Calcutta held came in the middle of the nineteenth century. Many of its urban development came after that when Calcutta lost many of its sovereign growth potentials. Sumit Sarkar writes:

“The last three decades of the nineteenth century saw some significant improvements: underground water pipes and drains in some areas from the 1870s; a pontoon bridge across the Hooghly river in 1874; gas lights on streets, and then from 1891 a slow replacement of them by electricity, the first telephones in 1882 and a few motor-cars from 1896; and, as mentioned by Cotton, electric lights and fans in a few homes and electric trams from around 1900.”<sup>11</sup>

These developments seemed marvellous in the context of contemporary urban developments in India. But they were the post-mutiny efforts to gear up the most important imperial city in the light of the developments of the time. “The Mutiny sealed the fate of the East India Company after a life of two and a half centuries” – Cotton wrote. “The Government of India was transferred to the Crown on the first of November, 1858,” he added, “and Lord Canning became the first Viceroy of Hindustan. An era of unexampled progress and internal reform succeeded that of bloodshed and repression.”<sup>12</sup> At the time when the British possessions in India were transforming into British Empire in India Wellesley wrote in his Minute of 1803 that the British empire henceforth would not be ruled from a traders’ emporium. Calcutta was manufactured to create the seat of what would eventually take the shape of an empire. Fifty five years later when the British Crown was taking over the Empire Calcutta was given a new life consistent with the modern parameters of city existence. Change was brewing in the atmosphere.

“In 1861, the Indian Council Act sanctioned the addition of non-official members to the supreme and provincial Legislative assemblies. The Penal Code, originally drawn up in 1837 by Macaulay and Cameron, and the Codes of Civil and Criminal Procedure were passed into law; and High Court of

Judicature took the place of the old Supreme Court in the three Presidencies. By the beginning of 1862, thirteen hundred and sixty miles of Railway had been opened; and the East Indian Railway, which in the Mutiny year had ended impotently at Raniganj, found itself pressing resolutely northward into the heart of the disaffected provinces. The whole foreign trade of India had increased from 32 Million in 1850 to 80 million in 1861. Canals and roads and public works were being everywhere prosecuted with the utmost vigour; and the great Trunk Road from Calcutta was completed as far as Peshwar.”<sup>13</sup>

Thus development became the hallmark of the greatest imperial policy in India in the second half of the nineteenth century. In writing about this development Cotton represents what Sumit Sarkar calls ‘the persistent intertwining of pride with nostalgia in British writings about Calcutta round the 1900s’.<sup>14</sup> In this period there was no much talk about the grandeur of Calcutta as the ‘City of Palaces’ because after the mutiny the British Empire and its advocates had learned to control their exuberance. The British Empire had gone introvert. After the general shake-up of the mutiny the Empire had to be revamped with the introduction of the modern facilities of an urban life. Such efforts opened new channels for the investment of British capital in the city. Before the first half of the nineteenth century came to an end the native capital lost its lead role in the economy and became subordinate to British capital. In such industries as jute, tea, etc. British capital was predominant.<sup>15</sup>

Calcutta was situated in the jute industrial belt and tea industry was in the periphery of Calcutta which was much within the hinterland of the city. The completion of the Assam Bengal Railway and the opening of the Chittagong port came to the tea-industry as a boom.<sup>16</sup> Tripathi writes: “Much more British capital was invested here (in tea industry) than in indigo, especially during 1890 – 1910 and the managing agency system had a near monopoly”.<sup>17</sup> Jute was one industry in which the British capital was in complete command. The capital of this industry was mostly imported from Britain. It meant that finance capital, an aspect of modern capitalism was operating in full swing in India in the second half of the nineteenth century. Calcutta was one of the bases through which the functions of this capitalism was conducted. As jute industry was a British monopoly<sup>18</sup> and as this industry flourished around Calcutta this city eventually became the centre of British capital predominance. Sumit Sarkar says that this predominance of British capital lay at the root of economic pre-eminence of Calcutta.

“More fundamental was the twofold economic predominance of Calcutta as the preeminent focus of British commerce, shipping, finance, and investments in the East, and as the city where British capital was in command

more overwhelmingly than anywhere else in India. On the eve of the First World War, about three-fifths of the total British capital invested in India was based in Calcutta, while according to one estimate 81 per cent of investments in Calcutta were of European origin as compared to only around 3 per cent purely Indian (the comparative figures for Bombay were 41 per cent and 49 per cent).<sup>19</sup>

Calcutta in the second half of the nineteenth century became essentially a satellite of British capital. Jute was mostly responsible for this. In 1894-95 there were altogether twenty nine jute mills in India. "Out of these twenty-nine mills twenty-six (and these all the larger) were in Bengal centred round Calcutta".<sup>20</sup>

The British capital was monitored by the managing agency system which favoured export-oriented manufacture and took within its purview all aspects of the economy – bank, finance, trade, commerce, railways and communication. Calcutta was the centre of all these.

"Calcutta was the hub, of the vital, British-dominated import-export trade, through which Lancashire textiles poured into the country and food grains and raw materials pumped out, with a favourable balance of trade that paid for Britain's trade deficits with the rest of the world".<sup>21</sup>

As the nineteenth century was drawing to its close Calcutta thus functioned as the satellite of the British capitalist system. Since the middle of the nineteenth century when native capital became shy of investment and when the possibility of an industrial revolution around Calcutta collapsed the economic role of the city was to function as the gateway for the introduction of British capital in this country. Out of this Calcutta glittered. Sarkar adds

"The interlocking structures of the managing agency system kept commerce, finance, railways, tea plantations, coal mines, and jute mills welded together in what amounted to a collective European monopoly of the commanding heights of Bengal's economy. The system was buttressed in decisive ways by racist privilege and exclusive access to the corridors of political authority. And Calcutta lay at the heart of it all, with British-owned jute mills strung along the banks of the Hooghly north and south of the city, and a concentration of business houses, banks and government buildings in and around Dalhousie Square that served as an effective symbol of the proximity and interdependence of imperial grandeur, power and profit."<sup>22</sup>

The investment of British capital in Indian industry was the order of the day. Given that the native capital shrank vis-à-vis investment and was scared of

risky ventures the coming of British capital was an invariable necessity of the time. "Just as the Land in India thirsts for water", wrote Justice Ranade, "so the Industry of the Country is parched up for want of Capital."<sup>23</sup> It was therefore natural that toward a capital-short economy the flow of British capital would direct itself. Lord Curzon who was interested in promoting Calcutta as an imperial city himself believed that there was no option to the application of British capital in Indian industry. "British capital is", he said, ". . . *a sine qua non* to the national advancement of India".<sup>24</sup> It was not that the reception of foreign capital was not welcome in Calcutta. The Amrita Bazar Partika on 23 February 1903 made a vigorous argument in favour of the introduction of foreign capital. It would be "suicidal and foolish", it wrote, "to oppose the influx of foreign capital into the country." Between 1854 and 1859 when the flow of British capital in this country was maximum Calcutta seemed little concerned about the consequences of the influx of British capital in India. By that time 150 million pounds were already invested.<sup>25</sup>

From then as time went on British capital "dominated the industrial scene and overwhelmed Indian capital in the field. Most of the jute mills, woollen and silk mills, paper mills, sugar factories, leather factories and iron and brass foundries were owned by foreign investors."<sup>26</sup> It should be noted that on the introduction of foreign capital the nationalist opinion was split.<sup>27</sup> Very powerful opinions from Calcutta went against it. For example Bipin Chandra Pal wrote : "The introduction of foreign, and mostly British, capital for working out the natural resources of the country instead of being a help, is, in fact, the greatest hindrance to all real improvements in the economic condition of the people".<sup>28</sup> To promote awareness about Indian Industries nationalist leaders were trying to organize industrial conferences so that industry could become an issue in the national agenda of welfare for the country. The first Industrial Conference was organized by Ranade at Poona in 1890. Following this lead one such conference was held at Calcutta in October, 1891<sup>29</sup>

"Unfortunately it did not have much of an impact" – wrote Bipin Chandra. In the city awareness at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century industry as represented through conferences did not click. In 1896 an industrial exhibition was organized in connection with the Congress session in Calcutta.<sup>30</sup> In 1901 an Industrial Exhibition was again held in Calcutta as an annexe to the Congress.<sup>31</sup>

What manifests from the above is clear. From the time of the collapse of the Union Bank in 1848 when native Capital was defeated Calcutta became an adjunct of the British Empire. It lost all the sovereign spirit of its individual growth. As Indian industries became captive fields for British capital Calcutta

had no axis of its functional individuality. The bank of the Ganga became dotted with jute factories and hence Calcutta's industrial line toed the jute industry which was overwhelmingly under British domination. Along with jute industry there were a few other industries which flourished near Calcutta and created the economic gravitation of the city. One such industry was paper industry. The production of machine made paper dates from 1870. That year the Bally mills were founded in Bengal. The Titaghur Paper Mill was established in 1882; the Bengal Paper Mill in 1892-94. "No other concern was floated in Bengal till 1918 . . ." <sup>32</sup>

Throughout the course of the second half of the nineteenth century Calcutta grew not as a base of India's industrial growth but a hub of educated but unemployed elites and hence a centre of nationalist agitation. Stationed in Calcutta the Governor-General and the Viceroy, Lord Curzon as the apex of the British authority in India tried to do two things. At one level he tried to convince people that the introduction of British capital in Indian Industry was a legitimate trend of global economy which was in its cross-roads. Secondly he tried to turn the attention of Indians to the glamour and grandeur of imperial achievements with Calcutta as their epitome. About the introduction of British capital he declared in one of his speeches: "Other channels of investment, outside of India, are gradually being filled up, not merely by British capital, but by the capital of all the wealth-producing countries of the world, and, if this be so, then a time must soon come when the current of British Capital, extruded from the banks between which it has long been content to meander, will want to pour over into fresh channels, and will by the law of economic gravitation, find its way to India, to which it should be additionally attracted by the security of British institutions and British laws". <sup>33</sup>

From Calcutta this dictum was thus promulgated that the global economic trend made India the destination of British capital. It was then likely that Calcutta the seat of the British power in India would bask in the warmth of foreign investments irresistibly making its headway to the east. At this stage it was necessary for British administration to make Calcutta the epitome of British glory. The process was already started when the defeated Muslim courts were exiled to Calcutta. <sup>34</sup> Bahadur Shah II the defeated and deposed Mughul Emperor – the last of the rulers of a great house – was exiled to Rangoon and not in Calcutta. The presence of an Emperor in Calcutta, however, destitute and miserable, would have been a sordid experience for an administration that was going for a change from a mercantile to a royal governance. The Muslim mind would have been distracted if the royal captive was brought to and confined in Calcutta. After the general shake-up of 1857-58

the imperial administration in Calcutta did not think it wise to create a pocket of tension in this imperial city with the deposed King lodged here. Trends developed in later years for native chiefs and members of royal houses to visit the city. This trend increased as the century drew to a close.

With the visit of the native rulers to Calcutta native capital began to flow into the city. Two things testify to this – the building up of the Mysore Garden in Calcutta near Sahanagar, Kalighat in the closing years of the nineteenth century and the construction of the Victoria Memorial Hall, a memorial building dedicated to Queen Victoria, the Queen of the United Kingdom and the Empress of India on a 64 acres (260,000 Sq.mtr.) of land on the Maidan.<sup>36</sup> The Mysore Garden with the temple of Salagram Vishnu and a dharamsala and a bathing ghat were built with money donated by the Mysore Government. This is how money began to flow into Calcutta. The Victoria Memorial Hall in the same way was created with the donation from Indian princes and the people in general. The British capital which was invested so much in jute and other industries did not come in support of the creation of the building. Curzon who talked of the irresistibility of the flow of the British capital to the east had in practice fallen back upon native capital to create a symbol of majesty of the British imperial power.

If not in works of embellishment, in essential services at least British capital was indispensable. An innovative transport system the Calcutta Tramways, was introduced with British Capital toward the end of the nineteenth century. The British registered the Calcutta Tramways Company Limited as a joint stock company in London in 1880.<sup>37</sup>

Tram services improved mobility in the city and Calcutta took a quicker pace toward urbanization. This was also the time when in Europe a rapid urbanization was taking place. There urbanization came as a result of the Industrial Revolution. Urban factories increased and this created a demand for labour. From countryside people moved to cities and urban centres became over populated with newcomers. In Calcutta jute and paper industry along with the brisk activities in the port brought new mankind to the city but the pace of urbanization was not as great as it was in Europe. Overcrowding of European cities revealed as much lack of urban planning as it was in Calcutta. But overcrowding did not persist long there. In Europe there were some attempts at urban reforms which mitigated the crisis. Such reforms were not there in Calcutta. Napoleon III employed Baron Georges Haussmann to rebuild Paris through government action. Haussmann razed slums to provide more space and openness to the city. He created new boulevards, new parks, new sewers and a new system of aqueducts. This is how Paris became a model of

other cities in Europe. This was possible because there was national capital available for urban development. In Calcutta such capital was absent. Dependence on borrowed capital, mostly foreign, stifled all initiatives for growth.

Even then there was some growth noticeable. Between 1850 and 1900 European cities were modernized. Calcutta was also modernized at the same time but her pace was slow. This was the time when mass transit began to be used in Europe. This relieved overcrowding and allowed access to decent housing. Calcutta's congestion in the northern part of the city and the various patterns of overcrowding behind the mansions situated in Chowringhee-Circular Road zone of the white city seemed difficult to be cleared up. For this money was needed and the government never had enough money to go for proper urban planning. The result was that Calcutta's growth was checkmated. The seat of the British power in India could not build its own pull factors so much so that what little population increase we see at the end of the nineteenth century in Calcutta was due to poverty-induced rural push which became a persistent factor even for the next century. Throughout the course of the twentieth century Calcutta remained to be a city of low-level urbanization. The imperial legacy did not allow it to enjoy any elevation in its status of a global city. It remained behind all contemporary European cities and had remained so even in subsequent years when it became an inordinately large city with no inner incentive to grow.

## Notes

1. Dharma Kumar ed. *The Cambridge Economic History of India*, Vol. 2, c. 1757- c 1970, p. 278. This observation has been made by Sabyasachi Bhattacharya.
2. "The decline of the cities of Murshidabad and Dacca was the subject of much comment in the early nineteenth century". – *Ibid.*
3. *Ibid.* The population of Burdwan was 54,000 and of Chandernagore 41000.
4. D.R. Gadgil, *The Industrial Evolution of India*. Oxford University Press, Fourth Edn., Seventh impression, 1959, p. 134.
5. *Ibid.*
6. D.R. Gadgil, *op.cit.*, p. 140.
7. *Ibid.*
8. D. R. Gadgil, *op.cit.*, pp. 140-41.

9. "The key failure of the CPI (Communist Party of India) seems in retrospect, and by comparison, to have been its failure to 'go rural'. It should be emphasized that this occurred, not simply because it had had some remarkably strong urban basis for nearly two decades, but more particularly because the position in the rural areas made it difficult for it to do so. For, speaking generally, patterns of political authority at the village level in so many parts of India were at this time still remarkably intact, and leftist movements accordingly encountered great difficulties, as they continue to do, in securing an entry there" – D.A. Low, "Sequence, Crux and Means : Some Asian Nationalisms Compared" in Robin Jeffrey ed. *Asia The Wining of Independence*, The Macmillan Press Ltd., London, 1981, pp. 275-76.
10. How Calcutta lost its chances of presiding over an industrialization has been described by Blair Kling in his essay "Economic Foundation of the Bengal Renaissance" in Rachel Van M. Baumer ed. *Aspect of Bengali History and Society*, Vikash Publishing House Pvt. Ltd. New Delhi, 1975.
11. Sumit Sarkar, *Writing Social History*, Oxford University Press, (1997), Oxford India Paperbacks 1998, Fourth Impression 1911, p. 163.
12. H.E.A. Cotton, *The Century in India 1800-1900* Reprinted from the Calcutta "Englishman" of January 1, 1901, p. 17.
13. Cotton, *op.cit.*, pp. 17-18.
14. Sumit Sarkar, *op.cit.*, p. 164.
15. For a detailed study see D.H. Buchanan, *The Development of Capitalist Enterprise in India*, 1934 and A. Chatterton, *Industrial Evolution in India*, 1912.
16. Amal Tripathi in R.C. Majumdar ed. *British Paramountcy and Indian Renaissance*, pp. 1100-1101. Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan's *History and Culture of the Indian People*, Vol. IX, Part I.
17. Tripathi, *op.cit.*, p. 1101.
18. "British capital, employed in indigo, was seldom imported. It was raised from the savings of the Company's servants and the fruits of Asiatic trade. Some capital was imported to finance tea and coffee plantations. It was jute manufacture, however, which mainly fed on imported capital and still remains a near British monopoly." – *Ibid.*
19. Sumit Sarkar, *op.cit.* p. 164.

20. D.R. Gadgil, *The Industrial Evolution of India in Recent Times*, p. 74.
21. Sumit Sarkar, *op.cit.*, p. 164.
22. *Ibid.*
23. M.G. Ranade, *Essays of Indian Economics*, Bombay, 1898, p. 92.
24. Lord Curzon, *Speeches*, vol. 1, p. 34.
25. Bipan Chandra, *op.cit.*, p. 91.
26. Bipan Chandra, *op.cit.*, p. 93.
27. See Bipan Chandra, *op.cit.*, Chapt. II & III, under the title 'Industry I' and Industry II'
28. Cited in Bipan Chandra, *op.cit.*, p. 90.
29. The Calcutta journal *Bengalee* (1880-1905) of 12 Sept. and 7 Nov. 1891 gives report about this conference.
30. S.N. Banerjea, *A Nation in Making* (Oxford Press, 1925), p. 146.
31. B. Pattabhi Sitaramyya, *The History of the Indian National Congress, 1885-1935*, Madras, 1935, p. 68.
32. Amales Tripathi in R.C. Majumdar ed. *op.cit.*, p. 1107.
33. Lord Curzon, *Speeches* (Vols. I-IV, 1900, 1902, 1904, 1906), Vol. III, p. 134
34. The families of Tipu Sultan of Mysore and Nawab Wajid Ali Shah of Awadh were lodged respectively in Tollygunge and Garden Reach in Calcutta.
35. One attraction for the royal chiefs was the Calcutta races. *The Indian Daily News*, Monday, December 24, 1894, page 7, Column 6 gives the following description of Calcutta Races. "The first of Calcutta meetings which commenced on Saturday evening was a marked success. The weather was pleasant, and the attendance quite as large as in previous years, and included His Honour the Lieutenant Governor and Lady Elliot with their staff, their highnesses the Maharajas of Mysore and Cooch Behar and Kumar Sahib of Patiala . . ." Cited in P. Thankappan Nair, *South Indians in Kolkata*, Punthi Pustak, Kolkata, 2004, p. 40. His Highness Chama Rajendra Wadiyar, the Maharaja of Mysore was suffering from Diptheria at that time. He died in Calcutta two days later on 26 December, 1894 – *Ibid.* Before that he paid three visits to Calcutta – Nair, *op.cit.*, pp. 33-46. Nair gives the detail of his visits to the city.
36. The building covered, a total area of 338 ft (103 m) by 228 ft. (69 m). It was designed by Sir William Emerson, President of the British Institute of Architects. Its construction was entrusted to

Messrs. Martin & Co. of Calcutta. Vincent Esch was assigned the task of supervising the construction. Thus he was the Superintending architect for it. The building rises to 184 ft (56 m). the total cost of the building was one crore and five lakhs or rupees. The foundation stone was laid in 1906. It was inaugurated in 1921.

37. From the High Court records relating to the Dr. Sudhir Chandra Neogy vs. Calcutta Tramways Co. Ltd. Dated 17 Dec. 1959 we get the following report about the Calcutta Tramways Company Limited.

“The Calcutta Tramways Company Limited is a Company incorporated with liability limited by shares, under the English Companies Act, having its registered office and carrying on business in London, England . . . In order to discover how this Company came to be in charge of the Tramways in the city of Calcutta, we have to look at the Calcutta Tramways Act 1880 (Bengal Act I of 1880). In the preamble of the said Act, we find that in 1879 the Corporation of the town of Calcutta, by an agreement dated 02.10.1879 granted to the persons named therein, called ‘grantees’, the right to construct and maintain and use a tramway or tramways, in Calcutta, upon terms and conditions mentioned in the said agreement. It is further mentioned that in as much as the grantees were desirous of being empowered to construct the several street tramways etc., it was necessary to obtain the authority of the Legislature, and that is why the statute came to be enacted, it is conceded, that the powers in relation to tramways in the city of Calcutta are governed by this Act, . . .” The next statute with regard to the Calcutta Tramways was the Calcutta Tramways Act, 1951 (West Bengal Act XXV of 1951). This Act was necessitated because the state of West Bengal intended to take over in future the working of the Calcutta Tramways.

CHAPTER 9  
THE MONEY CULTURE OF CALCUTTA  
AN EIGHTEENTH AND NINETEENTH CENTURY PROFILE

Calcutta's metamorphosis in the twentieth Century has been thus summed up by Asoke Mitra: "Before the Reorganisation of states, the common man's image of Calcutta, Bombay or Madras was more of a cosmopolitan city, serving the country as a whole, rather than any particular state. Each bore an unmistakable local physiognomy but belonged to the nation all the same. The reorganization cut everything down to size. In the public mind Calcutta was now West Bengal, Bombay Maharashtra, and Madras Tamil Country and not much more besides. This is India's loss and certainly among the first things worth retrieving. For not only are they still the nation's great doors through which we must either export or perish but also our wide windows to the world."<sup>1</sup> Calcutta thus lost its imperial and then a national status and has become confined to its province-shut existence. This is not simply a transformation. It is a fall from its majestic status. Calcutta was the capital of the British empire of India, the 'second city in the British Empire' and the 'City of Palaces'. The more Calcutta lost its status the more we fell back on the concept of *Tilottama* Kolkata<sup>1A</sup> only to redeem our soul which is afflicted by a painful memory of the city's glittering past. Immediately after independence dreams touched the eyes of city planners and there were talks to restore the city's glory.<sup>2</sup> But plans remained to be papers ineffectual and not translated into realities. Dreams fizzled out and their memories crowded into the galleries of unrealized contemplations. Why was this ? Why could not Calcutta be restored to its ancient splendour? To this question the present chapter has addressed itself.

Calcutta's misfortune was that Calcutta had no pace-setter. In the eighteenth century the East India Company was a spend-thrift business community that was reluctant to spend money for Calcutta. In the nineteenth century money was raised from lottery and in the twentieth century capital shrank. Asok Mitra writes: "Calcutta has grown quite differently. The city's big industrialists and businessmen came from elsewhere with no thought of a stake in the city to start with. Very many of them remained, and still remain, aloof from the affairs of the city, some out of a sense of diffidence, and of not belonging, others from an unwillingness to get more involved than is good for their work. The bulk of them have been content to get the most of what the city has had to offer but have hardly ever thought of placing themselves as a group at its service".<sup>3</sup>

This is the tragedy of Calcutta. It had capitalists but their capital was seldom used for the growth of the city. In the seventeenth and eighteenth century the capitalists of Calcutta came mostly from three communities – the Armenians, the Marwaris and partly for a short time the Bengalees. Charles Moore writing on *The Sheriffs of Fort William from 1775 to 1926* observes that the Marwaris took over as capitalists of the city from the Armenians.<sup>4</sup> He writes : “During the middle fifty years of the nineteenth century this community flourished in Bengal as their successors, the Marwaris, flourish today. In the record we come across them in all directions as merchants, suitors, jurors, and as men of wealth and influence generally”. “Like our young friends the leadsmen and pilots they loomed large in Calcutta’s social life and took up a considerable amount of room in the city”. Charles Moore speaks of the political importance and social prominence of the Armenians up to the middle of the nineteenth century. But he spends no word to say that they were the original promoters of the city. Moore adds : “But with the changed commercial conditions of recent years they are undoubtedly giving place to another class of traders whose methods of business are certainly not those of former years. A few, however, maintain a position of eminence in the commercial world, but it is evident that a few years will see the final departure of these. With their exit the Armenian community may find themselves in the position of the old Anglo-Indian families, dwindling in numbers, in wealth, and in importance.”<sup>5</sup> In the seventeenth and in the first half of the eighteenth century the Armenians were the leading capitalists and men of influence and power in the city. When the English became saddled in power they became their most effective supporters. For example the office of the Sheriff became surrounded with these men. “Everywhere the sheriff goes”, writes Moore, “. . . they are very much in evidence, and on occasions we find them leading bands of armed men to oppose the execution of the writs of the Supreme Court. Like the Europeans, they have vanished from the country districts of this province, and like the Europeans again, survive in very small bands in the principal cities of India.”<sup>6</sup>

The Armenians in Bengal were power-brokers and merchants but as entrepreneurs and fiscal innovators they were not as great as the Parsees of Bombay, Their stake in town-building was essentially poor. As a matter of fact from the eighteenth century onwards the solvent people of Bengal – rich merchants, affluent power-brokers and wealthy *zamindars* – failed to utilize new fiscal opportunities that were ushered in before them from time to time. Hastings as early as 1786 complained against the fiscal inaptitude of the people of Bengal. He observed : “The fact is, that our public credit, by which I mean the credit of our Interest Notes, and Treasury Orders, never extended beyond the English servants of the company, and the European inhabitants of Calcutta

and to these may be added a few, and a very few of the old Hindoo families at the presidency. All the other inhabitants of the provinces are utterly ignorant of the advantage and security of our funds, and have other ways of employing their money, such as purchases of landed property, loans at an usurious and accumulating monthly interest, and mortgages, to which though less profitable in the end, and generally insecure, they are so much attached by long usage, and the illusion of a large growing profit, that it would not be easy to wean them from these habits. . . .”<sup>7</sup>

The point to be derived from this is that towards the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century Calcutta did not grow a definite money culture. Modern instruments of finance, ‘Interest Notes’, ‘Treasury Orders’ etc., had not gone into the fiscal culture of the city. Usury and investments in land were more attractive sources of investment to people and they failed to participate in the new pattern of public credit which was unfolding in the city.<sup>8</sup> Benoy Ghosh, believes that this failure of the Bengalis was due to the fact that they are basically feudal minded with deep predilection for a rootedness in the soil.

Benoy Ghosh observes that the Bengalis who made considerable advance in social thinking in the nineteenth century remain steeped in stereotyped concepts of finance. Beyond real estate and usury they found no other avenues where they could invest their money. If they failed to come out of the shackles of tradition in the most important aspects of life how could they take such giant strides in other fields ? Or do we have to think that their postures in culture and politics were essentially postures of imitators given to momentary emotions ? Benoy Ghosh further comments that the conservative learning the Bengalis showed at that time were the basic traits of their character which eventually shaped the psychology of the Bengali middle class.

In any case Benoy Ghosh was speaking of a dichotomy in the mentality of the Bengali people. Politically conscious Bengali did not betray signs of being a finance-minded people. In the eighteenth century money was squeezed out of the countryside and dumped in Calcutta. Scrafton wrote that the interior *Rajas* sent all their money to Calcutta<sup>10</sup> and this made the interior a capital short economy. This was a persisting scene in the country lasting up to the twentieth century. A twentieth century economic observation about Calcutta noted : “Calcutta Metropolis presents a Semi-colonial Character. Its economic structure is characterized by a large amount of capital being concentrated in the city proper, which means wastage of a large amount of productive capacity for want of adequate use and utility in the city on the one hand, and under-developed and stagnant agriculture in its rural environs for want of adequate capital for investment on the other.”<sup>11</sup> Almost the same thing happened in

the eighteenth century. Huge money came to Calcutta but money was either hoarded or it was invested in real estate. Calcutta presented a picture of money-short economy. Money came and money went out. Money was hoarded and money was invested in real estates. And money was not available for business transactions. Money shortage was so acute that even the *Sarafs* who at one time controlled the money market as bankers and money exchangers complained about the shortage of money in Calcutta.<sup>12</sup> One reason for this was that capital was shut up from transaction. Writing as late as 1863 in his *Rise, Progress and Present Condition of Banking in India*, Charles Northoote Cooke<sup>13</sup> observed : “. . . the increase of banking institutions in this country is one of the most remarkable characteristics of the age. No single feature in the Commercial aspect of the Asiatic Peninsular is more observable than the growth of these establishments, which are now assuming a very prominent place amongst the colonial institutions of the Empire, and attracting the attention of a large and influential class in Europe-men who see in this country a luxuriant field for the Culture of Banking”. Thus investment in banking and fiscal agencies in India was mainly done by foreign Capitalists. Cooke does not mention the Indians as active agents in the field. Thus Geoffrey Tyson is very pertinent when commenting on Cook, he says<sup>14</sup> : “But notwithstanding Cooke’s ‘luxuriant field’, Indians of substance continued for many years to show a strong preference for investment in land, house property and precious metals and were reluctant to commit their savings to banks, either as depositors or shareholders.”

This reluctance to save in banks was because of three reasons. First in the age of the *Nawabs* money had no security. In a letter Scrafton wrote<sup>15</sup> that people in this country had developed a tendency towards hoarding money because the *Nawabs* had an eye to the wealth of the people just the way little children had an eye on the birds’ nest which they wanted to grab and destroy. Naturally people wanted that money should be screened from public eyes and money should be stored underground. Secondly, there was a bullion crisis in Bengal all through the *Nawabi* period. Jadunath Sarkar believed that in the first half of the eighteenth century a tribute of nearly one crore and forty lakhs were sent to Delhi annually and this was sent in bullion. This huge drain of bullion led to the fall in the total metallic reserve of the country and there was seldom any metal available for minting coins. As a result of this the total money in circulation was very small. People rarely had any purchasing capacity and therefore, in the absence of effective demand price remained low. People had no staying power and therefore in time of crisis they died like human sheep.<sup>16</sup> The third factor was the predominance of the *Sarafs*<sup>17</sup> who controlled the country’s currency. *Sarafs* were money changers<sup>18</sup> and the greatest of the

*Sarafs*, the Jagat Seths, controlled not only the mints of the *Nawabs* but also the bullion market.<sup>18</sup> and the greatest of the *Sarafs*, the Jagat Seths, controlled not only the mints of the *Nawabs* but also the bullion market.<sup>19</sup> In revenue matters the *Sarafs* stood as security for *Zamindars*, acted as bankers to the state and supplied credit in business in one instrument called the *hundi*. Towards the end of the eighteenth century the *Sarafs* vanished under pressures from the English.<sup>20</sup> The Government experimented with the Bank of Bengal (started in June 1806) and the Agency Houses appeared as fiscal bodies absorbing investments. But these bodies maintained precarious status from the 1790s to the 1820s. In the thirties of the nineteenth century they collapsed; public credit became sulky and people became scared of investment. This was the period when cotton industry was breaking down and if N.K. Sinha is to be believed by 1828 about 10 lakhs of people were “thrown out of employment”.<sup>21</sup> Between 1830 and 1835 all the major Agency Houses collapsed creating a panic in the minds of the native investors. Then in 1847 the Union Bank failed. This was the greatest crash the money world of Calcutta had ever experienced. This crash has thus been explained by a doggerel.<sup>22</sup>

“All rich men in Calcutta have lost their riches” went the doggerel. “Almost all of them”, it continues, “are declaring themselves insolvent. The Union Bank does not exist anymore. Cockerel and Tulloh have also failed. There is no ship in the port. Only Chhatu and Latu (son of Ram Dulal De) are crying and rolling in dust. The insolvency court of Mr. Peel is thronged with people. All men of property have been frightened. There are brisk and false transfers of property on a large scale”.<sup>23</sup>

This financial crash was a setback for the Indians. But financially the city was still a living one. Geoffrey Tyson wrote: “In 1863 Calcutta was a great and still growing city; moreover it was the administrative and business capital of India – a place where policy was made and executed until the seat of government was transferred to Delhi in 1912. Calcutta, it has often been said, is the most ‘British’ city in the East. Certainly it is a much more British creation than Bombay or Madras.”<sup>25</sup> The city with its British character lost its indigenous capitalists in 1847 and immediately after that “Ramdulal Dey died in 1825. Asutosh Dey in 1856, Dwarkanath Tagore in 1846, Rustomji Cowasji in 1852, Radhamadhab Banerjee in 1852, Motilal Seal in 1854. Their characteristic style of business activity ended. Their descendants invested in Calcutta house-property, land, gold and silver plates, jewels, government securities, company’s paper, zamindaries, taluks and rent-free land.”<sup>26</sup>

A vacuum was created in Calcutta money market when British Capital started flowing in this country. Leland H. Jenks in his *Migration of British Capital* (1927)

observes that this was the time, particularly between 1857 and 1865, when the major movement of British capital was towards India -- in the country's public works and nascent industries. One favoured sector where investments were directed was the Railways. It was not indigenous capital but the money from outside which made Calcutta the centre of the business world of the east. There was a massive dispatch of capital from England and if Jenk's records are reliable there were on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1868 not less than 49,690 share and debenture holders who held an average of about £1,500 each of Indian guaranteed railway stock. These shareholders were practically all residents of Great Britain.

The city capitalists were crushed but the country capitalists, the *Sarafs*, persisted with their age old credit instrument of the Indian money market namely the *hundi*. "Within the country", writes Tyson, "for credit transactions of any size the hundi, or internal bill of exchange, was extensively used and in every large town sharafs dealt in hundis in much the same manner as the bill broker of today buy and sells commercial paper".<sup>27</sup> In the interior *Sarafs* persisted, at Calcutta the financial entrepreneurs were ruined. The Indian capitalists suffered a trauma and shock from which they never recovered again. N.K. Sinha observes<sup>28</sup> : "Overtrading, ruinous speculation, dishonesty, fraud and failure of their western exemplars had created a reaction in the Bengali mind. Those amongst Bengalis who now associated themselves with Europeans were second hand merchants and commission traders doing small scale business". Sinha adds : "The permanent settlement, Regulation VII of 1799 and Regulation V of 1812 ensured security of landed property to *zamindars*. Moneyed people in Bengal could now think only about land and investment in land and the weakness of traditional society perhaps reinforced this attitude."<sup>29</sup> The Bengali entrepreneurs now preferred stability to adventure, safe gain to profit through risks. The partnership which the Bengali capitalists built up with the Europeans since the second half of the eighteenth century was now totally lost. "A distrust of European business became a part of Bengali business thinking" – observes N.K. Sinha.<sup>30</sup> "After 1848, Bengali businessmen practically withdrew from any adventurous business activity. With the exception of the firm Ramgopal Ghosh & Co., which took the place of Kelsall & Ghosh, there was no other firm of sufficient importance."<sup>31</sup> In fact many Bengali financiers in Calcutta who suffered the crash were eventually saved because they had enough *zamindari*s and 'Extensive house property in Calcutta' and around. Dwarakanath Tagore was the greatest of them. "This lesson", writes Sinha, "was driven home to the mind of moneyed men in Calcutta who wanted safe investment for their descendants. We read in more than one case record : "Since the death of Dwarakanath Tagore landed

property in Calcutta has greatly increased in value.”<sup>32</sup> Traditional Bengali land attachment grew.

Let us now look at a contemporary report on the accumulation of wealth in Calcutta and Bengal. I refer to *Bangadoot* dated 13 June 1829.<sup>33</sup> In an article entitled “The Increased Prosperity of Gourdesh (Bengal)”, it pointed out that there were three reasons why considerable wealth of late had been accumulated in Calcutta and other parts of Bengal. These are – increased value of land, increased volume of trade and concentration of European gentlemen in the country. A plot of land that was purchased for Rs. 15 thirty years ago now went for sale at value of Rs. 300. Thus increased land value, the article said, was the source of *sampad* (capital). From *sampad* emerged opportunities, from opportunities men moved to status and from status to distinction. Now distinction was being claimed by a new class – the middle class – the birth of which is a recent social experience in the country. The article in the *Bangadoot* clearly says that until recently wealth was concentrated in the hands of a few people, not in the hands of all. A few were at the top and the rest below living in subordination. The rise of the Middle class had changed this social structure and much benefit had accrued to the society by this. First, the polarization of wealth in the society dwindled. The author looked at Europe to see what happened there and found that in Spain the absence of a middle class left no bridge between classes too-high and too-low. There whoever was able to acquire little riches shunned labour and turned into a highbrowed Hidalgo assuming a posture befitting a king. From this point of view Bengal is blessed. With the existence of a middle class people Bengal is happy beyond a parallel. Secondly in recent years free circulation of money had increased. Cowries or shells had nearly gone out of use in Calcutta and before long it would be totally out of circulation.

The economy of the city was clearly monetized. Then the author comments that wealth is unproductive if heaped up and kept in one place and not put to use. Like fertilizers it is productive only when its potentialities are put to service. This is what happened in Bengal and Calcutta. The person, the author observes, who earned two rupees a month ten years ago was not happy even if he earned twenty rupees now. The carpenter previously working for eight rupees was now an earner of sixteen Rupees. Rice previously selling for eight annas per maund was now selling for two Rupees. This was an age of optimism in Calcutta. There were a free circulation of money, a greater degree of monetization, a wealthy middle class, increased wages and a higher purchasing capacity that could afford to tolerate a higher rise in price. This had created a sense of stability in Calcutta in particular and in Bengal in general.

This sense of stability was lost around 1848. A tremendous fiscal crash dried up the commercial culture in the city, made the Bengali *babus* conservative and forced them to fall back on land as the last resort for subsistence and stability. The Permanent Settlement was designed to substitute indigenous craft and industry by agriculture. Overtrading of European firms and recklessness of European partnership in Indian business broke the spine of the Bengali business community and threw them back on the time-tested shelters of real estates. Henceforth the Bengali mind shrank from any adventure and when in 1857 there came a new call for a political revolution the Bengali mind taking lessons from its economic failures refused to respond to a new tryst with destiny. Real estates gave them their cushion and this cushion of real estates saved Bengal from a fall. Economic ventures and political adventures were both forbidden to Bengal for next half a century.

Calcutta's finance-world from the eighteenth century contained a paradox. Peter Robb noted : "Calcutta – indeed the Indian empire – was built less with cash than with credit. Private and Public finances were complex and hand to mouth. Many of the effective rules were really codes of fair conduct, backed up by public opinion and notions of friendship. Credit depended on such codes, and upon exchanges of information that were essential to help protect reputations and to guard against fraud."<sup>34</sup> In this Calcutta resembled London. Linda Colley reported that in this period "credit played a more vital part in Britain's economy than in that of almost any of its competitors".<sup>35</sup> This visible cash shortage in Calcutta was balanced by huge influx of money drawn either from the interior or from business – the activities of the peddlers. But bulk of the money that came was either invested in land or was hoarded up and buried under soil. Hence loans in Calcutta were often paper transaction. Blechynden, an English builder and town surveyor in Calcutta in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century who lived in depressed conditions and financial disasters "entered into seven new loans. All were shorter paper transactions, so that Blechynden saw no actual cash. He could hardly afford to continue work."<sup>36</sup> In the early nineteenth century when cash was short job competitions were great. Peter Marshall informed us that there was "an indiscriminate migration to Bengal during the eighteenth century of Europeans of all kinds."<sup>37</sup> As a result two things happened. On the one hand at an upper level collaboration between powerful and solvent Englishmen and affluent Indians increased.

This collaboration broke down in 1848. However, at a lower level competitions between the English and the Indians increased. Upper class Europeans were limited in numbers. These men needed Indian partnership. For example

between 1762 and 1784 only 508 European Company servants were appointed. Of them only 37 had returned to England and 150 had died.<sup>38</sup> These men needed collaborators and rich Indians were there to supply their needs. In Calcutta there were 400 J.P.s of Fort William, all born in the British Isles, plus 74 jurors summoned to the session in 1818.<sup>39</sup> Below these men of high status there were innumerable lower grade Europeans. Charles Moore notes : “of coopers there were many shoemakers were to be met with by the score. Tailors, carpenters, coach and shipbuilders were very much in evidence . . .”<sup>40</sup> Blechynden’s ‘Diary’<sup>41</sup> mentions surveyor, builders, shipbuilders, printers, engravers, writers, journalists, lawyers, doctors, shopkeepers, auctioneers, booksellers, tailors, stable-owners, marine and army officers, padres and indigo planters. At least one European woman ran a brothel in the 1790s<sup>42</sup> Percival Spear clearly notes that an English middle class was lacking in Calcutta. This was because of two things – the falling status of trade and the division of the society between world of aristocrats and vagabonds.<sup>43</sup> Calcutta thus never had any substantial base of affluence. As a result money culture could not grow in Calcutta.

We can sum up the above observations in the following way.

Calcutta during the colonial age had no money-culture. The English East India Company was a money-thrill mercantile Company and spent very little for the promotion and development of Calcutta as an urban unit. The result was that at the beginning of the nineteenth century money was to be raised through lottery and it was this money which acted as the pace-setter for the city. Ashok Mitra analysing the money-shortage in the planning and development of Calcutta holds the capitalists of the city responsible for this. He says that the capitalist in Calcutta lived aloof and never contemplated to have a stake in the city’s development. This was because the capitalists were not the children of the soil. Their main purpose was to stay in detachment and amass money as a stock not for public use. Hastings ascribed the blame on the natives for, he said, they did not find any interest in the modern instruments of public finance which the Company’s Government was trying to build up in Bengal. Benoy Ghosh, a sociologist, puts the blame on the conservative nature of the Bengalis. He says that there was a clear dichotomy in the Bengali nature. On the one hand they adopted a very progressive posture with regard to adopting Western culture and renovating their world of thinking. But they were essentially a backward and shy people to adjust themselves with the modern behaviour of public finance. Given this, he argues, it may be conjectured that all the progressive postures in their social behaviour were outcomes of a deep instinct of imitating a superior culture instead of innovating something new of

their own. All developments leading to the crash of the Union Bank in 1848 can be taken as indicators of the lack of money-culture of the Bengal people in the colonial age. For such a people the only avenue for investment was found in the creation of real estates and here, one may argue, that the Permanent settlement left a permanent print on the psychology of the people.

## NOTES

1. Ashok Mitra, *Calcutta India's City*, New Age Publishers Pvt. Ltd.; 1963, p. 19
- 1A. Til (Point) + Uttama (most pretty dame) = *Tilottama* = A dame most beautiful by every point.
2. For planners' dreams see Benoy Kumar Sen, *Cleaning up Calcutta*, 1955, Progressive Publishing House, Calcutta.
3. Asok Mitra, *op.cit.* p. 39.
4. Charles Moore, *The Sehriffs of Fort William From 1775 to 1926*, Thacker Sprink & Co. 1926, Second edition, pp. 25.
5. *Ibid.*
6. Charles Moore, *op.cit.*, pp. 225-226.
7. Mr. Hastings' Review of the State of Bengal, London, 1786
8. See Benoy Ghosh, *Town Kalikatar Karcha*, October, 1961, pp. 105-106
9. Benoy Ghosh, *op.cit.*, pp. 105-106
10. Luke Scrafton, *Reflections on the Government of Indostan etc.*, London, 1763. Reprinted in Calcutta under the title *A History of Bengal before and after the Plassey (1739-1758)*, Calcutta, 1975.
11. S.S. Bhattacharjee, "Development of CMD : Need for an Alternate Approach" in Narendra Goya led. *The City in Turmoil*, sponsored by Gandhi Peace Foundation, Calcutta and Gandhian Institute of Studies, Varanasi, New Delhi, 1971, pp. 91-92.
12. See Ranjit Sen, *Metamorphosis of the Bengal Polity (1700-1793)*, Rabindra Bharati University, Calcutta. 1981 p. 222.

13. Charles Northcote Cooke was at that time Deputy-Secretary and Treasurer of the Bank of Bengal.
14. Geoffrey Tyson, *100 Years of Banking in Asia and Africa 1863-1963* Published by National and Grindlays Bank Limited, 1963, p. 10
15. Scrafton, *op.cit.*
16. Jadunath Sarkar ed. *History of Bengal*, vol. II, Dacca University Publication, p. 417
17. See N.K. Sinha, *History of Bengal*, Vol. I, J.H. Little, *The House of Jagat Seths*, Ranjit Sen, *op.cit.*
18. *Ibid*; Ranjit Sen, *op.cit.*, ch. VI
19. *Ibid.*
20. Ranjit Sen, *op.cit.*, ch. VI
21. N.K. Sinha, *op.cit.*, Vol. III, p. 7
22. N.K. Sinha, *op.cit.*, Vol. III, p. 71
23. Quoted by Sinha from *Hindu Intelligences*, 1847, Sinha, *op.cit.*, p. 71
24. The decision to transfer capital to Delhi was taken at the end of 1911.
25. Geoffrey Tyson, *op.cit.*
26. N.K. Sinha, *op.cit.*, Vol. III, p. 124
27. Tyson, *op.cit.*, p. 11
28. N.K. Sinha, *op.cit.*, Vol.III, p. 124.
29. N.K. Sinha, *op.cit.*, vol. III, p. 125
30. N.K. Sinha, *op.cit*, vol. III, p. 124.
31. *Ibid.*
32. N.K. Sinha, *op.cit.* Vol. III, p. 125.
33. B.N. Bandopadhyay, *Sangbadpatre Sekaler Katha*, vol. I, 1949, pp. 352-54
34. Peter Robb, "Credit, Work and Race in 1790s Calcutta : Early Colonialism through a Contemporary European View" in *The Indian Economic and*

*Social History Review*, Vol. XXXVII, No. 1, Jan-March, 2000, p. 6, Also read P. Spear, *Nabobs*, pp. 95-96.

35. Linda Colley, *Britons : Forging the Nation*. New Haven, 1992, pp. 66-67.
36. Peter Robb, *op.cit.* p. 3
37. Peter J. Marshall, *East Indian Fortunes : The British in Bengal in the Eighteenth Century*, Oxford, 1976, p. 21.
38. B.B. Misra, *The Bureaucracy in India : An Historical Analysis of Development to 1947*, Delhi, 1977, p. 52.
39. Peter Robb, *op.cit.* p. 2, note
40. Charles Moore, *op.cit.*, pp. 9-11
41. Blechynden left a voluminous diary which is a great source of our materials for 18<sup>th</sup> Century Calcutta.
42. Blechynden's Diary, Nov. 1794, quoted by Peter Robb.
43. Percival spear. *The Nabobs*, London, 1980, pp. 37, 57-61.

## CHAPTER 10

### THE FISCAL FACE OF CALCUTTA IN THE PHASE OF ITS EARLY GROWTH

In an exceedingly penetrating analysis of the 'Economic Foundations of the Bengal Renaissance' Blair B. Kling discusses the economic background in which Calcutta grew and eventually fell from its glory in the second half of the nineteenth century. Calcutta grew when an 'Indo-British collaboration' lurked in the background. This collaboration spanned the first one century of British rule in India. It stopped from the middle of the nineteenth century and Calcutta lost its lustre.<sup>1</sup>

The 'collaboration' referred to above was an 'economic cooperation between the races' – the English and the Indians, in our case the Bengalis. This cooperation took place at "a time of embryonic industrialization in Lower Bengal when the area was technologically advanced and when the mercantile community, composed of both races, was attempting to establish independent economic institutions."<sup>2</sup>

We do not know and Kling does not clarify whether Calcutta was one such institution which the collaborating communities were trying to build up. We know from our own knowledge of history that this collaboration took an institutional form when in the middle of the eighteenth century Krishnaballav, son of the celebrated dewan Rajballav of Dakha fled to Calcutta with a huge wealth. Calcutta was a sanctuary for that absconder who brought wealth to the city when the city starved of capital. Long before this incident the founding communities of Bengal traders – the Seths and the Basaks – found themselves in a state of decline. Their leadership to the up-country merchants. The famous *Sutanuti hut* which they built up passed outside their control.

