

THE HAUNTED CITY

CALCUTTA AND THE LEGACY OF NOSTALGIA

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Declaration

This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

Anupama Mukherjee

17/11/2017

Signed: -----

Date: -----

Dedication

To my late grandmother (dadi) in whose stories I discovered my love for the city, and who lives in her stories now.

To Kolkata, the nonchalantly beautiful, chaotic metropolis.



Acknowledgements

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Note from the author

The city that I am engaging with in this thesis was known in history by two names: Calcutta in English and Kolikata (colloquially Kolkata) in Bengali. In 2001, the city was officially rechristened as Kolkata in both English and Bengali. Nonetheless, the traces of the British name are conspicuous even to this day.

Even though the thesis occasionally uses Kolkata in reference to Bengali texts and vernacular culture, I have primarily used Calcutta over Kolkata, purely for the sake of convenience and consistency. All the English documents of the period that this research covers contain Calcutta as the official name. However, both these names haunt each other in ways more one.

ABSTRACT

THE HAUNTED CITY: CALCUTTA AND THE LEGACY OF NOSTALGIA

Nostalgia is one of the most persistent windows through which we see our pasts, and yet it is critiqued in literary and cultural discourses for sentimentalism. Interrogating the problem of nostalgic yearning and its discursive liminality, this thesis examines the affective politics of nostalgia in relation to the growth of a colonial city—Calcutta—a metropolis straddling the traces of its colonial modernity and a more recent postcolonial identity as “Kolkata”. My research assesses nostalgia’s multifarious ideological and social embodiments in Bengali literary and political culture. It reads the transformation of Calcutta in literature from colonial to postcolonial times through the critical lens of nostalgia and its changing paradigms across time and space. This nostalgia, I contend, bears a very specific connection to the city’s colonial modernity.

By reading the city through literary texts and records, this research addresses the role of nostalgia as an instrument of imperial domination, to its functions in mediating the spatial relationship between city and village in literature, and its association with spectrality and trauma. Here nostalgia simultaneously forms the theoretical framework, and the site of my archive in Anglophone and Bengali literary works from the nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century on Calcutta. I argue that specific literary works in particular historical and cultural circumstances produce notions of nostalgia in response

to the imagined emotional demands made by communities. By placing together the strands of palimpsestic memories of Calcutta this thesis traces two transitions concurrently: one in the narrative of the city and the second in the evolution of nostalgia itself as a cultural aesthetic.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER I: Empires of Nostalgia: Calcutta's "Little London" and the Politics of Imperialism.	67
CHAPTER II: The "Western" City and Vernacular Nostalgia in Colonial Bengal.	138
CHAPTER III: "Strangely Beloved": Calcutta and Modernist Nostalgia in Twentieth Century Bengal.	208
CHAPTER IV: "Rogues and Rebels": Night-Walking, Nostalgia and Decadence in the Late Modernist Tradition.	267
CHAPTER V: "The Inheritance of Loss": Nostalgia and Trauma in the Narratives of Indian Partition.	307
CHAPTER VI: "After the Empire": The Colonial Spectropolis and the Postcolonial Nostalgia	364
CONCLUSION	429
BIBLIOGRAPHY	436

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

- Figure 1:** Job Charnock's epitaph in Calcutta.
- Figure 2:** The octagonal mausoleum containing the gravestone of Job Charnock in St. John's Church, Calcutta.
- Figure 3:** The Calcutta General Post Office by the waterside
- Figure 4:** The famous dome of St. Paul's Cathedral, London.
- Figure 5:** Town Hall, near Calcutta High Court.
- Figure 6:** St Martin-in-the-Fields to the north-east of Trafalgar Square.
- Figure 7:** St John's Church, Calcutta.
- Figure 8:** A plaque, acknowledging the land donation by Maharaja of Sovabazar.
- Figure 9:** St Andrew's Church at Dalhousie Square (BBD Bag).
- Figure 10:** Hogg Market in Lindsay Street.
- Figure 11:** *Nahoum and Sons* in New Market.
- Figure 12:** Presidency College from the neighbouring Hare School.
- Figure 13:** A model of Rupchand Pakshi in his caged-cart.
- Figure 14:** View of the National Library.
- Figure 15:** View of the National Library.
- Figure 16:** Hastings House, Alipur (Alipore).
- Figure 17:** Writers' Building, BBD Bag (Dalhousie Square).
- Figure 18:** Begum Johnson's mausoleum plaque at St. John's Church, Calcutta.

Figure 19: The mausoleum of Begum Johnson facing the tomb of Job Charnock at St. John's Church.

Figure 20: Calcutta's Tram.

INTRODUCTION

Nostalgia has been the most persistent affective window through which Calcutta, the erstwhile capital of the British Empire in India, has been represented in Post-Independence popular culture: literature, films, songs, music-videos or television commercials. A hugely popular lyric from the 80s, reminiscing about a lost culture of sociality (“*adda*”) embodies this “nostalgia”—a sentiment integrally associated with Calcutta and its urban ethos—perhaps more than any other city in India:

Today our *Adda* in the Coffee House is no more

Today it is no more,

Where have we lost

The golden afternoons

It is no more.

Nikhilesh is in Paris, Maidul in Dhaka.

Their news can no longer be traced

Goanese D'souza, the guitarist in Grand

Is now sleeping in his grave

Smitten in love, wounded and crazed

Roma Roy, now in mental asylum stays

Amal is suffering from a deadly cancer

Alas, life too has shown him the bad days.

(my trans.; n.pag)ⁱ

In a more recent 2015 article in *The Citizen*, an independent online daily from India, a contributor Arjun Puri observes that: “If nostalgia were a

state, Calcutta would be her capital”.ⁱⁱ Such views about this city are not infrequent. Yet, a sustained analytical intervention aimed at understanding why nostalgia has been so central to Calcutta’s past and present, or its possible implications in literary and cultural narratives of the city, has not been carried out so far. My thesis addresses this question of why nostalgia is so prevalent in texts about Calcutta. It interprets the transformations of the city in literature and culture from the colonial to postcolonial times through the critical lens of nostalgia and its changing paradigms across time and space. This manifestation of nostalgia has a very specific connection to the colonial modernity of the city.

The thesis therefore explores the extent to which this coupling enables nostalgia to find a home in the “modern” city, given nostalgia’s vexed relationship to modernity in general. My research looks at nostalgia’s multifarious ideological, social and political embodiments in Bengali literary and political culture and its impact on the city of Calcutta, a metropolis that was caught between the traces of its colonial modernity and a more relatively recent postcolonial identity as “Kolkata”. By this reading of the city, I examine the role of nostalgia as an instrument of imperial domination, to its functions in mediating the spatial relationship between city and village in literature, and trace its association with spectrality and trauma. Nostalgia simultaneously forms the theoretical framework, and the site of my archive in Anglophone and Bengali literary works between the nineteenth and mid-twentieth century.

Etymologically, the roots of nostalgia can be traced back to the Homeric words *nóstos*’ or “homecoming”, and *álgos*, meaning “pain” or

“ache”. The term was coined in modern Latin by the Swiss physician Johannes Hofer (1669-1752) in 1688 as another rendering of German *Heimweh* (“home woe”), to designate “a form of melancholia caused by prolonged absence from one’s home or country” (OED). By the turn of the nineteenth century, it came to be regarded as a malady propelled by a sense of ontological homelessness—a wistful and often regressive yearning for a past.

Nostalgia is a series of complex projections of the “yesterdays” into the present, rather than a harmless strain on memory. Scholars like Susan Stewart in her book *On Longing* (1984) show how nostalgia can breed exaggerated and fictitious historical narratives that stem from our longings, or what she calls “a desire for desire” (Stewart 23).

Nostalgia is portrayed as paralyzing political agency in the present by prospering on a fabricated politics of hope. It creates an aesthesized, imaginary simulation of the past by destroying “our lived possibility of experiencing history in some active way” (Jameson, *Postmodernism* 21). However, more recent studies question some of these suppositions and the implied bias towards empirical truth as authentic:

As both cultural materiality and affect and desire, [nostalgia] troubles the boundary between ‘inside’ and ‘outside’. As both a sociological perspective and an object of study it muddles the borders between subject and object, and in its most straightforward sense as homesickness and longing for times past, it melds time with space (Radstone 187-188).