Given this, the question arises as to where did the Bengali trading and entrepreneurial classes who contributed to the new collaboration with the English come from. Kling's answer is that they were the products of British business. While giving birth to these classes Calcutta was developed. It was a two-phased event. The first phase was the period of the rise of the Bengali trading classes. The second phase was the period of the rise of Calcutta.

"The modern Bengali business class, in fact, owes its origin to British commercial activity", writes Blair B. Kling. "When Europeans began trading in Bengal in the sixteenth century, the traditional Bengali merchant castes had been displaced by traders from north India who had captured the lucrative foreign trade in Bengali silk and cotton textiles. It was from these outsiders –

Marwaris, Pathans, Kashmiris and others – and not from Bengalis that the British seized the trade of Bengal in the eighteenth century.”<sup>3</sup>

This event had all the implications of a new turn in history. The Bengali merchants retreated from trade giving up their leadership in the Bengal textiles business to the up country merchants. The latter could not hold their command for long. The thrust of the Europeans was too severe for them to withstand. When the eighteenth century opened the business leadership in the Bengal textile trade was already with the English. In the eighteenth century this leadership was consolidated.<sup>4</sup> Throughout the course of the first half of the eighteenth century the English with the backing of politics and the gun, courage and adventure promoted their cause as traders and outbid the native merchants.

“Greater resources”, writes Blair Kling, “and the use of the dastak enabled the British to outbid the merchants of north India for the products of Bengal. In addition, wherever possible the British bypassed the middlemen and gathered handloom weavers and silk winders into compounds under their own control. They also diverted the extensive coastal trade between Bengal and Gujarat from the boats of independent Indian merchants to their own ships and changed the direction of the flourishing trade between these provinces to a separate trade of each with the Far East.”<sup>5</sup>

This was, one may say, the complete mastery over the entire range of trade and the trade zone of south Asia. Calcutta’s rise under the English happened in this milieu of the transfer of trade mastery from the Indian to the Europeans.<sup>6</sup> The trade-mastery changed hands when the river was changing its own course. When the English came the riverine trade developed its larger sea-connections. In this situation the English traders needed their partners as well as their patrons. The Bengal banians, the early capitalists of the country, emerged to provide support in both the roles – a point missed by Kling. In any case Kling appreciates that a subordinate comprador class sprang up in Bengal as a creation of the English traders from outside.

“As they drove the north Indian traders from Bengal”, writes Kling, “the British developed in Calcutta a new Bengali merchants class. In the late seventeenth century, when they first came to the site of Calcutta, the British found a few villages of Seths and Basaks, lower caste Bengali weavers who had learned while dealing with the Portuguese in the previous century to combine trade with weaving. Under British rule many Setts and Basaks amassed fortunes as brokers and *dadni* merchants. Other Bengali communities quickly became aware of commercial opportunities under British auspices and migrated to

Calcutta. By 1763, along with the Setts and Basaks, the names of Kayasthas and Baniks appear on lists of investment agents of the East India Company, and after Palassey, Brahmin names were added.”<sup>7</sup>

The Bengali merchants were prominent in their trade in the fifteenth and the sixteenth centuries. The seventeenth century was a period of slump for them. That was the period when they surrendered to the up-country merchants their lead in trade and ventures. They again regrouped under the English in the eighteenth century. The rise of Calcutta synchronized with the rise of this new Bengali merchants class – the sub-ordinate partners of the English. Tamralipti and Satgaon were left behind and Hughli was now being gradually superseded. Calcutta raised its head to provide space to the emerging class of capitalists in Bengal. It emerged with the support of this class as the hub of a new trade aristocracy of Bengal.

As Blair Kling traces the rise of a trade aristocracy in Bengal as an event concomitant to the rise of Calcutta there happened in the background a parallel episode that facilitated the growth of Calcutta into prominence vis-à-vis Murshidabad. This being not within the purview of Kling he feels on concern for it but for the sake of historical knowledge we cite a few points here so that the perspective of the rise of Calcutta may become clear. A very powerful territorial aristocracy grew in Bengal under the patronage of the Muslim rulers in Bengal since the time Husain Shah and Ilyas Shah. The Bengal sultans, felt the need to cultivate the indigenous people as a source of man-power and strength for their rule. The Muslim talents which used to arrive in Bengal from the north-west ceased to come because of political turmoil and state revolutions in west and central Asia and in Delhi and north India as well. Suffering from acute shortage of administrative man-power the Bengal Sultans looked to the indigenous Hindu Bengali population for support. Thus a partnership grew up between the state and the society at least five hundred years before the coming of the English. The Hindu Bengalis quickly adapted themselves to a refined Arabic and Persian culture including the languages, etiquette and dress of the ruling elite. This only strengthened the partnership between the state and the society. This tradition was continued under Murshid Quli Khan and the Subsequent Bengal *Nawabs*. The result was that a very powerful human force with great administrative talent grew up. They were the service elite which in course of time became the power-elite of Dhaka and Murshidabad. From among their ranks the Hindu *zamindars* emerged. As a result a compact territorial aristocracy grew in Bengal in course of the five hundred years that preceded the foundation of the British rule in Bengal. This aristocracy – the one time power-elite that facilitated the emergence of Dhaka

and Murshidabad – sank with the fall of the *Nawabi* rule in Bengal. As they broke down a new money elite arose in Calcutta under the protective wings of the English. The banians formed a new service elite and Calcutta relied much on them for its own rise.<sup>8</sup> As the English patronized a new money and service elite in Bengal they also promoted a competent trade elite as their subordinate partners. They provided Calcutta the umbrella it required. Calcutta under the banians grew. This town was now the house of a composite partnership between the state and the society.

“By the end of the eighteenth century”, writes Blair Kling, “Calcutta had moved far ahead of the older trading and administrative cities of Bengal in population and in wealth. Among its citizenry was a new Indian elite composed of banians, dewans, and pundits associated with the British in trade, government and educational institutions. They were drawn from a variety of Bengali Hindu castes. What they had in common were ambitious ancestors who had come to the city in search of wealth. The new elite invested their money in both modern and traditional activities.”<sup>9</sup>

Here is thus a very profound and fundamental clue to Calcutta’s rise. Calcutta rose on the strength of the money of the Bengali capitalists. The ambitions Bengali adventurers and fortune-seekers had dreamed provided Calcutta with the new initiatives it required at the time of its growth. The partnership and competition among what Blair Kling calls the ‘variety of Bengali Hindu castes’ supplied the real dynamics of town-growth. Kling is very sure of this. He writes:

“To establish status in Bengali society, they (the new elite) built temples and ghats, supported Brahmin priests, threw great feasts, and performed expensive *shraddha*. But they also built new mansions and furnished them with western imports. In their productive investments they joined with Europeans in commerce, shipping, and land development. On their own they purchased zamindaris and urban real estate.”<sup>10</sup>

This partnership between the state and the Hindu Bengali society lasted till 1905 – the year Bengal was partitioned by Lord Curzon. It may, therefore, be said that Calcutta had a kind of growth till 1905. Then the city became stale as the centre for nationalist agitation and in consequence from 1912 it ceased to be the capital of the Empire. It was in the background of this partnership between the state and the society that a renaissance dawned in Bengal and Calcutta was the seat of this renaissance. This renaissance was financed by the Bengali capitalists class which was composed of a great trade-elite and a cultured and educated class of *zamindars* who emerged after the Permanent settlement of 1793. Many of them were enterprising business entrepreneurs

who reconciled the role of an estate manager with that of a trade and industry adventurers. A compact and composite trade elite based mostly in Calcutta and other European settlements in Bengal and emerged principally as the liaison officers and native managers of European trade circles in the Bengal chapters of their Asiatic trade. From the last quarter of the eighteenth century they were becoming somewhat sovereign and independent so that from the time of Ramdulal Dey to the time of Dwarakanath Tagore they had ceased to have their comprador trait in their class character. It was these men who were based in Calcutta and helped the city acquire its real glamour as one of the most leading cities of Asia. The Bengali capitalists were not the only people who ensured the financial basis of the rise of Calcutta. There were a host of up-country merchants who had their own finance and trade system independent of any connection with the Europeans. They gave the city its cosmopolitan character. Blair Kling rates them as equally sound as the Hindu Bengali capitalists.

“In addition to Bengalis”, writes Kling, “Calcutta attracted a large cosmopolitan population from all parts of India and Asia. A new wave of north Indian business communities, primarily Marwaris, settled in Calcutta to work as shroffs (money changers) and Kothival (merchant bankers) in the Burrah bazaar. During the nineteenth century they complemented the international commercial system by advancing money to agency houses that imported British textiles and acted as middlemen for the distribution of British imports to north-western India. Until the Opium war they also speculated heavily in opium. But unlike the Bengalis they usually remained outside British commercial institutions and maintained their traditional upcountry networks along with their traditional ‘bania’ way of life.”<sup>11</sup>

It is thus clear that the capitalism on which Calcutta depended in the formative period of its growth was not always a collaborative capitalism. Indigenous capital which had its own axis of growth for a long time kept itself free of British manipulation and ran in a competitive course parallel to the Bengali capital grown mostly under the protective wing of the British. The upcountry traders who promoted mercantile capital in Bengal out of their own enterprise were the scions of those who had once wrested the control of the Bengal textile trade from the early settlers in Calcutta, the Setts and Basaks. In later years they maintained their control and mastery over the Burra Bazar and when after the fall of the Union Bank in 1848 the Bengali Capitalists retreated from their trade ventures and concentrated in real estate ownerships, the upcountry merchants maintained their own genre. This meant that the

traditional shades of the indigenous capital did not change much even when the economics of the Empire underwent a change in itself.

Throughout the first half of the nineteenth century there were broadly speaking three agencies for capital accumulation and investment in Bengal. First of them were the Hindu Bengali capitalists who functioned mostly on the patterns of collaborative capital. The greater part of them was stationed in Calcutta. Parallel to them were the indigenous upcountry merchants who were the most redoubtable promoters of native capital. Then there were the Agency Houses which acted as the greatest investment outlets of the time. Calcutta housed all of them and they provided the fiscal basis of the rise of Calcutta. The first half of the nineteenth century was the period when money was raised through public lotteries for the development of the city. Money was then available in the city and the lotteries were the instruments through which the surplus capital was extracted from the people. This saved the government from the anxieties of mobilizing capital for the development of the city. The territorial revenue which ensured the solvency of the exchequer helped a mercantile company functioning as the government to siphon money to trade. The territorial revenue thus having been set aside as the sinews of commerce private capital was deployed for the development of the city.

The most organized sector for capital investment was provided by the Agency Houses. There were firms for capital management. Rich native merchants, the Company's servants, the army officers, the free traders, the liaison men in the official trade of the different East India Companies – all deposited their surplus wealth to the Agency Houses. As a result these Houses became the most effective and handy instruments for the British to carry out their international trade.

“The British carried on their international trade”, writes Kling, “through a group of firms known as agency houses. Formed in the late eighteenth century by enterprising men who left the Company service to try their hand in private trade, these houses represented the sector of the economy oriented toward international markets. They used the money of their constituents, civil and military servants of the Company, to finance the import export trade, especially the country trade, and to produce indigo and other agricultural products for export.”<sup>12</sup>

The activities of the Agency houses to a large extent promoted the functioning of the Calcutta port. Since they had a command over capital they could embark on the agenda of ship building. Clink adds : “They (the Agency Houses) built and operated ships, served as bill brokers, formed banks and insurance

companies, and lent their support to ventures in mining, manufacturing, and plantation industries".<sup>13</sup>

The wealth of the banians along with that of the British officers and army personnel substantially formed the bulk of the capital of the Agency Houses. Calcutta was the base of the banians and after 1765 when bullion was scarce in Bengal for not being imported from England the capital of the banians was the main stay for the English and sustained to a large extent the solvency of the individual Europeans and lubricated the fiscal machinery of the Company. The second half of the eighteenth century was the age of the banians and till the middle of the nineteenth century their importance as the source of finance did not diminish. Cling admits that they were the financial catalysts in the Calcutta circles in a period when modern banking system was yet to emerge. He writes:

"Bengali capitalists known as banians were directly associated with the Calcutta agency houses and provided money for the international export trade. In the eighteenth century the banian was valued for his knowledge of internal markets and sources of supply. As the British learned more about India, his value declined, but after the free-trade charter of 1813 and the influx of a new set of adventurers from Britain who came with little capital of their own, the banian again became important, now as a source of finance."<sup>14</sup>

In the first quarter of the nineteenth century the development of Calcutta depended upon the efficacies of two agencies – the Lottery Committee and the Agency Houses. The Lottery Committee mostly raised money for the construction of roads in Calcutta. From the seventies of the eighteenth century the business activities in Calcutta began to increase. The mercantile mentality of the Company was giving way to imperial aspirations. Trade was increasing in the city. Money was accumulating. Since there was no reliable and easy channel for remitting their surplus wealth to their own country the Europeans were investing money in Calcutta both in the Agency House and in the lotteries. With this new-found wealth the Agency Houses were going into new ventures out of which Calcutta's urbanization gained momentum. S.B. Singh who studied the activities of the Agency Houses gives us the following observation:

"New ventures and adventurous projects frequently attracted these houses of Agency. The promotion of steam navigation, the opening of telegraph lines and the working of mines greatly increased them. The establishment of a foundry and of the first cotton mill in Bengal was also due to them."<sup>15</sup>

In a further passage S.B. Singh informs us: "The Agency houses were interested in the establishment of telegraph line from Saugor point communicating with various stations on the river for the purpose of quickly conveying intelligence to and from the ships."<sup>16</sup>

The genre of civic improvement lay in the construction of roads. Hitherto the Agency Houses sought to invest their money. Singh notes:

"Moreover, the Agency Houses were much interested in the improvement of roads in Calcutta. In 1828, a committee of subscribers was formed for extending the Strand Road to the Garden Reach, and donations were invited for the purpose of carrying on the improvement."<sup>17</sup>

Calcutta was assuming a modern get-up, its formal townscape. After a stagnation of nearly one hundred years the urbanization of Calcutta suddenly acquired its own momentum. The combined activities of the Lottery Committee and the Agency Houses provided this momentum. One may say that the process started in the late eighteenth century and continued till the thirties of the nineteenth century. It created such enthusiasm all around that even private donations came flowing for programmes of necessary urbanization. One Aga Kurbullee Mohamed made a donation of Rs. 25,000/- towards the improvement of Strand Road on condition that on completion of the road it would be open to the people free of tolls.<sup>18</sup>

The mobilization of capital which Calcutta experienced in the first half of the nineteenth century came after a period of stagnation. P.J. Marshall and Amares Tripathi have shown "how the growing difficulties of remittance in the 1770s and 1780s and high profit/interest rates still obtaining in Bengal accounted for accumulation of European capital. People, who made money, would not like to put their eggs in the same basket, nor would they like to let the Company know the extent of their fortunes and the manner in which those were acquired. They preferred to remit in diamonds. When unable to do so, they trusted 'the Dutch, the Dane and the Devil' before they trusted the Company's Europe bills and deposited the rest with the agency houses to be invested in country trade or indigo or usurious loans to the government".<sup>19</sup>

From 1793 the practice began to raise money through lotteries. Just at the time when this practice consolidated itself in the first three decades of the nineteenth century the Agency Houses ventured into other trade practices which created the ambience in which Calcutta could grow as a modern urban centre. Tripathi informs:

“They (the Agency Houses) controlled trade, financed silk, indigo, sugar, and opium, ran three banks and four marine insurance companies, speculated in public securities, and negotiated bills on foreign companies.”<sup>20</sup>

The abundance of money in the city of Calcutta was essentially a phenomenon of the first half of the nineteenth century. But from the seventies of the eighteenth century trade started booming in the Calcutta port. As foreign trade increased the demand for credit began to be increasingly felt by European merchants. This led to the flowering of the banking business in the city. The Agency Houses perceived the situation and took initiatives in opening banks. Sometime in the 1770s Alexander & Co. opened the Bank of Hindustan, ‘the first European Bank in India.’<sup>21</sup> Messrs Palmer & Co. established the Calcutta Bank and Messrs Mackintosh & Co set up the Commercial Bank. These banks did not have a long life and they collapsed in no time – the Bank of Hindostan in 1832, the Calcutta Bank in 1829 and the Commercial Bank in 1833.<sup>22</sup>

Money was in abundance but there was no means for investment. This was the economic image of the city till the end of the twenties of the nineteenth century. Singh focuses on this:

“In the early twenties of the last century, . . . money became unusually abundant in Bengal. Every means of investment rose in value. There was hardly any channel for the remittance of private capital to Europe. It was a splendid opportunity for the Agency houses, who borrowed money at a low interest and invested it prodigally in indigo concerns. Indigo at that time was practically the only profitable means of remittance to Europe. But the first Anglo-Burmese War affected the money market adversely. At the end of the year 1826, money became scarce, and the Agency houses were placed in difficult situation.”<sup>23</sup>

This scarcity of money did not affect the city of Calcutta directly. There was still money in the hands of native banians and merchants of the city. They were affected when the Union Bank failed in 1848. N.K. Sinha writes :

“in the banking world of India the ruin of the Union Bank was regarded as a public calamity. There was a violent and indiscriminating panic which affected all financial circles, depreciating all securities, public and private.”<sup>24</sup> Never before had the money world of Calcutta become so insecure as it became in 1847-48. The misery of Calcutta found poignant the following expressions in words : “All rich men in Calcutta have lost their riches. Almost all of them are declaring themselves insolvent. The Union Bank does not exist any more. Cockerel and Tulloh have also failed. There is no ship in the port. Only Chhatu and Latu (two of the richest men in the city, two sons of Ram Dulal De)

are crying and rolling in dust. The Insolvency court of Mr. Peel is thronged with people. All men of property have been frightened. There are brick and false transfers of property on a large scale.”<sup>25</sup>

With the fall of the Union Bank the tradition of native rich men acting as the fiscal base of the English in Calcutta had come to an end. This tradition of Indians cushioning private British individual’s need for money dates back to as early as the days of the coming of the English in Calcutta. N.K. Sinha observes:

“When the English left Hooghly and settled in Calcutta, Sutanati and Gobindapore they brought some ‘native’ bankers with them. They belonged to the Subarnabanik caste. The most prominent of these bankers in the early years of British rule was Laksmi Kanta Dhar – Naku Dhar – who was probably the richest and biggest among them. What the Jagat Seths were to the Nawabs of Bengal Naku Dhar was to the British in Calcutta. He not only supplied them with money but also goods and trustworthy men. But his importance in the money market was local”.<sup>26</sup>

Native gentlemen operating as money-lenders and credit suppliers had for more than one hundred and fifty years composed what N.K. Sinha called the *nouveau-riche* of the city – the upstart elite whose command over money had entitled them into a partnership with the rulers of the Empire. These men started their career long before the *Nawabi* rule had gone into eclipse. Jadunath Sarkar notes that during the time of Murshid Quli Khan a host of men in Calcutta and some other towns acquired money in association with the European traders. Peasants in general reeled under heavy exactions of the state and the interior of the country became dried of capital. This was because “every portion of the annual increase of the fields and looms above that minimum was taken away by the state”.<sup>27</sup> In spite of this poverty of the people money was available in Calcutta in the hands of those who collaborated with the Europeans. “There was money”. Jadunath Sarkar writes, “in the hands of some people, but only under the protective wings of the European traders in Calcutta and Chinsura, and to a lesser extent in the neighbouring cosmopolitan town of Hughli.”<sup>28</sup> As time went on these Calcutta collaborators grew in strength and status and after the battle of Palasi their status and wealth swelled out of proportion. Many of these men participated in the loot that was perpetrated after the Palasi and amassed wealth out of unearned money. Maharaja Nabakrishna who was a prominent member of this *nouveau-riche* elite was a beneficiary of this loot. Sinha writes : “Nobkissan had his share of the ‘loot of Plassey’. He left property worth about a crore of rupees”.<sup>29</sup> Raja Nabakrishna was one of the early precursors of later aristocrats like Prince Dwarakanath Tagore who combined *zamindari* with other callings, banianship

in the case of Nabakrishna and entrepreneurship in the case of Dwarakanath. The Calcutta capitalists who emerged from banianship were very efficient in the intricate management of wealth. Hence a banian was compared with a Jew by Burke who while impeaching Warren Hastings directed one of his speeches to the banian thus :

“My Lords, a Gentoo banian is a person a little lower, a little more penurious, a little more exacting, a little more cunning, a little more money making than a Jew. There is not a Jew in the meanest corner in London that is so crafty, so much a usurer, so skilful how to turn money to profit and so resolved not to give any money but for profit as a Gentoo broker.”<sup>30</sup>

This was an unkind remark on the part of Burke who had no knowledge as to what exigencies and uncertainties surrounded the profession of banians. The spirit of adventure and mercenary ruthlessness guided the ambitions of private English men bent on becoming a ‘Nabab’ in the twinkling of eyes. The banians had to tke guard against all these. Their predicament increased with the turn of the nineteenth century when the English became free from their shakiness as masters.

The Calcutta banians were shaky from the beginning and they took a conservative outlook to their wealth. From the beginning their propensity was to invest in land. The trait of entrepreneurship which we see in the rich men of Calcutta in the first quarter of the nineteenth century was a sudden and a transient phenomenon. Sinha observes: “Large capitals accumulated by Bengal businessmen in Calcutta were diverted to land.”<sup>31</sup>

After the enunciation of the Permanent Settlement in 1793 property was ensured and land became a secured field of investment. The calcutta banians turned their face to *zamindaris* in the interior. Many *zamindaris* were sold in auction either in part or as a whole and as the nineteenth century progressed a huge land market grew in eastern India and land became the most secured zone of investment. Richmen in Calcutta who grew into a class of capitalists could not escape the temptation of investing in land. As a result the internal business world gradually passed into the hands of the Europeans. At least in the first hundred years of the British rule the phenomenon was this. Native capital got stuck in land. Sinha says :

“But curiously enough those Bengali banians who had money to invest would not become large-scale inland traders. The profession of the merchant in the interior of the country was both unpleasant and disreputable. Bengali banians who had money to invest left the field of inland trade to others.”<sup>32</sup>

The early traders and banians of Calcutta were not averse to inland trade. In the early days one of their major fields of investment was *dadni* investment.<sup>33</sup> *Dadni* was paying money in advance to book a contract. Operating either for their own selves or for the English and other European traders they used to pay money in advance to primary producers – peasants and weavers – and also to suppliers of other commodities like timber, chunam (lime), opium, indigo and sugar. *Dadni* merchants were the early capitalists – the sources of finance for British private traders. They acted as rudiments of banks in an unorganized economy which was slowly becoming monetized. The earliest *dadni* merchants of Calcutta were the Seths and the Basaks, the Dhars and the Malliks. They lost their command as potential *dadni* investors only when the Board of Trade began to organize the British commerce in Bengal as a chapter of their Asiatic trade.<sup>34</sup>

The disappearance of the Bengali capitalists and traders – the *dadni* merchants of the older generation – from British investment in the second half of the nineteenth century was a very notable event in the history of the growth of Calcutta. The service of the Calcutta banians was admired by the Company in the middle of the eighteenth century because they could supply credit in a capital short economy. That was the time when the “Calcutta Council was . . . grappling with the problem of scarcity of silver, and they were forced to write to the Directors that a further remittance to China was entirely beyond their capacity.”<sup>35</sup>

Starving of finance the rulers of the city could not mobilize fund for their commerce. In this situation the worth of the Calcutta banians was appreciated. They were the only men who had money and that money was drawn as the sinews of commerce. The result was that little money was left with the rulers to promote the cause of the city itself. There was acute shortage of silver and money could not be minted and hence the money in circulation was low. “The stock of silver in Bengal in 1757”, Sinha writes, “was not only not replenished but much of it was drained away in various ways. In their endeavour to solve this problem of scarcity of silver the Calcutta Council tried to introduce bimetallism but gold being overvalued the experiment ended in failure.”<sup>36</sup>

The bullion crisis in the middle of the eighteenth century was a transnational phenomenon. The Company tried to promote bills of exchange to curtail the actual use of bullion. They also depended on the bullion imported by rival European companies. But at the same time they also adopted measures to reduce their dependence on the banians and the capitalists from Calcutta. The result was that by the end of the eighteenth century participation of the Calcutta banians in the investment business of the Company became marginal.

“Respectable Indian contractors”, Sinha informs us, “had almost disappeared from Investment business and the very small number of those who were there were squeezed out in the days of Cornwallis.”<sup>37</sup>

The Company’s government tried to replace the Bengali capitalists by private British traders. But the latter were no match for the Calcutta banians. Yet the banians were marginalized. There was much distrust for the banians and the Company set them aside.

“The case of Akrur Dutt fully illustrates how this was brought about. He was a creditable *dadni* merchant in 1740. In the eighties he was the Company’s sloop contractor carrying packages sent to Europe and imported from Europe between Calcutta and Diamond Creek. He was ‘a creditable native, an owner of sloops with whose conduct the Board had much reason to be satisfied.’ Yet in 1791 the Board rejected his proposal but Eckroyd whose offer they accepted was found unequal to the task. Eckroyd wanted to be relieved from the engagement and the Board had again to make the best bargain it could with Akrur Dutt.”<sup>38</sup>

Calcutta began to grow really from the second half of the eighteenth century. By that time the private English traders had become powerful enough to compete with the native traders of Calcutta in all inland trade and business which concerned the Company. But in the Board of Trade’s minute they figure as lurid characters not worthy of trusts. They were, the Board of Trade notes in its minutes, “a number of adventurers possessing little or no capital, eager for employment at any rate, hazarding as it were in a lottery in which they may, under fortunate circumstances, draw a price and in which they risk comparatively nothing, having little or no property to lose and no credit to maintain.”<sup>39</sup> Such men whenever they became rich by their own assessment removed their wealth to England and in no time they themselves returned there.<sup>40</sup> This inclination for flight was rampant among the English adventurers and traders till the middle of the nineteenth century. This was certainly not a situation where a partnership between the Indians and the English could take place. From the end of the eighteenth century the trading aristocracy in Bengal who had already assembled in Calcutta to try their luck in bigger adventures had carved out a freedom for themselves. Out of this urge to be the masters of their own fate there emerged one Ramdulal De or Dwarakanath Tagore. The flight of Calcutta capitalists begins here. In the eighteenth century they were a little shy. With the turn of the nineteenth century they prepared themselves for a bigger take off. Why they were shy and conservative in the eighteenth century we explain below.

The Calcutta capitalists grew mostly out of the class of banians operating in Hughli, Chandernagore, Chinsurah and Calcutta. These men on the one hand lent money to the Europeans and on the other looked after multifarious duties relating to the business of their European masters. Working under a huge stress – anxieties and responsibilities – these men became naturally cautious and conservative.<sup>41</sup>

In the eighteenth century a banian could have been a successful trader because he knew all the intricacies of European business. He had at his command all the information of the market and also had in his possession capital. He was also thoroughly acquainted with the people and the country he lived. So all the parameters necessary for growing large capitalist enterprises in trade were under his control.<sup>42</sup> Yet in the eighteenth century context no banian could promote himself to the status of a successful inland trader. One reason for this was that the imperial economics had not grown into its full bloom. Ship-building and repairing, docking of ships, banking and insurance, export of opium, indigo, sugar and rice, import of British goods, trade with the Americans and also trade with Arakan, Pegu, Tenasserim, Malaya, Java, Malta, Persian Gulf and finally the Money-lending in sophisticated forms in which men like Rammohan Roy had tried their hands and business of investments in Agency Houses – all these did not grow and develop to the extent where entrepreneurship could be indulged in the proper western style. As these new avenues of enterprise opened in and around Calcutta men like Ramdulal Dey, Dwarakanath Tagore, Motilal Seal, Radhamadhab Banerjee, Nowrajee Sorabjee,<sup>43</sup> Rustamji Cowasji<sup>44</sup> flourished in the city as the first batch of capitalists to explore their luck in entrepreneurship. Of these men Dwarakanath was allied to the British, Ramdulal Dey to the Americans and Motilal Seal to the native world of business. Dwarakanath Tagore was more modern in his entrepreneurial outlook than the two others. He sought to purchase a colliery from Alexander & Co. for Rs. 70,000.00<sup>45</sup> Dwarakanath believed in entrepreneurial explorations and expansion; Motilal Seal in consolidation. As a result Motilal Seal's dominance in the money market of Calcutta was more solid than that of Dwarakanath.<sup>46</sup> Among the Calcutta capitalists Dwarakanath was one who believed in diversification. He was perhaps aware of the fragility of the Bengali capital and therefore, indulged in diversification. But he stretched himself too far – perhaps beyond the limit time would permit.<sup>47</sup> Being too much involved in too many business he could not eventually drag himself out of them when there was a crisis in any of his businesses involvements. Motilal presents a different story. "He was a power in the Calcutta money market" – goes the historian's assessment about him. "His commercial and financial ascendancy was uncontested. Of the Oswald

Seal Co. he was the banker and banian but he dragged himself out of it before it fell.<sup>48</sup>

The Calcutta capitalists of the first half of the nineteenth century had passed their heyday and all landed into disasters in the middle of the century. Their collaboration with the English and the European had crashed. After the collapse of the Union Bank most of them withdrew from business and invested their wealth in landed property. Whatever money they had invest in lotteries had gone into urbanizing the city. But that was not a story of continuous achievement. From the middle of the nineteenth century there was slump in the money market of Calcutta. The Bengali business enterprise in the city shrank. All Bengali business firms built in collaboration with the English had gone into liquidation. The sovereignty of the city as an economic entity thus collapsed. Meanwhile a university came to be set up in the city. The University age had dawned. The age of the money aristocracy was over. The age of cultural aristocracy which saw the fulfilment of the promise of the Bengal renaissance was ushered in. Calcutta's tryst with a new destiny began.

#### Notes:

1. Blair B. Kling, "Economic Foundations of the Bengal Renaissance" in Rachel Van M. Baumer ed. *Aspects of Bengali History and Society*, Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, Calcutta, 1976, pp. 26-42. If not otherwise mentioned all excerpts and views cited as Balir Kling's are from this essay.
2. Kling, *op.cit.*, p. 26
3. Kling, *op.cit.*, p. 27
4. In 1717 the English East India Company received an imperial *farman* by which the English were granted free trade in Bengal subject to an annual payment of Rs. 3000. They also received the right to rent more land in Bengal and settle in the interior. In Hyderabad lands they were granted free trade subject to a quit-rent for Madras. They also got trade exemptions for Surat. There all dues were commuted for an annual payment of Rs. 10,000. The Company's currency minted at Bombay was to get a free currency from now on. "These arrangements governed the Company's relations with the empire for the next forty years. But as the imperial authority declined, the Company's officials were increasingly

concerned with the local *subahdar* or Nawab of Bengal rather than with the emperor”, - Percival Spear ed. *The Oxford History of India* by The Late Vincent Smith, Third Edition, Oxford, 1958, p. 465.

5. Blair B. Kling, *op.cit.*, p. 27
6. For further study of trade leadership and the establishment of British mastery over the Bengal-cum-South Asian trade see N.K. Sinha, *Economic History of Bengal from Plassey to the Permanent Settlement* ( 3 Vols), Calcutta (1956-1962), Vol. I p. 99; Sukumar Bhattacharya, *The East India Company and the Economy of Bengal from 1704 to 1740*, London, 1964, p. 187; Holden Furber, *John Company at Work*, Cambridge, Mass, Harvard University Press, 1984, pp. 162-163.
7. Kling, *op.cit.*, pp. 27-28
8. For the rise of the Hindu Bengali service elite and territorial aristocracy see Jadunath Sarkar ed., *History of Bengal*, Vol. II, Dakha University Publication, 1948, Chapter on Murshid Quli Khan; also see Ranjit Sen, *Property Aristocracy and the Raj*, Maha Bodhi Book Agency, Kolkata, 2010, Chapter 1 and Ranjit Sen, *New Elite and New Collaboration, A Study of Social Transformation in Bengal in the Eighteenth Century*, Papyrus. Calcutta, 1985, Chapter 1.
9. Kling, *op.cit.*, p. 28
10. *Ibid*
11. *Ibid*. Also see Kissen Mohun Mullick, *Brief History of Bengal Commerce from the Year 1814 to 1870*, Calcutta, 1871, pp. 16-21; S.B. Singh, *European Agency Houses in Bengal 1783-1833*, Calcutta, 1966, pp. 1 – 35; N.K. Sinha *Economic History of Bengal* etc. Vol. 1, p. 93, Sukumar Bhattacharya, *op.cit.*, p. 188.
12. *Ibid*.
13. Kling, *op.cit.*, p. 29
14. *Ibid*.
15. S.B. Singh, *op.cit.*, p. 28
16. Singh, *op.cit.*, pp 28 – 29.
17. Singh, *op.cit.*, p. 29

18. *Ibid.*
19. Amales Tripathi, *Trade and Finance in the Bengal Presidency 1793 – 1833*, Calcutta, Oxford University Press, (1956) 1979, p. 10.
20. Amales Tripathi, *op.cit.*, p. 11
21. S.B. Singh, *op.cit.*, p. 31.
22. S.B. Singh, *op.cit.*, p. 32.
23. S.B. Singh, *op.cit.*, p. 276.
24. N.K. Sinha. *The Economic History of Bengal 1793 – 1848*, Vol. III, Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyay, Calcutta, 1970, p. 70.
25. *Calcutta Review*, Vol. IX, 1848.
26. N.K. Sinha, *op.cit.*, p. 73.
27. Jadunath Sarkar ed. *History of Bengal*, Vol. II, The University of Dacca (1948), Second Impression, 1972, p. 417.
28. Jadunath Sarkar, *op.cit.*, p. 418.
29. N.K. Sinha, *op.cit.*, p. 89
30. Cited in N.N. Ghosh's *Maharaja Nubkissen Bahadur, 1901, 6<sup>th</sup> charge – Impeachment of Warren Hastings*.
31. N.K. Sinha, *op.cit.*, p. 102
32. N.K. Sinha, *op.cit.*, p. 107
33. *Dadni* comes from the Bengali word *dadan* which means paying money in advance as a part of a contract.
34. "The Seths and Basaks were conspicuous *dadni* merchants before 1753. They were not prominent under the Board of Trade though a Seth or a Basak appears now and then in the list of persons submitting proposals for contracts for smaller *aurungs* [factories]" – N.K. Sinha, *The Economic History of Bengal, From Plassey to the Permanent Settlement*, vol. I, Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyay, Calcutta, 1965, p. 27.
35. N.K. Sinha, *op.cit.*, vol. I, p. 15.
36. *Ibid.*

37. *Ibid*
38. N.K. Sinha, *op.cit.*, Vol. I, p. 27.
39. *Prods.*, Board of Trade, 14 July, 1798 cited by N.K. Sinha, *op.cit.*, Vol. I, p. 27.
40. "This is without remedy for soon as an European acquires so much property as he may deem sufficient, to satisfy his desires, he removes himself to Britain and contributes to induce others endued with the spirit of adventure or hopes of subsistence to resort hither." – *Ibid*.
41. A banian has been defined by the activities he discharged. "A banian", goes the definition, "is a person by whom all purchases and all sales of goods, merchandise, produce are made and through whom all shipments are made on account and on behalf of the merchants or mercantile firm in whose establishment he is a banian. Such a banian is therefore responsible for the quality and quantity of goods, merchandise, produce and shipments made through him or his sircars or servants whom he employs. He has to make good any deficiency in weight or quality, to make compensation for any fraud in shipments of such goods or produce. The banian receives a *dustooree* or percentage of the sale and produce of goods and merchandise". – cited by N.K. Sinha, *op.cit.*, pp. 106 – 107.
42. N.K. Sinha, *op.cit.*, p. 107
43. "Nowrajee Sorabjee was one of the first Parsis to settle in Calcutta." – N.K. Sinha, *op.cit.*, p. 108.
44. Rustomji Cowasji was the friend of Dwarakanath Tagore and was the Secretary to the Calcutta Docking Company. Dwarakanath Tagore advised him to visit Malta to learn the latest improvements in docking and in shipbuilding – N.K. Sinha, *op.cit.*, p. 109.
45. N.K. Sinha, *op.cit.*, p. 118
46. "Motilal Seal was not perhaps as modern in his business outlook as Dwaranath. But his dominance in the Calcutta money market as a multi-millionaire was perhaps greater in the forties than that of Dwarkanath who perhaps identified himself much too clearly with the British, though he dominated over all those concerns in which he was associated with them". N.K. Sinha, *op.cit.*, p. 118.

47. “Dwarkanath Tagore was aware of the basic weaknesses of Bengali capital investment. Docking, shipping, insurance, banking on Western lines were sought to be promoted by him and even coal mining. But he was perhaps trying too many things at the same time. He also purchased zamindaries and sought to combine the role of an enlightened zamindar with that of a modern entrepreneur.” – N.K. Sinha, *op.cit.*, p. 119.
48. N.K. Sinha, *op.cit.*, p. 121.

## CHAPTER 11

### DID CALCUTTA GROW INDUSTRIALLY?

In the eighteenth and the early nineteenth century Calcutta had an industrialized periphery. This industrialization had its roots in the Indo-British collaboration which may be called one of the greatest colonial phenomena in India. The battle of Palasi led not only to what is called the *Plassey Plunder* but also to an era of fruitful cooperation between the two races, the Bengali and the English, which eventually gave birth to an embryonic industrialization in lower Bengal. From the middle of the eighteenth to the middle of the nineteenth century the region around Calcutta was technologically advanced and the mercantile communities of the country composed of both the English and the natives were experimenting on new economic enterprises. In the process they were trying to build up new economic institutions in lower Bengal. On the crest of this partnership came the early rudiments of industrialization in Bengal.

Three things were important as parameters of growth. First, during the first century of the British rule in Bengal the Bengali-British business collaboration did not lose its buoyancy and the purposeful economic imperialism which was thrust on Bengal, and as a matter of fact on India, in the second half of the nineteenth century did not provide any hurdle to the initiative and enterprise of the natives. Secondly, the aggressive nationalism which criticized British failure to promote the welfare of the masses had not taken its shape till the middle of the nineteenth century. Thirdly, Calcutta had not become an economic dependency of Great Britain which she had become after the collapse of the Bengali-British business partnership in the wake of the failure of the Union Bank in 1847.

During this period the Bengali capitalists termed as banians were still supreme. They grew up as go-betweens between the Indian producers and the various East India Companies and emerged as the liaison men between Indian enterprise and management on the one hand and foreign mercantile companies and private merchants on the other. In the pre-Palasi days banians were the source of credit to every European individual who was in need of money. A penniless European would grab a banian's wealth and would provide him in return with name, influence and umbrella. This was how the basis of collaboration was laid. The goodwill of the European and the money of the native laid the basis of a collaboration that lasted till the middle of the

nineteenth century. It was in the context of this partnership that the periphery of Calcutta was industrialized.

This industrialization, however, did not conform to the pattern of industrialization which flourished in England and France in the eighteenth and nineteenth century. Professor Morris D. Morris who subscribed to the view that the British rule had a beneficent influence on Indian economy was himself skeptic about the nature of industrialization in India. He admits: "Modern industrial process did not spread easily from sector to sector and the total effect was not cumulative. At the time of independence, India was still largely non-industrial and one of the world's poorest areas."<sup>1</sup>

In the context of this the traditional view of deindustrialization surfaces itself. It says that the process of deindustrialization in Bengal started quite early in the eighteenth century and continued over some long decades in the nineteenth. "For example, by the end of the eighteenth century the relatively advanced iron-smelting industry of Birbhum – advanced in comparison to the tribal household industry of the Agarias of south Bihar – was wiped out by imported iron."<sup>2</sup> Cotton Industry in Bengal faced the greatest blow of deindustrialization during the eighteenth and early nineteenth century. By the turn of the eighteenth century "many branches of cotton hand looming were facing a decline. Following the introduction of what has been characterized as 'one-way free decline' in 1813 and the large scale carrying of British manufactures to the market of the colony, the process was widened and quickened. By 1832 the cotton handloom industry, particularly the specialized weaving crafts localized in the major urban centres of Bengal, was in a state of serious crisis and the cotton spinning industry was facing a situation of near extinction."<sup>3</sup> N.K. Sinha says that by the end of the third decade of the nineteenth century nearly one million people in Bengal were thrown out of employment.<sup>4</sup> These were great setbacks which created a milieu in which other indigenous industries began to suffer. Silk, sugar, salt, and indigo declined or stagnated.<sup>5</sup>

If this picture of deindustrialization was absolute urbanization then had no chance of a take-off. Yet urbanization, we know, was slowly taking place in Calcutta from the second half of the eighteenth century. Maurice Dobb writes: "So far as the growth of the market exercised a disintegrating influence on the structure of feudalism, and prepared the soil for the growth of forces which were to weaken and supplant it, the story of this influence can largely be identified with the rise of towns as corporate bodies."<sup>6</sup> Viewing in this context one may say that the growth of Calcutta as a town in the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries was because of the growth of commerce and the

development of markets within and outside it that were operating with relentless force on the feudal economy of Bengal's interior. In India in the past towns emerged occasionally from ports here and there but mainly from three major processes. First, they were centres of pilgrimage or sacred places of some sort like Allahaabad, Benaras, Gaya, Puri, Nasik, Amritsar etc.; secondly, they were the seats of administration, narrowly of courts and broadly of governments Like Delhi, Lahore, Lucknow, Poona, Arcot, Tanjore, etc.; and finally, they were the commercial centres owing their existence to their positions along trade routes either on the river or on land, like Mirzapur, Hughli, Bangalore, Hubli and the like. Jadunath Sarkar gives us another insight about the emergence of towns. He says :

“In India cities were created in the past either by the royal residence or the special religious sanctity of a place. Wherever our Muhammedana sovereign or their provincial viceroys lived, cities sprang up. In a few years the tents were replaced by houses and when later on a defensive wall was added, it became complete city. Here all the best artisans of the land were concentrated, and here most part of the revenue was spent. Again, the Indian manufacturer of old never thought of going out to seek his customers, he expected them to come to his doors. Hence, every famous centre of pilgrimage, such as Benares, Puri, Kanchi, or Mathura by drawing tens of thousands of visitors every year afforded an excellent market and induced artisans to settle there. In time, the temple became the centre of a large and flourishing city.”<sup>7</sup>

From the account given above it appears that in most cases the origin of Indian towns was non-industrial in character. Calcutta fell in line with this tradition. It was created as a garrison city, turned eventually into a commercial centre and a port city and finally made into a seat of administration. Industry did not play any significant part in the making of the town till the coming of the jute industry in Bengal. The urge for industry became apparent in the second half of the nineteenth century. In 1869 Chandranath Bose called for protective tariffs as a measure to encourage the development of indigenous industries. The demand was repeated by Bholanath Chandra in 1873. This was the result of a middle class discontent which eventually led to economic nationalism in Bengal. Historians say that economic nationalism did not manifest in Bengal until the 1880s.<sup>8</sup> But truly speaking it started long ago when the Benali intelligentsia began to express concern for the misery of the Bengal ryots from the middle of the nineteenth century. The collapse of the indigo industry in the 1830s and 1840s, the fall of the Union Bank in 1847, the mutiny-scare of 1857-58 and the indigo revolt of 1860 kept the Bengali mind away from any thought

of industry in and around Calcutta. The national demand for industry manifested steadily in the second half of the nineteenth century.<sup>9</sup> But such demand was more articulated from Bombay than from Calcutta. Bombay nationalists, starting from Dadabhai Naoroji to Ranade had a better understanding of the problems of capital and industry in the country. Ranade wrote:

“Just as the land in India thirsts for water, so the industry of the Country is parched up for want of capital.”<sup>10</sup> In the absence of capital, not only industry but also urbanization and the promotion of life in India also suffered. From the 1850s foreign capital had come to be invested in India. In Calcutta there was a sharp division of opinion as to whether foreign capital was welcome to the Indians. Satish Chandra Mukherjee editor, of the very popular journal *The Dawn* from Calcutta opposed foreign capital investment and large-scale capitalistic industry in the country<sup>11</sup> whereas *The Amrita Bazar Patrika* clearly stated that in the existing circumstances it would be “suicidal and foolish to oppose the influx of foreign capital into the country.”<sup>12</sup> Bipin Chandra Pal was opposed to foreign investment in the country and in this he lined up with Satish Chandra Mukherjee. He summed up his position thus:

“The introduction of foreign, and mostly British, capital for working out the natural resources of the country, instead of being a help, is, in fact, the greatest of hindrances to all real improvements in the economic condition of the people. This exploitation of the land by foreign capitalists threatens to involve both Government and people in a common ruin . . . . It is as much a political, as it is an economic danger. And the future of New India absolutely depends upon an early and radical remedy of this two-edged evil.”<sup>13</sup>

The result of all this was that Calcutta remained bereft of industry in comparison with Bombay and Poona till the coming of the *swadeshi* days. As a matter of fact Calcutta in the second half of the nineteenth century did not see an industrial boom because Bengal leaders here were not as keen as those of Western India to grow their own industry.<sup>14</sup> The atmosphere of industry, therefore, grew in rapid pace in Bombay and Poona rather than in Calcutta. In western India the nationalist leaders themselves were pioneers in entrepreneurship<sup>15</sup> and as a result indigenous capital formation, however weak, was taking shape there and the cotton industry of the Bombay Presidency was perhaps the only major industry in India about this time which grew with indigenous capital. Ranade was one great spokesman for industrialization in Bombay. Gokhale said, the “most of the industrial and commercial undertakings that have sprung up in Poona during the last twenty years owe a great deal to his inspiration, advice, or assistance.”<sup>16</sup> This type of a

source for industrial inspiration was absent in Bengal in the second half of the nineteenth century. Bengal always lagged behind the Bombay Presidency in terms of the growth of industry and Calcutta shared this industrial backwardness of its hinterland so as to compare itself with Bombay. One example will suffice to prove our contention. "In 1879, Bipan Chandra observes, "there were in India only 56 cotton mills employing nearly 43,000 persons. Nearly 75 per cent of these mills were situated in the Bombay Presidency. In 1882, there were just 20 jute mills, most of them in Bengal, employing nearly 20,000 persons."<sup>17</sup> Thus on a comparative scale Bengal suffered and Calcutta suffered in the process. One reason why Bengal's indigenous industry did not grow was that the Bengali capitalists who used to stay mostly in Calcutta was shattered after the collapse of the Union Bank and the capital of Bengal became shy for industrial investment.<sup>18</sup> Henceforth the treasure of the Bengali merchants and capitalists was invested in land and that too in Calcutta and not in industry.<sup>19</sup> With the passing away of men like Ramdulal De, Dwarkanath Tagore and Motilal Sil, the age of the Bengali capitalists and entrepreneurs was gone. With the eclipse of the Bengali banians there was no moneyed class in Bengal who could compete with the English in equal terms. Once in its history – during the first century of the British rule – Calcutta grew both as a seat of power of the British rule and also as the seat of the Bengali capitalists who had the mind-set to go into industry. On the fall of this class in the middle of the nineteenth century Calcutta became the seat of two divergent trends of developments, one, the economic nationalism born of middle class discontent and the second, a very profound cultural nationalism. The two genres eventually mingled into one broad trend of political nationalism in the country and Calcutta became epicentre of all nationalist tremours in the country. The attitude of collaboration and cooperation which the Bengalis maintained during the eighteenth and the first half of the nineteenth century changed into a kind of xenophobia<sup>20</sup> because of the imperial impingement on the Bengali business enterprise.<sup>21</sup> The change of attitude was thus noted by Warren Gunderson: "by the 1870s . . . new cultural patterns were emerging which were more assertive and more aggressively national . . . . In the new age men appeared on the stage who were much more sceptical about the value of cooperation with the British."<sup>22</sup> The collapse of the world of capital, capitalists and institutions of capital like the Agency Houses was complete by the middle of the nineteenth century. Till then Calcutta had some chances of a sovereign industrial growth without remaining anyway dependent on the empire and the world capitalism. Calcutta was not linked to world capitalism till the beginning of the eighteen fifties. "The coming of railways," Bipan Chandra observed, "heralded the entry of

modern machines in India, and during the 1850's cotton textile, jute, and coal mining industries were started in India. As the latter two fields were primarily the preserve of European Capital, Indian enterprise and hopes rested mainly on cotton textile industry, which has from its very inception occupied the position of being the most important factory industry of the country."<sup>23</sup> This sort of industrial thrust was not there in Bengal so that the atmosphere of industrialization did not permeate in the making of this capital city in Calcutta. Calcutta could go industrial only with the coming of Jute but hitherto the initiative was in the hands of the foreigners so that the jute factories came to be situated along the bank of the Ganga in the interior suburbs of Calcutta. The city housed only the city offices of the factories thus keeping the ambience of the city mostly free of the spirit of industry.