Scholars such as Susannah Radstone and Svetlana Boym, who worked with nostalgia instead of rejecting it outright as regressive, raised a spectrum of concerns that may be deemed as some of the quilting points of the new discourses on nostalgia. Apart from trying to understand nostalgia within interpretative frameworks such as psychoanalysis—as Radstone does in *Sexual Politics of Time* (2007)—the interventions brought forth important questions, which include: Is nostalgia capable of initiating a process of change? Or, can nostalgia show us ways of improving upon the quotidian by proffering an ideal for reflection and imitation?

This is not to say that my research aims at a monolithic defense of the bulwark of nostalgia. However, it aligns with some of those new readings posited by scholars like Radstone or Svetlana Boym in *The Future of Nostalgia* (2001)—which aspire to achieve a more nuanced understanding of this everyday affect that is at once pervasive and disquieting. Thus, the thesis works to illuminate—through examination of literary texts—the interventions of nostalgia in recording an alternative narrative of Calcutta. This city is located within the socio-political milieu of Indo-European interaction in nineteenth and twentieth century Bengal.

London, Paris, Berlin, Moscow, St. Petersburg—cities have always been central to the corpus of critical interventions of nostalgiaⁱⁱⁱ. However, while several of these writings use the affective condition of nostalgia to discern the impact of a certain historical event or migration on the cityscape, they do not chart the major transformations (such as genesis or growth) of a city over a considerable period. My research examines

Calcutta's evolution through the lens of literature, by using nostalgia simultaneously as an archive and as an interpretative tool. Further, many of these studies on nostalgia and its development since the seventeenth century have centred around the West in literary and cultural discourses. Very little has been written about nostalgia in the context of the Indian subcontinent or its major cities. Even the most frequent evocation of nostalgic memories about the 1947 Partition of India has not yielded a sustained engagement with the critical paradigm of nostalgia: its bearing upon post-1947 literature and culture of the subcontinent, or its relation to other affective conditions such as trauma. The only exception is Dipesh Chakrabarty's oft quoted essay, "Memories of Displacement" in the *Habitations of Modernity*^{iv}. My thesis attends to these gaps and elisions. It interrogates the possible role of nostalgia in re-configuring the *affective* history of Calcutta and its people, by reading both Anglophone and Bengali literature on the city tentatively between nineteenth century and the mid-twentieth century, a period under the long shadow of colonial modernity. By doing so, it examines the aftermath of the British colonization of the subcontinent through the Partition at the end of that colonial rule.^v

NOSTALGIA'S DEFINITION(S) AND THE DILEMMA OF THE DOUBLE BIND

Fever has another characteristic: nostalgia. Every winter you grieve for the joy of what is absent; you walk under the rain, one in two persons: yourself and the man you were in another winter, and you

... speak to yourself in words you do not understand, because memory is unable to recall past emotions, because longing can lavish what was not on what was, so that the tree becomes a forest, a stone, a canopy, and it is as if you were happy in a cell, which you see now as more spacious than a public park... (Darwish 82).

The online edition of OED (1989) asserts that nostalgia might be a “sentimental imagining” of the past, thus raising questions about truth, memory and imaginative reconstruction in nostalgia. To what degree is memory selectively conditioned to become nostalgia? Is nostalgia memory in the first place or an idea contrived to suit the imaginary needs of individuals and groups aspiring to make demands on the social and political order? Indeed, one can be nostalgic about a past which never was, or that which was never witnessed. What is known as *protonostalgia* is precisely being nostalgic about a time (perhaps a distant past) or a place, or both, in which one has never lived. For instance, the nostalgia of the Romantics for the Medieval World is an example of this protonostalgia in literary aesthetics. Again, within the political domain, the obsession of Hindus with the *Ramrajya* or the idyllic land of the mythical king *Rama* in India is an example of another brand of protonostalgia. Whether this can be called “transgenerational memory”, historical legacy or only an imaginative evocation of the Utopian myth about an original society where everything is thought to be perfect, with a definitive political purpose, has been subjected to several debates, particularly in the light of nostalgia’s association with *Utopianism*^{vi}.