Blair Kling in a remarkable essay<sup>24</sup> shows how in the first century of British rule in Bengal the genius of the indigenous people had created the nucleus of a sovereign industrial growth in the country. Calcutta was then witnessing a new industrial revolution but it was not allowed to mature into fulfilment. The steps through which this growth was effected has been summed up below.

The first step toward this industrialization was collaboration between the English and the Bengali intelligentsia. "The dominant literary theme of the first half of the nineteenth century," writes Kling, "expressed by such diverse writers as Rammohun Roy, Bhabanicharan Banerjee and radical students of young Bengal, was Indo-British collaboration. They wrote in a period of economic cooperation between the races, a time of *embryonic industrialization in Lower Bengal* when the area was technologically advanced and when the mercantile community, composed of both races, was attempting to establish independent economic institutions."<sup>25</sup> [Italics ours]

This collaboration developed on two wheels – one was the partnership in trade and the other was a partnership in capital. The traditional Bengali merchants surrendered their command over the inland and coastal trade to the Pathans, Punjabis and Marwari traders of north India early in the seventeenth century. In the eighteenth century it was the English traders who because of their control of their *dastaks*, political authority and arms wrested this control from the upcountry merchants. With the Bengalis by their sides the up-coming English traders found no difficulty to organize their Bengali partners as their man-power support for their newly conquered trade. These men of collaboration were mostly Calcutta-based operators and through them the city became the rendezvous where the two races built their early commercial bonds. Out of these bonds emerged the ways and means to explore the interior.<sup>26</sup> The Bengalis were not lifted to their original status of predominating

coastal and inland traders of Bengal silk and textile but they were now seated as adjuncts to the global British trading system. Calcutta thus got a status uplift being linked to the world capitalist system that was slowly spreading its tentacles to the east. The Bengalis in the seventeenth century lost their control of trade to the outsiders – the upcountry merchants – and now they were reinstated in their control of the same business only as politically subordinate but financially equal partners of another set of outsiders with whom they shared a common territorial base located in Calcutta. This point is normally missed by historians that in the rise of Calcutta this command over the coastal trade gave Calcutta a corresponding control over a wide range of hinterland which eventually helped the Calcutta port to grow and sustain itself as an effective outlet for the cargoes of the orient.<sup>27</sup>

The financial partnership of the Bengali traders with the British merchants – the private traders of the eighteenth and the free traders of the nineteenth century – was effected through the channel of the banians. By the middle of the eighteenth century Calcutta had moved ahead in the accumulation of wealth and the Bengali middlemen acting as go-betweens between the foreign East India Companies and the primary producers of the interior accumulated great wealth. It was this wealth which was invested in bringing about an industrial regeneration in the country. The banians had knowledge of the production centres of the interior, had their own links with them and had their own accumulated capital. Knowledge, knowhow and wealth were the strength on the basis of which they had acquired a kind of distinction of their own and their primacy in all partnership with the foreigners. Thus the banians were the main business mankind who had grown with the Company as the most potential class that was capable of generating capital in the economy and make it available to the British traders.<sup>28</sup> On the basis of this strength of capital in the society the will for an industrial take off developed. Whatever industrial development took place around Calcutta in the first century of British rule in the country grew out of this will.

Blair Kling points out that until the middle of the nineteenth century Calcutta witnessed the growth of some industry and advanced technology around it.<sup>29</sup> The largest single industrial complex, he notes, grew at a place called Fort Gloster, fifteen miles south of Calcutta.<sup>30</sup> “The complex included”, he writes, “a factory for making cotton twist, a rum distillery, an iron foundry, an oil-seed mill, and a paper mill, all worked by five steam engines. The cotton mill, set up in 1817, was the oldest in India.”<sup>31</sup> Considering the context of the time this did not seem to be a mean industrial beginning for Calcutta – a town which itself was in the process of growth. Till 1833 the cotton mill worked very well, it

worked with two engines of fifty horse power each and produced a large quantity of cotton twist. According to a contemporary report the twist raised from the mill “was daily rising in the estimation of the natives . . . .”<sup>32</sup> By contemporary scale the labour employment was great. The same record notes: “. . . the labour of men initiated in the art of weaving is now almost double of what was performed at the commencement of the undertaking.”<sup>33</sup> Most of the industries in and around Calcutta flourished till the thirties of the nineteenth century. In this decade there was a crisis in the capital market of Calcutta. The Agency Houses fell one by one and even the indigo industry came to be starved of finance. The Fort Gloster could not escape unhurt from this blow. Kling observes: “After Fergusson and Company, its owner, went bankrupt in 1833, the Fort Gloster complex was purchased by a joint-stock company most of whose shareholders were old India hands resident in England.”<sup>34</sup> The Fort Gloster complex grew out of Bengali and British investments built in collaboration. The leading Bengali entrepreneurs of the time Dwarakanath Tagore<sup>35</sup> and others were some of the top investors in the making of the complex. “By 1840 the mill was producing 700,000 pounds of yarn annually, the lower numbers of which were sold in Calcutta better than imported yarn and the larger numbers on a par with imports. The labour force, with the exception of European superintendent, was recruited from Orissa and Bengal, paid by the task, and worked eleven hours a day.”<sup>36</sup> This, one would say, was a competent nucleus for industry in Bengal much in the heart of a colonial economy that certainly did not favour any sign of native competition to those in England. With weavers settled in Calcutta around modern Simla and other regions and yarn being produced in Fort Gloster with the Burra Bazaar as one of the major centres in the distribution network of the time Calcutta developed the potentiality of a textile industry comparable to that of Dakha in the early colonial years.<sup>37</sup> The territory of Calcutta was never used as a favoured site of industries. But in the areas around, particularly in the right bank of the Ganga some kind of industrial units were coming up, sometimes in clusters and sometimes individually, in the first half of the nineteenth century.<sup>38</sup> Three things promoted industry in Bengal at that time – the capital of the banians, the surplus wealth of the British traders, soldiers and officers and the power of the steam. Steam navigation made movement of men and commodity easy and created the ambience for industry.<sup>39</sup> The wind of change for industry started blowing long before the British capital began to flow in from the fifties of the nineteenth century. The Bengali entrepreneurial efforts on the Indian side adequately matched the British enterprise to create the nucleus of an industrial revolution in Bengal.

Indian side adequately matched the British enterprise to create the nucleus of an industrial revolution in Bengal. This revolution certainly had not assumed a formidable shape but its early beginnings were made so much so that the city of Calcutta was bubbling with the spirit of innovative enterprises in places not far off from its core. The select place of this industry was certainly the right bank of the Ganga but its radiations touched the city in the most effective ways. For example the labour force was drawn from Orissa, Bihar and the interior of the districts around Calcutta. Even the Eurasian and the Chinese settlements were also used as the centres from where effective workmen could be drawn. In the eighteenth century a vast sprawling area called the *cooly bazaar* maintained its obstinate existence near the new Fort William in Calcutta. From whatever places the labour forces were drawn the common spot for rallying them was Calcutta from where they were distributed to their required centres. With the man-power base being effectively built in the city proper the right bank of the Ganga was assured of its labour supply and industry could flourish. Adjacent to Calcutta sites for an industrial revolution thus grew up in the first hundred years of the British rule in India. It synchronized with urbanization but its pace was quick and rapid. In a small and defined space it was almost a clustered growth. Here we have a glimpse from Kling:

“Before the middle of the nineteenth century manufacturing activity had spread northward along the right bank of the Hughli River into the suburbs of Hughli, Howrah, Sibpur and Sulkea, called by one writer ‘the Southwark of Calcutta’.<sup>40</sup> Included were sugar factories, rum distilleries, cotton screws, a biscuit factory, flour mills, a mustard oil mill, and a paper factory. In and near Calcutta itself were a number of steam-operated iron factories; Jessop and Company, established in the eighteenth century, repaired steamboats, manufactured tools and simple machinery, and in 1825 offered to build a railway from Calcutta to Diamond Harbour. The government itself operated the most expensive foundry. The foundry supplied brass ordnance to the whole of India. The court of directors had sent out twelve boring and turning lathes, some lighter lathes and two small steam engines to power the works. Adjacent to the foundry was a casting and smelting house with cupola blast furnaces for smelting iron and large reverberatory furnaces for smelting gun metal”.<sup>41</sup>

This periphery of industry was important in view of the colonial character of the city. The industries noted above certainly do not represent a broad factory system of the type we had in England in the contemporary times. This was not possible in Calcutta because of two reasons. First, anchoring on the port the

city was made mostly as a commercial centre for the British Asiatic trade where a garrison-based town could eventually coordinate the growth of the British Empire in Asia. Secondly, an economy ripped of its ancient indigenous industrial parameters and subordinated to the will of a foreign economy could not produce a revolution of the scale comparable to the industrial revolution in England. A colonial economy thrust its direction to production of raw materials and whatever industry we had here during the period of our study was an appendage to it. Given this the question arises as to what promoted these rudiments of industry to come to the surface and provided an illusion of growth. Was it only because of the capital available from the society or was there any need of the Empire itself? The capital was certainly one factor and the need of the city was the other which inspired men of knowledge and capital to undertake entrepreneurial efforts. Along with this and not overriding them was a third factor namely the availability of cheap labour.

“A large, docile, and talented labor force,” writes Blair Kling, “was available to operate the factories and mills. The leading employer was the Government Steam Department, which hired Indian and Eurasian labor as mechanics, shipwrights, millwrights, plumbers, and boilermakers. Elsewhere in the city skilled workmen, recruited from Hindu artisan castes and from the Chinese community, worked as carpenters, painters, blacksmiths, locksmiths and jewellers, some under European master craftsmen. Workmen were hired in gangs under contract with a chief *mistry*, an Indian master craftsman who received the wages from the entire gang and distributed them as he wished. Although there were mixed reports on the quality of Indian labor, those employed in the mint were said to handle the machinery including the steam engine, with facility. Similarly, the workmen at the Fort Gloster cotton mill were considered experts in their machinery dutire.”<sup>42</sup>

As the spirit of industry gathered momentum industrial acumen slowly emerged among the citizens of Calcutta. The Bengali banians, traders, merchants and all collaborators with the various East India Companies had acquired entrepreneurial efficiency long before. Training of labour through apprenticeship was not common then but it did not affect labour productivity. Two factors account for this. First, some segments of labour were already skilled in their work. The Chinese carpenters, for example, were known for their efficiency which they acquired as the characteristic proficiency of their race. Bengali weavers had been adept in their work for generations. All they needed was an acquaintance with the machines in the cotton mills which they did in no time being under European supervisors – hard task-masters who were efficient in grooming labour. This European supervision was the second

factor that saved labour from dissipation. Normally the workforce was drawn from agriculture and they were seasonally employed in industry. Labour ghettos had not surfaced around factories because an organized labour class had not grown up yet. The industrial growth was thus small in all sense but Blair Kling says, it was powerful potentially and had the blast of a revolution. The whole process – deployment of capital, labour and enterprise – was manoeuvred from Calcutta. In this sense it was a pride of the city.

“In terms of total production of Bengal”, writes Kling, “this industrial activity was probably not of great significance. Its importance, instead, must have been in its effect on the intellectual and moral climate of the city, in awakening a pride of citizenship. Calcutta appeared to be moving inexorably toward industrialization, and a sense of progress pervaded the city. Indian participation in the modern sector of the economy was on an upward trend, and the Bengali elite must have participated in the prevailing pride of citizenship and sense of progress.”<sup>43</sup>

This picture of Calcutta’s industrialization was essentially a phenomenon of the first half of the nineteenth century. For the second half the picture was one of lost advantage in industry. Calcutta in official records was presented as a city of business marked only by buying and selling of wares produced outside the city and the city was earmarked as a place where manufacture was absent. It means that the most significant determinant of the growth of a city in the nineteenth century – rapid industrialization – was denied to Calcutta.<sup>44</sup> Before the coming of Jute as a full-grown industry in the twentieth century<sup>45</sup> factory system was never encouraged by the British in India. The fear was that lest Indian industry should compete with the British Industries that had grown up in course of the last two centuries in England. Calcutta was one city in the second half of the nineteenth century which thus suffered industrial atrophy to a great extent.<sup>46</sup> Labour was abundant<sup>47</sup> and Indian capital and enterprise were not absent. But British capital had started coming in after the collapse of the Indian business world in Bengal in the 1840s<sup>48</sup> and in the vacuum following this collapse British managing agency system had established its hold on the economy of the country. In the face of this imperial encroachment Indian capital began to fight shy. One reason why Bengali capitalists became shy of investing their wealth in business was that they were cheated by their European and other foreign partners and since crossing the sea was social taboo to them they could not undertake overseas journey and had to depend upon their non-Indian partners in businesses that required overseas transactions.<sup>49</sup> N.K. Sinha believes that the shock of being duped acted as a brake on their enterprise in business and industry. This collapse of the Indian

business world was a phenomenon of the middle of the nineteenth century. With their collapse the nucleus of industry that was steadily taking shape in Calcutta and around withered.

The reflection of this vanished industry came in the 1881 Census which highlighted Calcutta as a city of no industry. It noted: “certain industries have been introduced of late years, but the few cotton and jute mills that have been erected are mostly situated outside the limits of the Town and Suburbs”. The industrial vacuum of the city was thus writ large in the 1881 Census report. “Calcutta”, the report goes on, was “essentially a commercial city and not a manufacturing centre. Of the 327,343 male persons having stated occupations . . . it may be said that more than one-half are engaged in commercial pursuits, and that the rest are employed in administering their wants . . . [T]he industrial class . . . consist for the most part of persons who are supplying the wants of their fellow townsmen – carpenters, bricklayers, thatchers, barbers, tailors, shoemakers, washer men, water carriers, and the like. Of manufacturers either for export to foreign countries or for distribution in the interior, we see very few traces. The trade of Calcutta is one of buying and selling raw produce or goods manufactured elsewhere, a trade of exchanging the products of other countries or places, and not a trade of production. This fact is not a new discovery, but it is sometimes forgotten when persons institute comparisons between Calcutta and manufacturing cities of Western Europe.”<sup>50</sup>

This absence of industries was a tragic phenomenon in the history of Calcutta. What is significant is that there was no city adjacent to Calcutta which could grow as an industrial town in the nineteenth century just the way Glasgow grew along with Edinburgh.<sup>51</sup> Later-day historians believed that Calcutta in the colonial period could not build an industrial core. Nor could it build even an industrial periphery which could promote its own urbanization.<sup>52</sup> Industrialization in the west was the most creative force behind formation of cities. Mumford while discussing the process of urbanization in the west generalizes a pattern of transformation that came in the wake of the Industrial Revolution. He said that “if capitalism tended to expand the province of the market-place and turn every part of the city into a negotiable commodity, the change from organized urban handicraft to large-scale factory production transformed the industrial towns . . . .’ He argued that in the ceketowns,<sup>53</sup> the generating forces were the mine, the factory, the railroad etc. “In greater or lesser degree”, he wrote, “every city in the western world was stamped with the archetypal characteristics of ceketown”, and that “between 1820 and 1900 the destruction and disorder within great cities is like that of a battlefield,

proportionate to the very extent of their equipment and the strength of the forces employed.”<sup>54</sup>

The crux of the development lies here. Because of the Industrial Revolution the cities in the west went through a process of destruction and regeneration, both caused under economic impulses. This process was totally absent in India. Industrialization could not be a creative force behind the cities under the British rule and Calcutta could not be an exception. There was no change from organized urban handicraft to large-scale factory production in the city and in places around. Before the arrival of the English Sutanati was an important cotton production, cloth manufacturing and textile distribution centre of Bengal. That centre went down with the British predominance in Calcutta and Sutanati lost its sovereignty as a place of manufacture. It was gradually merged with Calcutta’s character as a trading town. By the beginning of 1830s when according to Blair Kling the potentiality of urbanization of Calcutta was not lost, the trading character of Calcutta and its official position as an administrative centre were well marked in the official literature of the time. In 1834 the School Book Society of Calcutta in its book *Geography of Hindoostan* defined Calcutta’s status as “likewise the capital of all India, being the residence of the supreme authorities both in Church and State.”<sup>55</sup> Calcutta’s budding industrial periphery of which Kling seems to be so eloquent was not mentioned. On the contrary it highlights the commercial character of the city. It said that in 1814 the imports, from beyond the seas, were at 18,100,000 sicca<sup>56</sup> rupees and export at sicca rupees 47,600,000. The inland imports and exports together amounted to sicca rupees 10,400,000 making a grant total of sicca rupees 76,100,000. This was a staggering figure – highest attained by any city in India at the time. Seven decades later, in 1903-04 the Imperial Gazetteer<sup>57</sup> determined the character of Calcutta in terms of the commodities it imported from outside – good worth Rs. 23.91 from Bengal, Rs. 6.28 lakhs from the Unites Provinces, Rs. 2.39 from Assam and Rs. 1.75 lakhs from the Punjab. This command in business with the traditional zones from the Punjab to Assam erstwhile considered as the hinterland of Calcutta port was considered to be a point of elation in the Imperial gazetteer and it shows that the city had never had any industrial character on which its glory could rest. From the Census to the Imperil Gazetteer there was a general recognition that Calcutta was essentially non-industrial and that had become the capital of an empire with a sound commercial base. This was the position of Calcutta at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century.

Calcutta was not industrialized, writes Barun De, because it had no production principles. In his own words, “there was no genuine production principle in

Calcutta and I do not think that the British had production principles, only commercial ones in India.”<sup>58</sup> Production principles within its own core and production relations with its periphery both were absent in India and were not developed even after independence. “But in any case”, Barun De adds, “whether it was Durgapur, Kalyani or Haldia, Calcutta did not establish, not even after Indian independence, the sort of productive relationship that Edinburgh established with Glasgow.”<sup>59</sup> The case, however, of Calcutta not being built around a factory was not a very particular case. Biplab Dasgupta, an economist of urban studies, notes:

“Actually none of the Third World cities have been built around factories. All of them had a certain similarity: they were built by the colonial masters to serve a certain purpose, which was to procure goods and materials from the hinterland, and to ship them to the metropolitan centre. That was the objective and the port played a certain role in that development. Which is why, not only Calcutta, but also cities such as Algiers or Accra played the same role, being the centre where the ruling class lived, where the privileges were concentrated, from where the country was directed and administered, and also into which the resources and materials of the rest of the country were brought and then shipped to other parts of the world, to the metropolitan centres.”<sup>60</sup>

This was what Calcutta seemed to be in the hey day of the British rule: a satellite of the Empire from where the will of the Empire was to be coordinated. Blair Kling believed that Calcutta had a sovereignty of its growth which it maintained for about one full century – from the middle of the eighteenth to the middle of the nineteenth century when it had a nucleus of an industrial revolution budding at a local spot around Fort Gloster. That was stifled. But that did not mean that chances were all gone. The prospect of an industrial take-off was still there in Calcutta in the middle of the nineteenth century when British capital had already started coming in. A British sojourner in the city, George W. Johnson<sup>61</sup>, as late as the early 1840s, clearly defined as to how India could become an industrial country in future. He wrote:

“Doubtless, it is of high importance for the increase of India’s wealth to improve the cotton growth, and to establish extensively on her soil the cultivation of tea-plant, but these are only some of the first steps towards the desired object . . . . It is now shown that the mineral wealth of India fits her for a higher destiny; and that she, like America, may be at first agricultural, but gradually may become, also, a manufacturing country.”<sup>62</sup>

This was the time when industries based on agriculture like indigo and rural handicrafts had yielded place to new plantation industries like tea and coffee, industries based on commercial cultivation like jute, and finally the railways and all these were being slowly introduced as avenues for the investment of British capital in India. This was also the time when small urban industries even the traditional ones were trying to adjust with change and had proved to be fairly successful in keeping themselves up vis-à-vis forces from outside. D.R. Gadgil says that when rural industries failed urban industries showed resilience and adjusted with change.<sup>63</sup> Even in this condition the industries around Calcutta did not survive. They were certainly not traditional industries and given the capital and enterprise back-up from the resident British and the Indians there they seemed to have the genre of making themselves into potential competitors of the British industries at Glasgow, Lancashire, Manchester and Sheffield. It was here that they seemed to be running cross to the British industrial and mercantile interest in England and their agents at the head of the Empire here in India. Under pressures from British industrialists and exporters the search had already begun to find out how far India could fulfil its role as a producer of raw materials – raw cottons and plantation products to suit the British industries in England. The colonial construct of dual relationship between a mother country and a colony was already being worked out in the academic frame of British mercantilism. Robert M. Martin, a promoter of export of British capital outside, stressed the enormous potential of India as an importer of both British goods and British capital. He defined the relation between England and India as ‘the one’ – the giver – with ‘the other’ – the taker – a structure where “the one [Britain] teeming with a hardy, industrious and ingenious population two-thirds of whom are engaged in manipulating and vending the produce of more genial climes . . .” will be matched by “the other [India] rich to overflowing with bounty with which nature has enriched the earth, and particularly so in those agricultural products necessary to the manufactures, comforts and luxuries of the more civilized nation.”<sup>64</sup> The construct was ready for the ‘more civilized nation’ theory to command its orientation in India. This was what Blink called a ‘racial arrogance’<sup>65</sup> vis-à-vis which no potential on the Indian side could be viable for growth.

Two things are worthy of note here. First, after the fall of the Union Bank the Indian capital in Calcutta was not available for industry. “In the banking world of India,” writes N.K. Sinha, “the ruin of the Union Bank was regarded as a public calamity.”<sup>66</sup> “Its failure was a blow to Indo-British cooperation.”<sup>67</sup> After this capital was not mobilized for industry and Calcutta became a hub where all

moneyed men invested for landed property. Real estate thus became booming in the city.<sup>68</sup>

Meanwhile *zamindaries* were breaking under the rigours of the permanent settlement and their splinters were being purchased by moneyed men in the city. Capital thus changed its direction from industry to land and in the vacuum created in the wake of this British capital flowed in. When this was the situation in Calcutta and in the east the industrial potential of the west – the Bombay Presidency around 1860 – showed signs of development around textile industries. Even Martin's confidence was shaken at the sight of this and he feared a competition from India. "Even the present generation," he warned his country – men, "may witness the Lancashire Manufacturer beaten by his Hindu competitor."<sup>69</sup>

There is a second point about Bengal's industrial potentiality about this time. Knowledge of the baneful effects of industrialization in England was trickling slowly in and people could see the miseries inflicted upon the weavers and spinners of the countryside by Fort Gloster yarn on the one hand and the machine-made imports from the west on the other.<sup>70</sup> Some kind of revulsion to industry also grew in public mind and Bengali interest shifted to land. This as time went on became a consolidated phenomenon in the city's economy. After the collapse of the Union Bank in 1848 and the failure of Indo-British partnership in all business activities in Calcutta circles and finally after the ultimate collapse of Fort Gloster enterprises in industry, Indians feared to invest in any venture in association with Europeans and their mind turned to other avenues of investment – land.<sup>71</sup> Indian business mind was not depressed when in the thirties of the nineteenth century the Agency Houses collapsed one by one and indigo industry financed mostly by native capital slowly shut down. It showed great resilience then.<sup>72</sup> But after the failure of the Union Bank the Indian business world shrank. Henceforth there was a tendency towards safe investment. By this time because of the activities of the Lottery Committee and the Hospital Committee the township of Calcutta was growing fast and the urban enclaves in the white town created some enchantments among the rich Indians.<sup>73</sup> As Indian mind became introvert and turned to safe investment orientations early, industrial ventures came to a complete close in the city and her outskirts. Calcutta's economy now became as a whole a satellite of the Empire.

## Notes:

1. Morris D. Morris, "The Growth of Large-Scale Industry to 1947" in Dharma Kumar ed., *The Cambridge Economic History of India*, Vol.II, Indian edn., 1984, p. 553.
2. Ranajit Dasgupta, "Industrial Change In Colonial Bengal" in Professor Adhir Chakravarty ed. *Aspects of Socio-Economic Changes And Political Awakening In Bengal From The Eighteenth Century To Independence*, State Archives of West Bengal, Education Department, Government of West Bengal, Calcutta, 1989, p. 64.
3. *Ibid.*
4. N.K. Sinha, *Economic History of Bengal*, Vol. 3, p. 7
5. For details in the debate on deindustrialization reference may be made to the following works: (i) Irfan Habib, "Potentialities of Capitalist Developments in the Economy of Mughal India", *Enquiry*, New series, Vol. III, No. 3, 1971; (ii) V.I. Pavlov, *The Indian Capitalist Class*, pp. 41-42 and *Historical Premises for India's Development*; (iii) A.I. Chicherov, *Economic Development in the 16<sup>th</sup> – 18<sup>th</sup> Century*, p. 238; (iv) Rajani Palme Dutt, *India Today*, pp. 95-96; (v) M.N. Roy, *India in Transition*, p. 90; (Paul Baran, *Political Economy of Growth*, pp. 179-80; (vi) A.R. Desai, *Social Background of Indian Nationalism*, p. 16; (vii) Saibal Gupta, "Potentialities of Industrial Revolution of British India" *Economic and Political Weekly*, March 1, 1980; (viii) Harasankar Bhattacharya, *Aspects of Indian Economic History*, Progressive Publishers, Calcutta, 1980, pp. 175-180.
6. Maurice Dobb, *Studies in the Development of Capitalism*, p. 70.
7. Jadunath Sarkar, *Economics of British India*, p. 83.
8. Blair B. Kling, "Economic Foundations of the Bengal Renaissance" in Rachel Van M. Baumer ed., *Aspects of Bengali History and Society*, New Delhi, 1976, p. 27.
9. "Thus, by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the demand for rapid industrialization of the country along modern lines had assumed national proportions." – Bipan Chandra *The Rise and Growth of Economic Nationalism in India: Economic Policies of Indian National Leadership, 1880-1905*, New Delhi, 1966, p. 69.
10. M.G. Ranade *Essays on Indian Economics*, Bombay, 1898, p. 92.
11. In this he becomes the forerunner of Gandhi in opposing modern industry.
12. *Amrita Bazar Patrika* 23 February, 1903.
13. Bipin Chandra Pal, *New India*, 12 August, 1901. In the next issue of *New India* he continued the campaign: "Under existing economic and

financial conditions”, he said, “we are constrained to look upon every new industry opened by English enterprise and worked by British Capital, as a source of fresh economic danger.” – *New India*, 19 August, 1901.

14. About the early nationalist pioneers of industry in Bombay see A.C. Mazumdar, *Indian National Evolution*, Madras, 1917.
15. About the early entrepreneurial enterprise of the nationalist leaders Bipan Chandra writes: “They [the nationalist leaders] were among the early pioneers of the movement for starting modern industries, banks, insurance companies, trading houses, etc. For example, in 1855 Dadabhai Naoroji became a partner in the commercial firm of the Camas, the first Indian firm to be established in London, and in 1869 he started his own concern under the name Dadabhai Naoroji and Co. Ranade played an important part in the origin and growth of the Cotton and Silk Spinning and Weaving Factory, the metal manufacturing Factory, the Poona Mercantile Bank, the Poona Dyeing Company, and the Reay Pape Mill, all set up at Poona . . . K.T. Telang and Pherozeshah Mehta, along with some others ‘who were keen in our new-born enthusiasm to promote industries and arts of India’, started a soap factory in Bombay in the 1870’s. As a matter of fact, Pherozeshah Mehta was quite intimately connected with the mill industry of India. Tilak also ventured into the industrial field, though only for a short while, when in 1891 he opened in partnership with two friends a cotton-ginning factory at latur in the Nizam’s territory. D. E. Wacha was the managing agent of the large and flourishing Morarji Gokaldas and Sholapur Mills; and for many years he was a member of the managing committee of the Bombay Mill Owners’ association. R.N. Mudholkar, one of the prominent Congress leaders of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, was also one of the forerunners of modern trade and industry in Berar. In 1881-82, he established in cooperation with some friends the Berar Trading Company, which was the first joint-stock company in Berar, and acted as its secretary. Later in 1885, he started along with others the first textile mill in Berar. He was also instrumental in the setting up of an oil pressing factory and several cotton ginning and pressing factories.” – Bipan Chandra, *op.cit.*, pp. 85-86.
16. Gopal Krishna Gokhle, *Speeches*, published by G.A. Natesan, Madras, 1916, p. 927
17. Bipan Chandra, *op.cit.*, p. 71.

18. On this point reference may be made to N.K. Sinha, *The Economic History of Bengal, vol. III, 1783-1848*, Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyay, Calcutta, 1970, chs. 6 & 7.
19. To what extent the Bengal capital was consumed in building up real estates may be known from Pradip Sinha, *Calcutta in Urban History*, Firma KLM Private Ltd., Calcutta, 1978, Appendix III, pp. 141-159.
20. David Kopf, *British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1969 pp. 208-209.
21. For the detail of it see N.K. Sinha, *op.cit.*, ch. 7
22. Warren Gunderson, "The Self-Image and World-View of the Bengali Intelligentsia as Found in the Writings of the Mid-Nineteenth Century, 1830-1870" in *Bengal literature and History* ed. Edward C. Dimock, East Lansing, Asian Studies Centre, Michigan State University, 1967, p. 146.
23. Bipan Chandra, *op.cit.*, p. 71.
24. Blair Kling, *op.cit.*, p. 26-42
25. Blair Kling, *op.cit.*, p. 27
26. "The Modern Bengali business class, in fact, owes its origin to British commercial activity. When Europeans began trading in Bengal in the sixteenth century, the traditional Bengali merchant castes had been displaced by traders from north India who had captured the lucrative foreign trade in Bengali silk and cotton textiles. It was from these outsiders – Marwaris, Pathans, Kashmiris, and others – and not from Bengalis that the British seized the trade of Bengal in the eighteenth century. Greater resources and the use of the *dastak* enabled the British to outbid the merchants of north India for the production of Bengal. In addition, wherever possible the British bypassed the middlemen and gathered handloom weavers and silk winders into compounds under their own control. They also diverted the extensive coastal trade between Bengal and Gujarat from the boats of independent Indian merchants to their own ships and changed the direction of the flourishing trade between these provinces to a separate trade of each with the Far East." – Blair Kling, *op.cit.*, p. 27.
27. For further details on these points see N.K. Sinha, *op.cit.*, Sukumar Bhattacharya, *The East India Company and the Economy of Bengal 1704-1740*, London, 1954; and Holdern Furber, *John Company at Work*, Cambridge, Mss, Harvard University press, 1948.
28. Blair B. Kling, *op.cit.*, p. 29
29. Blair B. Kling, *op.cit.*, p. 38
30. Blair B. Kling, *op.cit.*, p. 30
31. *Ibid.*

32. *Asiatic Journal*, vol. 13, January, 1834, p. 6, cited in Blair Kling, *op.cit.*, p. 30
33. *Ibid.*
34. *Ibid.* Dwarakanath Tagore, the Bengali colossus of the time, was one of the major shareholders of the complex.
35. Dwarakanath Tagore's holdings have been referred to in *Bengal Harkaru*, 22 May, 1848 and 27 March, 1852.
36. Blair B. Kling, *op.cit.*, p. 30
37. For further information of capitalist enterprise in India see Great Britain, *House of Commons Parliamentary Papers*, 1840, vol. 8, Select Committee on East India Produce, Testimony of Henry Gouger, pp. 116-123.
38. See "Notes on the Right bank of the Hooghly", *Calcutta Review*, vol. 6, July-December, 1845.
39. G.A. Princep, *An Account of Steam Vessels and of Proceedings Connected with Steam Navigation in British India*, Calcutta 1830 and Henry T. Bernstein, *Steamboats on the Ganges*, Calcutta, 1960.
40. The expression is available in "Notes on the right Bank of the Hooghly", etc.
41. Blair B. Kling, *op.cit.*, pp. 30-31.
42. Blair B. Kling, *op.cit.*, pp 31.
43. *Ibid.*
44. It has been stated in a recent research, that "the most crucial determinant in the growth of cities in the nineteenth century – rapid industrialization – was a feature notably absent in Calcutta. If anything, growth of the factory industry was positively discouraged in India by the British". – Partho Datta, *Planning the City Urbanization and Reform in Calcutta c. 1800 – c. 1940*, Tulika Books, New Delhi, 2012, p. 129.
45. "The jute industry that grew around Calcutta in the late nineteenth century was firmly in the hands of the British managing agency houses and contributed little to Indian industrial growth." – *Ibid.*
46. This point has been excellently analysed in Atiya Habib Kidwai, "Urban Atrophy in Colonial India: Some Demographic indicators" in Indu Banga ed., *The City in Indian History*, Delhi, Manohar, 1991. The driving away of native capital from industry, the unequal completion of the English in all industrial ventures from the beginning and the lost opportunities for Indian enterprise created an economy of no outlet for forward-looking and enterprising Indians. The university age had created new education and new middleclass in Bengal who had great aspirations for participation in business, administration and industry. They were choked in the bottlenecks created by the imperial administrative and industrial

policy. Out of the middleclass discontent Indian nationalism grew. It should be noted that no industry grew within the jurisdiction of the municipality of the city of Calcutta. Partho Datta comments: "Besides, strictly speaking, this phenomenon (growth of industry) was outside the jurisdiction of the municipality of Calcutta city." – Partho Datta, *op.cit.*, p. 129.

47. For further information on this point see Ranajit Dasgupta, "Poverty and Protest: A Study of Calcutta's Working-class and Labouring Poor 1875-1900" in A. Das, V. Nilkanth and P.S. Dubey ed., *The Worker and the Working Class*, Delhi, Public Enterprises Centre for Continuing Education, 1984 and Dipesh Chakrabarty, "On Deifying and Defying Authority : Managers and Workers in the Jute Mills of Bengal, c 1890-1940", *Past and Present*, No. 100, 1983.
48. For the failure of the Indian business enterprise see N.K. Sinha, *The Economic History of Bengal 1793-1848*, Vol.III, Calcutta 1970 Ch. VII under the title "Indian Business Enterprise: Its Failure in Calcutta (1800-1848)"
49. "There are many case records in the Supreme Court archives which prove that the Bengal, exporters of opium to the Far East could be cheated with impunity. The most conspicuous case was that of the sons of Gopey Mohan Tagore against the Barretts. Chundercoomer Tagore and his brothers were duped and cheated in a single transaction to the extent of five lakhs. The Bengali traders could not trust their agents in Macao or Canton whose shifts, subterfuges, pretences and contrivances they could not circumvent." – N.K. Sinha, *op.cit.*, pp. 107-108.
50. Beverly, *Census 1881*, 22, 46.
51. In a seminar held in Calcutta in 1981 Barun De, the historian, made the following observation: "I was trying to think of cities which have been healthy, which have maintained themselves, which have retained a vitality which is not colonial, and which have not had an industrial core. Immediately, two cities sprung to my mind, which did not have an industrial core at any rate: Edinburgh and New York." "Edinburgh is not only the political capital of Scotland, it is also its cultural capital. It was a city built around a rock with a castle on it. And sects of squabbling Presbyterian divines, on that narrow street which comes down from the rock, by their own process of interaction, bred what was known as the great intellectual renaissance of the eighteenth century in Scotland. The industry grew up about 60 miles away, in Glasgow, in Paisley, in Ayr, and such places. That was after imperial

exploitation fructified, when there was an integral relationship between Edinburgh and Glasgow.”

“New York . . . did not have an industrial core, it had an industrial periphery. It was a Dutch mercantile colonial city which then became a British neo-colonial mercantile city that is to say in the period from the Declaration of Independence till about the 1860s. Round its periphery developed working industrial units on the New Jersey shore and north of Long Island. The point here, I think, is that cities which are able to maintain a productive relationship with the predominant basis of industrial production are cities which are healthy. Calcutta did not develop such productive relationships. That is why Calcutta has tended to become cesspool of much economic crisis of West Bengal or the whole of Bengal.” Jean Racine ed., *Calcutta 1981 The city, its crisis and the debate on urban planning and development*, Concept Publishing Company, New Delhi – 110059, 1990, pp. 121-122.

52. *Ibid.*

53. Mumford spoke of two different towns in the west, the *paleolithic paradise* and the *Coketown*. The *Paleolithic paradise* refers to the towns which were pre-Industrial Revolution in their origin. The *Coketown* refers to towns which grew upon coal-mines and around steel plants and smelting factories.

54. Lewis Mumford, *The City in History*, 1961, p. 508.

55. School Book Society of Calcutta, *Geography of Hindoostan*, Calcutta, 1834, p. 4.

56. “Under the Great Mughals all rupees coined under the reigning King were considered as *siccas* and passed at their original value during his life. When a new king ascended the throne the rupees of the former reign became subject to a *batta* (discount) and were not received into the royal treasury. *Sicca* rupees were the only coins received in official payments.” – N.K. Sinha, *Economic History of Bengal*, Vol. I, Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyay, Calcutta, 1965, p. 129. The *sicca rupees* that were prevalent in the Bengal Presidency and known as the *Bengal type sicca* rupees was last coined in 1793. Under the nawabs the Bengal *siccas* were coined in Dakha, murshidabad and Patna. In the first three decades of the nineteenth century all *siccas* prevalent in the Bengal Presidency were coined within the territory of the East India Company. *Sicca* rupees weighed 192 grains troy (‘the system of weights used in England for gold, silver and precious stones’ – *Chambers’s Twentieth Century Dictionary*).

57. *The Imperial Gazetteer, The Indian Empire*, 1908, Vol. III, Table IX, p. 4.
58. Barun De, *op.cit.*, p. 122
59. *Ibid.*
60. Jean Racine, *op.cit.*, p. 121
61. George W. Johnson was an attorney who spent three years in Calcutta in early 1840s and narrated his experiences in a two volume book *The Stranger in India; or Three Years in Calcutta* published from London in 1843, London 1843.
62. George W. Johnson, Vol. II, *op.cit.*, pp 218-19
63. "Of the different forms of industry in India the only one that reflected the impact of new outside forces by a continuous change in its organization, was the indigenous urban handicrafts." "Urban industry, on the other hand, in all their crafts in which it still flourished, showed a distinct change in its organization." – D.R. Gadgil, *The Industrial Evolution of India in Recent Times*(1924), Fourth Edition, Seventh Impression, 1959 Oxford University Press, p. 173
64. R.M. Martin, *History of the British Colonies*, 5 Vols., London 1834.
65. *Ibid.*
66. N.K. Sinha, *The Economic History of Bengal*, Vol. III, p. 70.
67. N.K. Sinha, *op.cit.*, p. 71.
68. For 'Estates of Some Opulent families of Calcutta, see Pradip Sinha, *Calcutta in Urban History*, Firma KLM, Calcutta, 1978, Appendix III.
69. Cited in Morris D. Morris, *The Emergence of an Indian Labor Force in India* Berkeley, University of California Press, p. 25.
70. Blair B. Kling, *op.cit.*, p. 33.
71. "The collapse of the Union Bank in 1848 came as a great shock to those Indian businessmen who were associated with British businessmen in different enterprises. Indians were junior partners in this enterprise. Its failure almost synchronized with that of Cockerell & Co., Colville Gillmore & Co., Lyall Matheson & Co. Carr Tagore and Co, Rustomji Turner & Co., and Oswald Seal & Co." – N.K. Sinha, *op.cit.*, Vol. I, p 123.
72. "Even after the failure of these agency houses a second and a very different phase of Indo-British partnership began in the pursuit of commercial profit during the years 1834-47. This was largely due to the emergence of some outstanding personalities in the field of Indian business – Dwarkanth Tagore, Rustomji Cowasji and Motilal Seal . . . ." N.K. Sinha, *op.cit.*, p. 117
73. Partho Datta (*op.cit.*, pp. 53-54) brilliantly describes how this happened.

## CHAPTER 12

### BENGALI BUSINESS ENTERPRISE IN CALCUTTA IN THE EARLY COLONIAL ERA

It is a common place in historical observation that the Bengalis are not a business-minded community. Susil Chaudhuri who wrote the business history of Bengal in the seventeenth and early eighteenth century did not find any Bengali name that could be comparable to those of Kehmchand and Chintaman, Chaturmal and Mathuradas, or, as a matter of fact of any other merchant from Gujarat or Rajasthan present in Bengal.<sup>1</sup> He wrote : “Finally, it is of great interest to note that most of the prominent Bengal merchants during the period [1650-1720] were not local people but outsiders mainly from Gujarat or Rajasthan as their names, and in the cases of Khemchand and Chintaman, their signatures suggest. Of the eighteen prominent merchants who supplied raw silk and piece goods to the Dutch Company in Kasimbazar in the eighties, as many as nine were Gujaratis. This is rather peculiar since both in Surat and Madras all the prominent merchants were local people, and this is historical evidence of the fact that Bengali have never been and are still not business-minded.”<sup>2</sup> The only Bengali of some importance he could decipher was one Golap Roy, who Chaudhuri says, “was mainly a *Shroff* [*Saraf*] in Dacca”.<sup>3</sup> This was the time when Calcutta did not emerge as a prominent place of business activities. Even Murshidabad was not in the offing. Dhaka’s supremacy as the capital and centre of business in eastern India was still a reigning phenomenon. The European East India Companies had not yet built up their sovereignty in business enterprise. The seventeenth and early eighteenth century world in Bengal was essentially a Mughal world where the profession of a soldier was still adjudged a more dignified a profession than that of a merchant with whom profit remains to be a guiding motive and capital the guardian of all enterprise. The Company’s Council in Calcutta in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century dreaded not the Bengali merchants but the cordon effected by the Armenian merchants. The most prominent among the Armenian merchants was Khoja Surhaud and at one point of time the officers of the English Council in Calcutta sought the good office of this Khoja to make some settlement with the Armenians.<sup>4</sup> Until the middle of the eighteenth century these Armenians maintained trade relations with the foreign companies and acted as a corridor between foreign merchants and men in power either at Dhaka or at Murshidabad. In this context the Bengali business community, if there was any, had no scope to function.

In a recent research the business-shyness of the Bengalis has been treated as a misconception of history. Declaring a crusade against this misconception

Chittabrata Palit writes: “Before one goes into that *saga* of dauntless struggle against heavy odds, a few misconceptions about the so-called Bengali aversion to business must be dispelled. One chronic cliché is the lure of the Permanent Settlement leading to the flight of Bengali capital from business to landholding. In the first place, there had not been such a colossal transfer of capital of Bengali *banians* from Calcutta Commerce to the purchase of estates in the *mofussil* as has been established by recent researches”.<sup>5</sup> If we read Susil Chaudhuri’s work we find that in Mughal Bengal the business world was irrespective of the Bengalis. The forces of the age operating in the business world were relentlessly operating beyond the control of the Bengalis. The Armenians had inexorable links with the ruling elite and their predominance in overseas trade brought them close to the European merchants. The *Nawabs* and the power elite of Bengal profusely participated in overseas trade<sup>6</sup> and it may be presumed that the Armenians were forming a league with the Europeans to maintain their trade buoyancy in fact vis-à-vis the competition of the power elite of Bengal. Palit was speaking of the Bengali merchants when the context was different. It was the time when the Mughal rule was an event of the past. The British rule was consolidating itself. Calcutta had emerged as the city that superseded, both Murshidabad and Dakha and had benefited itself from the ruin of Hughli. Other towns, Chandernagore and Chinsura faded quickly and the mastery of Calcutta as the seat of power was rapidly acknowledged. This was the setting in which the Permanent Settlement, did not seem to be the only pace-setting event of the time. The Bengali *banians* emerged very fast as the supporter of foreign traders, their contact-men in this part of the country and eventually their liaison officers in exploring the avenues to wealth in the world of Indian business and production. As early as the first quarter of the eighteenth century, Jadunath Sarkar observed, the contact-people of the Europeans amassed huge wealth in Calcutta. The onset of the colonial rule had favoured a class of Bengali people in turning over a new leaf of life under the protective umbrella of the English. They were the new elite, a comprador class in the truest sense of the term, that emerged as the money-elite of the country thus substituting the power-elite of the past. This power elite composed of men like Raja Rajballav, Maharaja Nanda Kumar, Md. Reza Khan and the like veered around the *Nawabs*, walked along the corridors of power and remained steeped in the treasure derived from the profit of governance. With the battle of Palasi and more particularly with the grant of the *diwani* their days seemed to have come to an end. The loot of the Palasi followed then and the Bengali *banians* found themselves sheltered under the mercantile patriarchy of the Company. These men were the

forerunners of the Bengali business men of Calcutta in the early colonial period. Palit was speaking of them.

“The Calcutta baboos”, Palit says, “invested no less in urban property though the minions of the District Collectorate and the *Zamindari* establishment mostly indulged in the sale and purchase of estates and *ryoti* holdings in the *mofussil*. It was only obvious that in an economy of no outlets in trade and commerce under the colonial stranglehold, the second generation of Bengali businessmen should prefer land speculation to banianship of the British. They devoted their energy and savings to buying and selling of estates and tenures for safer investment and assured profit.”<sup>7</sup> Given this, we visualize a transition from Susil Chaudhuri’s world of no-Bengali enterprise to Palit’s brisk Bengali enterprise in land-speculation as an alternative to *banianship* to the English. Now for Bengali ‘*banians from Calcutta Commerce*’ Palit finds the new expression of ‘*The Calcutta baboos*’. *Banians* from fluttering around the *mofussil* and district towns now found their rendezvous in Calcutta and their status now changed from that of dependent brokers to that of independent *baboos*. As they discovered their ways to the new-found land in the Permanently settled Bengal of the early colonial era their spirit of entrepreneurship blossomed. This entrepreneurship they failed to demonstrate inland as new landlords and from this failure they experienced their first major rebound in other direction. They turned their face to commerce. Palit adds: “The formation of patchwork estates and the tentacles of colonial taxation ruled out capitalist agriculture. Some combined landholding with business by frequent inter-transfers of accumulated fortune, making the two occupations complementary rather than contradictory. A computation from the Court of Wards records shows the viability of land-speculation as the most lucrative business requiring considerable business acumen.”<sup>8</sup> Rebuffed by colonial taxation and patchwork estates the old *banians* cum new landlords found capitalist farming difficult and sought new avenues for investment. Some combined commerce and landholding and thus explored commerce as the new field where they could satisfy their ambitions. Palit maintains an obstinate defence of his standpoint vis-à-vis all arguments that the Bengali merchants were institutionally weak to undertake effective ventures in business. He writes: “Another pet excuse offered by imperial propaganda, in the form of the so-called pathological propensity of the Bengalis towards litigation, has been accepted by noted scholars like N.K. Sinha as a cause for the disintegration of estates and dissipation of native capital. It has to be realized that land became the sap of life for the Bengalis who could not be tied to bootlaces of the British speculators, and were dragged in to protracted lawsuits to safeguard their only title to economic and social

wellbeing. The legal brawls of the Mullicks or the Mukherjees or the Pal Chowdhurys must be read in this light to some extent and their extravagances in social ceremonies were due to the lack of opportunity to invest in trade and the fear of the British expropriation.”<sup>9</sup> Three things have thus been highlighted by Palit – first, the Bengalis in defence against aggressive colonial British speculators took shelter in law-suits; Secondly, there was massive British expropriation which the Bengalis dreaded and finally in the absence of avenues for investment the Bengali capitalists went into extravagant spending of their fortunes. In any case these points throw windows for us into the milieu where the Bengali capital had no scope to germinate. Calcutta was cramped by hostile British attitude to the Indians. “A typical British attitude of these years”, writes Geoffrey Moorhouse, “was represented by a correspondent to *The Englishman*, writing about Calcutta Corporation, which had lately been created with an elected majority of councillors, which meant a majority of natives. ‘Sir’, wrote the gentleman, ‘with reference to the question of the Municipal Government of Calcutta, I beg to submit that the present system is perfectly preposterous. Calcutta is a purely English city. The city belongs and has always belonged to the English, and the native community in it is simply a foreign and parasitical community which would cease to exist if the English were to abandon it. Its site was selected and the land taken up for it was taken up by the English. They founded it, built it, occupied it, maintained it, defended it, regulated it, and it is still from their commerce and enterprise that its revenues are now developed.’<sup>10</sup> The magnitude of this hostility showed to the Indians in Calcutta was totally unknown to them in any other city of Bengal contemporary or past. Dakha and Murshidabad were places where the Indian merchants dominated and the foreign traders had to seek corridors to the government either through the Indians or through the Armenians. They were the masters of their own world. In Calcutta the situation was different. In this situation it was not likely that the attention of the Bengalis in Calcutta would be focused on trade and commerce as one of the main objectives of life. Calcutta had overtaken Murshidabad as a seat of power in the second half of the eighteenth century and with this commerce grew in Calcutta. In the sixties of the eighteenth century Md. Reza Khan reported that while business in Murshidabad was drop of water in Calcutta it was like a river. Yet Calcutta had its rival in Dakha which was the greatest centre of cotton piece goods in Bengal. N.K. Sinha says: “Dacca was the Manchester of India in the eighteenth century. The continued prosperity of Dacca throughout the eighteenth century and its catastrophic decline in the opening years of the nineteenth serve as the measure and symbol of Bengal’s long dominance in world trade in cotton piece goods and her speedy downfall.” Speaking of this downfall Sinha further

observes : “This caused a revolution which was so complete that it has hardly a parallel in the history of commerce.”<sup>11</sup> Thus one may say that in the early years of the colonial rule, particularly in the second half of the eighteenth century Calcutta hardly had any major attraction for Bengali and as a matter of fact for Hindu merchants. This was the time when the Hindu bankers, the Jagat Seths, were tottering into pieces<sup>12</sup> and no indigenous house of banking could raise its head. The ancient Bengali trading families, the Seths and Basaks who among the early settlers in Calcutta commanded respect from historians had passed into oblivion. The Bengali merchants had lost their rallying point. Then came colossal changes. “The British system of inland trade duties was established in 1801.”<sup>13</sup> “During the years 1801 to 1834 and more specifically after 1810 the internal tariff on 235 articles from cotton piece goods to hooka snakes combined with town duties created such barriers between the upper and lower provinces that trade became ‘intricate, dangerous and disreputable’. The new system appeared to be purposely designed to impede the free agency of the merchant in every stage of his proceedings. There were 115 *chokies* in the small district of Banaras. The suburbs of Calcutta extended fifty miles along the right bank of the Hooghly and there were not less than sixty separate stations in every direction on the highways and byways. Though there was no demand for successive duties yet there were so many search stations for the collection of a consolidated duty. It should be noted that these *chokies* were independent of salt and opium *chokies*. Merchants very gladly compounded by a bribe. It was very easy to place any merchant in the position of a public delinquent. The profession of the merchant in the interior became a craft and he had to become crafty”. “This state of things very much affected Bengali Hindus in Calcutta. In the larger society of the city, public opinion had some weight and respectable people wanted to avoid the disrepute of being considered to be smugglers or in league with customs *Karindah* whose name was synonymous with rouse. This loss of Character respectable Bengali Hindus of Calcutta who had money to invest wanted very much to avoid.”<sup>14</sup> Trade barriers in towns and also in the interior were essentially a Mughal phenomenon but it persisted even in the first few decades of the nineteenth century. This was an institutional handicap because of which the Calcutta traders could not grow. A trader’s mentality a Bengali *bhadralok* shunned because it squeezed the spaciousness of human mind and made human character adept in low attributes of life. All this was because trade had never come under the patronage of the state. In the late eighteenth century some *zamindars* and land-speculators made trade ventures because their interceptions of territorial revenue provided the necessary back-up for commerce. Deby Singh the most oppressive farmer of Rangpur who

experienced one of the most formidable peasant uprisings in his territory invested much of his fortunes in trade. His sinews of commerce were built up by rack-renting peasants. Sinha writes : “Raja Deby Singh presents the rare case of a person who first acquired vast zamindari and real property but about 1789 established *kothees* or houses of business at Murshidabad and Calcutta for the trade and business of a merchant and native banker. At the time of his death he possessed zamindaries, taluks, and other landed estates, *kothees*, cash, Company’s paper and other securities valued at 1 crore of rupees – all this was self-acquired not ‘ancestral’”, according to the language of wills of those days. Deby Singh’s name was byword for reproach as an oppressive instrument of British money-makers of those days”.<sup>15</sup> Two points are worthy of note here. First, the farmer opened a *kothee* at Murshidabad as late as the end of the eighteenth century. Calcutta had not yet outgrown other cities as the traders’ paradise in Bengal. Secondly, Deby Singh, the rack-renter of peasants and a revenue manipulator was a byname in Bengal for the most wicked specimen of humanity. Such men were taking to trade in Calcutta and Murshidabad. What is significant was that money raised in the interior flowed into Murshidabad and Calcutta and seldom it found its direction to Dhaka in the formative years of the colonial rule in Bengal. Scrafton writing about the middle of the eighteenth century wrote that the *rajahs* and *zamindars* and men of opulence in the districts were sending their savings to Calcutta which they thought was the best resort for capital. Capital was thus forming in Calcutta. Sinha writes : “In the first half of the nineteenth century Calcutta looked like becoming a centre of business activity of the *nouveau-riche* but in the second half of the century we find very little large-scale business activity of these Bengali businessmen. Why were people in Bengal, who were so anxious to receive western education, so unwilling to imitate the British in trade, industry and finance in the second half of the nineteenth century?”<sup>16</sup> Sinha’s reading of the Bengali and in a bigger way the Indian enterprise in Calcutta comes as a significant balancer between the two opposing views of Susil Chaudhuri and Chitabrata Palit. Chaudhuri finds the Bengalis nowhere in the business world of Mughal Bengal. Palit’s contention was that in the colonial world of Bengal the Bengalis undertook meaningful effort in business participations. Between non-being and being as traders the Bengalis certainly did experience a transition. Sinha studies this transition. The phenomenon in this transition, Sinha thought, was the emergence of the Calcutta *banians*. From his study of the agrarian history he knew that the *banians* went for land speculation in the 1770s when the Five Yearly Farming System was introduced in Bengal during the time of Warren Hastings. It meant that in the second half of the eighteenth century the emergence of the *banians* were complete. With capital and land

tenure at their command they built their entitlement to be in the race for wealth. Sinha observes : “There was ceaseless pursuit of wealth by Bengali residents of Calcutta and neighbouring European settlements in the first half of the nineteenth century. Their business enterprise was largely imitative of the Europeans. There was money in the hands of Indian *banians* in Calcutta. It would be a mistake to describe the Bengali *banians* of this period merely as black *gomasta*, head native clerk and salesman.”<sup>17</sup> This *banian* was gaining confidence of his own stature and was dreaming of entrepreneurial adventures in a limited scale. The Character of the eighteenth century *banian* was different. He was “an interpreter, head book-keeper, head secretary, head broker, the supplier of cash and cash-keeper”. They were mainly the credit supplier to the penniless European merchants. But by the beginning of the nineteenth century the European merchants were in no need of Bengali capital except for emergency because the Agency Houses had come up and ex-servants of the Company and British Free Merchants contributed their fortunes to these Houses. Business in Calcutta increased and the Bengali *banian* had developed into a class of link-managers at different sectors of European business. The definition of *banians* now widened. It said : “A *banian* is a person by whom all purchase and all sales of goods, merchandise and produce are made and through whom all shipments are made on account and on behalf of the merchants or mercantile firm in whose establishment he is a *banian*. Such a *banian* is therefore responsible for the quality and quantity of goods, merchandise, produce and shipments made through him or his *sircars* or servants whom he employs. He has to make good any deficiency in weight or quality, to make compensation for any fraud in shipments of such goods or produce. The *banian* receives a *dustooree* or a percentage of the sale and produce of goods and merchandise.”<sup>18</sup> It is thus clear that the *banianship* at the beginning of the nineteenth century had experienced a virtual metamorphosis through a vast functional expansion in terms of its responsibilities and performances. Beginning their career as collaborators in a miniature scale the Bengali *banians* of Calcutta in the first few decades of the nineteenth century had developed as undertakers of European business and custodians of their business trust. If this may be taken as a sign of the rise of a Bengali business community in Calcutta in the first century of colonial rule in Bengal it is to be admitted that it was dependent bourgeois community that was yet to acquire its status of sovereignty. What is important was that the existence and eventual rise of the *banians* were linked to the needs of the British and European business in Calcutta and in other parts of the country. The civil and military officers of the Company supplied money to the Agency Houses but that was not sufficient enough to keep them on a sustainable

competence. Those who invested their money in the Agency Houses were lured “by higher rates of interest and speculative profits of trade in opium and indigo. But the agency houses suffered from almost chronic shortage of capital and this financial structure was very weak”, writes Sinha. The result was that Bengali capital was ultimately required by the Europeans to cushion their business in Calcutta. “In the beginning of the nineteenth century the decisive pressure of expanding British economy was felt in India. The inflow of foreign manufactures began but not the inflow of foreign capital. After the opening of India trade to private British merchants India was flooded with Manchester goods. This was the consignments trade -- goods to stock not to order. The surplus stock was shipped by merchants in Britain to agency houses to be sold on commission. So long as Chambers of Commerce did not fully develop – not until 1853 – the consignment system badly needed the service of banians”<sup>19</sup>

The new economy thus needed the *banians* as load-bearing agents who could cushion a money-short economy laden under the stress of excessive foreign imports. The managing agency system had not yet taken shape and the Bengali *banians* were made to absorb the stress of a changing economy. The *banian's* role in a colonial economy was defined by the activities of Raghunath Gossain, a Srirampur-based Bengali merchant-middleman who amassed money by supplying goods to the Danish East India Company and the captains of the Danish ships. The periphery of his business extended to Calcutta and he became a *banian* to Palmer & Co. Later on when this company became insolvent he became the *banian* of Cockerell & Co. To the latter Company he deposited as security money company papers worth not less than one lakh for which Cockerell & Co. agreed to pay him interest at 7 per cent. He was a *banian* to this company for two years during which he supervised purchase and sale valued at Rs. 2 crores. Motilal Seal was the *banian* of the firm Oswald Seal & Co. He often made financial advances to the company ‘charging *shroffy* rate of interest at 6 per cent and not the bazaar rate of interest of 12 per cent.’ In the book of accounts his *banianship* was closed in November, 1847 and a balance was shown in his favour a sum of Rs. 3,50,000.00. What made the Bengali *banian* indispensable to the Europeans? Reasons were many. They traded with their own capital. They knew the market, the people and the country, their knowledge about British business was sound. They had the potentiality of a large-scale inland trader. In the words of Sinha “Large capitalistic enterprises could have been organized in the sphere of inland trade.”<sup>20</sup> With all these possibilities the *banians* did not mature into a full-fledged merchant community. This was a pity. Cornwallis himself appreciated what he called “the large capitals possessed by the natives.” But that capital did not move into an effective productive end. Sinha writes: “But curiously

enough those Bengali *banians* who had money to invest would not become large scale inland traders. The profession of the merchant in the interior of the country was both unpleasant and disreputable. Bengali *banians* who had money to invest left the field of inland trade to others.”<sup>21</sup> The Bengali *banians* had an attachment to soil and did not move out from his home and hearth. Herein he stood in contrast to the Parsi merchant of Bombay. The Bengali *banians* had an aversion to go abroad and as a result of this their out-station agents became adept in profiting from their absence. The Bengali exporters of opium to the Far East ‘were cheated with impunity’. Gopi Mohan Tagore and their sons were cheated by their agents, the Barretts, to the extent of five lakhs in a single transaction “The Bengali traders”, writes Sinha, “could not trust their agents in Macao or Canton whose shifts, subterfuges, pretences and contrivances they could not circumvent. The middle men as also the captains of ships engaged in this trade could not normally be depended upon. It was said that ‘many natives consign opium to China for sale who have neither any interest in the ships on which it is freighted, nor in the different insurance offices in which it is insured.’ It is no wonder they could not thrive in the export-import business like the Parsis”<sup>22</sup> The paradox of the Bengali *banians* lay here. They had capital. Their ethics of business was sound. They had a thorough knowledge about the business methods of the Europeans. But initiatives they did not take. At moments they also lent money to the European Agency Houses charging an interest at less than the market rate. Trade in the interior they shunned because that, they thought, was disreputable. Overseas trade was not in their liking because that needed a voyage abroad. As a result they could not build up the trust for distant trade and became prone to be duped and cheated by their outstation agents. With all these the Bengali *banians* in the early colonial era could not mature into a full-fledged community of merchants free from the institutional fetters of life. Their capital eventually dried up or was wasted in the unproductive investment in soil. With the fall of the Union Bank in 1848 the last hope of the Bengali *banians* to rise was dashed to the ground. In the early colonial economy of Bengal capital formation was a very powerful experience. But from that formation no capitalist class emerged. For all years to come the people of Bengal teemed in the lingering shadow of this frustration. It is a unique experience in history that this economic frustration did not arrest the intellectual awakening of the Bengali people at large. By the end of the 1820s the position of the Agency Houses in Bengal became shaky and by the beginning of the 1830s they were tottering very fast. Many opulent Indians had wasted their fortunes through the Agency House. What happened was that the station of the *banians* in the long run was totally crushed. Henceforth the Bengali aristocracy in Calcutta

and in the interior did not incorporate merchants, but only meant territorial aristocracy. Rich merchants now looked at land and not at commerce as flourishing avenues of investment. Capital being land-locked an economy of no outlet was steadily ushered in in Bengal. The greatest paradox of history was now enacted in the country. An intellectually renaissance society became economically decadent. This paradigm of economic decadence henceforth became a lasting feature in Bengal's economy.

Notes:

1. Sushil Chaudhuri, *Trade and Commercial Organization in Bengal 1650-1770*, Firma K.L.M. Mukhopadhyay, Calcutta, 1975, Ch 4, section I.
2. S. Chaudhuri, *op.cit.*, p. 98.
3. S. Chaudhuri, *op.cit.*, p. 95.
4. S. Chaudhuri, *op.cit.*, p. 83.
5. Dr. Chittabrata Palit, *Growth of Commerce & Industry in Bengal, Bengal National Chamber of Commerce and Industry* Calcutta 1999, p. 5.
6. Sushil Chaudhuri, *op.cit.*, pp. 91-92. Chaudhuri writes: "An interesting feature in the composition of Bengal merchants engaged in overseas trade in the seventeenth century was the presence of *subadars*, *faujdar*s and other members of the ruling class in Bengal. As early as the forties of the century, we find the *subadar* of Bengal, Shah Shuja, had his own ships engaged in overseas trade. He even tried to monopolize some sectors of the province's external trade and made himself the sole purchaser of elephants, one of the chief items of the Dutch Company's import to Bengal. In 1651 a 'junk' belonging to the *faujdar* of Hughli went to Gombroon with different merchandise and to bring back horses as a return cargo. The Dutch Company refused many applications made by 'governor Jaffer' in 1654 for Muslim vessels wanting passes to Khedda, Colombo and Cochin. However, it was ultimately obliged to grant two passes for two of the *nawab*'s vessels to Tenasserim and Achin, and one for the *faujdar*'s to the Islands of Maldives. The Dutch also issued three more passes for the vessels of Nawab Nawazish Khan, the *faujdar* of Rajmahal, and Ahmed Beg, *ex-faujdar* of Hughli. Again, in 1656 the *faujdar* of Hugli appealed for a pass for his vessel to Colombo and Shah Shuja had asked for three passes for Colombo, Cochin and Jaffnapattam. But all these requests were politely refused because of Shah Shuja's attempt to monopolize some sectors of the province's external trade. The Dutch Company similarly refused a request for the

services of one of its mates for a ship sailing for Persia.” – Chaudhuri, *op.cit.*, pp. 91-92.

7. C. Palit, *op.cit.*, pp. 5-6.
8. *Ibid.*
9. *Ibid.* p. 6
10. Geoffrey Moorhouse, *Calcutta The City Revealed*, Penguin Books, 1971, pp. 81-82.
11. Narendra Krishna Sinha, *The Economic History of Bengal 1793-1848*, Vol. III, Firma K.L.M. Mukhopadhyay, Calcutta, 1970, p. 4.
12. See J.H. Little, *The House of Jagat Seth* with introduction by Prof. N.K. Sinha, Calcutta Historical Society, 1967.
13. N.K. Sinha, *op.cit.*, p. 41.
14. N.K. Sinha, *op.cit.*, p. 43.
15. N.K. Sinha, *op.cit.*, p. 91
16. N.K. Sinha, *op.cit.*, p. 88
17. Quoted in N.K. Sinha, *op.cit.*, p. 105.
18. N.K. Sinha, *op.cit.*, p.p. 106-107
19. N.K. Sinha, *op.cit.*, pp. 105-106.
20. N.K. Sinha, *op.cit.*, p. 107.
21. *Ibid.*
22. N.K. Sinha, *op.cit.*, pp. 107-108.

## CHAPTER 13

### CONFRONTING RADICAL CHANGES : CALCUTTA IN THE SWADESHI YEARS

Calcutta stepped into the twentieth century with an ill fate. The changes in the Calcutta Corporation in 1899, the Universities Act of 1904, the Partition of Bengal in 1905<sup>1</sup> and finally the transfer of capital from Calcutta to Delhi in 1912<sup>2</sup> sealed the fate of a city that had so long carried the majesty of an imperial seat of power. In the nineteenth century Calcutta was the centre of a renaissance which came as a result of the collaboration between the Hindu Bengalis on the one hand and the British Empire on the other.<sup>3</sup> It was a partnership between a community that had been taking shape for the past few centuries<sup>4</sup> and the state that had recently been founded on the ruins of the Mughal empire. A new state always needs to build up its own support – its own man-power base that is normally wrung out from the collaboration of the society itself. It was in the context of this partnership between the state and the society that Calcutta grew in the nineteenth century. This partnership broke down in the twentieth. With the partition of Bengal Calcutta became the seat of Bengali agitation which gave birth to four things – the resurgence of a Hindu cult of *Shakti*<sup>5</sup> an offshoot of which was revolutionary terrorism; an identification of the country with the mother land; an emergence of a new leadership that had derived its inspiration from the Hindu mythology and its past and tried to plant Hindu symbols as rallying points for mass mobilization and finally a concept of boycott of British goods as a measure to hit the empire at its purse. None of these was congenial to the interests of the Muslims and as a result the Muslims became indifferent to the new orientations Calcutta was going through.<sup>6</sup> Calcutta was really set to a new destiny. It was going to be a centre from which the concept of *swaraj* was to burst forth into the horizon of a new age. The university age that was ushered in in 1857 had produced two generations of educated Indians that looked for job and participation at a time when the nineteenth century was drawing to a lustreless close. These men of education were mostly Calcutta based or were looking to Calcutta for their regenerative employment openings. Calcutta had already commissioned them into a cosmopolitan global culture the ethos of which seemed to be vibrating in the city. It was in the midst of this culture that men like Rabindranath Tagore, Aurobindo Ghosh, Bipin Chandra Pal and others matured as sovereign human marks of an assertive society. The city had truly prepared itself to become the centre of a new and formidable quest of a Bengali identity. The entire *swadeshi* movement was basically a quest for this Bengali identity worked out within the matrix of a broad Indianness.

The city of Calcutta in the first decade of the twentieth century was, therefore, basically this – a city where an identity quest was writ large. In course of its last hundred years' existence it had experienced two forms of agitation that was fundamentally integrated to the pattern of its growth. One was the agitation of the Young Bengal and the other was the agitation of the *swadeshi* movement. One was the agitation against stagnation signifying an urge for reform. The other was an agitation for integration and consolidation of Bengal's exterior existence backed by the cohesion of her inner self. The instrument that orchestrated both these trends was what may be called the public opinion. During the time of Young Bengal public opinion was nascent in its form. It was taking shape under the auspices of Rammohan Roy and Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar and that was in connection with their social reform movements. Under the *swadeshi* impact public opinion had matured into a powerful social force. In the nineteenth century Calcutta as a city provided the soul of a community formation. Now in the beginning of the twentieth century the city had become a politically motivated centre of national awakening. A Hindu chauvinism and a powerful nationalism now combined to give the city a new spirit and that spirit was in keeping with the upright mentality of a community that had completed through reforms its social formations and had perfected its language as a base of its inner articulation. None of these was to the liking of its masters, the British rulers of the country. The wrath of the rulers and an upright mentality of a community bent to do justice to itself now stood in a position of irreconcilable contradiction. Calcutta in the first decade of the twentieth century 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 charged nationalism. Out of this dialectic of history she developed all her twentieth century formations.

At the turn of the twentieth century Calcutta's development as a metropolitan city seemed to be under two major brakes. One was the disinclination of the Muslims to stay modest in their participation in the actual governance of the city. The establishment of the National Muhammadan Association in 1877 and the formation of the Muslim League in 1906 had given them their strength and courage to look straight at the face of Hindu domination in all matters of civic management. Jamaluddin Afghani's visit to Calcutta<sup>7</sup> provided a new fillip to the rising sentiments of the Muslims. With a very determined mind they now addressed themselves to improving their own position in the country, particularly in Calcutta. A modern writer divulges their mind thus:

“So this argument went on: because Calcutta was the official headquarters of the province, the city received a large portion of the revenue

of the entire province for the maintenance of its, roads, hospitals, government buildings, police force and bureaucracy. The contribution from the provincial exchequer outweighed Calcutta's own revenues. Hence, there was a large hidden payment to the city by Bengali Muslims through taxes and revenue demands, and therefore, Muslims as a community were entitled to have voice in the affairs of the Calcutta Corporation, because of their contributions in taxes and revenues. This argument was really that the total population, and not the number of rate payers alone, should decide voting rights and the level of representation."<sup>8</sup>

The Muslim aspirations emerged from a feeling of a deprivation which the Government instead of making any effort to bridge began to fan as a counteracting force against Hindu nationalism. In February 1904 Curzon while visiting eastern Bengal declared before a vast Muslim audience that he had planned "to invest the Mohammedans in Eastern Bengal with a unity which they have not enjoyed since the days of the old Mussalman Viceroy and Kings".<sup>9</sup> The plan was to partition Bengal and create a new province consisting of eastern Bengal and Assam – a Muslim majority province that would quash the Hindu dominance on the one hand and on the other would choke Calcutta's potentiality of growth.<sup>10</sup> This was a political necessity and the plan was a basic bureaucratic manoeuvre to contain the nationalist spirit of Calcutta. The logic behind the partition was that Bengal as an administrative province was unwieldy and Amal Tripathi says that three leading Civilians of the time hatched the conspiracy and passed the argument through the lips of the Viceroy.<sup>11</sup>

Calcutta was hurt by this partition in three ways. First the plan was to promote Chittagong as the most prospective outlet for all sea-bound commodities of Assam and eastern Bengal.<sup>12</sup> Secondly, as the capital of the new province of Assam and Eastern Bengal Dakha was to have a High Court which would mean that the business of the Calcutta Bar would suffer.<sup>13</sup> Thirdly, since the province was to be partitioned on communal basis, Calcutta would lose a demographic clientele that would henceforth in all matters of education, health, employment and business look to Dakha as a substitute of Calcutta. These three were the inner organic operations that were set to suck the life-blood of Calcutta. All these were distressing for a city that for the last one hundred and fifty years had experienced a sovereign growth as the first and the most dignified imperial city of the Empire and that had now been threatened with the collapse of its own majesty vis-à-vis an archaic Dakha and a remote Chittagong. What happened was that the political will which had so long acted as the umbrella of the city now disappeared. From 1860s there had been an

attempt to integrate the Indian upper and middle classes to the Empire. Wood in 1860 drove home the necessity “to attach to our rule what remains of the upper and middle classes in India”. Towards that end the competitive examinations were opened before them. But could the Indians be integrated by introducing competitive examinations? The question was asked and answers came readily. “I have no doubt”, a very senior officer observed, “of your obtaining plenty of native talent. What we want in natives is moral character, which no examination can test; and taking people from the better classes in such a way as to attach those classes to us”. After the revolt of 1857 there began the quest for Indians with high moral character which meant obedience and submission to the Empire. This was not to be found among the Bengalis after 1857 because they had started emerging with the enlightenment of the University age to which was added the frustration born of a lack of employment opportunities. Tripathi writes: “It was not so much ability as ‘honesty and character’ that he [Wood] needed and he found it more in the Talookdars of Oudh than in ‘the highly crammed Baboo in Calcutta’.”<sup>14</sup> The ‘baboo’ and ‘Calcutta’ henceforth became synonymous expressions to denote a race and their culture that henceforth came to be held in great ignominy. A new vested interest grew in the British circles who began to look to the north and north-central India as areas of prospective support for the Empire. In this new administrative vision Calcutta and the Bengalis suffered. “From the 1860’s”, writes Tripathi, “this vested interest began to spread canards about the Bengalis to which even the Viceroys contributed.”<sup>15</sup> There emerged in the British administrative circles what Tripathi called ‘the Punjab school’<sup>16</sup> that discriminated the Bengalis as a weak race whose ‘physique is poor and weak’ and whose ‘heart is feeble and timid’<sup>17</sup> and that favoured a vigorous attachment to the Punjabis and the Pathans. From the sixties of the nineteenth century it was argued, first by Lawrence and then by others, that the vigorous races of the north, the Pathans and the Punjabis, would better be ruled by the English than by ‘the effeminate’ Bengalis - “foreigners of another Indian country, however intellectually acute those foreigners may be”. A tremendous hatred for the Bengalis was brewing up as a dominant school of thinking in British administration<sup>18</sup> and Calcutta shared the odium all through. Whenever the *baboos* were referred to they were referred invariably as *baboos of Calcutta*. Curzon was the greatest of all who seemed to be reluctant to allow an anti-British force to coagulate on the eastern flank of the Empire for such a force he knew would inevitably be based on Calcutta. In a revealing letter to Brodrick he wrote: “The Bengalis, who like to think themselves a nation, and who dream of a future when the English will have been turned out and a Bengali Babu will have been installed in Government House, Calcutta, of course

bitterly resent any disruption that will be likely to interfere with the realization of his dream. If we are weak enough to yield to their clamour now, we shall not be able to dismember or reduce Bengal again; and you will be cementing and solidifying, on the eastern flank of India, a force already formidable and certain to be a source of increasing trouble in the future.”<sup>19</sup> In this frame of mind there was no room for Calcutta and its uplift. In the given condition two things seemed most unsuitable, the philosophy of agitation which unfortunately the Bengali intelligentsia had adopted as their political culture with the turn of the twentieth century and the place that had allowed itself to be the nest of that culture, Calcutta. Rightly or wrongly, the idea gained ground that Calcutta was the centre of the Congress activities and the contagion of agitation was spreading all over the country from the capital of the Empire itself. It gave no comfort to the English gentlemen to think that the capital of the Empire had become a hub of politics that aimed at the liquidation of the Empire. Tripathi writes: “To Curzon it was a very simple equation: Congress – Calcutta leaders.”<sup>20</sup> The ascendancy of the Calcutta leaders was thus viewed with dismay. The emergence of a lawyer class as the spearhead of nationalism was essentially a Calcutta phenomenon because all of them were either Calcutta-based or had strong attachment to Calcutta. As early as February 1905 Curzon made his mind absolutely clear on the point. He wrote: “Calcutta is the centre from which the Congress party is manipulated throughout the whole of Bengal, and indeed the whole of India. Its best wirepullers and its most frothy orators all reside here. The perfection of their machinery, and the tyranny which it enables them to exercise are truly remarkable. They dominate public opinion in Calcutta; they affect the High Court; they frighten the local Government, and they are sometimes not without serious influence on the Government of India. The whole of their activity is directed to creating an agency so powerful that they may one day be able to force a weak government to give them what they desire.”<sup>21</sup>

This was how Calcutta was assessed by the Viceroy and his administration at the turn of the twentieth century. Clearly the British mind was made up for a new agenda. Calcutta, the capital city, had to be side-tracked for which Dakha had to be rebuilt. The port of Calcutta was to be bypassed and Chittagong was to be raised as an alternative port. The High Court at Calcutta had to be curbed by raising a new one at Dakha. The lawyer class of Calcutta must be beaten by creating its parallel in eastern Bengal. The Bengali nationalist entity must be put to check by raising its counterpart, a rejuvenated and confident Muslim entity. Calcutta was truly ill-fated for it became the centre of an aspiration for new life that had shed its evils in the past century, acquired the confidence of the new age, thanks to the maturity imparted by University education and was

now prepared for a higher participation set as a goal by its own destiny. This was where the British mind was disagreeable to change. The Bengalis on the other hand had perceived the dawn of a transforming era and they were reluctant to retreat. Curzon knew that and he wanted to intimate this to his administration. In a frenzy of hatred for the Bengalis he wrote: “Any measure in consequence that would divide the Bengali-speaking population; *that would permit independent centres of activity and influence to grow up; that would dethrone Calcutta from its place as the centre of successful intrigue, or that would weaken the influence of the lawyer class, who have the entire organization in their hands, is intensely and hotly resented by them*”.<sup>22</sup> [Italics ours]. The soul of the Bengalis was powerfully driven to its core – Calcutta and this relentless centripetality of a national force manifesting itself through its own icon, the city, had unnerved the British masters and their patronage to Calcutta was timely withdrawn. Calcutta before long ceased to be the capital of the Empire.

This was therefore the genesis of the transfer of the capital from Calcutta to Delhi in 1911.<sup>23</sup> Lord Curzon was certainly one among the masters who wanted to contain the force of Bengali nationalism in Calcutta. The fire of nationalism must be extinguished. Calcutta must not be allowed to grow as the stronghold of the Congress. Beyond this routine strategy of containment Curzon had no plan to destroy Calcutta. At the time when he arrived at Calcutta<sup>24</sup> a new municipal legislation was under consideration. This legislation envisaged ‘wide and far-reaching changes’ in the administration of the city.<sup>25</sup> This legislation was not directly in Curzon’s plan of reforms<sup>26</sup> but its consequences were thrust on him. The legislation was drafted long before Curzon was in the scene and before he arrived here the lieutenant-governor of Bengal had accepted it as a draft-legislation. It was later approved by the Government of India and was eventually agreed to by the Secretary of State in London. On his arrival Curzon took up the legislation and proposed to give the legislation ‘the thoughtful consideration which its intrinsic importance demands’. Curzon had a concern for Calcutta and could realize that a municipal legislation at the turn of the century might be of profound importance for the growth of the city. After a careful examination of the suggested changes in the legislation Curzon felt that they were drafted ‘partly in panic and partly in anger’<sup>27</sup> and, therefore, they were devoid of any sustainability of their own.<sup>28</sup> Was Curzon against any radical change in the management of the city? Or was he in favour of the old status in which the city radiated its imperial glory? Curzon appreciated the aura of the old system, a point so nicely described by Edwardes thus :

“The old city corporation had indeed been inefficient, but it had at least been a working partnership between the British and Indian residents of the imperial capital. These new proposals, while appearing to preserve the interracial nature of the corporation as before, would in actual fact transfer control to an executive committee almost entirely British in composition. As a result of the delay in passing the legislation, Indian politicians had begun to speak in public against its provisions and even the English were coming to doubt its wisdom. Curzon decided that the whole matter must be reconsidered and that new proposals should be submitted to the secretary of state.”<sup>29</sup>

Calcutta occupied so much of Curzon’s concern that even at his years of inexperience – for he had just arrived in Calcutta – he was engrossed with such trivial things as the municipal administration of the city. In Curzon’s eye Calcutta had emerged from administrative minutiae into an issue of imperial significance. That is why his shock was great when he discovered that Calcutta had become a stronghold of the Congress. Calcutta to him was not only a city. More than that it was a centre from where the shape of the Empire was formed. That Empire in the long run was an inchoate body and superseding that Calcutta had to have the glamour of a unifying apex of British paramountcy. He ascribed to Calcutta a status which was beyond its routine character either as a garrison town, or as a port city or even as a citadel of nationalism. This was not a caprice and there were sound reasons behind it. Reasons at one level emerged from a very practical realization of the nature of the British Empire in India and on the other they were subsumed under fear. The British rule was essentially based on arms and its nature was essentially that of a tyranny of an alien minority. The government being the only source of power here the Viceroy had to be conversant with every aspect of imperial administration. Every major decision emanated from him and every failure rebounded to him again.<sup>30</sup> A megalomaniac ruler understands its citadel well and Curzon knew that in the imperial structure of governance Calcutta represented London not only as a metropolis but also as the seat of power. The London-Calcutta bond in a structure of power and dominance was one thing which did not escape the keen eyes of Curzon. If the global dominance of the British was monitored from London, certainly its Asian hegemony was controlled from Calcutta. That Calcutta was to be governed by a corporation and the supreme government must not be indifferent to its functions. “The Calcutta corporation was in fact, a special case”, writes Edwardes, “for Calcutta was the imperial capital, the seat of power. Furthermore, it held for Curzon some of the magic of history. The city had been created out of a swamp by the British, and it was the symbol of the growth of their domination. Later, Curzon

came to regard the city as a sort of living museum and lavished time and money upon its glorification and improvement.”<sup>31</sup>

Curzon’s love for Calcutta was not of any inducement to the Indians. In the Viceroy’s scheme the city’s glory was to be enhanced and appropriated only for British interests. He wanted to strip the Indians of any participation in the administration of the city. On September 27, 1899 the new Calcutta Municipal Bill passed through the Bengal legislative Council and “it was greeted with cries of rage by Indian nationalists.” There was uproar everywhere and a climate of agitation was created. “Twenty-eight Indian members of the Calcutta corporation resigned and Indian newspapers came out with black borders, in mourning for the city’s murdered self-government.”<sup>32</sup> The country was on the threshold of a new age and only a three-month-three-day distance from a new century beaming in the horizon. It was clear that a partnership between the government and the people, between the state and the society would not be further in the contemplation of the new Viceroy. Even the Indian national Congress, a fourteen-year-old body that had not yet got rid of its early vacillations seemed to be concerned with the event. “To the moderate Indians”, Edwardes writes, “who apart from Tilak far away in Western India, were still the spokesmen of nationalist opinion, the Calcutta bill was reactionary in that it excluded them from the control of the corporation. These men were never revolutionaries. Unlike Tilak, they did not wish to get rid of the British. All they demanded was a cut of the cake. Now Curzon had made it clear that there would be not even a crumb for them. On this and other ways, he was to destroy the moderate nationalists; by ignoring their demands for partnership he opened the door to extremist who wanted everything for themselves”.<sup>33</sup>

The result of all these was that at the turn of the century the city was bustling with tensions. In the wake of the Municipal Bill<sup>34</sup> came the Universities Bill<sup>35</sup> and finally came the Partition of Bengal.<sup>36</sup> Calcutta’s name came to be intrinsically involved with the question of self-government. Surendranath Banerjea wrote: “The Calcutta Municipal Bill was a local measure, but it had an all-India interest as it affected the principle of Local Self-government, in the growth and development of which all India felt a concern.”<sup>37</sup> The Bengal leaders knew that and they tried to convert a local issue into an all-India one. “It was still possible for Bengal leaders”, writes Gordon, “to give local issues a national turn and assert that the cause of Bengal was the concern of India”.<sup>38</sup> Bengal leaders felt that Calcutta could be made to grow as the centre of a national issue and agitation over the question of self-government could be commissioned as a new strategy in national politics. But ultimately the mission

of the Bengal politicians failed. Gordon says that all “petitions and agitation fell on deaf ears”. The Calcutta Corporation was “officialised” in the teeth of Indian opposition – Surendranath wrote in great despondency.

Calcutta thus at the turn of the century became a symbol of Indian dejection and in no time in the wake of the partition of 1905 the same city turned around to become the scene of Indian determination to stem the tide of vicissitudes. The city affair seemed instantly to be a great blow to the moderate Congress. “This was a blow not only to the Moderates’ belief in the power of public opinion and their own influence”, writes Gordon, “but also to their faith that steps would be taken toward progressively greater self-government.”<sup>39</sup> The concept of public opinion grew first in Calcutta many years ago under the protective wing of the Company’s *Raj* when Rammohan Roy and Vidyasagar acted as a mouthpiece of change favoured so much by a reforming state. This concept of public opinion was an institution of the west and it was allowed to be transplanted here on the Indian soil as a part of the civilizing mission of the British nation. The Indian trust and belief in a progressive realization of this mission received a great setback at a time when Bengal was aspiring a newer and wider role for its talents.

The Municipal Bill clearly showed that a partnership between the state and the society was no longer an object of the British political will. The Universities Bill which came in the wake of the Municipal Bill revealed something more than this. It showed that the administrative mind of the British had begun to prefer exclusion of the Indians from all institutions of trust and management. Calcutta throughout the course of the nineteenth century had become mostly a product of the University of Calcutta and the English learning which the University had imparted. Upper caste Hindus had mostly settled in the city<sup>40</sup> and they were the beneficiaries of the new education. Their language, literature, ethos and culture – all borrowed heavily from Western ideas and their belief in Western institutions was firm. In the accumulation of their culture the contribution of the city was great. That city was now being progressively stripped of its Indian shade of management. This the Bengalis could not accommodate. As a matter of fact the radical spirit of revolt that manifested itself in the city in the immediate aftermath of the partition in 1905 originated about this time and seemed to be thickening in all these years.

The Universities Act of 1904, the Bengalis thought, was a direct stab on their bosom. It was so displeasing to the Bengalis that even in a retrospective analysis it did not escape a censure from a Marxist historian of Bengal. Thus Sumit Sarkar writes:

“Universities reform was formulated at a secret and purely white conference at Simla in September 1901, and worked out by a Universities Commission whose sole Indian member, Gurudas Banerji, strongly disagreed with its recommendations. Trumpeted by Curzon as a move ‘to raise the standard of education all round’, the act cut down the number of elected members, transferred the power of ultimate decision in matters of college affiliation and school recognition to government officials, and tried to fix minimum college fees.”<sup>41</sup>

This was a very pervasive event which aimed at scuttling down the role of the University as a centre of radical thought. This, the movers of opinion in the city thought, would stifle the spirit of the city and would choke the animation of the Bengali life which in all its higher aspirations had come to be based on the city itself. Hence, Sarkar believes, opposition to this Act was not unnatural.

“Educated Indian opposition”, Sarkar argues, “on grounds of the Act’s undemocratic and restrictive nature was hardly unnatural. Claims that educational improvement was the principal aim consorted oddly with the fact that that total expenditure on education was only Rs. 20.46 million in 1903-04 and Rs. 24.49 million in 1905-06 – only slightly more, it will be noted, than the increase in police expenses during the same period and a paltry 2.5 per cent or so of the total budget. The new emphasis on Universities becoming postgraduate teaching rather than primarily examining bodies did produce some good results in the end, particularly at Calcutta where it was implemented by a Vice-Chancellor of great vision, Asutosh Mukherji. But much more important in the immediate context were the new official controls on affiliation and grants-in-aid. These were to be liberally used from 1905 onwards to curb student militancy, and so the Universities Act really deserves a place alongside the Police Commission in strengthening of British defences against the rising nationalist tide.”<sup>42</sup>

This was where Calcutta found its animation choked. The University was its real spring of life, the cradle of its superiority, the source from where its inspiration for progress came. Curzon now was out to stifle the whole source of its existence. The moderates felt that Curzon’s aim was entirely on the wrong direction. They felt “that education to Curzon was one more field for exhibiting the mechanics of improved administration in which management was more important than purpose and direction more desirable than result.”<sup>43</sup> Curzon wanted to remodel two institutions which for many years past had shaped the city and built up its essence namely the Calcutta Municipal Corporation and the University of Calcutta. He was visualizing Calcutta as an imperial city manufactured under the pattern of London. The Indians,

particularly the Bengalis, thought in a different way. To them the city was the centre of their renaissance, the house of their culture that opens for them their windows to modernity.<sup>44</sup> Curzon was not opposed to the growth of Calcutta along a modern line but it should grow, he believed, only as a halt for the East-moving Britons who might find in the city elements enough to refresh his memories of London. He was not opposed to the city's culture being tinted with ideas from the West but he was opposed to its being a "too slavish imitation of English models." He feared that from such imitations would grow pretensions to participation and unfulfilled pretensions would eventually pamper unrestricted nationalist aspirations. In a broad way he was opposed to the growth of the city as a parlour for nationalism.

This is how the clash between the Bengali Indians and the Government of Curzon took its origin. Calcutta unfortunately became the battle ground of the two. The imperial mind of the ruler which bent itself to one direction never learnt to unbend itself. "Curzon's mind", Tripathi writes, "like his body, wore a steel corset; it could never unbend. Wrapped up in his ego, he went on wounding the susceptibilities of others (eager to assist him) in the supreme unconcern of a child. By repudiating the Western-educated intelligentsia he was weakening the tenuous link of loyalty that still bound India to Britain."<sup>45</sup> Curzon like Dalhousie had the knack to unmake and make things and in that he often rode too far not knowing where to stop.<sup>46</sup> It was here that he created problems for himself and for others.