Despite its reactionary tendencies and the dangerous propensity of nostalgic narratives to replace history with imagined pasts, in Pre-Independence India the restorative myths of the original society has been effectively used in the construction of nationalist history. This idealized time has been set against the grand narrative of colonial historiography that projected the Indian past as a slice of the British history:

Which meant, first, a representation of the precolonial past as preparatory to an eventual and almost providential outcome in the form of British paramountcy in the subcontinent, and secondly, the production of a narrative genre to write up the history of the Indian people as the story of 'England's work in India' (Guha, "Authority" 300).

The accusation from European thinkers about being a nation without history agitated early nationalists like Bankim Chandra Chatterjee (1838–1894). This led to the belief that the writing of a “truly Indian historiography of India” (Guha, *Dominance* 211) was a national responsibility. This nation, whose history had to be written, was imagined as a fundamentally Hindu nation^{vii} by the Bengali intelligentsia, which consisted mainly of upper-caste Hindu males. The principal narrative of this national history was premised on a glorious *Vedic* past. In the short essay “The Authority of Vernacular Past” Guha thus posits:

the investment of native languages into a new kind of narration called history was to have consequences nobody had foreseen. For these

languages began to act as a sort of reagent on the very chemistry of the past, so that facts ignored or misrepresented by colonialist writers would henceforth combine with nostalgia and mythopoeia to generate the notion of an originary and organic nationhood antecedent to British rule. An Indian historiography powered by such a mixture of information and vision could poison the ethos of hegemony by sighs for a purloined past. It could develop into an inconsolable critique, which would measure the achievement of the Raj against millennial glories and find it wanting. More ominously, it could stimulate dreams of power incompatible with subjection to alien rule (301-302).

Such narrations, backed by nostalgia for the lost glories of India in the decolonizing movement, were pitched as an oppositional category against the “imperialization” of history, sometimes with subversive effects. However, from these narrations of the past, supported by both spontaneous and strategic deployment of nostalgia, “imagination” emerges as a significant term which merits a close consideration.

How much of nostalgia is memory and how much of it is a construct? Is nostalgia fiction or fact? Also, to what extent can memory and “imagination/construction” be posited as antithetical, since recapitulation often uses the faculty of imagination. How do we historicize nostalgia? In this section, I will try to address a few of these questions by considering nostalgia’s double bind: as quasi-fact or as quasi-fiction.

Nostalgia may be concurrently posited as fact and fiction. To understand this bivalence of nostalgia, Hal MacDonald suggests that it may be worthwhile to go back to the distinction Aristotle made between

history and poetry in relation to factual reality and its representation in literature. According to Aristotle in *Poetics*, “the difference between the historian and the poet is not that between using verse or prose; Herodotus’ work could be versified and would be just as much a kind of history in verse as in prose. No, the difference is this: that the one relates actual events, the other the kinds of things that might occur” (59) in terms of “probability or necessity” (59).

Nostalgia betrays ideal situation, pregnant possibilities or even probable impossibility i.e. what is possible or consistent, in Aristotelian terms, to the law of “probability or necessity” (60). It often tells us what might have happened, along with/instead of what has happened. Interestingly, certain branches of history too sometimes engaged in such speculations. Several historiographers in the twentieth-century preoccupied themselves with putting forth what came to be variously known as speculative, virtual or counterfactual histories. They combat the “what if” questions by analyzing a historical phenomenon through a series hypothetical extrapolations of things that never occurred but could have occurred and thereafter, altered the trajectory of that event altogether. A very early example of such counterfactual history in the twentieth-century is *If It Had Happened Otherwise* (1931)^{viii}, a constellation of essays edited by J C Squire. It includes entries like “If Napoleon Had Escaped to America”, where H. A. L. Fisher imaginatively explores what if Napoleon Bonaparte had absconded from his exile in St. Helena and liberated Central and South America from the Spanish-Portuguese regime, or G.K

Chesterton looks at the possible outcomes if Mary, “the Queen of Scots” married Don Jon of Austria.