The partition of Bengal in 1904 was one act which entirely transformed the character of Calcutta. The Viceroy could not assess the magnitude of consequences he unleashed by this act. From the time of its foundation Calcutta had kept changing its character consistent with the change of time. It emerged under the British first as a garrison town, then successively as the administrative centre of the East India Company, as a port town and finally as the seat of power of a vast empire. The Bengali mind gradually adapted itself to this change. The caste Hindus had utilized opportunities of the city and made it a centre of their education and culture that drew much sustenance from the West. Its political character had not yet fully taken shape. Many who benefited from the city came from eastern part of Bengal and had some kind of attachment to land.<sup>47</sup> Hence politics of agitation and politics of resistance which had gripped the city from 1905 onwards had not formed any aspect in the agenda of the city's life even towards the end of the nineteenth century. Speaking about the time Bipin Chandra Pal reminisced:

"Politics did not involve in those days any sufferings . . . the whole thing was . . . a pastime."<sup>48</sup> For many years situations were coming up that made

ways for upper caste Hindu Bengalis to get into politics. They received education in Calcutta and places around but seldom could they find themselves placed in the world of business and industry in this metropolitan city of the empire and in the periphery beyond. The result was kind of an uneasy discontent that was hanging like a mist in the mind of the people and forced them to seek redress elsewhere. The Indian Statutory Commission, in their report, published in 1930 assessed the situation very well:

“The city of Calcutta, with a population including its suburbs, of about 13,00,000 is in one sense an exotic, for it owes its origin as a great city to commercial enterprise in which the Bengalis have played little part. Even today the great jute mills on its outskirts are mainly controlled by Europeans, and the bulk of the Indian labour employed in them comes from outside the province. The Bengali generally has not taken to factory or mill work; he leaves that almost entirely to the Oriya and upcountry coolie or artisan. At the same time Calcutta had become a great Hindu intellectual and political centre; with its newspapers and its enormous university, it exercises a profound influence over the views of the province an influence which naturally does not stop at its boundaries. The quick and receptive mind of the Bengali readily absorbs education of a westernized type and a problem of great perplexity is presented by those of the Hindu middle class (or more correctly Hindu *Bhadralok*) who often at great sacrifice, have been trained for clerical and professional careers in numbers enormously in excess of the amount of work of this type which is available. It is not surprising that many of them turn for an outlet to the political arena deeply imbued with hostility to the present regime.”<sup>49</sup>

The crux of the problem lay here. Calcutta as a city had housed educated Hindu Bengalis who had little outlet to the world of business and industry. These people were now being laid off from the management of the Calcutta Municipal Corporation and the University of Calcutta. The Municipal Corporation was almost as old as the British empire<sup>50</sup> and the people here had become used to consider it as one of the bases of the city power.<sup>51</sup> This accounts for the Bengali sensitivity to the Municipal Act of 1899. Curzon had little considerations for the Bengali sentiments. He knew that in the metropolitan cities of India, particularly Calcutta, British capital and entrepreneurship played a dominant role. That way the city’s enterprises were more British than Indian. The expatriate businessmen invested huge capital in industry and they did it mostly in railways, jute, coal and tea plantation. On the eve of the First World War it was found that 81% of capital invested in Calcutta was of European origin and only 3% was purely Indian. In Bombay 41% of the

capital invested was European and 49% of capital was Indian in origin.<sup>52</sup> In terms of industrial management the overall picture was even bleaker for the Indians. Two years after the transfer of capital to Delhi – in 1913 – the British Managing Agency firms were found to have swallowed most of the industries in this part of India. They controlled 116 coal mines, 43 jute mills, 89 tea gardens, 19 railway and steam navigation companies, 6 cotton mills and 42 miscellaneous companies.<sup>53</sup> In 1902 – three years before the partition of Bengal – Andrew Yule, a British merchant house managed 15 tea gardens, 4 jute mills, 4 coal companies, 2 flour mills, 1 cotton mill along with the Midnapore zamindari Company covering 2400 square miles.<sup>54</sup> Where were the Bengalis then?<sup>55</sup> Their participation in the business world of Calcutta in the second half of the nineteenth century – the greatest period of their renaissance bloom – was confined to “barren clerkship, petty speculation, limited merchandising and short term usury.”<sup>56</sup>

Cornered in clerical jobs and confined in practices at the Bar the Bengalis had developed a peculiar attachment to the city. Hence when Bengal was divided in 1905 their emotions were let loose on the issue of partition. Five things happened about this time which directly affected Calcutta. First, a politics of ceaseless agitation set in and Calcutta became its centre. From here agitation spread to other places in Bengal, particularly in eastern Bengal. This agitation started as an opposition to partition and it eventually took the shape of an opposition to the British rule.<sup>57</sup> As a centre of this politics of opposition Calcutta acquired the character of a place where new experiments in political and social institutions could be made.<sup>58</sup> Secondly, as an offshoot of new national sensations there had happened a tremendous increase of newspaper circulation in Bengal<sup>59</sup> and Calcutta became the base for organizing radical public opinion in the country.<sup>60</sup> Thirdly, there was an upsurge of a neo-Hindu culture in the city and the concept of *shakti*, the icon of *kali* and the scripture epitomized in holy *Gita* became powerful instruments in the resurgent politics of agitation.<sup>61</sup> Broomfield notes the fourth development as follows: “The period also saw new religious institutions spreading into the mofussil from Calcutta. Throughout much of the nineteenth century, the metropolis, and one or two of the larger towns, had witnessed a lively conflict between reform groups like the Brahma Samaj and their traditionalist opponents, but in rural Bengal religious organization had retained its traditional familiar form. Vivekananda’s Ramakrishna Mission, whose *math*, *ashrams*, schools, hostels, libraries, and dispensaries were soon to be found all over Bengal and beyond, supplied a new model – and, incidentally, a new arena of politics.”<sup>62</sup> The fifth and final development was a very serious one – on the wings of radicalism there emerged an extremist politics called revolutionary terrorism.<sup>63</sup>

All these changed the character of the city. Tensions and bustles burst forth and the city was in the grip of restlessness. This took away much of the imperial dignity of the city which was now responding to a new destiny. A colonial British city had now assumed a sanguine hue of nationalism, of course much to the discontent of the English.

The first effect of this transformation was the appearance of a chaos in the city. It was a chaos in relations and organizations – chaos in ambitions and aspirations – the sum total of which was termed ‘pandemonium’ by Gokhale. By 1906, - the year when according to Broomfield the *swadeshi* movement turned militant and when the Muslim aspirations rallied around the foundation of the Muslim League – Gokhale observed, Calcutta had become a

“Regular pandemonium – Surendranath’s inexcusable excesses, the *Patrika*’s vindictive pursuit of Surendranath, the fierce quarrel between Surendranath and Bipin Chandra Pal and the latter’s unscrupulous ambition to play at all costs the role of a new leader, the Anglo-Indian ferocity let loose against Indians, Mahomedan ill-will stirred up against Hindus . . .”<sup>64</sup> These are not events unrelated to the context of the time. A new age was making its appearance and the tranquillity of the old order was giving way to the dynamics of a changing one. Calcutta was a new city at the beginning of the twentieth century which had outgrown its old character namely that of an imperial town of the British. Once the old majesty was gone there was no logic that it should continue to function as the seat of the Empire. Thus the transfer of capital to Delhi in 1911 was in the logic of things. Old order died in the city of Calcutta. A new order emerged. A seat of administrative power Calcutta now became the seat of functioning nationalism. This was a metamorphosis indeed. So long Calcutta was ruled by a paramount imperial will. Now besides that will and parallel to it an indigenous will came up to govern not the routine administration of the city but the everyday mood of the people. Calcutta continued to be an epitome of the British power in the east but its inner spirit became thoroughly Indian. In spite of its imperial get up this colonial city became spiritually an epitome of *swaraj*. This inner transformation of the city thus became an invisible but inexorable pointer to the coming doom of the Empire.

Notes:

1. “The real confrontation between Curzon and the nationalist intelligentsia came through three successive measures: changes in the Calcutta Corporation in 1899, the Universities Act of 1904, and the Partition of Bengal 1905. The first reduced the number of elected Indian

members, and was a move directly connected with the interests of the Calcutta European business community, which had often complained about delays in the grant of licenses or other favours . . . . Universities reform was formulated at a secret and purely white conference at Simla in September 1901, and worked out by a Universities Commission whose sole Indian member, Gurudas Banerje, strongly disagreed with its recommendations". – Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India 1885-1947*, Macmillan India Limited, 1983, p. 105.

2. Calcutta was the capital of the Empire till December, 1911. The declaration that the capital would be shifted to Delhi was made by George V, the Emperor of India himself. Delhi was chosen as the new site for a Capital because of its geographic and strategic location and also because it was a place of confluence of the Hindu-Muslim culture. It was argued that it would be possible to administer India in a better way if the capital was shifted from a corner position in eastern India to a more northerly-central position of the country. But these were all apparent reasons. The real reason was the fear of and the hatred for the Bengalis. The British administrators had come to the realization that Calcutta had become the greatest centre of Indian nationalism and the Indian National Congress was led by the 'Calcutta babus'. The Government wanted to break the stronghold of nationalism in Calcutta. The British administrators had a good knowledge that outside Bengal there was a revulsion to the domination of the Bengalis and men like Sir Syed Ahmed Khan had already shown this to be a conviction of the upcountry Muslims. Therefore, in an atmosphere of a total disjunction with the sort of nationalism that was brewing in Calcutta the Government decided to transfer the capital of the Empire from Calcutta to Delhi. For further analysis see Amales Tripathi, *The Extremist Challenge: India between 1890 and 1910*, Orient Longman's, Calcutta, 1967, ch. 3 & 4
3. For details see Ranjit Sen, *Property, Aristocracy and the Raj*, Mahabodhi Book Agency, Kolkata, 2009, Ch. 1.
4. See Jadunath Sarkar, *History of Bengal*, Vol.II., Dacca University Publication, 1948, chapter on Murshid Quli Khan. Also see Ranjit Sen, *Property, Aristocracy and the Raj*, Calcutta 2009, Ch. I. The rise of the Hindu Bengalis began not under the rule of the English East India Company but under the Bengal Sultans in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.
5. This cult originated from Bankim Chandra's *Ananda Math* and the famous song *Bande Mataram* which was written independent of the

novel and was eventually incorporated in the novel itself. Later on Aurobindo Ghosh in his *Bhowani Mandir* strengthened the concept. The cult got stimulus from the concept of *Kali* the mother whose worship as the ultimate in terror and benevolence was popularized by Sri Ramkrishna *Paramahansa* and *Swami Vivekananda* and later upheld by sister Nivedita.

6. For details see Mohammad Shah, *In Search of an Identity, Bengali Muslims 1880-1940*, K.P. Bagchi & Company, Calcutta, 1996, Ch. 6 & 7. The Muslim sentiment in this regard had thus been described by Shah : “The Congress slogan that the Indians should think themselves as Indian first and Hindus and Muslims afterwards did not work with the majority of the two communities. The sectarian cry of ‘Bande Mataram’ in the Swadeshi period allegedly demanded the sacrifice of religious feelings of other communities. This was challenged by the Muslims, who adhered to the belief that in Islam religion, society and politics were inseparable.” (p.23). And also : “Already Muslim sentiment was deeply wounded by the anti-Muslim sectarian Swadeshi literature of the Hindus (*Anandamath* provided the Swadeshi slogan, *Bande Mataram*). A great frustration engulfed the orthodox Muslims. In distress they looked to the Muslims living outside India for support and considered themselves a part of the greater Muslim community, so much so that the distress of the Muslims in other countries distressed them equally and inspired them to come forward to help with whatever resources they had”. (p.234)
7. In 1882 a nationalist struggle broke out in Egypt and it was suspected that Jamaluddin Afghani had a hand in it. He was summoned to Calcutta by the Government of India and was interned there. He was relieved only when the nationalist struggles in Egypt subsided. Jamaluddin was the harbinger of the Muslim renaissance of the nineteenth century. He was a missionary whose main aim was to promote and organize the assertive Muslim response to the West. He was against capitulation to the West and to non-Muslim forces in any form.
8. Mohammad Shah, *op.cit.*, p. 160. To get real insights into the matter one should go beyond the specific time frame of this chapter and read the post-First World War Municipal papers relating to Calcutta like *Bengal Legislative Council Debates* (henceforth referred to as BLCD) and *Bengal Legislative Council Proceedings* (henceforth referred to as BLCP). Refer to the speech of Hamidul Huq Chaudhury on the Calcutta Municipal (Amendment) Bill, BLCD, 23 March, 1939, BLCP, Vol. 2, 1939, pp. 503-505; and Sir Abdur Rahim’s speech on the Calcutta Municipal

Bill, 1921, BLCD, 1 December, 1921, BLCP, Vol. 5, 1921, p. 523. It should be noted that the most assertive Muslim mind with regard to Municipal developments of Calcutta truly matured in the twenties of the twentieth century.

9. Curzon's speech at Dakha on 18 February, 1905 quoted by Amales Tripathi, *The Extremist Challenge*, Orient Longmans, Calcutta, 1967, p. 97.
10. "Creation of a Moslem majority province on the flank of Bengal had become a political necessity . . ." – Amales Tripathi, *ibid.*
11. "Creation of a Moslem majority province on the flank of Bengal had become a political necessity and once again, the argument had been put into the mouth of Curzon by three Civilians – Andrew Fraser, Lt. Governor of Bengal, Bamfylde Fuller, Chief Commissioner of Assam (and the first Lieut. Governor of Eastern Bengal and Assam after partition), and Sir Herbert Risley, Secretary to Home Department, India Government.
12. Curzon wrote to the Secretary of State on 30 April, 1902: "Bengal is unquestionably too large a charge for any single man. Ought Chittagong to continue to belong to it, or ought we to give Assam an outlet on the sea? Is Orissa best governed from Calcutta? Ought Ganjam to belong to Madras?" – quoted in Amales Tripathi, *op.cit.*, p. 93.
13. "Bureaucrats like Risley anticipated present-day Cambridge historians in their fondness for interpreting opposition to Partition entirely in terms of elitist interest-groups. Vikrampur *babus* were worried about their clerical jobs, *zamindars* with estates in both Bengals disliked having to appoint two sets of agents and pleaders, the Bhagyakul Roy family with raw jute and rice trading interests near Calcutta were jealous of a possible rise of Chittagong, and Calcutta lawyers were afraid that a new province would ultimately mean a new High Court cutting into their practice . . . and Calcutta politicians would find their influence gravely curtailed" – Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India 1885-1947*, Macmillan India Limited, Delhi, Calcutta, 1983 pp. 107-8.
14. Amales Tripathi, *op.cit.*, p. 87.
15. Amales Tripathi, *op.cit.*, p. 88.
16. To this school belonged almost everyone, Wood, Lawrence, Northbrook, Curzon and a host of subordinate officers.
17. These expressions were used by Lawrence in a letter to Cranborne, 8 November, 1866.
18. Here is an excerpt from Lawrence's letter to Northcote 17 August, 1867: "No doubt the present arrangements operate as a bar to natives in any

number entering the service . . . . But even in this (Judicial Department) we ought not to have many natives in the superior grades. As it is now, the Bengallees (sic) are the race who have most benefited by education, because they have had the greatest opportunities, and also because that, as a rule, their intellects are more subtle and acute than those of the people of any other part of India. But such men, however intellectually capable, however highly qualified to succeed in a competitive examination, have not the stuff in them which makes good rulers and administrators. The courage, the activity, and self-reliance, which makes so many Englishmen good administrators are generally wanting in the Bengallee(sic)" – quoted in Amales Tripathi, *op.cit.*, p.88.

19. Quoted in Tripathi, *op.cit.*, pp. 96-97.
20. Amales Tripathi, *op.cit.*, p. 98.
21. Curzon to Broderick, 2 February, 1905.
22. *Ibid.*
23. The transfer was effective from 1912.
24. Curzon arrived in Calcutta in the afternoon of January 3, 1899.
25. For an analysis of the point see Michael Edwardes, *High Noon of Empire: India under Curzon*, Eyre & Spottiswoode, London, 1965, pp. 53-54.
26. Curzon's plan of reforms was vast. Edwardes writes: "The question to which Curzon proposed giving his attention ranged from educational reform to radical changes in bureaucratic procedure; from a thorough revision of the rules governing home leave in the civil service, to the employment of Indians of 'good family' in the army; from an overhaul of the department of archaeology and the establishment of an Imperial Library in Calcutta, to the construction of a railway across Baluchistan to Persia. Curzon intended to work upon these questions during the comparatively tranquil summer months in Simla" – Edwardes, *op.cit.*, p. 53.
27. *Ibid.*
28. "In Curzon's opinion, however, the new proposal were doomed to failure" – *Ibid.*
29. Edwardes, *op.cit.*, pp. 53-54.
30. Curzon's logic has thus been summed up by Edwardes: "There were sound reasons. British rule in India was a tyranny exercised by an alien minority. Everything that took place in India reflected upon the government, for there were no other sources of power. Even the drains of the empire were more than sanitary conveniences. They were part of the essential pervasiveness of British rule. The hand of the rule must be seen to be everywhere and even a new drain must be known to be a gift

from that hand. The ultimate responsibility for everything the British did in India lay with the viceroy – it was only he who could answer to the secretary of state. Curzon was to take that responsibility literally and exercise it with as little delegation as possible. He wasted his energies upon the minutiae of imperial government because he believed the power – and the responsibilities to be indivisible.” – Edwardes, *op.cit.*, p. 54.

31. *Ibid.*

32. Edwardes, *op.cit.*, pp. 87-88.

33. Edwardes, *op.cit.*, pp. 88

34. The Municipality Bill was dated 1899.

35. The University Bill became an Act in 1904.

36. The Partition of Bengal was dated 1905. “Between 1899 and 1905 conflict ensued over three issues; the Calcutta Municipal Bill, the Universities Bill, and the partition of Bengal.” – Leonard A. Gordon, *Bengal: The Nationalist Movement 1876-1940*, Manohar, (First Indian Edition 1974), Reprint 1979, p. 82.

37. Surendranath Banerjea, *A Nation in Making, Calcutta* (1925), 1963 reprint, p. 152.

38. Leonard A. Gordon, *op.cit.*, p. 82.

39. Leonard Gordon, *op.cit.*, p. 80.

40. According to the census of 1931 the Hindus belonging to the high castes formed 6.1 per cent of the population of Bengal. They formed 28.9 per cent of the Calcutta population. For details see Government of India, *Census of India 1931*, Calcutta 1932, Vol. V, Part 2, pp. 225-32; Edward C. Dimock, Jr. and Ronald Inden, “The City in Pre-British Bengal”, in Richard L. Park, *Urban Bengal*, East Lansing, Michigan, 1969, pp. 3-18. In general for Calcutta’s demographic composition and other aspects see Government of India, *Census of India, 1951* (ed. By A. Mitra), Vol. VI pp. 74-81; H.E.A. Cotton, *Calcutta Old and New*, Calcutta, 1907, pp. 250-51; O.H.K. Spate, *India and Pakistan, A General and Regional Geography*, London, 1954, pp. 542-548; Asok Mitra, *Calcutta, India’s City*, Calcutta, 1963, pp. 19-29.

41. Sumit Sarkar, *op.cit.*, p. 105.

42. Sumit Sarkar, *op.cit.* pp. 105-06.

43. Amales Tripathi, *op.cit.*, p. 55.

44. For further discussion on the point see Leonard A Gordon, *op.cit.*, pp. 1-2 and Uttara Chakraborty, “Through a Glass Darkly” : Fearful English and the Ambivalent Bengali: Calcutta 1857-58” in Subhas Ranjan Chakraborty ed., *Uprisings of 1857 Perspectives and Peripheries*, The Asiatic Society,

- Kolkata, 2009. In this article Ms Chakraborty traces the origin and shape of Bengali attachment to the city.
45. Amales Tripathi, *op.cit.*, p.55.
  46. For a comparison between the two see Percival Spear, *Oxford History of India*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn., pp. 750-51.
  47. Atul Chandra Pradhan, "Aspects of Urbanisation in Three Colonial Metropolises (Calcutta, Bombay and Madras)" in Chittabrata Palit ed. *Urbanization in India Past and Present*, (Prof. Nisith Ranjan Ray Centenary Volume), Institute of Historical Studies, Kolkata, 2009, p. 187. "It is said that the Vikrampur district of East Bengal supplied one-third of Bengal Government clerks" – Pradhan, *op.cit.*, p. 185.
  48. *Bengal District Administrative Committee Report*, para 204.
  49. *Indian Statutory Commission*, Vol. I Survey, London, 1930, pp. 61-62.
  50. In Calcutta a corporation was established as early as 1727 which consisted of a Mayor and nine aldermen. Operating in a meagre set-up its duty was equally meagre – to collect ground rent and town dues and make necessary repairs of roads and drains. There were efforts in 1857 to organize a municipal fund by levying a house tax. This was the first effort of its kind to promote a municipal fund for the uplift of the city.
  51. This explains why in later years leaders like Chittaranjan Das, Subhas Chandra Bose, Jatindra Mohan Sengupta and Bidhan Chandra Roy were so much involved with the Calcutta Municipal Corporation.
  52. Sumit Sarkar, *Writing Social History*, Oxford, 1997, p. 164.
  53. N.R. Ray, ed. *Western Colonial Policy*, Vol. I, Calcutta, 1981, p. 105.
  54. *Ibid.*
  55. Literally speaking the Bengalis were nowhere. The jute industry revealed the grimness of their position. Here is an estimate of it: By mid-1855 the first jute mill of India was set up by an English entrepreneur named George Auckland at Calcutta. His firm being a pioneer one was not very successful but he paved the way for other successful British entrepreneurs. By 1884, 23 jute mills operated in Calcutta with 6000 looms and 48000 mill hands. (Dietmar Rothermund, *An Economic History of India*, New Delhi, 1988, p. 52) Raw jute was now produced in east Bengal but the mills were established on the banks of the river Hooghly both to the north and south of Calcutta. Dalhousie Square emerged as the business hub of the city and most of the commercial houses and the banks came to be located here. Run by British firms jute became the focus of colonial business of the British between 1880 and 1929 (B.R. Tomlinson, *The New Cambridge History of India*, Vol. III, Indian Edn., 1993, p. 119). The Bengalis figured little in the whole enterprise.

56. Ranjit Kumar Roy ed., *Retrieving Bengal's Past : Society and Culture in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*. Calcutta, 1995.
57. J.H. Broomfield writes: "Opposition to the partition of Bengal had begun as soon as the proposal was announced in 1903, but the agitation followed the pattern of 'polite' protest characteristic of the late nineteenth-century Congress. It was 1906 that brought radical departures: the mobilization of the Congress volunteer brigades; a militant campaign of economic boycott and Swadeshi; and the first spectacular strikes by the terrorist *samity*." - J. H. Broomfield : "The social and Institutional Bases of Politics in Bengal, 1906-1947" in Rachel Van M Baume. *Aspects of Bengali History and Society*, Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 1976.
58. The new experiments in politics included all elements of *swaraj*, boycott and constructive *swadeshi*.e. what Sumit Sarkar said "the rejection of futile and self-demeaning 'mendicant' politics in favour of self-help through *Swadeshi* industries, national schools, and attempts at village improvement and organization". – Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India*, p. 113.
59. One example of this is the Bengali news paper *Yugantar* which came out in March, 1906. It was brought out by a host of men who were activists in revolutionary politics – all members of the Anusilan Samity of Calcutta including Barindra Kumar Ghosh, Abinash Bhattacharya and Bhupendranath Datta, the youngest brother of Swami Vivekananda. 7000 copies of *Yugantar* were sold every day in 1907. When articles of special importance were published in the paper a single copy of it would be sold at an enormous price, several rupees for one copy.
60. "Lord Curzon's partition gave an extraordinary boost to politics in Bengal, one indicator being an immediate jump in newspaper circulation. In the latter half of the nineteenth century Calcutta had been justly famous for its lively journalism . . . . It was only from 1906 onward that readership expanded sufficiently to support a sizeable number of professional journalists, and the newspaper and periodical offices became the focal points of important political groupings.", J.H. Broomfield, *op.cit.*, p. 136.
61. Parallel to Calcutta Dhaka in eastern Bengal became a centre for the resurgence of the Islamic culture. Following the December 1906 conference in Dakha the All-India and Bengal Presidency Muslim Leagues were born. This "was an event of major importance, but surprisingly this was the only significant Muslim institutional innovation in this period." – Broomfield, *op.cit.*, p. 138.

62. Broomfield, *op.cit.*, p. 137.
63. For details see Dr. Amitabha Mukherjee, "Revolutionary Nationalist Activities in Bengal (1902-1913)" in Dr. Amitabha Mukherjee ed. *Militant Nationalism in India 1876-1947*, Institute of Historical Studies, 1995, Calcutta, pp. 70-79; B.B. Majumdar, *Militant Nationalism in India*, Calcutta, 1966; J.C. Ker, *Political Trouble in India, 1907-17* (1917), Delhi, 1973; Jiban Tara Haldar, *Anusilan Samitir Itihas* (in Bengali), Calcutta, 1977; *Sedition Committee Report*, 1918. "In 1906 there was a secret gathering of revolutionaries from different parts of Bengal at the residence of Subodh Chandra Mallick in Central Calcutta – Amitabha Mukherjee, *op.cit.*, p. 73.
64. Gokhale to Krishnaswamy, September 29, 1906, Gokhale papers, quoted in Pardaman Singh, "The Indian National Congress – Surat Split", *Bengal Past and Present*, Calcutta, July to December, 1965, Vol. LXXXIV, Para 2, p. 127.

**BIRTH OF A COLONIAL CITY: CALCUTTA**

## Historiography of Calcutta

### BOOK III

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### **A NOTE ON BOOK III**

#### **WHAT IT IS ABOUT**

This book is not an investigation into the ancestry of Calcutta. It is about the theories which scholars have propounded to understand how an insignificant Mughal village came to prominence in the eighteenth century. Those who speak of a glittering ancestry for Calcutta will find that till date bulk of scholars in the field had rallied against them. Historians do not trust imagination as a tool for they rely on facts. Since facts have retreated from giving Calcutta an individual distinction as a pre-British urban settlement no theory is available in the book that says that Calcutta's origin lay in the extravaganza of pre-colonial Mughal trade in Bengal. For the last five hundred years the river courses of south Bengal have been shifting and ports in the lower delta where business bustles used to create history, it is said, had been in a state of losing their heyday. It is, then, difficult to conjecture how trade glamour could be associated with an insignificant fisherman village of Mughal Bengal so as to prove that prior to the coming of the Europeans Bengal had the potentialities to promote township where the identity of a port, a habitation, a city and an administrative centre could manifest into one formation. This book has, therefore, avoided speculation and fancy, imagination and sentiment to yield place to documented history. The purpose of this book is perspective-building. Beyond that it has no intention to oblige nationalistic interpretations that saw in an obscure village the growth of a trade nucleus which the English grabbed to their advantage. Finally, one must note, that this book is not an anatomy of a myth that Calcutta in all its glory is pre-British. Its presentation is sober that Calcutta acquired majesty only as a colonial town.

## Preface

This is a book on historiography. It discusses the works of historians, their craft and their mental orientation. Some of the debates and discourses on Calcutta have been the substance of the book. We all know that history is the study of the past. In studying the past historians, therefore, provide us with three things: the art of knowing the past, the knowledge of the past as an output of knowing and a broad philosophy in which this knowledge becomes relevant to an understanding of the present. History has four parameters: men, events, ideas and time in which they interact with each other. Every paradigm of history rests on these four parameters. Paradigms when clustered into a process of thought we call it a discourse. This book deals with discourses on Calcutta. It owes allegiance to no school of thought which means that Ideas presented in the book are all indigenous to their own authors.

The book has its own planning. It has excluded debates and discussions on Calcutta conducted in Bengali language. This is because most – and certainly not all – of Bengali writings are based on unsure research and their execution was sporadic and anticipatory in nature. All major theoretical understandings on Calcutta available in English language have, therefore, been taken as the subject of this Book. In course of my class-room teachings of history at the post-graduate level in different Indian Universities, mostly in Rabindra Bharati University and University of Calcutta in Kolkata, new ideas on Calcutta very often burgeoned in my mind. I sought to correspond and coordinate these ideas with the writings of some established scholars on the subject. Some of these correspondences have been coordinated and put into a format of essays now available in the Book. During the last ten years I had occasions to address a reading audience at Dhaka, Rajshahi and Chittagong in Bangladesh. Many

debates were unleashed there which were processed into perfection through arguments and counterarguments with the audience. Recently the Asiatic Society of Calcutta invited me to deliver lectures on methodology and historians' craft of writing history in a refresher's study workshop. In some of these lectures I used Calcutta as a unit of reference. The audience being mature students from various disciplines, mostly college and university teachers from all over India, I had to undergo a rigorous research on historiography. Many ideas blossomed in my mind then which were originally not at home with me. These were some of the academic experiences through which the first three Books of this thesis have assumed their shape. Other information and knowledge that have not been incorporated here in this Book III of the thesis or in other Books of it have been presented in a separate book outside the purview of this thesis.

In writing the Book III of the thesis I have taken history and historians as a compound unit of knowing the past. In the science of history writings history and historians cannot be separated. What we can separate is a variety of history and various historians. What we cannot separate is a historian and his work which is an integral piece of the study of history. Variety of history and various historians make up the core of the science called historiography. When G.W.F. Hegel opened his lectures on philosophy of history with an account of "the varieties of historical writing", one may say, he ushered in the modern approach to what later developed as the science of history writing – historiography as we call it today. Since Hegel historiography has undergone many changes and transformations. Friedrich Nietzsche foreshadowed professional historiography when he wrote *On the Uses and Disadvantage of History for life, 1874*. While writing a book on historiography in the twenty-first century we

have shifted far away from Hegel and Nietzsche. Our focus has been shaped by many modern phenomena: industrialism, urbanism, imperialism, nationalism and many other such things. In the present thesis I have taken urbanization of Calcutta as the only factor to study the city's antiquity and its colonial past. Therefore in this context the origin of Calcutta would mean the origin or the beginning of urbanization of the city. Calcutta as a village with some antiquity and heritage existed long before the coming of the English in this country. But its urban growth is a recent phenomenon associated with the growth of the Empire itself. Historiography of Calcutta in the present context essentially means the historiography of Calcutta's origin as an urban centre. Its scope is limited to this extent and cannot be stretched to any point beyond it.

[For further details on the points made above please refer to Ranjit Sen, *Indian History Preception Perspective Purview A Note On Methodology in History*, Progressive Publishers, Kolkata, 2019.]

## INTRODUCTION

This book is on Calcutta. It intends to discuss various interpretations that had gone into analysing the mystery of the city. Calcutta did not grow all on a sudden. It has its own history. That history, some say, is prior to the British Empire. Others argue that its origin lay in colonial urbanization. Between these two antithetical arguments Calcutta's early history tends to be an enigma. Calcutta was certainly a village when merchant ships passed by it in the fifteenth and the sixteenth century. Yet it had never had the prominence of a halt-station. Its references in literature are, therefore, very casual and few.

Historians have to rely on occasional references to show that it was not unnoticed in the past. A population of fishermen had no attraction to all who passed by. Traders must have been there and rudiments of trade- marts must have abounded the region around it.

This sometimes caught the attention of casual observers. In this situation it is difficult to understand how Calcutta had a sovereign and colourful pre-colonial ancestry of its own.

Early settlers of Calcutta villages were an obscure humanity. We are unsure as to when the Bengal traders – the Sets, Basaks and Malliks – settled in this region. By seventeenth century the Basaks and Setts were already seen as settlers in an adjacent village Govindapur where they built the temple of their adored deity Govindaji. This was the time when the riverine settlements of lower Bengal were going through a transformation. Hugli was founded in the second half of the sixteenth century.<sup>97</sup> This eventually became a magnificent settlement around which a trade axis came to be formed. Satgaon fell and Hughli emerged. Then in series came to life other settlements there. It was indeed unique that before long all European attention came to be riveted on places around the region. “In Indo-European history”, it is said, “there is not, undoubtedly, a more interesting Indian town than Hooghly because there, within a range of a few miles, seven European nations fought for supremacy: the Portuguese, the Dutch, the English, the Danes, the French, the Flemish, and the Prussians.”<sup>98</sup> All these European nations had supplied animation to trade that was emaciating at the falling port of satgaon and seeking diversion from it. Calcutta had fitted itself properly in this energised trade zone long before the English had set their feet here. The entire history of Calcutta prior to the English,

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<sup>97</sup>“When Tavares [Pedro Tavares, a Portuguese captain] returned to Hooghly in 1579 or 1580 he was high in the estimation of the people and choosing a favourable site in Hooghly established the settlement, which grew into the greatest centre of trade in Bengal and supplanted the historic glory of Satgaon.” “Hence it may be asserted that the settlement of Hooghly was established either towards the close of 1579 or in the early months of 1580.” J.J.A. Campos, *History of the Portuguese in Bengal with Maps and Illustrations*, Asian Educational Services, New Delhi, 1998, p.53 & p.54

<sup>98</sup>J.J.A. Campos, *op.cit.*, p.44

must, therefore, be sought in its effort to adjust itself with this process of a moribund territory slowly reversing itself to life.

Calcutta as a village did not gain any individual prominence because of shift in commerce and change in geopolitics. The Bengali merchants lost their participation in maritime trade before the turn of the seventeenth century. The command over sea-going enterprise then passed to the Armenian, Pathan, Kashmiri, Rajasthani and Gujarati merchants.<sup>99</sup> The Indian merchants did not hold their sway for long. They surrendered the trade to the Europeans from the beginning of the eighteenth century or even earlier. Geopolitics played its role in bringing over this change. The predominance of the Portuguese in the Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean was a deterrent to the Bengali merchants.<sup>100</sup> The Portuguese were pirates

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<sup>99</sup>“The modern Bengali business class, in fact, owes its origin to British commercial activity. When Europeans began trading in Bengal in the sixteenth century, the traditional Bengali merchant castes had been displaced by traders from north India who had captured the lucrative foreign trade in Bengali silk and cotton textiles. It was from these outsiders --- Marwaris, Pathans, Kashmiris, and others – and not from Bengalis that the British seized the trade of Bengal in the eighteenth century. Greater resources and the use of the *dastak* enabled the British to outbid the merchants of north India for the products of Bengal. In addition, wherever possible the British bypassed the middlemen and gathered handloom weavers and silk winders into compounds under their control. They also diverted the extensive coastal trade between Bengal and Gujarat from the boats of independent Indian merchants to their ships and changed the direction of the flourishing trade between these provinces to a separate trade of each with the Far East.” – Blair Kling, “ Economic Foundation of the Bengal renaissance” in Rachel Van M Baume red., *Aspects of Bengali History and Society*, Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, Calcutta,(1975), First Published in India, 1976,p.27

<sup>100</sup>“The Portuguese settlers of Hughli did not themselves commit piracy in the Mughal territorial waters, nor raid Bengal villages for capturing slaves. But they shared the odium of their fellow countrymen who lived in Arakan as allies of the Magh king and *made annual raids in the rivers of lower Bengal, committing unspeakable atrocities on the Indians who fell into their hands. The innate cruelty of the southern Latin races and the inflamed lust of seamen in foreign parts, made the entire Feringi race a terror and abomination to the Indian people. Their periodical incursions stopped the inland navigation of deltaic Bengal by the local people in their raiding season, and turned many a river-side village into a manless wilderness.*”—Jadunath Sarkar ed. *History of Bengal*, Vol.II, University of Dacca Publication, (First edition 1948) Second Impression 1972 pp.321-322 ( Italics ours)

and were engaged in slave trade. The Bengali merchants had no defence against them. The Rajasthanis and Gujaratis had a more powerful trade network and control over finance than the Bengali merchants had. Operating from Rajasthan and Gujarat they had a fairly good acquaintance with the activities of the Portuguese in the west – in the trade zone of the Arabian sea. As the Bengalis retreated from the maritime trade in the east they slowly filled up the vacuum there. The removal of the Portuguese from Bengal, particularly from the Bay, by Shahjahan in 1632 and their defeat at the hands of Captain Bay in the west in 1612<sup>101</sup> facilitated the take-over of the sea trade by the up country Indians. But this change was a transitory event. The removal of the Portuguese from the bay opened a vast sea-board to the upcoming Europeans, particularly the English. They had their own ships and the navy which the Indians did not have. Stationed at Madras the English could easily penetrate into the sea and rule the waves. The up-country merchants retreated and as inland settlers they now switched off to a new trade as controllers of capital in the interior. With capital in command they positioned themselves as financiers and bankers to the state. They now functioned as *sarafs* or money-changers. This was how the Jagat Seths had emerged.

At the early years of its formation Calcutta did not profit much from Indian merchants. These merchants were centred at Satgaon and Hughli and when Murshidabad was founded as the capital of Bengal many of them had shifted there. With the turn of the eighteenth century the upcountry Indian merchants as financiers of the state came to be embedded in the power lobby of the country. They hovered around Hughli, Murshidabad and Dakha. Calcutta was little

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<sup>101</sup>See for detail *The Oxford History of India by the Late Vincent Smith* Third Edition, ed. By Percival Spear, Part III Re-written by Percival Spear, Oxford at the Clarendon Press, (1958), Reprint 1961, p.367.

visited by them. Armenians had some early association with Calcutta and in that they must have some stake in the making of the city. But in general till the middle of the eighteenth century, that is, till such time as the battle of Palashi, Calcutta had not been a merchant-visited city at all. After the battle of Palashi the Armenians were in distress and they had no stake in making Calcutta an urbanized settlement.<sup>102</sup>

Calcutta certainly had a port but the port was commissioned into full action only after the coming of the English to power after the grant of *diwani* in 1765. In the first half of the eighteenth century the English had two major constraints in their own growth. First, they were confined to the fort and had no sense of a sprawling settlement outside anywhere around it. Secondly they were scared lest there should be spies of the *Nawab* in the city and their own wealth and activities should get exposed to the *Nawab*. The rebellion of Sobha Singh<sup>103</sup> in 1696 supplied two major incentives to town building to the English. In the first place it urged the English the necessity of having a fort for themselves. The English realized that in the event of further native uprisings and zamindari turmoil the English should have their own fortifications to protect their own settlement and

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<sup>102</sup>For detail see Shubhashis Ghosh, "Palashi-Parabarti Parbe Armani Banikder Abasthan: Kolkata High court-er Nathir Alope"(The Position of the Armenian Merchants in the Post-Plalashi period: In the light of the Documkents of Kolkata High Court" in Saumitr Sreemani ed. *Kalikata Kolkata : Saumyendranath Mukhopadhyay Felicitation Volume*, Kolkata, 2015, pp. 270-292; C.R.Wilson, *Early Annals of English in Bengal: Bengal Public Consultations for the First Half of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century*, Vol.I, Asiatic Society, Calcutta, 1963; Sushil Chaudhuri, "Khawaja Wazid in Bengal Trade and Politics – C. 1740-1760" in *The Indian Historical review (IHR)*, Vol.XVI, Nos. 1-2; M.J.Seth, *Armenians in India From the Earliest Time to Present Day*, Calcutta, 1967

<sup>103</sup>"In 1696 when Shova Singh was rocking the western part of Bengal the *faujdar* of Hugli could only save his fort after the English had sent a frigate to his support.. Just at the time when the *faujdar* of Hugli counted upon the strength of the English for his own defence, only a handful of English soldiers about fifty in number routed the soldiers of the rebel *Raja* in front of the factory at Sutanati."--- Ranjit Sen, *Metamorphosis of the Bengal Polity (1700-1793)*, Rabindra Bharati University, Calcutta, 1987, pp.44

trade. Shova Singh had built up his own jurisdiction within the territory of the *Nawab*. It was a kind of a state within a state. This was possible because the westernmost military outpost closest to Midnapur, Birbhum and Bankura where Shova Singh had carved out his own sovereign territory was in Jessore. Hughli was then a commercial station but not the headquarters of a military district called *faujdari* in Mughal parlance. No *faujdar* was also then stationed in Chitpur. In this situation Shova Singh could build up his own jurisdiction in a wide area of western Bengal. The English were keen watchers of events and from Shova Singh's uprising they had learnt as to how enclaves of territories could be built in the east in situations of weak governance. Therefore, immediately after the collapse of Shova Singh's rebellion the first attempt of the English was to purchase the three villages of Kalikata, Sutanati and Govindapur and thus get a foothold in the territory of Bengal. Once territory was acquired their next move was to secure privileges to buttress their station as traders. After an effort of nineteen years they were able in 1717 to secure from the Emperor of Delhi some privileges which helped them to consolidate their position in Bengal. By the *farman* of 1717 the Emperor allowed the English some trading privileges which were eventually used to outdistance their European competitors and native traders alike so much so that Calcutta could become the most important trade centres in eastern India from where privileged trading was possible. With trade privileges in their grip the English had become a little more ambitious. They had already acquired from the Emperor the right to purchase thirty-eight villages in and around Calcutta. This early dream of Calcutta's territorial expansion, however, remained unfulfilled. The Bengal *Nawabs* did not allow the English Company to purchase new villages and expand territorially. It meant that Calcutta did not have a territorial dynamism till the battle of Palasi. In the pre-

battle conspiracy Mir Jafar granted the English the 24 Parganas as their zamindari. This meant that Calcutta acquired a free zone for expansion as far as Kulpi in the south. It took the English fifty-nine years since the purchase of three villages of Kalikata-Sutanati-Govindapur in 1698 to acquire a free chance to expand.

Was there a chance of urban growth in the pre-Palashi confined zone of Calcutta? Those who argue that Calcutta's origin was pre-British see in southern Bengal a trade zone developing under the auspices of the Bengali merchants. This argument is an outcome of a translucent imagination. It has its counter arguments. First, up till 1632 the seaboard of Bengal was dominated by the Portuguese. Their piracy on the sea was a constant deterrent to smooth movement of trade. Secondly, the Bengali merchants had surrendered their trade-leadership to the upcountry Indian merchants in the seventeenth century so much so that the possibility of a trade nucleus to be grown anywhere in south Bengal prior to the coming of the English was difficult. Thirdly, from the end of the fifteenth and the beginning of the sixteenth century the river-flow of Ganga disgorged the bulk of its water in eastern part of Bengal. The result of this was that the southern flow of the river waned, the volume of its water was reduced and in the event of sinking water-sufficiency the rivers of southern Bengal began to dry up. Thus when many of the rivers in the eastern Bengal were juvenile the rivers in the western part of the country became senile.<sup>104</sup> In these circumstances of the silting and shrinking of rivers how there could

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<sup>104</sup>“A distinguishing feature of East Bengal during the Mughal period –that is in ‘Bhati’ – was its far greater agricultural productivity and population growth relative to contemporary West Bengal. Ultimately this arose from the long-term eastward movement of Bengal's major river systems, which deposited the rich silt that made the cultivation of wet rice possible. Geographers have generally explained the movement of Bengal's rivers in terms of the natural process of riverine sedimentation.”--- Richard M.Eaton , *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier 1204-1760*, Delhi, Oxford University press, 1997,p.194

be a possibility of the emergence of a new trade zone does not seem to be understandable. During the time of Pratapaditya the southern part of Bengal acquired geopolitical importance with the result that the said ruler with the help of the Portuguese built some mud forts in this region. With the expulsion of the Portuguese and the extinction of the local potentates of Pratapaditya's stature this region lost its geopolitical importance. There was none to rejuvenate a new charm in southern Bengal.

Yet Calcutta's ancestry has been traced in some of the pre-colonial growth of its neighbourhood— mostly through assumptions, fanciful and conjectural in most cases and squarely unauthorized by any supportive evidence and documents, either oral or archival. In a recent article such a hypothesis has been used to create a perspective in the city's narration. The period from the fourteenth to the eighteenth century, an observer notes, has marked a significant period in Bengal's history. Quick political changes, expansion of trade and development of new settlements had gone into the making of its glory. Internal trade, contacts with external commerce, the active presence of some foreign traders and merchants, and above all coming into life of new commercial settlements on the both sides of river courses of the country— all served as elements for promoting a town -- Calcutta.<sup>105</sup>

This is a hypothesis which provides space for conjectural research. Lack of specific information based on authentic data invites conjecture in history. Offshoots of such conjectures are generalizations. To say that Calcutta's growth as an urban centre was pre-colonial is a like exercise in generalization. It has been said

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<sup>105</sup>“Gram Govindapur, Kalikata, Sutanati: Shahar Kolkatar Upakhyanmala” (Village Govindapur, Kalikata, Sutanati: Annals of the City of Calcutta) in Saumitra Sreemani ed. *Op.Cit.*, p.88

that industry and commerce led to economic development in southern Bengal. The association of foreign merchants, the navigability of a flowing river, the proximity of the area to the sea – all these provided the necessary historical and geographical context in which one can trace the transformation of a city into which Calcutta was shaping.<sup>106</sup> The thrust of this narration is that some parts of southern Bengal presented themselves as fast-growing trade zones in the region. The importance of the region was not unknown to the Mughals. The erection of two forts at Tanna (or Tanda) and Matiaburuz<sup>107</sup> by the Mughals shows that some parts of southern Bengal had already become strategically important. This importance grew not from any military standpoint but from trade potentialities unfolding from the sixteenth century. The flow of trade that came from the interior to the sea had been getting slender year after year over centuries because of two reasons. First, the domination of the Portuguese of the Bengal sea in the sixteenth century, their piracy in the high sea and their slave trade had created an atmosphere where the oceanic trade was gradually losing its animation. Once the Portuguese were removed from the sea the Dutch, the French and the English and also later the Danes had moved into the open seaboard leaving no space for traditional trade of the interior to go for maritime adventures. Slowly the coastal trade surging out from the inland centres was bottled up and later it seldom had a chance to flush itself out into the sea. Secondly, many of the rivers in southern Bengal were experiencing silting and drying up which forced them to change their courses repeatedly.<sup>108</sup> Around fluctuating river flows

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<sup>106</sup>Uttara Chakrabarti, *op.cit.*,p.92

<sup>107</sup>Tanna or Tanda was near modern Botanical Garden in Shibpur. Matiaburuz is from *mati* meaning mud and *buruz* meaning fort.

<sup>108</sup>“But the great rivers, flowing over the flat plains, could not move fast enough to flush out to sea the sediment they carried, and instead deposited much of it in their own beds. When such sedimentation caused riverbeds to attain levels higher than the surrounding

and changing river courses long term growth of settlements did not seem to be possible. This was why after its first reference in the year 1495-96 in Bipradas Piplai's *Manashavijaya* the name of Calcutta does not find any mention in subsequent literature, either lay or official. In view of this it is difficult to admit that behind the rise of Calcutta there was a 'long and many centuries-old natural process'.<sup>109</sup>

Does Calcutta really have a 'centuries-old tradition' in which a 'natural process' was at work? The answer awaits further research unaffected by parochial emotion and nationalist sentiment. Only an objective and data-searching probe into the matter can show whether a tiny and obscure village had any potential to conjure up its own charm in history. Very often unsubstantiated claims for an insignificant place create myths and out of myths a locality assumes its glamour. This has happened in case of pre-colonial Calcutta [then

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countryside, waters spilled out of their former beds and moved into adjoining channels. In this way the main course of the Ganges, which had formerly flowed down what is now the Bhagirathi-Hooghly channel in West Bengal, was replaced in turn by the Bhairab, the Mathabhanga, the Garai-Madhumati, the Arial Khan, and finally the present-day Padma – Meghna system. 'When the distributaries in the west were active ' writes Kanangopal Bagchi, 'those in the east were perhaps in their infancy, and as the rivers to the east were adolcescing, those in the west became senile. The active stage of delta formation thus migrated southeastwards in time and space, leaving rivers of the old delta, now represented by Murshidabad, Nadia and Jessore with the Goalando Sub-Division of Faridpur , to languish or decay.' As the delta's active portion gravitated eastward, the regions in the west, which received diminishing levels of fresh water and silt , gradually become moribund. Cities and habitations along the banks of abandoned channels declined as diseases associated with stagnant waters took hold of local communities. Thus the delta as a whole experienced a gradual eastward movement of civilization as pioneers in the more ecologically active regions cut virgin forests, thereby throwing open a widening zone for field agriculture." – .Richard M. Eaton, *op.cit.*, pp.194-95. Also see R.K.Mukerjee, *The Changing Face of Bengal. A Study of Riverine Economy*, Calcutta, University of Calcutta, 1942, pp.65-72; W.H.Arden Wood, "Rivers and Man in the Indus –Ganges Alluvial Plain" in *Scottish Geographical Magazine* 40, no.1,1924, pp. 9-10; C. Strickland , *Deltaic Formation with special Reference to the Hydrographic Processes of the Ganges and the Btahmaputra*, Calcutta Longmans,Green, 1940, p.104; Kanangopal Bagchi , *the Ganges Delta*, Calcutta, University of Calcutta,1944, p.33.

<sup>109</sup>Uttara Chakrabarti, *op.cit.*, p.91

known as Kalikata]. Tangible facts drawn out of archival data and literary sources have turned out to be inadequate in ensuring a centuries-old ancestry for Calcutta. Kalikata as a village must have existed long before the English came here. It was situated in a region that had diverse links to oceanic trade. The region was marked as stop-over spots for sea-going trade vessels. Yet the socio-economic glamour of the region had little charm to traders from the middle of the sixteenth century. That was the time when the bulk of the river Ganga had already started moving eastward. Favoured by this flow of water new alluvial lands emerged there. Meanwhile the rivers of the west including the Saraswati which was the major trade route in south Bengal dried up. When in the east rivers were juvenile they were senile in the west. So in the western part of lower Bengal no new trade artery could grow. Trade flowing from the interior to the sea lost its animation. Therefore when the Europeans pushed into Bengal from the sea they met little resistance from native merchants of mainland interior. A new thrust of trade now coming from the sea created a block to the out-moving trade of the mainland merchants. It was in this situation that there were new demands for the European merchants to find new bridgeheads into the river banks of lower delta. New lands had to be discovered which would serve as bases for commerce away from centres of native trade power and Mughal military might. This urge gaining momentum in time the Portuguese built up their base at Hughli, the French in Chandernagore, the Dutch in Chinsura, the Danes in Srirampur and the English in Calcutta. All the previous trade centres --- Tamralipti, Saptagram, Betore, Tribeni, Bhadreswar, Bansberia -- had sunk and a wide area of south Bengal had passed into a zone of closing animation. They had little attraction for the incoming merchants from outside. The Portuguese had begun the process of exploring new sites which could serve as the foothold of commerce in a new

age. The English had followed suit. In view of the drying up of the Saraswati and other rivers in south Bengal and also because of the decline of Tamralipti and Satgaon and later of Hughli from the end of the seventeenth century a trade vacuum was created in which the routine vivacity of life on the banks of rivers of which we hear so much in the context of fourteenth to seventeenth century was threatened with change. In this situation it is futile to speak of a tradition of trade patterned with sailing merchants and cargo vessels moving to the sea. The heyday of the medieval Bengal trade was over by the end of the sixteenth century<sup>110</sup> and changing courses of rivers did not permit enterprise on traditional lines. European traders were bringing bullion to the country. With bullion money was minted so as to ensure the money sufficiency of the Empire. This had endeared the foreign traders to the rulers of the land and had led the Bengal *Nizamat* to call back the English in 1690 after their company had withdrawn their trade from Bengal following their war with Aurangzeb (1686-1690).<sup>111</sup> From the middle of the seventeenth

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<sup>110</sup>“Although the process described by Mukerjee had actually begun long before the fifteenth century , it dramatically intensified after the late sixteenth century. As contemporary European maps show, this was when the great Ganges river system, abandoning its former channels in western and southern Bengal, linked up with the Padma, enabling its main course to flow directly into the heart of the east.... Already in 1567 the Venetian traveller Ceasare Federici observed that ships were unable to sail north of Satgaon on the old Ganges --that is, today’s Bhagirathi-Hooghly in West Bengal. About the same time the Ganges silted up and abandoned its channels above Gaur, as a result of which that venerable capital of the sultanate, only recently occupied by Akbar’s forces, suffered a devastating epidemic and had to be abandoned. In 1574 Abu’l-fazl remarked that the Ganges River had divided into two branches at the Afghan capital of Tanda: one branch flowing south to Satgaon and the other flowing east toward Sonargaon and Chittagong. In the seventeenth century the former branch continued to decay as progressively more of its water was captured by the channels flowing to the east, to the point where by 1666 this branch had become altogether unnavigable” –Richard M. Eaton, *op.cit.*, pp.195-198.

<sup>111</sup> “In 1690 Ibrahim Khan, the weak successor of *Nawab* Shaista Khan, had entreated the English who had withdrawn from Bengal into their settlement at Madras to return to Bengal. And the English were offered ‘a footing with the most favoured foreign nation’. This was done not before the English Company had ‘resolved, that unless a fortification , with a

century Bengal's economy was slowly getting monetized and bullion provided the requisite metal for coining money. The medieval Bengali literature did not testify to the import of bullion by indigenous merchants who were traditionally adept in using the non-metallic medium of exchange -- *kowri*. Since rivers were getting slender in south Bengal agriculture at some places was slowly being substituted by artisan craft. This was in response to the demands of the bullion age that had been ushered in. Inland and coasting trade had also geared itself to craft products. The greatest of Bengal's craft-products was cotton goods. Neither rice nor any other agricultural product finds mention as major items for export. From the middle of the sixteenth century the Bengal trade had three major components: textile wares, bullion supply and sea-navigations. Rivers being frequently changing their course and being susceptible to silting the thrust for moving out from the interior to the sea was slowly waning. In this sense traditional trade enterprise of which we are so eloquent had little scope to promote river-bank activities. That was why no new riverine settlement came into prominence since the middle of the seventeenth century. Bengali traders who had control over textile trade remained confined to inland hawking. This was because they had no control over bullion and no command over the sea. In view of this the concept of flowing rivers, booming trade, bursting energy, founding of new settlements on the river banks and also images of big merchants and trade-icons seemed to be a part of fading glamour of Bengal's maritime past.

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district round it, in Bengal, to be held *as an independent sovereignty*, should be ceded to them by the emperor of Hindoostan, *with permission to coin money* which should be current throughout all the dominions, they would no longer carry on any commerce with the country, but annoy him and his subjects by every means in their power". (Italics author's) –Ranjit Sen, *Metamorphosis of the Bengal Polity (1700-1793)*, Rabindra Bharati University, Calcutta, 1987, p.44

This was the perfect context in which the English set up their new Bengal bridgehead in the three villages of Kalikata, Sutanati and Govindapur. It will be idle to say that these three villages were glittering trade-spots prior to the coming of the English. There were certainly cotton marts at Sutanati and some other places. But they were twinkling stars in an encirclement of gloom. They blazed only when they came within the radius of European trade glare of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century. One may say that lower Bengal had become a zone of sensitized trade bustles only after the coming of the Europeans. Job Charnock had visited Calcutta twice before he finally landed here in 1690. Never had he felt any attraction to make this place the station of his final halt. Up till 1698 when the English purchased the three villages of Kalikata-Sutanati-Govindapur the English eyes were set on Chittagong. That was their coveted place and not Calcutta. Once in the past they planned to capture Chittagong by force. But that remained to be a dream. For centuries-long Calcutta's ancestry remained obscure as a fishermen's village that had little incentive for growth. When it became the seat of an Empire its tryst with destiny began. An insignificant Mughal village was set on the way to become the second city of the Empire.

## CHAPTER I

### HISTORIOGRAPHY OF CALCUTTA

#### Theories about its origin

##### I. *Unsolved Ambiguities*

“Calcutta turned three hundred in the year 1990”.<sup>1</sup> This was how Calcutta was greeted in its birth anniversary in the twentieth century. It only underlined the fact, which is often disputed by pseudo-scholars and amateur historians, that Calcutta’s journey for urbanization began in the year 1690 when Job Charnock set his foot for the third time for a final settlement on this small spot here in eastern India. But doubts lurk somewhere as to whether this contention is true. The lustre of a presupposition vanishes in a moment for in a subsequent passage of the same book the author questions :

“ . . . but we may ask whether Calcutta really ‘began’ three hundred years ago. Certainly the British settlement which became the official nucleus of today’s Calcutta was set up in 1690, after abortive starts earlier. But the region had seen flourishing settlements from some time before: Sutanuti and Gobindapur, Kalighat where the pilgrims came, the textile centres of Chitpur and Baranagar. There is more to the issue than mere quibbling over dates : it concerns the question of Calcutta’s social origins and composition. The formal, and dominant note of the city’s history was undoubtedly colonial; but as these earlier settlements remind us, colonial forces operated here in a terrain rich in competing systems and traditions. These were sometimes supplanted, sometimes transformed by fusion with the colonial experience; at times the latter acted as a catalyst; at times it left the ‘native’ discourse untouched and even unsuspected”.<sup>2</sup>

##### II. *The Colonial Foundation of the City : The Nair Thesis.*

This passage is a unique compromise between the two irreconcilable arguments – one that says that Calcutta’s birth was pre-colonial and the other which, speaking with the support of records, say that its origin was a colonially engineered phenomenon. That Calcutta as an urban settlement was pre-colonial

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1. Sukanta Chaudhuri ed. *Calcutta the Living City, Vol. 1 : The Past*, Oxford India paperbacks, Oxford University Press, 1990, Preface to the 1995 edition.

2. *Ibid*, Introduction. <sup>ii</sup>

is a ramshackle argument for it lacks support of conclusive evidences and archival research. The whole theory, therefore, degenerates into conjecture. The other theory of its colonial origin grows out of the compulsive logic of facts and hard research. Calcutta's biographer P. Thankappan Nair thus observes :

“Calcutta is the only metropolitan city founded by the English in India unlike Bombay and Madras. And the honour of laying the foundation of Calcutta on the marshes of Sutanati, Govindpur and Kalkatah, as a prelude to a ‘well-grounded dominion in India’, goes to Job Charnock.”<sup>3</sup>

The foundation of Calcutta, according to Nair, was thus a deliberate event. It was not ‘chance-erected’ as Rudyard Kipling had thought. It was an outcome of a conscious effort on the part of the English who wanted to organise a base of their operations in eastern India. Nair writes :

“The birth of Calcutta was the result of Job Charnock’s deliberate breach with Mogul Emperor Aurangzeb. That the East India Company entertained military designs in the 80’s of the Seventeenth Century is a fact stranger than fiction. Charnock knew the strength and weakness of the Great Mogul. His 35 years’ residence in Bengal gave him a keen insight into the Mogul court and camp. Sir John Child and other senior merchants of the Company in India in the 17<sup>th</sup> century were no match to Charnock’s firm grasp of the political situation in Mogul India. Otherwise, how could he burn Hugli and Balasore with impunity ? Sir John Child was ordered to be expelled from India by Emperor Aurangzeb for his war-mongering, but Charnock was granted permission to lay the foundation of British Empire in India on the soil of Sutanati.”<sup>4</sup> ---

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3. P. Thankappan Nair, *Calcutta in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century, A Tercentenary History of Calcutta*, vol. I, Firma KLM Private Limited, (First published 1986), 1986, preface.

4. *Ibid.* The burning of Hooghli and Balasore destroyed Mughal vigilance outposts near Calcutta. This facilitated the rise of Calcutta.

Charnock – a war-monger, a sanguine leader and a warrior-factor of the English East India Company could not be defeated by the Mughal Emperor. Calcutta was thus founded in defiance of the Mughal might. This is where the birth history of Calcutta differs from that of Bombay and Madras. Carrying his points further Nair writes :

“The foundation of Calcutta cannot be seen in isolation and the war with the great Mugul cannot be treated as the childish prank of Sir Jon in India and his patron, Sir Joshia Child, in England. The skirmish at Hugli, occupation of Hijli, burning of Balasore etc. are to be viewed as part of that grand design of establishing a dominion in India behind the back of Aurangzeb. Aurangzeb’s grant of trading privileges to the English Company in 1690 cannot be looked upon as another act of generosity, but he was forced to do so to protect his Haj pilgrims and the far-flung trade of his subjects. His acucescence in the transfer of the Company’s trading operations from Hugli to Sutanati and their acquisition of the zamindari rights of Sutanati, Kalkatah, and Govindpur which ultimately grew into Calcutta are sufficient indications of Aurangzeb’s weakness. The foundation of Calcutta together with the acquisition of its zamindari rights laid the first stone of British Empire in India and Job Charnock’s part in these events is noteworthy.”<sup>5</sup>

The origin of Calcutta was thus the result of the geopolitics of Mughal India. P.T. Nair considers Job Charnock as “the founder of Calcutta”<sup>6</sup> and says that “the history of colonial Calcutta dates from August 24, 1690.”<sup>7</sup> He adds :

“The zamindari right of Sutanati, together with that of Kalkatah and Gobindapur which adjoined it, were acquired from the Savarna Raychaudhuries of Barisha in 1698 for Rs. 1300. Sutanati, Kalkatah and Gobindpur together grew into Calcutta in course of time. The Company’s officials lived in thatched houses in Calcutta till Fort William was

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5. *Ibid.* The English onslaught on Hijli, Balasore and Hugli destroyed their potentiality to grow as competitors of Calcutta in future.

6. P. Thankappan Nair, *Calcutta in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century*, Firma KLM Private Limited, Calcutta, 1984, Preface.

7. *Ibid.*

constructed. The Fort was begun in 1697 and was almost finished in 1708. The security afforded by the Fort to the life and property attracted natives and other European nationals from the nearby foreign settlements to Calcutta.”<sup>8</sup>

“St. Anne’s Church was consecrated on 5<sup>th</sup> June, 1708. Fort William and the English Church were the landmarks of Calcutta during the first decade of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.”<sup>9</sup>

Thus the nucleus of Calcutta grew out of three things – a purchased property, a fort and a church. It was not a very urbanized settlement then. The English had secured a strong foothold in a compact territory and the achievement of Job Charnock was this that he brought to an end the long English search for a place where they could lay the first foundations of their settlement in the eastern part of India. Thankappan Nair thinks that the choice was deliberate and the author of the choice was no other than Job Charnock himself.

“Job Charnock, the founder of Calcutta,” writes Nair, “had lived for about 35 years in different parts of Bengal. On his return from Madras, after the rupture with the Mugul *Faujdar* at Hooghly in 1686, he selected the marshy swamp, Sutanati, for the future seat of the East India Company’s trading operations in eastern India, as he was far away from the prying eyes of the Dutch and French, who were all upstream at Hooghly. They were at his mercy as he was in a position to cut off their shipping.”<sup>10</sup>

It was a strategic choice for Sutanati was in the middle between the French and Dutch settlement on the one hand and an outlet to the sea on the other. It took Calcutta six more decades to consolidate its position vis-à-vis the Mughal *faujdar* at Hooghly. Situations changed only after the grant of Diwani in 1765, :

“The appointment of Warren Hastings as Governor General at Fort William in Bengal in 1774 and the establishment of the Supreme Court of Judicature at the Presidency raised Calcutta to the status of the capital of British Empire in India.”<sup>11</sup>

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8. *Ibid.*

9. *Ibid.*

10. *Ibid.*

11. *Ibid.*, p. VIII.

From Hastings' position as the first Governor General at Fort William the British empire in India derived much benefit. Calcutta's benefit was zero. "Warren Hastings did nothing for the improvement of Calcutta . . ." writes Nair. His view is that "Commercial prosperity as well as political powers brought Calcutta into limelight"<sup>12</sup> Nair's thrust in this is subtle and clear. The city owes its promotion to its own dynamics and no individual after Charnock could be thought of as its builder. Calcutta's strategic location, its security, its immunity from chaos outside served as the logic of its self promotion. Nair does not say that Calcutta was a self-promoting city but he takes care to quote Mackintosh's<sup>13</sup> view that Calcutta as city was a "temple dedicated to hospitality"<sup>14</sup> A hospitable city was what Calcutta had been from the beginning. Charnock carved out his own sphere of influence around the three villages of Govindpur, Sutanati and Calcutta and imposed on the inhabitants there his own rule of law. Delinquents were brought before him and he ordered them to be under lashes. It is said that the goaning of the criminals served to be the dining music of the master. This was how law was established by force and tranquillity was made to prevail under the protective umbrella of power.

### ***III. From the Colonial Foundation emerges the garrison Town of Calcutta. The Bustled Thesis.***

Thus the English did these things. They purchased a property, brought into force a political will and administered peace with the help of arms. In true sense of the term force was the rallying point for Calcutta and the fort eventually became the physical point around which the nucleus of a city could form.

Of the three villages purchased by the English Sutanati was the most prosperous one in terms of trade and business activities. But the middle village, Kalikata, gradually became more prominent and her name was appropriated as the

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12. *Ibid.*

13. William Mackintosh, the author of *Travels in Europe, Asia and Africa etc.* published in 2 volumes in 1782. For details see, Thankappan Nair, *op.cit.*, pp. 180-186.

14. Nair, *op.cit.*, Preface, p. IX.

Nomenclature by which all three villages eventually came to be referred to. The individual entities of the villages were lost and the three were clustered under single designation 'Calcutta'. How this happened was reported by Busteed <sup>15</sup> thus :

“English trading in Bengal had been in existence for nearly fifty years [before the Black Hole tragedy of 1756 for Busteed’s book starts with this incident] when the many quarrels and conflicts between the Company and the Mugul authorities issued in the withdrawal to Madras, in the end of 1688, of the Company’s head Agent, the Rt. Worshipful Job Charnock, and his entire establishment, involving a suspension of all commercial relations for close on two years. Aurangzeb, who recognised the advantage to his treasury of European traders in his country, directed his Bengal Viceroy, Ibrahim Khan, to invite the English to come back. The agent, after some consideration, accepted the invitation and set sail for ‘The Bay’ accompanied by his factors and writers and a few soldiers. The riverside village of Sutanati had been the latest site of English enterprise in Bengal, and it was to this that Charnock now returned in August 1690, and where he and his people literally set up their tents and sheltered themselves, as best they could, in those and in huts and boats, as the houses of their previous occupation had disappeared during their absence.”

“Under the matured guidance of the old chief, trading was resumed, and building operations of the simplest kind at first, were gradually taken in hand. As the result of conciliating the local powers, and of winning general confidence, Armenians and other wealthy merchants were attracted to the English, and as success followed industry, the settlement extended itself southward along the river’s bank, bringing into the sphere of occupation the contiguous villages of Calcutta and Govindpur. *The former, the intermediate one of the three, was probably the first to be supplied with buildings of more substantial kind to serve as magazines for the Company’s increasing wares and investments, and so the middle territory came to give its name to the whole.*”

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15. H.E. Busteed, *Echoes From Old Calcutta, Reminiscence of the Days of Warren Hastings, Francis, and Impey*, Rupa and Co., (year not mentioned) pp. 4-5. The book was originally published in 1908.

The movement of the centre of gravity of English trade from Sutanati to Calcutta meant that the Company's drive for expansion and consolidation was toward the interior. A factory of the Company grew into existence in course of time and Calcutta now became a growing centre of business of the Company in the east. As business grew the fort considered to be the 'central stronghold' of the Company<sup>16</sup> needed some defensive fortifications around. But the Mughal government was unwilling to allow the English to raise their fortification at a place near Hooghly which was the headquarters of the Mughal military system along with the greatest Mughal customs house in lower Bengal. But situations changed very soon. Shova Singh's rebellion in 1696 shook the fabric of the Mughal empire in western Bengal. Busteded observes :

“circumstances exceptional and opportune (connected with what is historically known as Subha Sing's rebellion, which indirectly benefited the English from many points of view) happened to favour the obtaining of this concession, which the policy of the native powers had hitherto wisely forbidden to European traders in the country. The walls of a future fort accordingly soon began to arise.”<sup>17</sup>

A 'fort' was a grandiloquent epithet with which the English used to denote their defence structure in Calcutta. It had, however, become the rallying point of the English power in Bengal – the nucleus around which the future colonial town of Calcutta grew. This was how the beginning of the 'garrison town' was made and Calcutta became an abode of peace in the midst of chaos of Mughal degeneration around. A fort needed a little territory around it which the English gained within a short time. Busteded writes :

“A year or two later certain territorial privileges were judiciously secured, which added greatly to the assurance of the English position; so much so, that in December 1699, the Court of Directors were able to write out . . . 'Being now possessed of a strong fortification and a large tract of land, hath inclined us to declare Bengal a Presidency, and we have constituted our Agent (Sir Charls, Eyre) to be our President there and Governor of our fort, etc. which we call Fort William'.

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16. Busteded, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

17. *Ibid.*

So cautiously and gradually was the fort constructed, that it took nearly twenty years before it could be called a fortification.”<sup>18</sup>

The British defence fortification in Calcutta was now christened Fort William. From the Fort St. George at Madras the English East India Company now pushed up to find another base from where a watch could be maintained over the activities of the Nawabi Government operating in western Bengal through the faujdari of Hughli and also on all trading activities of the French and the Dutch situated at Chandernagore and Chinsurah. The seaboard was cleared of the Portuguese in 1632 by Emperor Shah Jahan. This was a very significant event. If Captain Best had not defeated the Portuguese in the Arabian sea in 1616 and if the Mughals had not defeated them and expelled them from the Bay of Bengal in 1632 the colonial cities of Bombay and Calcutta would not have emerged. The expulsion of the Portuguese from the Bay of Bengal helped the English to build an axis of power through a line of communication between Madras and Calcutta over the Bay. In later years at the beginning of 1757 Clive could regain Calcutta from the control of the Nawab because the seaboard of the Bay was clear and Madras could act as the greatest rear area and a base for military counter offensive. Throughout the course of the first half of the eighteenth century Madras operated as a rear base for Calcutta without which Calcutta could not have gained its status as a commanding station of business in the east.

Calcutta essentially centred around the fort. The fort was necessary in order to provide protection to Company's station in Calcutta. The Mughal governors were rapacious and they were bent on fleecing the foreign companies in slightest pretext. Mughal spies used to infiltrate into the city and the authorities of the town had always to remain in guard against them. As time went on fleecing mounted and fear from the Nawabs increased. A representation to the Emperor became a necessity. Calcutta was expanding, its business escalated but the fear of the exactions of the Nawabs acted as a permanent depressor on growth of the town. From the exhaustion of a cramped existence the Company

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18. Busteed, *op. cit.*, pp. 5-6.

made a desperate move to reach out to the Emperor. This effort integral to the geopolitics of the time was the most effective exercise which the Company's authorities made to place the town on effective basis of imperial legitimization. Busted recaptured the spirit of the time thus.

“Each succeeding Bengal Viceroy [Nawab] was more extortionate than his predecessors, and his ministers more rapacious. When money was needed by the Court at Murshidabad or at Delhi, the remedy was to vex the stranger sojourning in their land. The expedient was always ready of finding a pretext for hindering the Company's trade and imperilling their investments, until the viceroy's favour and forbearance had to be purchased. A feeble show of resistance was sometimes offered to this shameless bullying, but it was found on the whole safer and cheaper to truckle to it.”<sup>19</sup>

“Once, indeed, the worm turned, and had the temerity to appeal – greatly to his chagrin – over the head of the Viceroy to the Emperor at Delhi. The Company sent an embassy (well laden with presents) to the Great Mugul, as he was called to pour out their grievances and seek redress. This, after two years of tedious intriguing and lavish bribery, returned (1717) fairly successful, bringing the Imperial firman for the craved territorial and commercial privileges.”<sup>20</sup>

The *farman* gave Company the confidence with which they now addressed themselves towards building up their station in Calcutta. Two things happened as a sequel to this. First it “brought an increased inflow of the inhabitants around to live under the protection and liberty of the favoured settlers.”<sup>21</sup> Secondly, the career of the Company, from this time onward “Steered a progressive and profitable course.”<sup>22</sup>

The war between the Mughals and the English was over by 1690 but its embers

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19. Busted, *op.cit.*, pp. 6-7.

20. Busted, *op.cit.*, p. 7.

21. *Ibid.*

22. *Ibid.*

did not die. Braving these Calcutta had to urbanize itself. After the *farman* the Company became all the more an object of suspicion of the *Nawabs*. A cold war between the Company and the *Nizam* began. But the fort had offered a kind of security to the settlement of the English which otherwise would not have been achieved. Calcutta now extended over three miles from Chitpur to Esplanade near the fort. No new territory was added to it but habitable lands and habitations increased. This was by means of cutting jungles of the existing territory under the control of the Company. From Sutanati around Chitpur the town now proceeded toward Kolkata (Kalikata) where jungles were begun to be felled. Habitation expanded because commerce increased. Calcutta was taking the shape of a garrison town.<sup>23</sup> The nucleus of the town thus remained to be the fort.

A fort-centric development of a city was essentially a colonial affair and suggests no antiquity for the town. This is where our two authors, Busted and Nair, seem to have an agreement. None of them could find the heritage of the city beyond its colonial origin. The southern part of the Bengal delta where the three villages of Kalikata, Govindapur and Sutanati were situated must have some heritage in terms of commerce, habitation and formations as a pilgrim centre. They made up the antiquity of the region. This antiquity was missing in the writings of almost all the early authors – even in the first and foremost of the connected accounts of the city which Beverley had drawn toward the end of the nineteenth century. Busted and Beverley were historians in the age of the Empire. To them no heritage of the city could exist beyond the Empire and, therefore, to them the growth of the city was itself a tribute to the Empire.

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23. “By 1756 Calcutta had reached such a stage of industrial progress, that its trade is stated to have exceeded one million sterling yearly, and that some fifty vessels or more annually visited its port. Its territory extended in a crescent along the bank of the river from north to south for about three miles (say from modern Chitpur Bridge to site of present fort). Standing nearly midway between these limits was the little fort. The houses of the English inhabitants were scattered in large enclosures for about half of a mile to the north and to the south of the fort, and for about a quarter of mile to the east of it”. – *Ibid.*

#### IV. *The Missing Antiquity In the First Connected History of the City : Views of Beverley.*

“The first connected history of the rise and growth of Calcutta was written by Mr. H. Beverley, c.s., as a part of his census report of 1876.” This is how A.K. Ray described the beginning of the historiography of Calcutta.<sup>24</sup> As the initiator of urban historiography Beverley’s thesis about the origin of Calcutta is thus the first premise from which a comprehensive study of Calcutta can start. The thesis does not speak of the antiquity of the city. It ascribes no indigenous glamour to its origin. Spanning over two centuries the city, he says, had a meteoric rise from some desolate villages, sprawling rice-fields and marshy lands interspersed with forests. From a projected backward vision the site of the present city of Calcutta, in Beverley’s analysis, presented the spectacle of a very humble origin. He writes :

“There are probably few cities in the world that, from so humble an origin, and apparently under such unfavourable conditions, have within so short a period attained the position now occupied by the capital of India. Less than two centuries ago the site of the present city of Calcutta presented the ordinary aspect of a rural district in the delta of Lower Bengal – a flat rice-swamp, interspersed with patches of jungle, with a few scattered villages on the river-bank. Few would have ventured to predict that here would shortly arise a ‘City of Palaces’, that physical drawbacks would be made to yield to the indomitable energy of a foreign race; that in spite of morasses, malaria, hurricanes, and the difficult navigation of a treacherous river, Calcutta would in the nineteenth century be an emporium of trade of the first magnitude, and the Capital of an Empire in the east.”<sup>25</sup>

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24. A.K. Ray, Preface, “A Short History of Calcutta Towns and Suburbs”, in *Census of India, 1901*, vol. VII, Part I. This was later published as a book under the same title with an introduction by Nisith R. Ray by RDDHI –India, 28 Beniatola Lane, Calcutta- 9 in 1982. Forming a part of the Census Report of 1901 it was published in 1902. Henceforth all references to and excerpts from A.K. Ray’s notes will be from this book. Beverley’s account of Calcutta originally written as an Introduction to the Census Report of 1876 under the title “The Rise and Growth of Calcutta” has been incorporated in Professor Adhir Chakravarti (Director of Archives, Government of West Bengal) ed., *List of Documents of Calcutta*, Vol. I. 1764-1800.

25. Beverley, *op.cit.*, para 91.

This story of conversion of a cluster of villages into a grand ‘city of palaces’ under the rule of the Company has ever since become a settled part of the imperial anecdotes of Calcutta. To some extent the story was true. The region around Calcutta might have a throbbing bazaar centre, particularly located in the Sutanutty (Sootalutty<sup>26</sup>) area but its potentialities for an urban take-off was never a manifest reality in the past. Calcutta and its adjoining area belonged to the district of Nadia. To create a habitation out of life-threatening conditions was not an easy task. The English did it. Thus Calcutta owes its development to the enterprise of its colonial masters .

Thriving settlements may not always be towns and Sutanuttee, Kalikata and Govindpur, the three constituent parts of the present city of Calcutta, had been referred to as villages by Beverley.<sup>27</sup> Their stimulus to outlive their rural precincts came only under the impact of the English presence there. According to Beverley the origin of Calcutta was a phased out event starting with the ‘establishing a firm footing in that village’ (Sutanuttee) in August 1690 followed by obtaining next year ‘a patent from Aurangzebe allowing them to trade free of custom duty, on condition of an annual payment of Rs. 3,000’. This was followed by the acquisition of a right ‘to fortify their factory or to exercise jurisdiction over the natives employed by them.’ Finally when the Emperor’s grandson Azim-us-shan became the governor of Bengal the English ‘obtained his permission to purchase from the zemindar or Indian proprietor’, Beverley quotes Orme,<sup>28</sup> ‘the towns of Sotalooty, Calcutta, and Govindpore, with their districts, extending about three miles along the eastern bank of the river

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26. *Looty* or *latai* means reel or spool on which *suta* or thread is wound. Sootalutty was a place where weavers used to have their *aurungs* (looms) and there was a flourishing bazaar of yarn and thread there.

27. “Within the limits of the present town of Calcutta stood formerly three villages – Sotalooty, Calcutta and Govindpore. Of these villages, Sotalooty was the northernmost, being situated near Hatkhola in the Koomartooly ward; Calcutta was somewhere between the present Mint and the Custom House; and Govindpore on the southern glacis of the Fort.” – Beverley, *op.cit.*, para. 92.

28. Orme, Vol. II, p. 17 W. Bolts in his *Considerations on Indian Affairs*, (2<sup>nd</sup> Edn., 1772, p. 60) writes that the villages were “to the extent of about one mile and a half square.”

Hooghly, and about one mile inland’<sup>29</sup> What is significant is that Orme considers the three villages of Sutanuttee, Govindpur and Kalikata as ‘towns’ and not villages.<sup>30</sup> In any case these three villages had some kind of importance which Beverley thought, was due to the arrival of the English there. Crowd pullers as they were the English within a decade of their coming to the eastern part of the river made the region a centre for attraction for people around.

“During the next seven years,” goes Beverley’s account, “the settlement of Calcutta , we are told, attracted such a number of inhabitants as to excite the jealousy of the Governor of Hooghly, and the increasing importance of the colony induced the Company in 1707 to declare Calcutta a separate Presidency, accountable only to the Directors in London” .

This was a great leap toward future – toward creating Calcutta a composite urban body which would serve as the future nucleus of an imperial city. Sutanuttee, Govindpur and Kalikata were situated within the jurisdiction of the Nawab and its territorial existence was only as a part of the Nawabi territory from which the Nawab extracted his annual tribute. But now some kind of an extraterritoriality was ascribed to it. It was made into a settlement subservient not to the Nawab but to the authorities at home. Later on the English began to talk of Calcutta as their ‘estate’<sup>31</sup> In other words they began to claim exclusive jurisdiction over the three villages which passed under the general nomenclature of Calcutta. This created tensions between the Company’s administration on the one hand and the Nawabs from Murshid Quli Khan to Sirajuddaullah on the other.<sup>32</sup>

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29. Beverley, op.cit.

30. The annual tribute of these three villages due to the Nawab was Rs.1,195 which he extracted very regularly. Orme writes: “The prince, however reserved the annual fine of Rs. 1,195, which this ground used to pay to the Nawab of the province.” Measured by the standard of time this sum of the tribute seemed to be quite high and this shows that the villages had the status of settlements which were already on their way to becoming towns. But their full-fledged urbanization had not set in.

31. This point has been discussed in Ranjit Sen, *Metamorphosis of the Bengal Polity* (ch. II, Section 2), Rabindra Bharati University, Calcutta, 1987.

32. The conflict between the Bengal Nawabs and the authorities of the Company over the jurisdiction of Calcutta has been discussed in Sukumar Bhattacharya, *The East India Company and the Economy of Bengal 1794-1740*, London, 1954, Second Edn. Calcutta , 1969.

In 1715 the English sent an embassy to the Court of Delhi to secure further concessions from the Emperor. They had set themselves to two purposes: to acquire more land around Calcutta and to secure an immunity from the interference of the Nawab. The result of this embassy, Beverley writes: “was that in 1717 they obtained the confirmation of all their former privileges, with permission to purchase thirty-eight villages extending down both sides of the Hooghly for a distance of ten miles. This latter concession, however, was practically frustrated by the Nawab, who deterred the holders of the land from parting with their property;”<sup>33</sup>

What emerges from Beverley’s description was that the Company was trying to build up Calcutta as an interference-free settlement of the English. This was where the promoters of Calcutta, the Company, and the rulers of the land came to a conflict. During the first half of the eighteenth century Bengal was being developed into a consolidated revenue-paying area of the Mughal empire and as such this part of the Empire was experiencing a new kind of consolidation when other parts of the Mughal empire was in a state of collapse.<sup>34</sup> The point to be noted here is that Calcutta had gone into its career as an emerging city of the English at a time when the Mughal position in Bengal was very powerful. Calcutta grew out of conflicts between the indigenous authorities on the one hand and the authorities of the company on the other. Therefore the momentum of the growth of Calcutta had come from the necessity to develop it as a fortified area where merchants could be harboured in peace. In other words the momentum was not an outcome from an easy flow of situations but must have been the one that emerged out of deliberate efforts of the aliens to create a settlement in the teeth of oppositions from the government.

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33. Beverley, *op.cit.*, para 92. For details of the result of this embassy see Sukumar Bhattacharya’s book where he deals with the 1717 *farman* of the Emperor exhaustively.

34. For the Mughal consolidation in Bengal see Jadunath Sarkar ed. *The History of Bengal*, vol. II, Dakha University, 1948, chapter on Murshid Quli Khan. Also see Abdul Karim, *Murshid Quli Khan and His Times*, Dacca, 1963 and Ranjit Sen *The Metamorphosis of the Bengal Polity (1700-1793)* Rabindra Bharati University, Calcutta, 1987, Chapter I.

The Mughals opposed the growth of Calcutta because of two reasons; First, the Government had already sponsored the construction of a city – the prospective capital of the province – at Murshidabad which was going to replace Dakha as the most prominent city of the east. Secondly, the Bengal Nawabs were reluctant to see Calcutta grow as a power-base that could eventually challenge the jurisdiction of the Nawabs and create an enclave of extra-territorial pretensions in the country. Right from the beginning the English had in their mind the idea that Calcutta was their purchased property and hence they used to treat it as their estate. That such an estate did not negate the jurisdiction of the Nawabs did not go well with the English. A purchased city had an entrenched right and this had always coloured the English vision about Calcutta. The firmness shown by the Government in preventing the Company from acquiring more territory around Calcutta proved that Calcutta did not have any territorial dynamism till the year 1717 when the imperial *farman* was granted. Till then, Beverley says, Calcutta went with an undetermined boundary<sup>35</sup> and quoting Captain Alexander Hamilton's description he says that the total population in the settlement was 'about 10,000 or 12,000 souls.'<sup>36</sup> Not only the population but also three other things gave the settlement the character of an English colony. These were 'the Old fort', the old St. John's Church and the Writers' Buildings. In 1706 the garrison in the fort consisted of 129 soldiers of whom 66 were Europeans.<sup>37</sup>

The Imperial Calcutta grew around this fort. Beverley does not deny that it was fort-centric but says with much alacrity that from the beginning it was divided into two parts as black and white towns, one contrasted with the other just as a neat and sprawling formation contrasts itself with a congested and gloomy one. What is significant is that Beverley makes no effort to discover the antiquity of Calcutta. He starts from the premise that Sutanuttee, Govindapur and Calcutta were originally villages and they merged into one settlement under pressure of circumstances and the needs of the Company's government. To say this is to highlight that Calcutta's ancestry lay in the muddy rusticity of villages. Its pretension to be a reputable pre-English formation of dignity and size was ignored as unworthy of acceptance. This was how the official view of the origin of the imperial city of Calcutta came into vogue.

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35. Calcutta's boundary was determined in 1794. A.K.Ray, *op.cit.*, p. 110.

36. At para 92 Beverley quotes Captain Hamilton's views about early Calcutta.

37. Beverley, *op. cit.*, para 92.

Beverley was specific about Calcutta's origin. He writes: "Modern Calcutta dates from the year 1757."<sup>38</sup> This statement has its own implications. From 1698 when the three villages of Sutanuttee, Govindapur and Kalikata were purchased till 1757 when the Palasi revolution took place the possessions of the English in south Bengal were under the watchful eyes of the Nawabi Government. The Bengal Nawabs from Murshid Quli Khan to Sirajuddaullah were not well-disposed to the English and they did not like that an enclave of power should grow in Calcutta which would eventually rival their power centres, first at Hughli and then at Murshidabad. Calcutta did not experience any territorial dynamism during this period because the Nawabi administration did not allow the English Company to acquire the 38 villages scattered around Calcutta both in the east and the west banks of the river. This brake on Calcutta's expansion was lifted in 1757 and the progress of the settlement toward gaining its status as a city moved full steam. From 1757 the Nawabi decline began and the Company's slow and imperceptible ascendancy to power started. The English were on their road to the Empire. Beverley makes Calcutta's beginning synchronize with the start of the Empire and in this sense he becomes the first English historian to give the city its first historically acclaimed imperial character.

#### ***V. Outside the Rim of Imperial Historiography : The Views of A.K. Ray***

Writing about 25 years after Beverley A.K. Ray presents a deeper analysis of the origin of Calcutta. He discusses the geological origin of the lower Gangetic delta where Calcutta is situated and endeavours to adjust it with legends and traditions connected with it. His findings in this regards are as follows:

“(1) That in remote antiquity, gneissic hills stood out from the sea where Calcutta now is.

(2) That at later date --- probably during the tertiary period -- these hills were depressed and a tidal swamp extended up to the foot of the Rajmahal hills.

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38. Beverley, *op. cit.*, para 110..

- (3) That the Lower Gangetic plains below the Rajmahal hills began to be elevated by fluvial deposits about four or five thousand years ago.
- (4) That the extension of the delta was from north and west to south and east.
- (5) That near Calcutta, an elevation of the area has alternately been followed by a subsidence.
- (6) That in historical times the extreme south-eastern portion, including the districts of Khulna, Jessore, the Sundarbans, and Calcutta, was not fully formed in the seventh century of the Christian era, when East Bengal was sufficiently inhabited to form the nucleus of a kingdom.”<sup>39</sup>

A unique information thus emerges from the research of A.K. Ray. The land-formation of south-eastern Bengal was incomplete as late as the seventh century of the Christian era. A boundary is thus automatically set to the antiquity of Calcutta. It cannot by any stretch of imagination be pushed back to the first century of the Christian era. The alternate events of elevation and subsidence of soil over a vast area of south-eastern Bengal made habitation there difficult and eastern Bengal taking a lead over its neighbours prepared itself as a place fit for kingdom formation in Bengal. This meant that south-eastern Bengal required centuries’ more time to build itself up as a habitat zone for human beings. The emergence of Calcutta as a habitation with riparian privileges seemed in view of this to be a later phenomenon. In working out this philosophy A.K. Ray connects legend with science and combines tradition with history. His observations thus give a perfect insight into the origin of Calcutta as a human habitation in southern Bengal. He writes :

“It will thus appear that the description of Lower Bengal (including Calcutta and its neighbourhood) in Barahamihira’s *Brihatsamhita* as ‘Samatata’ or tidal swamp, and the inference that it was gradually raised by alluvial deposits into a habitable kingdom about the seventh century after Christ, are in perfect accord with the trend of modern physical researches, while there is nothing in the social history of Bengal which commences with King Adisur between the seventh and the ninth century after Christ that appears to militate against the inference.”<sup>40</sup>

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39. A.K. Ray, *op.cit.*, p. 8

40. *Ibid.*

One important aspect of A.K. Ray's theory is that it analyses the Hindu legend that Calcutta's antiquity is related to *Kalikshetra*, a pilgrim centre associated with the name of the pagan goddess *Kali*. There is a popular belief in many circles of the Hindu community that Calcutta emerged as an area anchored on the religious sanctuary of Kali. The growth of such a sanctuary was not an ancient phenomenon – as A.K. Ray says : “. . .the sanctuary did not attain much importance till the days of Hindu rule were over.”<sup>41</sup> Even at the time of the Bengal King Adisur *Kalikshetra* was either inconspicuous or was virtually non-existent. Calcutta, therefore, had no existence as a place to reckon with. It is said that King Adisur imported five Brahmans from Kanauj as missionaries of Aryan religion and granted fifty six villages to each of their fifty-six children. A. K. Ray observes : “. . . while there is considerable significance in the fact that as far as the estates awarded by Adisur to the 56 children of five Kanauj Brahmans can be traced, there is not one that can be identified with Calcutta or its neighbourhood on the eastern bank of the Hooghly.”<sup>42</sup> One reason why Calcutta's antiquity could not be associated with *Kalikshetra* was that the popular worship of the goddess *Kali* was not in vogue for a long time.<sup>43</sup> A scanning of the Hindu legend shows that the earliest trace of Calcutta as a part of *Kalikhsehtra* was not before ‘between the 12<sup>th</sup> and the 15<sup>th</sup> centuries of Christian era. . .’<sup>44</sup> Kali, it should be noted, was an aboriginal ‘goddess unknown to the Vedic religion of the Aryans.’ In the Tantric age “on account of the decay of Brahminism during the Buddhistic period, the instinct of self-preservation compelled the Brahmans to admit to the Hindu pantheon a great many of the gods and forms of the worship of the aboriginal tribes with whom they came into contact, and Tantric rites, embodied in the worship of the goddess Kali amongst others, came into vogue.”<sup>45</sup>

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41. A.K. Ray, *op.cit.*, p. 13.

42. *Ibid.*

43. *Kali* although absorbed in the Hindu pantheon was not popularly worshipped till the time of King Vallal Sen – Ray, *op.cit.*, p. 14.

44. *Ibid.*

45. A.K. Ray, *op.cit.*, p. 12.

Given this, the question arises as to when did the worship of Kali become a prominent feature in the religious practice of South Bengal so that it could become the nucleus of an urban settlement there? It was certainly not before or any time during the rule of King Adisur 'whose reign is variously timed between the seventh and the ninth century of the Christian era.'<sup>46</sup> King Adisur 'felt the necessity of importing Brahmins from Kanauj and of inducing them to settle down with their families by the offer of landed estates.'<sup>47</sup> "No mention of the worship of Kali is found in any of the proceedings of Adisur's court, and it is nowhere stated that he settled the Kanauj Brahmins in order to prevent the spread of Tantricism."<sup>48</sup>

"Tantric rites", A.K. Ray observes further, "did not come in vogue in Lower Bengal till the time of Vallala Sen in the 12<sup>th</sup> century . . . but it is very doubtful whether the worship of Kali was at all popular or was openly recognised by the court. In the records of Kalighat, we find no trace of any 'sanad' or grant from any of the Hindu Kings or their contemporaneous citizens such as we would naturally expect a popular sanctuary to possess. This seems to show that the sanctuary did not attain much importance till the days of the Hindu rule were over."<sup>49</sup>

A sanctuary-based city, if Calcutta was that ever, had little prospect of growth in the pre-Islamic phase of Indian history, "Bipradas's 'Manasa'<sup>50</sup>", writes A.K. Ray, "proves that Calcutta had been differentiated from Kalighat in 1485 A.D. It does not prove that it had existed before . . ." <sup>51</sup> The argument is clear. The antiquity of Calcutta cannot be pushed back to the period when the aboriginal goddess Kali was being absorbed into the Hindu pantheon. The point Mr. Ray wants to drive home was that the urban base of Calcutta was not an outcome of the growth of Kalighat as a pilgrim centre in ancient times. The emergence of Kalighat was a later phenomenon. The coming of Buddhism and Islam in

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46. *Ibid.*

47. *Ibid* "As many as fifty-six separate estates (gram) were given free of rent to the children of the five Brahmins he caused to be brought down to Bengal." *Ibid*

48. A.K. Ray, *op.cit.* p. 13.

49. *Ibid.*

50. See Chapter III of Bipradas's book

51. A.K. Ray, *op.cit.*, p. 15 note.

Bengal placed Hinduism on a retreat and in its retreat it was unlikely that a religion would be able to commission into career one of its major centres of worship in eastern India. During the time when Muslim rulers ruled Bengal new cities grew up – Dakha, Chittagong, Sonargaon, Hughli, Murshidabad and the like. Still steeped in rusticity the status of Calcutta was still not such as to place it in the rank of any prominent Islamic towns of eastern India. Calcutta had to wait for many years to reach its prominence as one of the centres of urbanity in India.

**VI. *Disproving the Colonial Origin of the City : Views of Radha Kamal Mukherjee*<sup>52</sup>**

Radha Kamal Mukherjee believed that three factors led to the founding of the imperial city of Calcutta. First, ‘a string of Portuguese, Dutch and English settlements, serving as both factories and trading centres along Hughli and other rivers in Bengal’ created the situations for the foundation of a new city in lower Bengal.

Secondly, the holy places along the course of the river created the ambience in which a city could take its birth. He writes :

“But when in 1690 Job Charnock acquired the fishing villages of Sutanuti on the Hughli and also Govindpur and Kalikatta in 1698 he laid foundations of the second city of the British Empire, showing John Bull’s practical common sense and foresight to a marvellous degree. Nearby on the Adi Ganga, the ancient sacred channel of the Bhagirathi to the Sunderbans, was situated the celebrated temple of the Mother Goddess which attracted a considerable body of pilgrims. A few miles down the river, where the Bay was reached, was the sacred island of Sagar, another ancient place of pilgrimage, but now no longer on the Bay. On the opposite bank was Bator, the oldest seat of European trade in Bengal. That site was visited by Chand Sadagar, who prayed to Batai Chandai on his seaward journey, and also first attracted the Portuguese, its importance being due to the fact that the larger ships had to anchor as ‘upwards the river is very shallow and little water.’

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52. This theory is available in Radha Kamal Mukherjee, “The Rise of the Metropolis” in *The Calcutta Municipal Gazette*, Sixteenth Anniversary Number, 30 November, 1940 pp, 5-7. All excerpts quoted here are from this article.

Surrounded by pilgrim centres Calcutta attracted a flow of pilgrims over ages. It was known to people, particularly to traders, as forming a line with Bettor beyond which the river was not navigable.

Thirdly, the places around Calcutta suited the trading and strategic necessities of the English. Mukherjee writes :

“In close proximity to the place where a considerable number of European ships used formerly to lay in anchor has been constructed one of the biggest docks in the east. As a matter of fact when the English applied in 1714 to the Emperor Farrukhsiyar for a grant of a number of villages the list included Salkhia, Howrah and Bettor, for apart from their close proximity to Calcutta ‘there were docks made for repairing and filling their ships’ bottoms, and a pretty good garden belonging to the Armenians’ to boot.”

Calcutta provided two advantages to the Company in the eighteenth century. First, it acted as a sanctuary for people threatened by the Maratha invasions. Secondly, the river being narrow at the point where Calcutta was situated ferrying of people and commodities for trade was easier than at other points of the river. The imperial city at the outset did not emerge as a centre of governance but merely as a trading post where the ships could disembark for unloading their cargoes. The English could take the river into confidence because they could appreciate advantage of the narrowness of the river strip. At this point the trade strategy was the utmost in the English mind.

“At Bator”, Mukherjee goes on to write, “the river was narrow enough (as its narrowest point now the Howrah Bridge) to be easily crossed for trade, while it was an excellent moat against the depredations of the Marathas who were playing havoc in western Bengal at that time. Not merely did the Marathas never cross the river but on the left bank the water ran deeper, while numbers of weavers and members of the Sett family who traded with the East India Company also lived on the left bank.”

Radha Kamal Mukherjee thus harps on two basic advantages from which Calcutta had always benefited , namely the navigability of the Calcutta part of the river and the human habitation in and around the three Calcutta villages where weavers and the families of the Seths, the early collaborators of the company, lived. The Seths were the links between the textile production centres of Calcutta and one of the greatest foreign traders of Bengal textiles, the

English East India Company. The links being set there was no harm for the English to come and settle in Calcutta.

Here was thus the importance of the left bank of the river. It was a secured place for trade. Insulated from the attack of the marauders it had the benefit of the presence of rich trading families around whom habitations settle and trade marts normally grow. Moreover on the left side the river was more navigable than its right side and this eliminated the fear of ships running suddenly aground with cargo loads.