To answer the question of whether nostalgia can be deemed memory, the answer is “yes”, but of a special kind; i.e. to say we can remember a person or a place anchored in the past without being nostalgic about it, but the reverse is generally rare.

It seems as if the axiomatic truth is that one can remember without being nostalgic, but one cannot be nostalgic without memory— the suggestion being that nostalgia is different from “plain” reminiscence or “simple” memory recall. It is as if memory, conceived of as a cognitive activity, needs to be cathected or “lit up” by affect as it were, for it to be nostalgic (Laubscher 218).

Nostalgia combines both the cognitive and the corporeal elements of memory and affect in being a kind of affective memory or what Lucia Christine describes as a “climate of memory” (128). Before proceeding with a discussion about the balance between fact and fiction in memory vis-a-vis nostalgia, it is vital to make a distinction between “memory” (*mnēmē*) and “recollection” (*anamnēsis*). While the former, as Aristotle defines it in his short treatise on Memory and Recollection (*De memoria et reminiscencia*), is a straightforward evocation of the past, the latter speaks of a reconstruction which involves the creative faculty of imagination: “for the persons who possess a retentive memory are not identical with those who excel in power of recollection; indeed, as a rule,

slow people have a good memory, whereas those who are quick-witted and clever are better at recollecting” (Aristotle; Trans.; J.I. Beare; ebook). Recalling from memory, of course, cannot result in unproblematic retrievals. It can lead to what Rushdie’s protagonist Saleem Senai proclaims somewhat playfully in *The Midnight’s Children* as the ‘Chutnification of history’ (442) where facts and fiction get so intrinsically enmeshed that they can be hardly distinguished from one another: “‘I told you the truth,’... ‘Memory’s truth, because memory has its own special kind. It selects, eliminates, alters, exaggerates, minimizes, glorifies, and vilifies also; but in the end it creates its own reality, its heterogeneous but usually coherent version of events...’” (207). In this succulent concoction, facts get increasingly muddled in Saleem’s mind. He struggles to separate them from his fertile imagination in *The Midnight’s Children*. But the author defends Saleem by putting forward an argument that:

Facts are hard to establish, and capable of being given many meanings. Reality is built on our prejudices, misconceptions and ignorance as well as on our perceptiveness and knowledge. The reading of Saleem’s unreliable narration might be, as I believed, a useful analogy, for the way in which we all, every day, attempt to ‘read’ the world (“Errata” 25).

Sometimes imagination is integral to the process of recapitulation, and at other times, it is a strategic and purposeful misrepresentation of facts for a certain end. Yet, the significance of memory in structuring history cannot be denied as a concept “capable of doing what history can no

longer do” (Santos 164). David Lowenthal thus writes in *Past is a Foreign Country*, a seminal text on memory and nostalgia’s role in documenting the past:

Self-continuity depends wholly on memory; recalling past experiences, links us with our earlier selves, however different we may since have become. ‘As memory alone acquaints us with the ...succession of perceptions’, Hume reasoned, ‘tis to be consider’d...as the source of personal identity. Had we no memory, we never shou’d have any notion...of that chain of causes and effects, which constitute our self or person’ (197).

The loss of memory by effacing the past divests the present of any meaning. Remembering is thus an epistemic imperative, even though no act of recall including first-hand eyewitness accounts is accurate:

People tend to report what they expect to see or hear more than what they actually see or hear. To sum up: mediation of perception by memory and emotional state shapes an account. Memory typically selects certain features from the successive perceptions and interprets them according to expectation, previous knowledge, or the logic of "what must have happened," and fills the gaps in perception (Vansina 5).