The left bank of the river also witnessed the tradition of urbanization in Bengal. The major capitals of Bengal did flourish there. The river course in the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries had not completely gone senile although its juvenile strength was gone. The flow of water along the river course still held prospects for urban settlements in the new deltaic alluvium in lower Bengal. Mukherjee's analysis gave primacy to the geographical factors of the urbanization of Calcutta. Here is he on the point.

“All the older capitals in the Ganges valley were situated on the left bank of the river, Gour, Murshidabad and Saptagram, the river Hughli being a real divide between the new alluvium and the scarp of the old block which makes a firm western bank for the river. Between the Suti mouth where the Bhagirathi deflects from the Ganges up to Howrah the river has maintained the ancient channel through several centuries, but beyond Howrah the river formerly took a different south-eastern channel (the *Adi Ganga*) through the Sunderbans to the bay coursing through Kalighat and Govindpur and many other villages such as Garia, Baruipur and Joynagar which have now become insignificant. The older *Adi Ganga* Channel was formerly shallower and for traffic safer, the galliasses of the Aracanese pirates resorting to the deeper western channel. Nearer the Bay but above the swampiest level Fort William certainly occupied a more naturally advantageous position than the French settlement in Chandernagore founded in 1676. The latter had neither the commercial advantage nor the strategic importance of Calcutta, as the French learnt to their cost when the British men-of-war under admiral Watson sailed up the river with the tide and took the French port in a quarter of an hour in 1757. The British brought to the Bhagirathi in front of Chandernagore three or four sixty-four and sixty-six gunships.”

Mukherjee's thesis as noted above rests on the appreciation of the geographical situation of Calcutta and its importance as a riverine city that fell in line with other previous capitals of Bengal in reaping advantages from deltaic changes along the course of the river. The cities in the left bank of the river, it should be noted, did not enjoy a lasting existence and died down with the changes in the course of the river. Hence Mukherjee raises legitimate question : "Is Calcutta A Doomed City?" The deltaic changes, he says, are constant and, therefore, there is no certainty that the city will enjoy a fate better than that of its predecessors. Calcutta's situational existence was a gift of nature but its growth it owed to its imperial status. The British Empire itself was a transitory phenomenon and the Empire could not be its perpetual source for sustenance. Mukherjee, therefore, doubts the prominence of Calcutta as a continuing phenomenon in history. His views are specific and categorical.

"Whatever might be the merits of the site of Calcutta its future like that of all deltaic ports is however uncertain and precarious, depending as it does on the life-cycle of the deltaic system and the shifting course of the rivers, tributaries and minor channels. The Hughli, which has seen the rise and decay of so many trading towns and cities, is now practically a 'beheaded' stream; such fresh water as it receives from the Ganges is by way of subsoil percolation, except of course during two months in the flood season. Zoological investigations show the presence of maritime fauna at the Palta Head Water Works, indicating that the river is being transformed into an inland lagoon. At Sakrail, 4 miles below Calcutta, and at the Middleton bar the river level has seriously declined (going down to 14 ft. at low-water at the bar), making it necessary for heavy draught ships to arrange long in advance their times of arrival and departure with the port authorities at Calcutta. Continuous dredging has been necessary to keep open somehow a sea-to-the-docks channel; but 'there is a marked absence of heavy draught ships coming to the port.' On the east more than half of the Bidyadhari is now dead, and yet Calcutta is now discharging into it 60 million gallons of sewage per day. The salt water lake was formerly much deeper and wider, running probably close to the Circular Road, and it overflowed during the rains, as Holwell stated in 1790. Now a considerable portion of it as well as the Bidyadhari channel have silted up to such an extent that before long the problem of storm water and sewage disposal will become well-nigh insoluble. Calcutta is faced with peril due to the decay of the local deltaic system, and new schemes of water supply, sewage, waste water disposal and canalization are already under serious considerations."

The aforesaid view of Radha Kamal Mukherjee goes a longway to disprove the fact that Calcutta owes its origin entirely to the British efforts undertaken by Job Charnock and his successors. Nature had its hands in working for Calcutta. This city and its predecessors, according to Mukherjee, were mostly offshoots of the deltaic changes that had been in progress for over centuries. The imperial efforts to make Calcutta the most important urban centre in the east were essentially subordinate to the efforts of nature in giving shape to its own creations. The Empire shaped the city only when nature provided its basis.

### ***VII. Reasserting the Colonial View : The Atlas Theory of the Birth of Calcutta***<sup>53</sup>

Taking 1690 to be the base year for study of Calcutta the authors of the Atlas theory have cut short the antiquity of the city. It is clear from the questions they have addressed that in their contemplation Calcutta remains to be a colonial city in spite all efforts to push its antiquity back. The questions they ask are :

“What were the forces which joined together to make from a foothold to a stronghold of the British empire in a foreign soil, thousands miles away from Europe? Was it a part of spreading gospel, or creating ‘little Englands’ all over the world, or simply trade and commerce? These questions are intricate and will require turning several hundred pages even to give a near-comprehensive answer. In Africa all these three reasons were possible. In the case of Australia, it became lebenstraum for the expanding English population. In India, though towns, hill stations, railway colonies were developed during the colonial period,

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53. The views under this caption are available in the following book : Anil Kumar Kundu and Prithvis Nag, *Atlas of the City of Calcutta and its Environs*, National Atlas and Thematic Mapping Organisation. Ministry of Science and Technology, Government of India, Calcutta, 1990, Chs. I-V. In Chapter I under the title ‘Birth of Calcutta’ the authors write : “Calcutta has been studied for several purposes and in different ways. The current interest in its study is due to the tercentenary celebrations now being observed in the erstwhile second largest city of the British empire. Without going into the controversy of the exact date of its birth, the year 1690 A.D. has been considered as the reference or base year for studying the growth and expansion through the maps available of different times. Obviously, such as (an) attempt cannot be considered as comprehensive. However, this atlas along with other contributions on Calcutta will make interesting comparisons.” (p.9)

there was no attempt to systematically colonise the country as in the case of Africa or Australia or in other parts of the world.”<sup>54</sup>

If colonisation had never been in the aims of the English in India why was then that there should be attempts at urbanization ? The answer is simple. The urbanization, if there was any, was a part of the trade exploration of the Company. Hence the statement : “the origin of Calcutta is somewhat linked with the fate of the East India Company.”<sup>55</sup> To say this is to highlight the understanding that the question of antiquity of the city is one of indifference. Starting from this observation our authors have traced back the process of Calcutta’s foundation to as early back as the foundation of the East India Company with the Royal Charter in 1600. From this point starts a series of trade ventures the end point of which was the foundation of the city of Calcutta. The trade ventures moved in the following series.

The first event : “On 31<sup>st</sup> December, 1600, the Company received the royal charter granting it the monopoly of the eastern trade for fifteen years.”

The second event : “The Company sent Captain William Hawkins to India. He reached Mughal emperor Jahangir’s court in 1609, and in early 1613 English were permitted to establish a factory in Surat in the west, permanently.”

The third event: “Following this, Sir, Thomas Roe, an ambassador of the king of England was sent to the Mughal court. He succeeded in getting permission to establish factories in Agra, Ahmedabad and Broach which were under the control of Surat.”<sup>56</sup>

Together with this the global ambience was changing.

“Meanwhile the Dutch East India Company (1602) and French East India Company(1604) were formed. In 1631(1632) Portuguese were expelled from Hooghli and in 1604 the English occupied this place as a first major step in their activity in Bengal. On the other hand, Bombay, in the west, was transferred to the East India Company by Charles II who got it from [the] Portuguese as a part of dowry. Portuguese settlement started with the Vasco da Gama’s discovery to India. In 1500 he reached Calicut. Portuguese influence

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54. *Ibid*

55. *Ibid*.

56. *Ibid*.

Reached Bengal quickly and they virtually monopolized trade and commerce and established settlements including Hooghli. In 1687 this city superseded Surat and became chief English settlement in western India. The English establishments grew in other parts of India as well, such as Masulipatam, Madras (Fort St. David), Hariharpur and Balasore”<sup>57</sup>

The western trade penetration was a rapidly expanding phenomenon of the time. Competitive settlements were growing up. The gravity of trade was shifting to eastern India. Old towns were being overtaken by new ones and the English needed a base in the east.

“Calcutta was yet to be born by then. The nearest English settlement by then was Hooghly (1651) and following it at Patna and Cassimbazar. In 1658 all the English settlements and factories were brought under Fort St. George in Madras.”<sup>58</sup>

Thus by the middle of the seventeenth century British trade ambitions came to be anchored in territoriality and there is no denying that Territorial ambitions the English gathered from the atmosphere of time. The lust for territory and power was the order of the day. There were signs of institutional changes everywhere. Aurangzeb began his reign in 1658 and he reigned for forty-nine years dying in 1707. He “became emperor in 1665,” writes the Atlas authors, “and in the following year Shah Jahan, the deposed emperor died.”<sup>59</sup>

Under the new regime local aspirations were cropping up. “Shivaji became powerful in Deccan and ultimately became independent. French took over Pondicherry in 1673, and Guru Govind Singh formed Sikh confederacy (1676-1708).”<sup>60</sup> Clustering around their own interests local forces were gaining ground. Madras under the English and Pondicherry under the French were pitted out against each other. In this situation the imperial juggernaut relentlessly moved ahead and the process of conquest did not stop. “Auranzeb’s army marched southwards and annexed Bijapur and Golkunda, and he died in Amednagar before he could completely subjugate the Marathas.”<sup>61</sup>

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57. *Ibid.*

58. *Ibid.*

59. *Ibid.*

60. *Ibid.*

61. *Ibid.*

The seventeenth century annals of Indian history which the Atlas historians cited above as a background for the foundation of Calcutta really suggest the dialectic of historical forces that were operating in the sub-continent of India. The imperial decline had set in and local forces were harnessing their efforts to carve out zones of their own influence. The English had a foothold in the west – in Bombay. In Madras in the south they had a stronghold from where they managed their settlements in south and central India. They now needed a base in the east preferably in southern Bengal along the course of the river from where their sea-board link with Madras could be maintained. Since the Portuguese were removed from the Bay of Bengal it was now within the reach of the English to forge a link between Madras and Calcutta. The British attention was thus roving around territories adjacent to the seaboard that now lay open for whoever took the sea into confidence.

The foundation of Calcutta resulted out of this – truly an outcome of the logic of situations of the time. The emergence of the Marathas under Shivaji destabilized the entire course of the Mughal empire and led to the fall of Surat. Prospects of commerce in the west had dwindled. Commerce in India now looked up to the east. The English Company adjusted with time. The Atlas authors wrote

“The East India Company was trying to expand its commerce in Bengal. With all the support from Emperor Aurangzeb, the Company faced problems and had to pay taxes and met the demands of the local customs officers. Due to the above circumstances, the Company had to take decision to protect themselves by force for which a fortified settlement was necessary. Thus Hooghly was selected for this purpose. But hostilities broke out between the Mughals and the Company, and the latter were pushed out of this place to a site near the mouth of the river. Kalabaria south of Howrah and Hijli in Midnapur district were the other abandoned sites of the English settlements in Bengal.”<sup>62</sup>

Thus the logic of trade and demands of security combined to create the necessity of a new settlement in Bengal. Therefore, it cannot be said that Job Charnock’s arrival here was ‘chance-directed’ and Calcutta’s foundation was ‘chance-erected’. Efforts to find a site in southern Bengal were the outcome of a deliberate choice. Our authors write

“In 1687, Job Charnock, a Company agent and chief of the English factory at Cassimbazar initiated negotiations and secured permission for the English to return to Sutanuti, a site on the eastern bank of River Hooghly. Job Charnock arrived on 22<sup>nd</sup> December, 1686 while English

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62. *Ibid.*

Settlers arrived at this village on 20<sup>th</sup> March 1686. *This was in a way the origin of this great city.*" (Italics ours)

Thus very broadly the Atlas historians are within the precincts of traditional interpretations about the origin of Calcutta. The antiquity of the city does not go beyond the arrival of Job Charnock in and around the city. Our historians do not deny that Calcutta was a flourishing settlement prior to the coming of Job Charnock. But the momentum of a new foundation came only after the official arrival of the English in the city. This point has been explained by our historians thus :

"However, it is claimed that by then 'Calcutta was an important centre of production and commerce with several villages filled with cloth manufacturers when Charnock set his mind on the site. Nevertheless the hostility between the Mughals and the Company agents persisted which were stopped after the peace treaty between President and Council of Bombay and the Mughal Emperor in 1690. Job Charnock returned to Bengal in the month of August same year and established an English factory at Sutanuti. *This is considered as the foundation of this city. The exact date is 24<sup>th</sup> August, 1690 A.D.*"<sup>63</sup> (Italics ours)

This is thus, the traditional story of the foundation of Calcutta which is being presented here under a new garb. Its only importance is that it dispels the concept that the foundation of the city was 'chance-erected' and 'chance-directed', as Rudyard Kipling had suggested. It shows that the creation of a new city in eastern India was in the logic of developments of the time. How it gained momentum from contemporary events is made clear by our authors.

"Further, following the rebellion of Sobha Singh a zamindar in the district of Burdwan, the company got an excuse to fortify the factory in 1696, and in 1698, zamindari<sup>64</sup> of the three villages of Sutanuti, Kalikata and Govindpur was granted on a payment of Rs. 1200 to the previous owners. *This was how this great city was born in the seventeenth century.*"<sup>65</sup> (Italics ours)

This is in short the view of the Atlas historians which confirms the contentions of the British imperial view that Calcutta had no antiquity and that it was a creation of the English. This colonial perceptions of the origin of the city has been challenged from many quarters but till date it has not been superseded by any other authentic approach based on facts and interpretations. The old view has been retold by Atlas historians but it has been placed in the context of the

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63. *Ibid.*

64. There is a great doubt among historians whether it was the right of zamindari or talukdari. For details see Ranjit Sen, *Metamorphosis of the Bengal Polity (1700-1793)*, Rabindra Bharati University, Calcutta, 1987, p. 20, note 10

65. *Ibid.*

English imperial drive in the east. Calcutta was the outcome of the exigencies of time. History and the needs of the British empire both contributed to the making of them.

**VIII. *The Colonial and Post Colonial Views Reconciled : A Via Media Approach by Pradip Sinha.***

Pradip Sinha believes that the colonial cities of Bombay , Calcutta and Madras had antecedents that predate their origin to a period long before the coming of the Europeans. He writes

“Each of these cities [Calcutta, Bombay and Madras] had a black town from the earliest stages of its growth. Was it not, to an extent, a continuation of traditional urbanism, meaning thereby the complex attributes of pre-colonial port cities, riverine emporia and the regional urban centres ? could we not detect a segment of Surat, of Delhi’s Chandni Chowk, and of a traditional town in Bengal like so many period pieces in the spatial arrangement of, say, late 18<sup>th</sup> or early 19<sup>th</sup> century Calcutta ? Could we not still wonder, looking at the traditionally most organized Muslim sector in Calcutta, whether it was a silhouette of a Mughal town ?”<sup>66</sup>

This perception of a shadow of a Mughal town only shows that the Islamic urbanity in Bengal even in its process of decay did not suffer a disjuncture altogether. Long ago Bholanath Chunder saw Delhi’s Chandni Chowk replete in Chitpur<sup>67</sup>, one of the Muslim inhabited parts of old Calcutta. Chunder’s vision was essentially a nationalist vision that wanted to see a national mind persistently inherent in all British innovations. Pradip Sinha has apparently no shade of a nationalist but his vision seems never to have lost links with India’s past. The traditions of Hindu urbanity at some points of time, he emphasizes, gave over to Islamic traditions and the latter persisted in all marks of colonial innovations in India’s urban history. Islam was an urbanizing force which came from west and central Asia and took over from the Hindu-Buddhist-Jain urban tradition that was slowly yielding itself to the incoming thrust.<sup>68</sup> The penetration

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66. Pradip Sinha *Calcutta In Urban History*, Firma KLM Private Ltd., Calcutta, 1978, Introduction, p. xi.

67. Bholanath Chunder, *The Travels of a Hindoo*, London, 1869, Vol. 2, p. 278.

68. Sinha writes : “Islam, or rather peoples professing Islam, and allied peoples from west or central Asia tended to act as a major urbanising force in India for centuries after the serious weakening of the Hindu-Buddhist-Jain urban tradition.” – Sinha, op.cit, p.xii.

of Islam did not allow India “to close in on itself, though the tendency was at a certain point irresistible for a deeply agrarian civilization to consolidate itself on the basis of a village kinship and rural commodity production.”<sup>69</sup> The tradition of rusticity was not over when the British came. Even Islamic impulses could not wholly transform a village economy and its proneness to keep itself clustered around its inner components did not give up even under certain revolutionary trends of time.

Yet incentives of urbanity came from some inner inspirations of the economy itself. Merchants provided these incentives. They were the ones who could carry their aspirations for adventure beyond the pale of village economy. Even they could not break the kinship bonds. The Gujaratis were India’s leading merchants. They built up their network of trade and finance which far transcended the mechanism of village economy. They could not bypass the rural kinship bonds but they created the milieu from which Indian urbanism could take off.<sup>70</sup> Upon such an inoffensive society Islam imposed its thrust. New agglomerations came up, commercial impulses floated and politico-military organizations took shape. Under the influences of Islam political authority tended to veer around military camps so that conscious promotion of urbanization was weak.<sup>71</sup> Yet a bazaar economy based on trade and commerce was promoted from which urbanism got its start.<sup>72</sup> The bazaar economy as the base of urbanism was perfected over years. Sinha writes :

“The medieval west-central Asian bazaar had been taking shape in the Indian context during the period.”

“A further expansion of the bazaar occurred with the expansion of Mughal peace in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century. The control of the traditional Indian business communities continued. But the oriental bazaar derived its structural synthesis from the complex groupings of Arabs, Persians, Jews, Armenians and

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69. Sinha, *op.cit.* , p.xiii

70. *Ibid.*

71. “The centres of Muslim political authority till about 1500 were more like military camps than developing urban centres.” – Sinha, *op.cit.* p. xiv

72. “This essentially Persian – speaking Muslim ethnic group had provided politico-military, cultural and even mercantile leadership at a broad organizational level for some centuries, and this leadership was reflected in some crucial features of urban development such as the cosmopolitan bazaars, caravanserais, *kataras* and the fort-palace complex.”

others acting as middlemen in the trade between India and west-central Asia. They were the traveling merchants – the pedlars. Commercial contacts with Europe during the Mughal period led to further sophistication of the bazaar economy, dominated internally by the *baniyas* of traditional business communities.”<sup>73</sup>

This bazaar- specificity subsumes all Sinha’s arguments regarding the origin and growth of Calcutta. Truly speaking Calcutta had a queer experience of growth through a ‘dualism’.<sup>74</sup> The fort and its ramparts had always served as the nucleus of a new town – the white settlement that as time went on assumed the glamour of an imperial town. Its contrast to it, the agglomerated localities of the natives – often termed by the English as ‘black town’ – flourished with equal vigour so that as the city grew this dichotomy became absorbed in a synthesis of a unity. The functionality of the city spread far and wide and its centre, the fort area became a symbol of embellishment. It was in this situation that the bazaar orientation of the city became the source of its dynamics in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century. We quote below one excerpt from Sinha to make our point clear :

“As the urban area began to grow and spread, the component units tended to coalesce and interpenetrate, retaining at the same time elements of segregation or developing new ones. The process worked in an overall setting of dualism, basically a feature of all colonial cities, between the white and the black town. The phenomenon of dualism, in its origin derived from the pre-colonial trading settlement pattern, reflected the concern of the Europeans with defence and security, manifested in the fort and the fence, and the concern of the ‘natives’ about maintaining their own mode of social and economic organization. In the colonial setting the fort progressively became an embellishment, retaining an accommodational function, and the fence fell down. The black town shed some of its aloofness and drove wedges into the white town . . .”<sup>75</sup>

This was how, Sinha believes, Calcutta grew. In the process of interpenetration Calcutta retained the traits of Islamic township which had a bazar-proclivity as an essential part of its growth. There was one part of Calcutta where there

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73. Sinha, *op.cit.*, p.xv

74. Sinha seems to have a special affinity for this expression of ‘dualism’ which he uses with emphasis to connote his concept of a contrast between the white town and the so called black town that marked the morphology of early Calcutta.

75. Sinha, *op.cit.*, p. 7.

was a direct intervention of European planning. There was another part which did not experience such intervention. Bazar was the spring of life for this part. Sinha notes :

“Urban growth along the Cornwallis Street-College Street axis (in Centrally north Calcutta) was, at least in the initial stage a direct result of the intervention of European planning. The older axis of Chitpur Road and the whole complex of roads (lanes, by-lanes) connected with it were far removed from any such intervention and represented both a historical relic and a base for urban expansion. The original nucleus of this area was the Bazar – the central wholesale market with its ramifications where the ‘Black Merchants’ used to live in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century. By the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century the Bazar had become, for all, practical purposes much more important than the original residential village – Gobindapur, the village of ancestors, the ‘sacred’ village heavy with memories and legends – to which all the old families of Calcutta – the Dattas, the Setts and Basaks, the Tagores and the Debs, among others – trace back their origin . . .”<sup>76</sup>

The centrality of the bazaar in the growth of urbanism in Calcutta was an outcome of the strategic planning of the empire. When the new fort began to be erected it appropriated the entire space of the Gobindapur village. Population was displaced and the whole settlement of the village was shifted to the Burra Bazar area. This gave a new boost to the already existing trend of rallying around the Bazar. Sinha is very categorical on this point.

“The ‘infamy’ of the Bazar settlement” Sinha writes, “was being slowly removed when the dismantling of the whole Gobindapur village by British imperial fiat to make way for the new fort perforce added an altogether new dimension to the great Bazar. The ‘sacred’ ancestral village disappeared as if swallowed by a river inundation and the villagers had to seek new spots for their residences and family deity, Gobindaji, to a spot in Burrabazar . . .”<sup>77</sup>

Thus the imperial need for consolidation around the fort gave incentive to the process of congestion that was thickening around the white town of Calcutta. The congestion increased in the middle of the eighteenth century when the Maratha scare drove good many people to Calcutta where safety was assured. Thus dislodged an agricultural people did not get much of new land where

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76. Sinha, *op.cit.*, pp. 12-13

77. Sinha, *op.cit.*, p. 13. Other evidences say that the population of Govindapur was shifted to areas around Simla or Similia in north Calcutta.

tillage could be resumed. In search of livelihood they thronged around the Bazar. This event synchronized with the fall of Hughli and Murshidabad so that Calcutta and its Bazar became the heartland of business in south Bengal. This trend, Sinha finds, was operative behind the rise to prominence of the Calcutta Bazar.

“With the rapid development of Calcutta’, Sinha goes on, “and the growth of its population – the Maratha scare was one of the major factors in the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century – the continued decline of Hooghly and Murshidabad, the older cities, in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the great Bazar was taking on an increasingly complex and cosmopolitan character.”<sup>78</sup>

This Bazar-gravitation, Sinha thinks, was the major pull factor for the city. There was an intermediate zone between the white and the black town where the Armenians, Portuguese, Greeks, the Muslims built up their habitations. With every increase in momentum the Bazaar of Calcutta penetrated into this cosmopolitan middle, the buffer between the white and the black towns of the city. This penetration, Sinha believes, was crucial for the growth of the city.

“The black town shed some of its aloofness and drove wedges into the white town, so to speak, of the Portuguese, Greeks and Armenians of the pre-colonial period – which was considered a ritually impure zone by the dominant social groups of the black town as is suggested by the original names of the localities of the area.”<sup>79</sup>

The expression ‘pre-colonial period’ is suggestive in the present context. The underlying belief is that the old Islamic conglomeration had existed at the rim of the new town and it was this conglomeration which Sinha, after Bholanath Chunder, seems to find replete in Chitpur.<sup>80</sup> Calcutta, the symbol of colonial urbanity, thus grew along with its contact with the past and the confidence of this town at its core owed much to the Bazar itself, or what Sinha calls ‘the cosmopolitan bazaar network of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century.’<sup>81</sup>

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78. Sinha, *op.cit.*, pp 13-15

79. Sinha, *op.cit.*, pp. 7-8

80. “In the 1860s a Bengali traveller, who wrote some good things among a number of bad ones, observed in the course of his preregrinations in Delhi that the rael Chandni Chowk was not in mid-19<sup>th</sup> century Delhi but on Chitpur Road in Calcutta” – Sinha, *op.cit.*, Intorduction, p. vi.

81. Sinha, *op.cit.*, p. 15.

This is the primary thesis, Sinha propounds, for the genesis of Calcutta's urbanization in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century. This thesis was put forward in 1978.<sup>82</sup> A slightly modified version of this thesis was presented thirteen years later in an essay<sup>83</sup> where the genre of the early thesis was kept in tact with a touch of a little more sophistication in it. In the earlier thesis Calcutta was conceived in the context of a Burra Bazar–centric growth. In the later essay City was imagined as an outcome of a bigger change in global commerce and the changing strategic determinants of the empire and its structure of power.

“Calcutta was basically”, Sinha observes, “a commercial city, a port town where both Europeans and Bengalis<sup>84</sup> had made fortunes in late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The foundation of the British settlement in 1690 was a natural consequence of the shifting centre of gravity of India's external trade from western to southern to eastern India. Bengal was to emerge as the premier trading region of the East India Company in the eighteenth century. When Charnock established a trading settlement on the site of Calcutta in 1690, after two abortive attempts and a brief war with the Mughals (1688-89), his aim was to set up a fortified centre that, along with Bombay and Madras, would complete a triangle of British power.”<sup>85</sup>

The “triangle of British power” in India is much of a part of the strategic history of the British empire in its broad Asiatic setting. In Sinhas story of Calcutta this strategic beginning has little role to play. His emphasis is on trade. He gleefully expands the commercial setting in which, he believes, Calcutta grew. Thus he writes :

“With the expansion of the textile trade, the East India Company began to view Bengal as the rising investment area in India. The Company had long been aware of the productive potential of Bengal and its contribution to international trade. Bengal was India's granary; it supplied India and the world with muslin and silk yarn; it had abundant stock of saltpetre. These last three products

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82. In 1978 was published Pradip Sinha's main work on Calcutta *Calcutta In Urban History*.

83. Pradip Sinha “The Genesis Of A Colonial City” in *Calcutta's Urban Future* edited by Biplab Dasgupta, Mohit Bhattacharya, Dev Kumar Basu, Monidui Chatterjee and Tapan K. Banerjee, Government of West Bengal, Calcutta 1991, pp 1-7

84. Calcutta was a business hub not only of the Bengalis alone but also of the Indians, Armenians and men of other nations as well. To talk of the Bengalis alone will be to present Calcutta in a very narrow spectrum.

85. Sinha, “The Genesis Of a Colonial City.”, p. 1

gave it a paramount importance for the European trading companies.”<sup>86</sup>

Calcutta was spurred by its trade potentialities and Burra Bazar was one area where these potentialities crystallized. It was this Bazar-centricity that eventually did not allow Calcutta to grow along the line of a western city. The breakdown of the buffer zone of the medley population of Armenians, Jews, Portuguese and the central Asian and west Asian Muslims under pressure from a congested black town and the interpenetration of the white and black towns in its eventual developments changed the axis of the city and converted it into a traditional city of India. This may be taken as a very powerful conclusion which underlies all Sinha’s understanding about Calcutta. “By the middle of the eighteenth century Calcutta had advanced quite a distance from a haphazard collection of hamlets towards a traditional type of Indian city.”<sup>87</sup> This is the confidence which fills the core of Sinha’s writings and he tries to put this into the story of the rise of Calcutta in the eighteenth century.

### ***IX. A Post Colonial Outlook : Views of Soumitra Sreemani***

“Calcutta in the middle of the eighteenth century was neither a town nor a village. It was situated half the way from a cluster of villages transforming themselves into a magnificent town.”<sup>88</sup> This is how Soumitra Sreemani assesses the position of Calcutta in the middle of the eighteenth century. This incomplete formation of the city was not due to any absence of a tradition of urbanism in India. The Indian urban centres had enough wealth that could generate momentum for growth in the Mughal period.<sup>89</sup> Administrative necessities also led to the growth of towns.<sup>90</sup> But Sreemani says, “it is unfair to trace its history

86. *Ibid.*

87. Sinha, “Genesis”, p. 5

88. Soumitra Sreemani, *Anatomy of a Colonial Town Calcutta 1756-1794*, Firma KLM Private Ltd. Calcutta, 1994, Preface.

89. “The great expansion of commerce during the Mughal period – to be seen most conspicuously in the manufacturing and marketing of textiles to meet both an internal and an external demand – inevitably brought increased wealth to the major urban centres of the country” – T. Raychaudhuri and I habib ed. *The Cambridge Economic History of India*, Vol. I, Longman, India, 1984, p. 441.

90. “Some towns were regularly built for administrative purposes. Shahjahanabad or Delhi, Farrukkabad, Agra, Fatehpur-Sikri may be mentioned in this regard. In Bengal Dakha and then Murshidabad were good examples of such urban growth. Everywhere the zeal of the rulers and unbridled mobilization of resouces on their part helped the towns and cities to flourish” – Sreemani, *op.cit.*, Introduction. p.ix.

on any European model.”<sup>91</sup> Such model was absent in the Mughal tradition and hence when Sinha found the persistence of Mughal elements in Chitpur in Calcutta he had no hesitation to conclude that Calcutta was going the ‘traditional type of Indian city.’ The foundation of Islamic cities was not as expensive and cumbrous as it was in the colonial age.<sup>92</sup> The Mughals being an urban people town-building became a tradition with them.<sup>93</sup> “The ascendancy of the colonial powers”, Sreemani argues, “the English, the French, and the Dutch robbed the Indian towns of the patronage they needed much. Hence the golden age of Mughal town-building met its end during the eighteenth century.”<sup>94</sup>

This view has not been universally accepted by historians. Bayly tells us that the north Indians towns achieved a kind of stability during 1770-1810.<sup>95</sup> Sreemani discounts the view saying that ‘the picture was certainly not clear.’ Even if there were examples of Indian town-building in the eighteenth century the trend was far from being universal. Sreemani propagates the confidence that Calcutta in the eighteenth century did not enjoy the patronage of the rulers. While Murshidabad and Lucknow flourished because of the persuasion of their rulers Shujauddin Khan<sup>96</sup> and Asaf-ud-Daulah<sup>97</sup> Calcutta in the eighteenth century had none to back her. Its birth was afflicted by a crisis. This was a crisis, not explicitly stated by Sreemani, was born of the internal revolutions of the bodypolitic of Bengal in the middle of the eighteenth century. Sreemani writes

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91. Sreemani., *op.cit.* p.x.

92. “On surface the setting up of military posts, *thanas* with an imperial deputy appears to be a simple matter. Even where a new town for the purpose was to be founded the procedure was equally uncomplicated. Forty *namazis*, a central mosque and a central bazaar was all that according to Muslim legists was needed to found a town.” – H.K. Naqvi, *Urbanization and Urban Centres under the Great Mughals*, Simla, 1971, pp. 4-5.

93. Sreemani, *op.cit.* p. x

94. Sreemani, *op.cit.*, p.xi Sreemani makes this statement on the basis of an observation of Irfan Habib. Sreemani writes: “Irfan Habib’s computations prove the decline of urban population during the period under study. According to him the percentage of such population was only 13 in the year 1800 while in 1600 the figure might have been 15” – pp. xi-xii. For Habib’s view read *The Cambridge Economic History of India*, vol.I, p. 169.

95. C.A. bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazars, North Indian Society in the age of British Expansion, 1770-1870*, Cambridge, 1980, chapt. 3.

96. Shujauddin ruled from 1727 to 1739.

97. Asaf-ud-daulah ruled at Lucknow from 1775 to 1797.

“The crisis was an all-pervading phenomenon. It engulfed the entire body politic of Bengal and the entire economy on which a society in transition had come to rest. It involved the confidence of the ruler and the ruled and it was a crisis at the administrative level of the rule of the Nawab as well as the East India Company.”<sup>98</sup>

Starting from a concept of crisis Sreemani arrives at the conclusion that “Calcutta’s growth was not in the least a natural one because the crisis had beset its scope to grow as an urban centre.” “The colonial masters”, Sreemani goes on “had no interest to mobilize fund nor did they have any articulated policy for urbanising India. Hence the general benevolence of the Mughals towards their subjects were (was) totally absent during the colonial regime.”<sup>99</sup> Highlighting thus that the public role in urban development was inadequate Sreemani argues, almost as a logical next step to his thesis, that private enterprise was largely responsible for promoting the city in the eighteenth century.

“The result (of the lack of public initiative),” Sreemani argues, “was that initiative was left to private individuals who invested their labour and wealth for the promotion of the town. The Mughal phenomenon was certainly not available in Calcutta in the second half of the eighteenth century. Calcutta did not even witness any favour to the builders which the East India Company distributed in Madras. As a result Madras experienced a building boom.<sup>100</sup> But Indians did a little, if not much, to compensate their alien masters’ lack of initiative in town-building.”<sup>101</sup>

Sreemani is emphatic on the point that the ascendancy of the colonial rule first led to the decline of Mughal urban tradition and what we see as a colonial tradition later got into start initially by the private enterprise of the Indians. Captioned as *The Rise of Colonial Power and Urban Decline*.<sup>102</sup> Sreemani’s arguments make up what may be called a critique of colonial urbanization in India. His thesis is a mass of stray observations which are justified by their inner cohesion. “It is often said”, writes Sreemani, “that a steady decline of

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98. Sreemani, *op.cit.*, p.xii

99. Sreemani, *op.cit.*, p.xiii

100. Sreemani makes this observation on the basis of the following: Narayani Gupta , *Towers, Tanks and Temples: Some Aspects of Urbanism in South India: Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century* Occasional Paper Series : Urban History Association of India, Amritsar, 1983, p.20.

101. Sreemani, *op.cit.* pp. xiv-xv

102. Sreemani, *op.cit.* p.xiv.

Indian towns coincided with the ascendancy of the colonial powers in the country and only Ahmedabad could survive.” A more meaningful statement then comes in : “By this way, the political and military hegemony of the colonial powers could change the entire calculus of town-growth in India.”<sup>103</sup> Along with militarism came trade and Calcutta’s growth as an urban centre was submerged under interests of trade. “Infrastructures could be built up only as appendage to trade” – Sreemani wrote. Beyond Calcutta he finds how the negative role of the colonial regime destroyed the potentiality of India’s urban growth.

“When the population of Lucknow was declining steadily”, Sreemani observes, “the Company expended ‘1.9 million rupees or 75 per cent of the entire budget of the PWD for the province’ in military constructions.”<sup>104</sup> Similarly, the finest buildings of Delhi after the rebellion of 1857 were demolished for the same purposes.”<sup>105</sup>

This, Sreemani thinks, were signs of de-urbanization that became marked with the advent of the British rule in India. Calcutta, of course, did not suffer the same fate but her growth was stunted. This was because of the fact that “capital was seldom available for the promotion of those three villages into a town or the town into a city.” “Whatever elements of town-building were available in this context of capital shortage was either done by private enterprise or if at all done at public level, it was done as half-hearted effort losing its spirit before reaching the point of maturity.”<sup>106</sup>

What Sreemani wants to drive home is that the basic incentive for town-building was not there in Calcutta in the eighteenth century. This does not, however, mean that the city did not grow at all. In the broad thrust of his arguments he agrees with Pradip Sinha that the birth of the city was not entirely due to the effort of the English. A very powerful tradition of town-building was already there in Bengal when the British took over. Sinha believed that the relics of the Mughal town-building persisted in Calcutta in the form of the great bazaar – the Burra Bazar – in the vicinity of the white town around the

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103. Ibid.

104. Sreemani makes this observation on the basis of the following : V.T. Oldenburg, *Peril, Pestilence, and Perfidy. The Making of Colonial Lucknow 1856-57*, Michigan, 1985, p. 12. Pp. 26-34 & pp. 50-51

105. Sreemani, *op.cit.* p.xv. He makes this observation on the basis of the following: Narayni Gupta, *Delhi Between two Empires, 1803-1931: Society, Government and Urban Growth*, New Delhi, 1981 p.27

106. Sreemani, *op.cit.*, p. 37.

Fort or in the replica of the Meena Bazar of Delhi so glaringly replete in Chitpur even in the nineteenth century. What is meant by this is that in its birth Calcutta had little affinity with a European model and then, when born, was eventually absorbed in the vortex of Indian bazaar economy. Sreemani says that the town planning was done essentially on colour lines<sup>107</sup> – a point which Sinha carefully detailed long before Sreemani wrote his book. What is important is that this division of the city into colour segments was not a later imposition. It was a congenital attribute which was broken, as Sinha says, when the over-congested black town thrust itself into the rims of the white town. Sinha looks into the phenomenon as a Calcutta specific event where as Sreemani finds it to be a colonial attribute for Indian town planning. He says that the study of Lewandowsky on Madras one of the earliest colonial towns in India, admirably proves his point. Lewandowsky says, Sreemani quotes :

“The wealthiest and most prestigious residents of the city resided in closest proximity to the inner Fort, containing the factory house. White town developed on the north side of the Fort to house the Europeans, Eurasian and native Christian population . . . Black Town, the extension of Madrasapatam, was the residential quarter for the city’s indigenous inhabitants.”<sup>108</sup>

Lewandowsky’s observations must not lead us to think that Calcutta’s birth was through a process that was much anticipated by Madras. The birth of this city on the Ganga had its own geopolitics in which global commerce and the fiscal need of the Company converged into an urge for territorial base. As the seventeenth century was drawing to its close this urge had taken a definite shape. The Portuguese had already been driven out and the entire sea-board lay open for

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107. Sreemani Writes (p.xvi): “Hence all the towns were divided strictly on colour basis”. He makes this statement on the basis of the following: A.D. King, *Colonial Urban Development : Culture, Social Power and Engiornment*, London, 1976, p. 17 and p. 33 Sreemani writes : “Calcutta presented a city that was basically divided into two parts – oe housed the colonial masters and the men of the breed and the other housed the locals. Calcutta was divided into ‘white town’ populated by the Europeans and the ‘black town’, populated by the Indians.” – Soumitra Sreemani, *The Gangetic West Bengal A Seventeenth-Nineteenth Century Survey*, New Central Book Agency (P) Ltd., London, Delhi, Kolkata, 2011, p. 117.

108. In K.N. Chaudhuri and C.J. Dewey ed. *Economy and Society: Essays in Indian Economic and Social History*, New Delhi, 1979, p.314. Madurai has been called a ceremonial city by the author. See Sreemani, *op.cit.*, p.xvi note.

the adventurous British to build their own axis between Madras and any foothold they might get in the Mughal territory of Bengal. Calcutta owes its birth to this and also some other aspects of the contemporary geopolitics of eastern India. Both in circumstances and nature Calcutta's birth was unique to itself.

Sreemani finds no great story in the rise of Calcutta in the eighteenth century. Calcutta's gradual emergence into prominence began, he says, only in the later part of the century.<sup>109</sup> From the beginning the city failed to attract high caste Hindus so that the population of the city was a medley of lower people – the cultivators, the weavers and the fishermen. Brahmins were mostly absent from the city. This robbed the city of its social dynamics. In a pale social ambience there was no incentive for the government to spend. Public frugality and social insipidity marked the early growth of Calcutta. Sreemani writes:

“Calcutta's urbanization presents a unique history. The Company refrained from investing any amount from its coffer though the said coffer was built-up with the money collected here by various means. Even prior to 1757, in face of the Maratha raids in the 1740s the Company had mobilized the residents within its area to contribute towards digging the Maratha Ditch . . . this was the single defence barrier of its kind in the entire province. Ultimately the protective arrangement helped to build up confidence within the minds of the people.”<sup>110</sup>

Because of security which the English settlement in Calcutta provided population of the city rose very quickly. Transactions increased and bazars grew up.

“The bazaars”, writes Sreemani, “were the most lucrative investments that produced regular rents. Calcutta in the late eighteenth century roughly grew up surrounding a number of such bazaars, some of which still exist in the same places as they did more than two hundred years ago.”<sup>111</sup>

This bazaar orientation of the city was essentially a Mughal tradition and the growth of the city as a colonial town did not deviate from this axis of a medieval township. Calcutta's origin was a slow process and if Sinha and Sreemani are to be believed the masters of the town at the initial stage of its

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109. “From the later part of the eighteenth century Calcutta grew up as the future metropolis of India and this prospect generated varieties of employments. Hence the number of people gathering in Calcutta and its near-by places also grew.” – Sreemani, *The Gangetic West Bengal*, p. 113.

110. Sreemani. *The Gangetic West Bengal*, p. 117.

111. *Ibid.*



suitable hinterland, Calcutta had been the ideal choice.”<sup>115</sup> This emphasis on trade overlooks the point that the choice of Calcutta was made after a third landing on the site in 1690 when after the war with the Mughals the English traders and their Company needed a foothold in Bengal away from the immediate clutch of the Mughal *faujdar* at Hughli. Our historian provides no space to this strategic consideration and trade to him was overriding, the most predominant as an underlying force for Calcutta. He writes :

“The location of Calcutta at the head of the great riverine system of the lower Gangetic valley placed it in an unassailable position as an entrepot of Northern India. Calcutta, the British trading centre’s march to steady growth depended on trade, both overseas and inland. In course of time, both economic and political gravity shifted to Calcutta which grew into a primate city. In fact within a century after the foundation of English East India Company’s settlement in India, Calcutta became the capital of the British India and the second city of British Empire, ranking next to London.”<sup>116</sup>

Thus Calcutta was to be the station for traders. A control over an entrepot, a command over the river, the trade artery that connected their station with a vast hinterland spread as far north as the river was navigable and finally an axis for overseas trade manoeuvres were some of the major points on which the choice of Calcutta was anchored. But the choice was not innovative. Calcutta was not an empty space where the English Company had created a settlement. A buoyant maritime tradition was already there around Calcutta. The archivist interpretation has a tone of sanguinity in its version.

“But Calcutta did not originate in a vacuum.” It says. Then it goes further on to say : “It had been a part of age old rich maritime tradition of South Bengal. Gangaridae, Tamralipti, Satgaon predated Calcutta as major ports of eastern India since the ancient times. Calcutta also followed the legacy of this tradition.”<sup>117</sup>

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115. *Ibid.*

116. *Ibid.*

117. *Select Documents*, p.xiv

In promoting Calcutta the Company had never been a vacuum-filler. It was acting in line with history. But the English had never been the unconscious tool of history. The choice of Calcutta was never made in a fit of absent-mindedness.

“Again Job Charnock”, the archivist version goes on, “did not land in Calcutta on 24 August, 1690 in a fit of absent mindedness. Charnock came to India in 1656, when records show him as working as a junior member of the Bay Council of the English East India company at the salary of twenty pounds. 24<sup>th</sup> August, 1690 was the official date when the settlement came into existence, as the Council accepted the report of Charnock to establish its settlement in the area which was Sutanuti, Dihi Kolkata and Gobindapur, which was then leased from the Mughal Government of the time on annual rent.”<sup>118</sup>

From Charnock’s arrival at the Bay in 1656 to the founding of the British settlement in 1690 there was a period of more than thirty years when Charnock must have got time to survey the locality and neighbourhood of Calcutta on the basis of which his report to the Council was framed. The rich maritime tradition must have come into the notice of Charnock because the tradition was there.

“Even before Charnock’s landing”, our historian writes, “Kalikata had attracted rich Bengali trading communities like the Seths and the Basaks. Even the Dutch had come down to Calcutta. The English East India Company took a cool and calculated decision through a period of trial and error. But the British had to overcome a series of encounters at the initial stage since the days of Emperor Aurangzeb. Battles over Calcutta continued for more than six decades.”<sup>119</sup>

The feasibility of holding a station in Calcutta, according to our archivist school, was worked out on the basis of knowledge gained from prior reconnaissance of the entire region. The presence of the Setts and the Basaks and their entire gamut of trade based on the south Bengal commercial network was certainly an allurements for the English traders. Once they settled after a war with the Mughals their station became a fort-centric settlement which eventually grew into a citadel of power for a commercial Company that was now bent on acquiring territory for itself. A traders’ station eventually became a garrison town. Trade and military power thus merged to provide what may be called the real basis for the rise of Calcutta. To this the archivist school unmistakably draws our attention :

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118. *Ibid.*

119. *Ibid.*

“The Fort William became the matrix of Company’s trading enterprise and defence, comprising the whole settlement of Sutanuti, Dihi Kolkata and Gobindapur. The Fort emerged as the symbol of Company’s onward development, when Nawab Sirajuddaula’s pre-emptive attack was designed to curb the Company’s drive to encroach upon the Nawab’s sovereign authority. After 20<sup>th</sup> June 1756, Siraj named the whole area as Alinagar. On 2<sup>nd</sup> January 1757, it was named Calcutta by Colonel Clive.”<sup>120</sup>

This fort-centricity overshadowed trade as a driving factor behind the rise of Calcutta. With the fort as the centre of strength emerged the aspiration for territory and power. Now the English Company and the Bengal Nawab faced each other with irreconcilable interests. The battle of Palashi was fought. Our historian writes :

“The Battle of Plassey(1757), which the Company maneuvered to win, was a skirmish. But it was politically important. More decisive battle was fought at Buxar, which was followed by the grant of Diwani powers to the English East India Company by Mughal Emperor Shah Alam in 1765. This grant gave the Company a farman to collect land revenue of Bengal Subah.”

This rounds up the story of the rise of Calcutta. The archivist school did not excavate any new fact in the story of the rise of the city. It only showed how trade eventually merged with ambitions of territory and power to create a new station for the English. In doing this it sets the story against the assertion that Calcutta was not a discovery of the English Company and their finding a station in Calcutta was very much in line with the tradition of the maritime culture of lower Bengal. Calcutta was not created in a vaccum. Its rise was set in tradition espoused by the British with a kind of firmness not known before.

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120. *Ibid.*

*Second Version*

That Calcutta was set in the maritime tradition of Bengal and was eventually lifted by the English into an entrepot linked by a navigable river system to the sprawling hinterland of north India was one part of the thesis from the archives. Different from this idyllic version there is the other part of the thesis which gives us a more pragmatic approach to the history of Calcutta's rise.<sup>121</sup> It says

“It may be said that the growth of Calcutta, Kolikata or Kolkata is mostly a colonial phenomenon. This makes the city an ideal case study of implementation of western urban ideas in an eastern context. That the city was to play the role of the nerve centre of a modern day empire and the concern of the British for their physical well being in a completely different climate were important factors in the growth and development of the city and its infrastructure. We shall see that London and other English cities served as role models in many developments in Calcutta.”<sup>122</sup>

Three factors are thus significant in the archivists' versions in motivating Calcutta's rise: application of 'western urban ideas' in the making of an eastern town, the role assigned to Calcutta – and not to Bombay and Madras – as 'the nerve centre of a modern day empire', and the sensitivity of the English to their physical wellbeing and existence in an alien climate. These factors came to play only when the initial stage of the rise of the town was over. Spurred by an urge for security and seclusion in a hostile environment the English in the initial stage confined themselves to the inoffensive position of traders. Thus Calcutta was at the outset a trading centre that outgrew its circumscribed bearing into a functionally spacious role under the influence of a spreading Empire. The archivists' version unfolds thus :

“Initially Calcutta was a trading post and its physical safety from the Marathas, the Nawab of Murshidabad and even competing traders from Europe was a real factor which influenced its early growth. Later the city enjoyed the prime position in the scheme of the Company and then the Crown-in-Parliament. Apart from its military and administrative importance Calcutta rapidly emerged as the main hub of British economic interests – trade, industries, mining, tea and timber and point of entry to vast area including the Himalayas.”<sup>123</sup>

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121. The second version of the 'Thesis From The Archives' is available in the section titled "Infrastructural Growth" written by Sarmistha De and Bidisha Chakraborty available in *Select Documents*, pp. 93-110.