Nostalgia works its way through public historiography into the affective realms of individuals and collectives to seek meanings beyond facts. It, thus, aporetically functions as a *supplement* that Derrida takes up

after Rousseau in *Of Grammatology*. In a sense, nostalgia as a surplus enriches the pre-existing knowledge of history like a “plenitude enriching another plenitude, the fullest measure of presence” (Derrida 144). At the same time, nostalgia screens and paradoxically reveals its lack: [it] “adds only to replace. It intervenes or insinuates itself in-the-place-of; if it fills, it is as if one fills a void. ... it represents and makes an image... its place is assigned in the structure by the mark of an emptiness” (Derrida 145). Nostalgia exposes the ineluctable absence within presence itself and destabilizes it from its core to assert its own interventions. No narration, whether written or oral, is incapable of capturing an event holistically. As Julian Barnes puts it in his Booker Prize winning novel, *The Sense of an Ending* quoting Patrick Lagrange: “History is that certainty produced at the point where imperfections of memory meet the inadequacies of documentation” (17).

Narratives based on nostalgia too tend to that insufficiency and yield to it at the same time. Thus, looking at an event through the lens of memory, vis-à-vis nostalgia can only bring forth one version of it, by sacrificing the “other others”. From this vantage, it may be cogent to delineate the scope and the limitation of my research at the outset. None of the archives and the narratives they constitute—nostalgia in this case—can give us the complete story by themselves. Individually, they are like windows opening out to a larger world waiting to be explored, as Tennyson’s eponymous protagonist summarizes the paradox of “experience” in his poem *Ulysses*: “Yet all experience is an arch

wherethrough' /Gleams that untravelled world, whose margin fades/ For ever and for ever when I move” (563).

In this thesis, the aim is to challenge these margins by relentlessly pushing the discursive boundaries. By engaging with nostalgia in its complexities and contradictions to create a theoretical framework for archiving a certain narrative, I hope to serve that purpose. The critical field of nostalgia is not as expansive as other branches of memory studies like trauma. Apart from being stigmatized as reactionary, it has been deemed too unstable, too coloured by sentimental excesses to be traditionally considered a reliable archive. Yet the precise challenge is to grapple with the elusiveness of nostalgia at the juncture where it slips off, disintegrates and crumbles. My thesis thus works at the interface of memory, nostalgia, fiction and history while negotiating with a range of issues such as: what might be the role of nostalgia in “supplementing” public historiography? What function could be allocated to nostalgia within the cognitive field of memory studies as well as an affect?

NOSTALGIA’S AFFECTIVE EMBODIMENTS

In his foreword to the book *The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social*, Michael Hardt qualifies affect as that which refers “equally to the ‘body’ and the ‘mind’”, and which “involves both reason and passion” (ix). Thus “they illuminate in other words, both our power to affect the world around us and the power to be affected by it, along with the relationship between two powers” (ix). Whether nostalgia, a defined concept, can be regarded as a pure “affect”, is debatable. According to Felicity Callard, affect is

“precognitive”, “nonrepresentational” and refers “to an amorphous, diffuse, and bodily ‘experience’ of stimulations impinging upon and altering the body’s psychology” (Callard and Papulias 247). It is thus unlike emotions which are “structured, qualified, and recognizable experiential states of anger, joy, sadness and so on, into which such amorphous experience is translated” (247). Nostalgia, however, has a strong embodied dimension. There are tactile, visual, olfactory or other corporeal extra-linguistic “experiences” or stimuli that trigger a sense of nostalgia. Unlike trauma, which is often accompanied by convulsions, disruption of speech, parched tongue, stammering, breaking down into tears — where the symptoms are written on the body—the physical manifestations in nostalgia are sometimes not very pronounced. Yet etymologically, in the *algos* of nostalgia there is a clear allusion to an ailment, sickness or pain. If one looks at the etiology of nostalgia, indeed when Hofer formulated this term for his Basel dissertation, he ostensibly marked it as “a cerebral disease” (Hofer 387) common among Swiss students and mercenaries in the foreign lands of France, Germany and Italy who wistfully pined to return to their homes. They were affected to such a degree that they confused past and present, complained of hearing hallucinatory voices and of being haunted by their phantom pasts. Hence nostalgia was often called *mal du Suisse* “Swiss illness” or *Schweizerheimweh* “Swiss homesickness”.