122. *Select Documents*, p. 93.

123. *Ibid.*

Calcutta's real rise thus lay in its politico-economic functions both as a trade centre and as a nerve centre of the Empire. The geo-politics of the rise of Calcutta was essentially motivations for the rise of the town in its initial stage. The growth of its majesty as an imperial city was a later day phenomenon.

The thesis of the archivists in two versions shows that the claim for predating Calcutta as a town before the colonial rule has no archival support. Calcutta was certainly there but only as a village in the company of its two neighbouring partners Sutanati and Govindapur. *The Sutanati Hat* which was later renamed as *Burra Bazar* was a thriving business hub that had not assumed the formation of a town. Yet 'town' was a general appellation which was applied to denote a flourishing village. A.K. Ray writes:

"In early times it was the practice to talk of any village that could boast of a *hat* or mart as a town. The Embassy headed by Surman asked for the zamindaries of '38 towns'. These so-called 'towns' were as we know, no better than very ordinary riparian villages. We further know that Sutanuti, Govindapur, and Calcutta were, from the earliest days of the Company's settlement called 'towns', although they were, as we have seen, but petty villages in Charnock's time. We have further seen that Holwell called the four villages Baniapooker, Tangrah, Dhallanda, and Pagladanga 'out-towns' of Calcutta, though according to his own statement, they could together boast of no more than 228 bighas of rent-paying land. We also know that after the excavation of the Maratha Ditch in 1742, it became the fashion to describe it as the inland boundary of the 'town', though, as we have already learnt, the Mahratta Ditch has never represented the actual inland boundary of the Town of Calcutta."<sup>125</sup>

From this it may be inferred that the pre-colonial status of Calcutta was as much that of a riparian village mart as any of the villages mentioned by A.K. Ray was. Taking this as a cue in our study it may be argued that the archivists' thesis while admitting the pre-colonial existence of Calcutta as a settlement does not contribute to the conception that it was a well-developed formation set on its way to a full-grown town. It confirmed certain major points as factors in promoting Calcutta's rise to prominence. The present study sums up the following points.

1. Calcutta was no discovery of the English and it did not rise in a vacuum.
2. It was well set in the maritime tradition of Bengal.
3. Its origin was from a humble position of a trading centre.
4. Its later majesty was the outcome of its emergence as a nerve-centre of an empire
5. It emerged under the impact of application of western urban ideas.
6. In its rise geopolitics playing its role in early days eventually made way for the politico-economic role of the city.
7. Sensitivity of the English to an alien climate.

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125. A.K. Ray, *A Short History of Calcutta*, p. 125.

## ***XI. Was Calcutta Pre-Charnock ?***

### *A. The Views of J.J.A. Campos*

Campos starts with the idea that Calcutta with other cities of south Bengal which flourished later resulted from the coming of the Portuguese followed by other European traders in Bengal. He writes : “Kalikatta (Calcutta) was an insignificant village on the left bank. The towns of Hooghly, Chandernagore, Chinsura, Serampoare and Barrackpore did not even exist in name. They flourished only as European settlements.”<sup>126</sup> The only town of some significance at that time was Satgaon through which *muslins* of Dakha were shipped to Europe in the sixteenth century.<sup>127</sup> This port was situated on the river Saraswat in the western part of Bengal. This river branched off from the river Hughli below Tribeni and joined it higher up.<sup>128</sup> “This historic port was, however, destined to decline on the advent of the Portuguese, chiefly because the river Hooghly diverted its current through the main channel, and caused the silting up of the Saraswati which became unsuitable for navigation.”<sup>129</sup>

The fall of Satgaon led to the emergence of the ports and cities of south Bengal. Calcutta emerged in the train of this. “The river Hooghly was not navigable for larger vessels higher up than the Adi-Ganga (Tolly’s Nollah) but lighter craft could transport to satgaon and other places on either bank of the river the goods which the Portuguese disembarked at Garden Reach.”<sup>130</sup> If Satgaon fell, one can assume, the region around Garden Reach would flourish because the river up to that point was navigable by both large and light crafts. Large Portuguese ships reached up to Betor near Shibpur, Howrah and from there smaller crafts carried the cargoes to Satgaon. These ships were laden with rice, cloth, lacca, sugar, pepper, oil and many other merchandises. Campos writes :

“In Betor the goods were stored in thatched houses of straw or bamboo and were either sold or exchanged in big local markets or taken to other places. Gradually these goods swelled the markets of Calcutta and Chitpore, which were then very insignificant villages. It is to these thatched houses and villages which as Frederici and Manrique say, were made and unmade by the Portuguese when they went back, that can be traced the origin of the great city Job Charnock founded.”<sup>131</sup>

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126. J.J.A. Campos, *History of the Portuguese in Bengal, with Maps and Illustrations*, with an introduction by F.J. Monahan, Asian Educational Services, New Delhi, 1998, p. 23.

127. J.J.A., Campos, *op.cit.*, p. 22

128. *Ibid.*

129. *Ibid.*

130. J.J.A. Campos, *op.cit.* p. 23

131. J.J.A. Campos, *op.cit.* p. 114.

This is a new insight Campos had offered us. The entire region of Garden Reach Calcutta and Chitpur basked in the commercial radiation of Satgaon and Betor. As a matter of fact these two port towns were functioning as entrepôts or the main centres of a distribution network. Bettor, Chitpur and Sutanati were the major supply centres of the Portuguese goods that were brought to Satgaon.

“It is in these marts of Betor, Chitpur and Sutanuti”, writes Campos, “which were supplied by Portuguese goods that can be seen the first glimmerings of the great commercial importance that Calcutta attained many years later. .”

The idea behind this argument was that Calcutta emerged under radiations from Portuguese trade. Campos cites C.R. Wilson in support of his argument. C.R. Wilson remarked

“It is under their (Portuguese) commercial supremacy that the place which we know by the name of Calcutta first began to have any importance; it is to them that we are chiefly indebted for our first reliable information about Hughli and its markets.”<sup>132</sup>

#### B. Views of R.J. Minney

In a chapter entitled ‘The Birth of Calcutta’ R.J. Minney writes :

“Calcutta proper centres round Dalhousie Square. It was ‘Calcutta’ before Job Charnock ever came here; and when he came, in 1698 he went past it, and turned into a little creek, that ran where now is Hastings Street, the haunt of the lawyers. The creek coursed its way through unkempt fields and was overhung by a luxuriance of tropical vegetation, while all around tall trees abounded. All that is left of the creek today is the name of Creek Row, through which it once flowed. The creek meandered down to Sealdah and there at the corner of what is now Bowbazar, and was then merely an uncared –for Maidan nursing some straggling *bustis* stood a tree, bigger than all the others, affording a welcome shade. Here, thought Charnock, we shall make our home”<sup>133</sup>

This is how the English settlement in Calcutta began. Calcutta was pre-Charnock and it was confined to a small part at the river-basin later known as Dalhousie Square. Charnock did not land here. He moved further east through the creek and landed at a place near Sealdah.<sup>134</sup> The ‘luxuriance of tropical vegetation’ was one major attraction of the area. In the midst of this there was a habitation where weavers lived.

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132. Quoted from C.R. Wilson’s *Early Annals of the English in Bengal*, by Campos, *op.cit.*, p. 114.

133. R.J. Minney, *Round About Calcutta*, 1922, Humphrey Milford, Oxford University Press, London, Bombay Madras Calcutta, p. 9.

134. This area was known in early times as *Srigaldaha*.

“Some cotton workers lived around”, writes Minney, “and nearby was a cotton market. A factory for the Hon’ble the East India Company was accordingly erected at this site and Charnock and his fellows built themselves houses. This spot was later to be incorporated in a growing Calcutta. As yet it was merely the village of Suta (Cotton) nuttee”<sup>135</sup>

What is noticeable in the description is that Minney shows no interest in excavating pre-Charnock Calcutta so that the city remains broadly to be a post-Charnock phenomenon. Calcutta was the last in a series of port-cities to grow in South Bengal – Tamralipti, Satgaon and Hughli<sup>136</sup> and this has been the thrust point of many Indian writers<sup>137</sup> who wrote on Calcutta. Minney is one of the major subscribers to the Charnock-thesis relating to the origin of Calcutta and he dramatically highlighted the point that Calcutta emerged not from Calcutta proper but from Sutanati, the land of the weavers. Charnock sailed passed what Minney describes as “It was Calcutta” – the site on the river bank termed later as Dalhousie Square.

With this landing of Charnock Calcutta was not founded. Minne writes :

“But here they did not stay long. Trouble with the Indian administrators forced them to abandon their homes and proceed to Madras where existence was more secure, because of numbers. A few months later, however hearing of dissensions that distracted the Indian authorities in Bengal, Charnock and his fellows returned, landing this time in Calcutta, then merely a cluster of huts known as Dihi-Calcutta, scattered around tanks, one of which was later to be made the centre of a Park and is now preserved for us in the heart of Dalhousie Square”<sup>138</sup>

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135. R.J. Minney, *op.cit.*, p. 9

136. For further information see Dr. P.C. Bagchi, *Calcutta Past and Present*, Calcutta University Press, Calcutta, 1939, ch. I, entitled “History of the Foundation of Calcutta”

137. This was precisely the point on which the Hon’ble High Court of Calcutta based its judgment that Calcutta has no founder and no date of birth. .

138. Minney, *op. cit.*, pp. 9-10.

it is with this landing of Charnock that Calcutta becomes prominent. The previous landing, says Minney was on the bank of the Creek. This landing was on the bank of the river, slightly away from the neighbourhood of the Salt Lake. Whether this landing in Calcutta was a chance landing Minney does not specify. His focus is on the challenges which Charnock and his team faced in Calcutta this time.

“Charnock and his companions noticed”, he writes, “that their factory and home at Sutanuttee had been destroyed during their absence, and perhaps they thought it wiser to build nearer the river, instead of on the banks of the Creek as before. Possibly, too, they thought Sutanuttee was too near the Salt Lake which, in those times, exuded a most insanitary odour”.

“In their barges they lived for some days until they built themselves some huts similar to those in which the Indian villagers lived around their tanks; and then these English settlers took themselves wives among the people. Charnock married a Hindu widow whom he is said to have romantically rescued from a suttee pyre, and the daughter of this union was destined to be Lady Eyre, wife of one of the first Governors of Calcutta”<sup>139</sup>

This is how the English settlement of Calcutta began. Minney considers this to be ‘The Birth of Calcutta’. The idea behind this is that a village was moved into action only by the presence of the English. It was their presence which gave a boost to population.

“There were not many Europeans in Calcutta at that date, probably under fifty, but in twenty years a traveller computes their numbers at 1,500. If Eurasians (known as Portuguese) and Armenians and Indians are included there were as many as 12,000 people at that time”<sup>140</sup>

As population grew the town got its territorial dynamism. People needed space for living. The Europeans tried to avoid congestion. New fields were opened for residence. The town expanded.

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139 Minney, *op.cit.*, p. 10

140. *Ibid*

“As the city grew people began to go further afield, crossed the creek, cleared away jungle and built themselves palatial houses on Chowringhee, then merely a pilgrim track through the jungles.”<sup>141</sup>

This is how a village was gradually animated into a city. But its birth was a long drawn process. It took nearly half of the eighteenth century to take a proper shape. The Maratha invasions in the middle of the eighteenth century helped the English to organize and reinforce their fort and place cannon brought from Madras on river fronts to ward off an attack. When Mir Jafar came to power he offered huge restitution money to the English. With these the city took areal start.<sup>142</sup>

Minney gives us a very straight jacket understanding of the birth of Calcutta. The only point he wants to make is that Calcutta’s growth was an outcome of the English arrival in this part of the century which turned sleepy villages into settlements with life. This is a very common place observation and contributes much to the view that Calcutta emerged under the auspices of the English with others having little claim to its awakening.

### C. Views of S.M. Ray

The view that Calcutta has no historical tradition has been the thrust point of another historian S.M. Ray. In discussing ‘The Rise of the Christian Power in Bengal’ he writes :

“Calcutta, the second city of the British Empire, can boast of no historical tradition like many of the big cities in India. This English city had a very humble beginning and grew up out of the union of a group of river-side villages full of swampy lands, salt water lakes and jungles verging the

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141. *Ibid*

142. Minney, *op.cit.*, p. 11

Sunderban and having all the unhealthy and unwholesome atmosphere of that big forest”<sup>143</sup>

There are two thrust points in this observation. First Calcutta was an ‘English city’ and it had no great ancestry save a ‘humble beginning’. Secondly, it emerged as a part of the ‘unwholesome’ forest region of the Sundarbans. It means that its town potentiality was not great at the time of its origin. Given its lurid topographical background the growth of the town could not be simply from a union of three villages of Sutanati, Govindapur and Kalikata. Its constituents would have been wider than this. Some other towns and villages went into its making. Prominent among them were Chitpur, Salkia, Kalighat and Betor.<sup>144</sup> It certainly does not mean that all these constituents became physically parts of the city. They created the ambience in which the city grew. In the eighteenth century at least Chitpur was a developed village with all the potentialities of a town for a faujdar was posted there. As a matter of fact the two faujdaries of Chitpur and Hughli were the only two major outposts of the Mughals in southern Bengal that kept a watch over Calcutta under the governance of the English East India Company. In the fifteenth century, in the days of Sultan Hussain Shah when the Bengali Brahmin Bipradas wrote his *Manasamangal* Calcutta was a developed village but not very much on the road to township. It gathered so little an importance as to get a simple mention in the text. Bipradas’s observation is often summed up so as to find out the ancestry of Calcutta. But little is known from it save the fact that it gets a mention where as Sutanati does not although it was an important cotton mart in later years.<sup>145</sup>

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143. S.M.Ray, *Introduction to Bengal with Fuller Treatment of Calcutta*, Oriental Agency, Calcutta, p. 1

144. “The three commonly recognized of these group of villages are Kalikata, Sutanuti and Govindapur the other constituents playing part in the development of the city being Chitpur, Salkia, Sanctuary of Kalighat and Betor.” – *Ibid*

145. “Saptagram on the right bank of the Ganges between Tribeni and Bandel, is the great port. Lower down the river Betor, on the same side, is a large market – town; Chitpore and Calcutta are neighbouring villages passed just before reaching Betor. Govindapur and Sutanuti do not exist; Kalighat is a small sanctuary claiming just a bare notice.” – cited by S.M. Ray, *op.cit.* , pp 1-2.

The real start of the rise of Calcutta began with the coming of the Portuguese. When they first came to Bengal in the sixteenth century the two great centres of trade in the country were Chittagong in the east and Satgaon in the west. "The former soon lost its advantageous position being the haunting place of 'Feringi' outlaws and pirates, adventurers and fugitives from Goa and its dependencies. But Satgaon, which has now dwindled into an insignificant group of huts in the vicinity of the town of Hooghly, was more fortunate. The river was easily navigable by sea-going ships, as far as the Adi Ganga (the modern Tolly's Nullah) which was then the outlet to the sea."<sup>146</sup>

The Portuguese predominance in the Chittagong sea was disastrous for the stability of the area. The east sank and the subsequent comers among the Europeans turned to the west. The navigability of the river much up to the interior of the country allowed the region of south-western Bengal to grow. No part of the Bengal sea was untraversed by the Portuguese. At the outset the entire trade network of Satgaon, Betor and Hughli benefited from the Portuguese trade. "Garden Reach was the anchoring place of the Portuguese and Betor was the place where the merchants of Satgaon gathered on the arrival of ships from Goa. *Here then may be traced the nucleus of the future city of Calcutta.*"<sup>147</sup>

Bettor was thus an entrepot where a brisk trade was developed by the native and the Portuguese merchants. This world of trade thus developed in south Bengal in the sixteenth century had induced the growth of Hughli and Calcutta at a later date. Satgaon began to fall from the end of the sixteenth century. The river silted opposite Satgaon and rich merchant families shifted to places neighbouring the village Kalikata and founded a flourishing settlement at Govindapur. In next two centuries jungles were cleared, habitations were developed and trade settlements came up in the eastern bank of the river. Now Betor became the trade centre and the glow of commerce radiated all around. In these developments the ancestry of Calcutta should be searched. The sixteenth century transformation inside the trade zone of south Bengal was a rapid phenomenon. It shifted the gravity of trade from Satgaon to Betor; from Betor to Hughli and finally from Hughli to Calcutta. Two factors had shaped the dynamics of the situation. One was the change in the river course and the other was the coming of the Europeans, first of the Portuguese and then of the others. The transit from the river to the high seas was made possible because of the meeting of the Portuguese with the native merchants at Betor. The fall of Satgaon made it possible. For our glimpse into the developments the following excerpts serve as our window.

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146. S.M. Ray, *op.cit.*, p. 2

147. *Ibid.*

“Towards the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century the merchant princes of Satgaon, were forced to seek another market for their trade, due to silting up of the river opposite Satgaon. Most of them settled down at Hooghly, but a few families of Bosaks and Setts determined to profit by the growing prosperity of Betor and founded the village of Govindapur on the east bank of the Ganges, just above the junction of the Adi-ganga. They cleared jungles and built houses for themselves and a shrine for the deity Govindjee. They soon opened, on the north side of Calcutta a place for the sale of cloth, which was soon to become celebrated as Sutanauti Hat (the Cotton Bale Market)<sup>148</sup>

The process of shifting southward and eastward was not due to any deliberate human choice. Silting of river in a detail formation was a routine thing and the pressure of this routine phenomenon had forced the pattern of trade to change. The Portuguese ‘first began to frequent Bengal about the year 1530.<sup>149</sup> Nearly a hundred years later around 1625 the Dutch made their way to Bengal. They established themselves at Pipli and Chinsurah. Calcutta had not yet embarked on its new career because the English were not there. They ‘contenting themselves with trade at Balasore and Harishpur in Orissa, were still to come’.<sup>150</sup>

Basking in the reflected glory of Satgaon, Bettor and Hughli and the village of Calcutta steadily gained prominence. In the Mughal administrative manual ‘*Ain-I-Akhbari*’ written by Abul Fazl in 1596. “Calcutta is mentioned as a district in the ‘Sarkar’ of Satgaon.<sup>151</sup> This mention is important. This was a very critical time because Satgaon was in the last stage of its decline as a big trade-mart. In no time it surrendered its glamour to Betor and Betor’s ascendancy was short-lived. The essence of Calcutta’s rise lies here.

“Betor was steadily disappearing as a foreign-market which was being transferred to Sutanuti, where the Setts and Bossaks had been laboriously building up an European connection, particularly with the English, who had been permitted to set up their factory at Hooghly by Emperor Shah Jehan, and like the Portuguese, were using Garden Reach as an Anchorage for their sea-going vessels.”<sup>152</sup> With Garden Reach as the growing site for anchorage and Hughli as the new trade-centre providing an alternative to Betor Calcutta becomes a radiant middle point which assumes prominence from the borrowed lustre of the earlier shipping centres.

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148. S.M. Ray, *op.cit.* pp. 2-3

149. S.M. Ray, *op.cit.*, p. 2

150. S.M. Ray, *op.cit.*, p. 3

151. *Ibid*

152. *Ibid*

Calcutta's coming to prominence became an adjunct to the rise of Hughli as the successor of Betor. "Hooghly was the head quarter(s) of the English merchants, outside which a few isolated factories at Dacca, Balasore, Cossimbazar and Patna made up the total of English possessions in Bengal and a good many years yet to pass before Job Charnock was to establish himself at Sutanuti thus laying the foundation of a great city as well as a big empire which evolved out of it."<sup>153</sup>

The point to be noted here is that neither Hughli nor any other station around Dakha or any other places around Balasore, Kashimbazar and Patna could be the nucleus of a permanent English settlement in eastern India. One reason for this was that the relation between the English and the Mughal administration in Bengal had not been properly settled. Since the expulsion of the Portuguese from Hughli there was none other than the English to take advantage of the vacuum that was created on the sea-board. The English were slowly building up a nexus between Madras and Hughli and was trying to make their position commanding at Hughli. This led to a conflict between the *faujdar* of Hughli and the English.

This eventually caused a break between Hughli and the English settlement there. The English were dislodged from Hughli and thus began their quest for a new settlement on the bank of the river. Out of this quest Sutanati was discovered. In this sense Calcutta's origin should be traced to the events of the war years between 1686 and 1690. "The years 1686 to 1690 were a period of a stormy crisis in the fortunes of the English factories in Hooghly" – writes Ray<sup>154</sup> Charnock and his men were expelled from Hughli. On their way down the river Charnock "halted at Sutanuti and tried to stem the Nawab's forces by demolishing all the forts within his reach."<sup>155</sup> With the destruction of the forts a part of the Nawabi stronghold in lower Bengal collapsed. "Having negotiated peace in vain he [Charnock] withdrew further to Hidgelee, an island at the mouth of the river . . ."<sup>156</sup> There he suffered a siege for three months and lost 'about half of his retinue'<sup>157</sup> At this point Charnock did two things – he appealed for peace to the Nawab and sought help from Madras. In no time

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153. S.M. Ray, *op.cit.* pp. 3-4

154. S.M. Ray, *op.cit.* p. 4

155. *Ibid*

156. *Ibid*

157. *Ibid.*

Captain Heath came from Madras, took over the charge from Charnock, cancelled overtures for peace, bombarded and burnt Balasore and retired to Madras.<sup>158</sup>

This created a new situation. The English had no more possibility to return to Hughli, Hijli and Balasore. Thus finding out a new place for settlement was a geopolitical necessity for the English. “Fifteen weary months Charnock had to pass at Fort ST. George before a favourable negotiations could be opened with Ibrahim Khan, the new Nawab of Bengal, who agreed to permit the English to return to Bengal on payment of Rs. 60,000 by way of compensation for the goods plundered and damage done”.<sup>159</sup> This was how the English returned to Bengal – the traders’ El Dorado in India. On 24 August, 1690 the English landed in Bengal and “occupied the deserted village of Sutanuti for the third time and final . . .”<sup>160</sup>

We are not sure whether Sutanuti was deserted place at the time of Charnock’s third landing there. But this time the landing was decisive. The English did not budge. The old Bengal Council was restored and four days later it held its first consultation. In it it was resolved as follows: “in consideration that all the former buildings here are destroyed, it is resolved that such places be built as necessity requires and as cheap as possible . . . these to be done with mud walls and thatched roofs till we get ground where on to build a factory”<sup>161</sup>

Thus a mud-hut settlement was planned in response to a challenge. Charnock’s landing was made in an inclement weather and the search for a home in a state of homelessness was acute. Calcutta grew out of it. Our historian’s note makes this point all the more poignant. He writes : “Thus, the ‘rain falling day and night’ and ‘the factors forced to betake themselves to boats which considering the season of the year, is very unhealthy’, was set up amid ruin and desolation the city of Calcutta.”<sup>162</sup>

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158. *Ibid.*

159. S.M. Ray, *op.cit.*, pp 4-5

160. S.M. Ray, *op.cit.*, p. 5

161. *Ibid*

162. *Ibid*

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**BIRTH OF A COLONIAL CITY: CALCUTTA**

**Book IV**

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## CHAPTER I

### **The City on a Hind Sight Some Observations in Conclusion**

Calcutta's growth was a phased out development. From a territorially clustered village settlement its journey to a modern town was an event of chance – slow and unperceived at the outset but later quick as it picked up momentum since the end of the eighteenth century. The chanced victory of the English at the battle of Palasi truly ensured its destiny. Prior to that, about six decades since the purchase of the three villages of Sutanati, Govindapur and Kalikata, the English settlement at Calcutta had no territorial dynamism. The English had the permission to purchase 38 villages around Calcutta. But it did not materialize because of the opposition of the Bengal Nawabs. The vigilance of the Bengal Nawabs put a cordon around it. Robbed of a chance of expansion Calcutta had little prospect of growth. The Company's personnel lived in the fort, the nucleus of the town. Suffering from a cramped existence Calcutta's early fate was to grow as a garrison town. The fort had a small garrison essential both for defence of settlement and security of trade. Emerging out of a war with the Mughals (1686-90) and the turmoil of a massive zamindari revolt (Shiva Singh's revolt of 1696) the logic of a fort-based settlement did never miss the English mind.

The more the English became fort-centric the more they became suspect to the Nawabs. Four things made them objects of suspicion and finally accounted for Calcutta being under Nawabi scanner. An island people the English had a river inclination. To this they added a fort inclination as well. The Mughal rulers knew that they were weak at the sea. They also had the knowledge that stationed at Madras the English could move out to the sea with command. This had always scared the Mughals. When such people, redoubtable as they were with command at the sea, developed an inclination for fort and territory they became suspect in the eyes of the rulers. This was Calcutta till the middle of the eighteenth century -- a suspect territory that had little chance to develop itself.

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The English were suspect because of many reasons. They claimed a jurisdiction which was contrary to Mughal Principles of governance. They imposed their own will and applied their own law in Calcutta. This practice was initiated by Job Charnock himself who ordered offenders to be lashed in the evening so that, it is said, their groans served to be the music of his dinner. As time went on this practice gained momentum and the Company's authority claimed exclusive jurisdiction for their settlement in Calcutta. Residents in Calcutta were to be tried by their own laws and not by the laws of the government. This was opposed by the Nawabs. Subjects of the Nawab committing mischief in Nawabi territories escaped to Calcutta and got shelter there under Company's authority. The Bengal *Nizamat* and the Company's government in Calcutta had always been at loggerheads on this issue and their conflict since the time of Murshid Quli Khan cumulatively mounted to an open conflagration in the time of Siraj-ud-daullah over the custody of Krishnadas, alias Krishnaballabh, son of Raja Rajballabh of Dhaka, who fled to Calcutta with a huge amount of unauthorized wealth. Disapproving this Siraj invaded Calcutta in 1756 and the English were routed. After the Company's war with the Mughals in the years 1686-1690 this was the second round of incidents when the English seemed to be on the path of war with the Mughals. In 1690, after the end of the war, the English were invited back into the Mughal territory of Bengal by the then Mughal Governor of the *subah*. This time in 1756 they were driven out. The English entry back again into the city was forced through a war. This time the Mughals were routed. The defeat of the Nawab changed the status of Calcutta and inaugurated series of further changes that ensured Calcutta's rise to power. Calcutta became the station from where the English could coordinate the rise of the British Empire in India.

In Calcutta the English combined a position of reality and vision. The reality was that the Company was a small assignee of revenue – a *talukdar* of three villages within the framework of Mughal system of governance. The vision was that their *taluk* was their property. From the beginning they construed it as their 'estate' where they could exercise their own authority. This conjured image of a possession had blurred Calcutta's constitutional position from the beginning. The result was that the *de facto* authority the English enjoyed and exercised in Calcutta was mostly appropriated and hence unauthorized. In

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order to defend its entitlement to this authority the Company always needed to be in a state of preparedness for war. For this they required very urgently the defence of a fort. Immediately after the battle of Palasi their first duty was, therefore, to raise a new fort and discard the old one. To this effect a new site was selected at the village Govindapur near Calcutta which was immediately vacated and its residents were transferred to Similia (later known as Simla) in north Calcutta. This was the first major case of mass transplant of population in Calcutta. This demographic resettlement was a prelude to a set of bigger changes in Calcutta. Three major institutions were installed in Calcutta in the aftermath of Palasi which gave stability to the Company's regime in Calcutta and consolidated the Company's claim for an extra-territorial jurisdiction in the three villages in lower Bengal –Kalikata, Sutanati and Govindapur. These were construction of the fort, installation of the office of the Governor General and the setting up of the Supreme Court – three major institutions of power in one city, Calcutta, and at one given time – the immediate aftermath of Palasi. From the 1770s, one may say, Calcutta began its career as an imperial city. With an imperial status newly acquired Calcutta seemed to have no infrastructure. As a city it was really a bundle of inconsistencies and its inherent contradictions continued till the time of Hastings. The new Governor-General was too busy in arranging the internal consolidation of power in Calcutta and coordinating from there the formation of the British possessions into a British empire to make any planning of city improvement tangible in terms of contemporary requirements. The result was that up till the time of Cornwallis the city seemed to have been desperately trying to patch up its acquired imperial status and balance it with its sham infrastructural reality.

Students of the English rise to power in eastern India in the eighteenth century know that the conflict between the Company's authority in Calcutta and the Nawab's government at Murshidabad blocked Calcutta's rise to power and its early colonial city formation up to the battle of Palasi. The English command over the sea with a powerful navy, their pretension to extra-territorial jurisdiction, their craze for a fort and finally their lust for territory and commercial privileges were the four major factors which had always made the English suspect to the Bengal Nawabs. Concessions on the acquisition of new territory and trade privileges the English had cleverly extracted from the

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Emperor of Delhi in 1717. They gained permission to purchase thirty-eight villages near Calcutta. The villages were spread on either side of the river. It meant that the English were planning to assume a pervasive influence on both sides of the river-banks. If they could do it extra-territorial enclaves would be formed bordering on the *faujdari* of Hugli with Calcutta as their centre. The Nawabs always dreaded this. Therefore, they put barriers to all English efforts to acquire new territories anywhere in Bengal. Calcutta thus lost its territorial dynamism during the first six decades of its foundation by the English.

The Company's relations with the Nawabs grew out of antithetical adjustments. So did Calcutta's fate. The Nawabs fleeced the English whenever they were in need of money. This was because they were traders and had money. Contrary to fleecing they were also placated because they brought bullion to Bengal without which money could not be minted and Bengal's economy would run dry. The English were aware of this. Within the context of this relationship Calcutta and Murshidabad developed their cross-political adjustment. As early as the time of Murshid Quli Khan they engaged themselves in two serious adventures which made Calcutta all the more suspect to the Nawabs. They tried to build a more formidable structure in the site of the present fort. This was promptly thwarted by Murshid Quli Khan. Parallel to this they consolidated their own jurisdiction by setting up the Mayor's Court in 1726. With the fort and the Court operating together as units of exclusive existence Calcutta became, much to the annoyance of the Nawabs, an enclave of the English outside the structure of Mughal governance in Bengal. The Mayor's Court continued till 1774 when it was taken over by the Supreme Court of Judicature that had of late come into existence.

By the time the Maratha invasions took place in Bengal in the 1740s Calcutta had become a consolidated zone resembling a sanctuary. People in distress took shelter there and its population increased. Calcutta could be considered now as one of the most important military strongholds in south Bengal. It was likely, therefore, that men of Calcutta and around had begun to repose faith on the English and accommodate the city in their confidence. Calcutta was now slowly emerging out of its garrison status. It had begun to gain political importance. Krishnaballabh's flight to Calcutta in 1756 was a milestone toward

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this. As an asylum of a fugitive Calcutta now assumed a kind of political importance. It was a new reality for Calcutta. The city was now considered as an alternative seat of power by those who went for defection in the Nawabi camp and joined the English in a conspiratorial alliance before Palasi. Political gravity now seemed to have been slowly shifting to Calcutta.

From the beginning the English in Calcutta had a set of ambitions to fulfil. These were an accession to mint [which they got in 1757], a fort, compact territories of villages, trade privileges and extra territorial jurisdiction in the form of imposing their own law in dealing with natives who otherwise were subjects of the Nawabs. All this was tantamount to claiming an entitlement to autonomy for Calcutta. Many new things happened now which helped Calcutta's rise to prominence. First, Clive on his way to Calcutta bombarded Hugli and Chandernagore thus disabling the prospective Mughal-French alliance in a moment of crisis for the Mughals. This also destroyed the capacity of the two cities to rise ever as competitors of Calcutta. The status of Calcutta was also now changed. So long its status was that of a purchased city based on the grant of the Emperor. Now it added a new feather to its status. It was a conquered city – a spot where the Nawab was made to surrender to the English. In many ways it had anticipated the bigger Mughal surrender at the battle of Buxar in 1764 where the combined army of the Emperor and the two Nawabs of Bengal and Awadh surrendered to the English. The whole movement was manoeuvred from Calcutta. Between Clive's victory in Calcutta in early 1757 and the English victory at Buxar in 1764 there took place the battle of Palasi where a chance victory changed the status of Calcutta. In the treaty of Alinagar (Calcutta was renamed by Siruddaullah in 1756 as Alinagar) a defeated Nawab surrendered many marks of sovereignty to the English. The English now achieved an accession to mint. This *de facto* authority over currency-making gave Calcutta a new boost. Within three months' time, after the battle of Palasi, the English gained access to territories as far as Kulpi, near the sea in the south. This was a concession the English gained because of their participation in the conspiracy against the Nawab. This lifted the brake on Calcutta's territorial space for expansion. Immediately after the battle of Palasi a new fort was constructed. This completed the status of Calcutta as a garrison town. This positioning of Calcutta as a military station provided new benefits to

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Calcutta in the long run. After the battle of Buxar the Mughal army that guarded the eastern flank of the Mughal Empire was crushed. In the vacuum that was created a militarily upgraded Calcutta stepped in. This helped Calcutta to emerge as the arbiter of the post Mughal situations in the east.

The coming of Krishnadas to Calcutta was important. It signalled the alliance between the English on the one hand and the country's power elite on the other. From this point on ward started Calcutta's defiance of Murshidabad which was both political and constitutional. This defiance became an institution after the battle of Palasi when the English changed the protocol of addressing to the Nawab. Previously the governor of Calcutta as the authority of the Fort William Council or any of his agent operating through the Resident at the *darbar* met the Nawab at Murshidabad. Now the Nawab had to come down to Calcutta to meet the governor and his council members in Calcutta. Later Calcutta's defiance changed its target. From the Nawab the Governor General in Calcutta – Hastings – turned his attention to the Emperor whose annual tribute he stopped. Thus one of the most unconstitutional events took place in order to boost up Calcutta's imperial arrogance to the point of defying the apex imperial authority in the country.

Hastings placed Calcutta in an all India perspective of power. His participation in the First Anglo-Maratha war, his Rohila war, his treatment of Chait Singh of Benaras and the Begams of Awadh and finally his tribute-defiance of the Emperor—all made Calcutta a station of concern for everyone who either contested to be the successor of the Mughal Empire or wanted to remain as sovereign splinter of that fractured overarching structure. Positioning Calcutta in power was a mammoth job and being engrossed with it the new Governor-General did not get much time to rivet his attention to town-planning.

Yet remarkable things happened in the process of town development. First after the battle of Palasi the Company's officers influenced by the newly acquired confidence of victory over the Nawab moved out of their clustered existence in the fort. The age of Clive and Hastings in Calcutta saw Englishmen spreading out into the sprawling zone of Chowringhee. English residences began to grow along this new axis beyond the rampart of the fort. This was the new civil line that had grown up about this time. As this had happened the

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English officers, merchants and people of rank and file became accustomed to new ways of life fashioned after the leisurely styles of the orient. They became accustomed to domestic service offered by Indians. Cheap labour and its abundant supply transformed the European life in Calcutta. This was the beginning of the appearance of what was later called 'nabobs' – Englishmen free of occidental rigours, rich with oriental wealth and given unmistakably to the luxurious comfort of leisure.

From the middle of the eighteenth century conversion from mud hut to brick-building started in Calcutta. Calcutta was very much afflicted with fire and pests –rats and white ants. Naturally the trend was ushered in that clay structures had to be substituted by brick structure. Two things happened in consequence. Brick kilns developed around Calcutta and jungles began to be cleared in the city proper so that kilns could be provided with wood as fuel. There was so much demand for wood in the kilns that domestic supply of wood became short creating uproar in the European households. As jungles were cleared new space was available within the city providing scope for house-building and real estate growth. Calcutta developed as a security zone – the greatest, perhaps, in south Bengal. This was also the time when there was a colossal rise in banditry in Bengal. Those in the interior who had wealth and a stable family and whose invariable practice it was to bury their wealth for safety began to migrate to the city. As a result the native sector of the town, technically called the 'black town' in the north, swelled with population and became congested. Slave-trade was still in vogue. Lifting and kidnapping of young girls and boys were a common practice. To escape this horror many solvent families left their home and hearth in the districts and settled in Calcutta and its immediate neighbourhood. This process of migration doubly benefited Calcutta. First, because of the rise in population the Company's revenue increased. With the coming of rich families the wealth so long accumulated into the interior now found its way to Calcutta. In next seventy years' time so much wealth poured in Calcutta that toward the end of the first quarter of the nineteenth century Calcutta was considered to be the abode of Lakshmi -- *Kalikata Kamalaya* – by Bhabani Charan Bandyopadhyay. Much toward the building of this wealth was also contributed by the *banians* who traded with foreign Companies and acted as the liaison men of private

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European traders and amassed conspicuous wealth out of their business, particularly their connections with men of power. After the battle of Palasi another new trend was seen in Calcutta. Zamindars in the interior began to deposit their wealth in Calcutta. Calcutta now became the focus of the interior. This elevation of Calcutta was surely the achievement of the Clive-Hastings regime that spanned nearly three decades after the battle of Palasi.

The geo-political elevation of the city did not necessarily mean that the city was also keeping up morphologically. During the first twenty years since the battle of Palasi the thrust of the Company's city planning was renovation and not innovation and new construction. Ramshackle structures, shades, barracks, godowns, storehouses factories and the like which had become dilapidated or worn-out were sought to be either overhauled or substituted by alternative accommodations. The Company's administration in Calcutta always received instructions from the home government advising them to be frugal. Operating under ban from superiors the Calcutta administration practised economy and all planning for constructive improvement was set aside as extravagant. One may say that the Clive-Hastings phase of Calcutta's growth was broadly a phase of transformation. It was a period of Calcutta's geopolitical elevation. Only in the nineties of the eighteenth century it was realized that the morphological growth of Calcutta did not match its geopolitical elevation. Then attention was paid to town planning. It was a turn to a new direction for which money was needed. The city's boundary was not yet determined. It was to be done on the basis of an urgent necessity. After the digging of the Maratha ditch in 1742 people it became the fashion to describe it as the boundary of Calcutta. Later on the Maratha ditch was filled up and along its axis the Circular road was constructed. By a proclamation of 1794 the inner side of the Maratha ditch was declared to be the boundary of Calcutta. The previous year, in 1793, the system of public lottery was instituted for public improvement. Thus a new phase began. From the proclamation of 1793 to Wellesley's minute of 1803, one may say, the real phase of town planning for Calcutta started.

The massive spate of building construction in the city took place since the time of Wellesley. It means that Calcutta's take off started with the turn of the nineteenth century. Prior to that situation in Calcutta was not conducive for

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urban construction. The Company itself was in financial crisis. There was famine in 1770 and also in the middle of 1780s. Calcutta was also affected by famine. Moreover there was a dearth of building materials. *Chunum* had to be brought from distant places like Sylhet. Supply of soil to brick kilns was also a factor. Random and clandestine digging of soil was destroying the face of the earth around Calcutta. Up to the beginning of Hastings' rule the major supply of brick and labour went for the construction of the fort. Poaching of labour for private construction was not of course uncommon. But none could thwart the irresistible pull with which the fort had drawn labour and building materials to its site. The work of fort construction was such vast that at one point the Company's authorities in Calcutta requisitioned masons and bricklayers from England. The labour-force necessary for construction was drawn from among the peasants. After the famine of 1770 one-third of the population in Bengal died and one third arable land returned to jungle. As a result agriculture suffered. It was difficult to procure men from the interior who would work as construction labours in the city. This was one reason why city constructions did not take off in the second half of the eighteenth century. Secondly, there was paucity of public fund which could be invested in the construction of the city. The East India Company itself solicited loan from the Parliament and there was talk in England that those at the helm of affairs in Calcutta and the districts had squandered money. There was a picture of spoliation everywhere. The profits of the 'Plassey Plunder' – the huge money extracted from the Nawabs -- enriched officers allowing them to grow as owners of private wealth. This spoliation was the event of the Clive-Hastings regime. In this phase Calcutta's urbanity suffered. Every English house needed domestic labour. Every English officer was surrounded by service attendants. These men lived in slums that grew behind the residences of the Europeans in the white town. A big 'coolie bazar' grew near the fort itself. Streets had not been developed and no drainage system was there to keep the city free of filth. The city ambience of Calcutta was yet to grow under active government patronage. That patronage came only under Lord Wellesley. As a preparatory to that preliminary works like boundary fixation and fund-raising through lottery were done under Cornwallis. That much only was the city achievement. A capital city with bare infrastructure: that was Calcutta in the eighteenth century.

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In 1789 one observer, Grandpre, noted that the “roads were merely made of earth; the drains were ditches between the houses, and the sides of the road, the receptacles of all manner of abomination.”<sup>ii</sup> “Even in 1803”, A. K. Ray observes, “the streets in the ‘Blacktown’ as the Indian portion of the town was called, were, according to Lord Valentia, narrow and dirty and the houses generally of mud and thatch.”<sup>iii</sup> There was no sign of take off before 1803 when Lord Wellesley declared that Calcutta was to be improved so as to suit the majesty of an empire. “We have it, however, on the authority of Mr. H. E. Shakespear, that up to 1820p, the improvements sanctioned by the Government had not been carried into effect, and the streets were, with four or five exceptions, kutcha, and the drains mere excavation by the roadside.”<sup>iii</sup> The real improvement of the town began with the coming into force of the system of lotteries. Although started in 1793 nothing much was achieved from the lottery fund till 1805. Some important works were executed by lotteries between 1805 and 1817. Finally in 1817 the Lottery Committee was appointed and the balance of the previous 17 lotteries was made over to it. The Lottery Committee existed till 1836. During these twenty years tangible benefit was accrued to the city. A. K. Ray says that “the town improvements ceased with the abolition of the Lotteries.” And then “with the establishment of the Corporation of the Justices in 1871, under Act VI of that year, a fresh era of Town improvements dawned, and streets, lanes, tanks, landing and bathing ghats, drains, markets, houses and all other matters connected with the sanitation and ornamentation of the metropolis obtained considerable attention.”<sup>ii</sup>

Given the above, it is clear that the urbanization of Calcutta was essentially a phenomenon of the nineteenth century. Its eighteenth century career was one of mixed developments. The first sixty years of its foundation were absolutely non-dynamic. It experienced a geopolitical elevation in the aftermath of the Palasi. But then its city formation did not match its political rise. There was little government patronage for town-building during this period. The major concern for town-building came when the fort gave security to the settlement. Business within and outside the city increased. The need for boundary demarcation was felt. Means were devised to raise money for civil construction. What was now needed was the political will which would spur

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visions into action. This came early in the nineteenth century, in 1803, with the minutes of Lord Wellesley. With the political will taking shape Calcutta now set <sup>ii</sup>in for its destination to be the second city of the Empire – the city of palaces in the east. Under Hastings Calcutta began her career as the capital of the British Empire. Under Lord Wellesley she became enthroned assuming the imperial majesty of a capital.

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- III. Miscellaneous official Literature
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- V. Literature Relevant to 18<sup>th</sup> Century Calcutta
- VI. Censuses
- VII. Maps.
- VIII. Documents & Reports
- IX. Official Manuscript Records.

### **Part II : Secondary Sources**

- X. Books
- XI. Journals & News Papers.
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### **IX. MAPS OF BENGAL IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY NOW AVAILABLE IN THE NATIONAL LIBRARY, CALCUTTA WITH THEIR CALL NUMBERS.**

A General map from the Ganges to Dacca; being a continuation of ruoute from Jaynagore & Hobbygunge. [no place no pub.] [1765] map (fold)

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Scale : 1" to 1 mile, or, 1:63, 360, Inset : Iddyrackpore.

M.P. 386. 3/G 286.

India Office of the Surveyor General, Calcutta

Plan of Calcutta, reduced by permission of the commissioners of police from the original one executed for them by Lieut. Col. Mark Wood in the year 1784 & 1785, Calcutta, Wm. Baillie, 1792, map, Scale : 1" to 800 ft. Facsimile plan of Calcutta in the years 1784-85 from an old print in the possession of the Record Commission.

M.P. 954. 15 in 2 pl.

Plaisted, Bartholomew and Ritchie, John, Survr.

A chart of the northern part of the Bay of Bengal [Calcutta], [no pub.], 1772. Map. (fold), Scale; not mentioned. Graduated & engraved by B. Henry. The writing engraved by Whitchurch. Pub. According to Act of Parliament, the 15<sup>th</sup> Sept. by Alexander Dalrymple.

M.P. 954.1/P 691.

Plaisted, Bartholomew

A Survey of the coast of Chittagag and the river up to Dacca [Chittagang], 1761. Map (part col. Fold.) Scale not mentioned

M.P. 954. 923/P 691.

Plan for the intelligence of the military operations at Calcutta, when attacked and taken by Seerajah Dowlet, 1756. [no place, no pub.] [n.d.] map. Scale not mentioned.

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Rennell, James.

A Bengal atlas : containing maps of the theatre of war and commerce on that side of Hindoostan. Compiled from the original surveys. Calcutta, Court of Directors for East India Company, 1781. 22 maps (part col.) Scale-vary.

M.P. 954. 15/R 294 b

Rennell, James.

A general map of part of the Kingdom of Bengall; constructed chiefly from observations made during the course of several surveys.

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Calcutta, John Spencer, 1765, map.  
Scale : 1" to 20 miles; or 1: 12,67200

M.P. 954-15/R 294

Rennell, James.

A map of part of the Kingdom of Bengall, drawn from Surveys made in the year 1762 & 1763. [no place, no pub., n.d.] map (Rennell's collections)  
Scale : 30 miles ½ a degree

M.P. 351.

Rennell, James.

A map; showing the extent of the Late Survey, and its situation with respect to Calcutta likewise a general sketch of the Creeks from the reports of some European passangers and the courtry people; also a comparison of part of M.D. Anville's accurate map with the truth from A to B the extent of the survey. [no place, no pub.], 1764. Map (2 sheets)  
Scale : 1" to 10 miles; or 1: 63,3600.

M.P. 954.15/R 294 gan

Upjohn, A.

Map of Calcutta and its environs; from an accurate survey taken in the years 1792 and 1793. Calcutta, map. [n.d.] Scale 1" to 1400 ft. (approx.), or 1: 16,900

M.P. 954.15/Up 4

Maps available outside National Library, Kolkata

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## **X. OFFICIAL RECORDS**

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**WHICH HELP BUILDING UP THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE FORMATION AND GROWTH OF CALCUTTA.**

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