The lovelorn yearning of nostalgia in Homer was thus reformulated as a disease with visible symptoms. This was partially a result of the gradual movement towards Empiricism, to rationalize what one sees in

concrete scientific terms. In 1833 *Cyclopaedia of Practical Medicine Vol. II* affirmed that the affliction of nostalgia occurs “in the natives of other countries, and evinces that it has its source in the very frame and constitution of human nature in every part of the world” (53), thereby universalizing the experience. The symptoms of nostalgia generally included “persistent thinking of home, bouts of weeping, anxiety, irregular heartbeat, anorexia, insomnia, and even smothering sensations” (McCann, 1941, as qtd. in “Nostalgia: Content, Triggers, Functions” 975) and whose “pernicious effects” *Cyclopaedia* notes, are “indeed, fatal in a high degree, when any debilitating or depressing powers were applied at the same time” (53). In fact, the word often associated with nostalgia— “pining”, comes from Old English *pinian* meaning “to torture, torment, afflict, cause to suffer,” and has close association with pain^{ix}, irrespective of nostalgia. Pining which also meant “to languish, [and to] waste away,” often out of love for someone/something unattainable has clear corporeal manifestations. There are copious examples in both eighteenth and nineteenth century literature of men and women withering away to death. For instance, Christina Rossetti in *Goblin Market* (published in 1862) gives a graphic example of Laura’s physical afflictions when she wizened away yearning for the “goblin” merchants who vanished after persuading Laura into eating their luscious fruits in the sinister glen where they hawked forbidden goods that were “Sweet to tongue and sound to eye” (2) but had evidently unfavourable effects on the mind and body. Seduced by the call of devious merchants' promises of rich delights that sounded like “voice of doves/Cooing all together:/They sounded kind and full of

loves/In the pleasant weather” (5) Laura traded a golden curl for the fruits, only to fall ill into a dreamlike lassitude and pine away in desperate yearning for more:

But when the noon wax'd bright
Her *hair grew thin* and *grey*;
She *dwindled*, as the fair full moon doth turn
To *swift decay* and *burn*
Her fire away.

(my emphasis; 15)

Pining for homeland in nostalgia led to similar physical torments. The British literature of the Raj, as we shall see in the following chapter, abounds in such situations where bodily sufferings and the consequent fear of dying in an alien land that “glisten[s] with eternal heat” (24)^x exacerbated the psychic depression. It created a perfect environment for nostalgia. Expatriates craved for “milder suns on happier seasons” (Anonymous, “Calcutta: A Poem” 24) at home:

Away, vain thoughts! The blazing sky proclaims
Another clime. Here we must groan and sigh
Under oppressive heat, whose fierceness tames
The riotous constitution, swelling high
With youthful blood; its channels soon are dry:
Disease triumphant ov'r the city flies,
And claims a double tribute—always nigh.

(Atkinson, “The City of Palaces, Stanza X” 10)

Plagued by the chaotic conditions of the colonial life, the grieving foreigners pined for England, which now looked ever more beautiful in the charmed-circle of nostalgia.

Nostalgia was placed in the inventory of “endemic diseases” by Dr. Thomas Hancock, along with “Intermittent Fever”, “Bronchiole” and “Cretinism”^{xi} in the British monthly medical journal published from London edited by John Forbes, Alexander Tweedie and John Conolly. It was described as “the concurrence of depressing symptoms which sometimes arise in persons who are absent from their native country, when they are seized with a longing desire of returning to their home and friends and the scenes of their youth...” (*Cyclopaedia* 53). While the pathological associations of nostalgia underwent a series of displacements, its association with the body was never really stripped off. Thus, an important issue in the context of nostalgia is how it has evolved over the years in relation to its focus on the body and the senses. While it is no longer considered to be a *physical* illness in the strictest sense of the term, it is often driven by disappointments, annoyances and irritations with the present. In more serious cases, nostalgia may be the cause or the effect of a severe depression, acute loneliness or insanity. It is quite telling that in a visit to Rydalmere Psychiatric Hospital (a mental asylum from 1888 to 1980s in Western Sydney, and now turned into a museum), I stumbled upon a list enumerating a broad spectrum of “mental causes” for madness in late nineteenth century, which has nostalgia along with “love affairs and seduction”, “religious excitement” or “domestic trouble”.^{xii}

More optimistically, it is accepted that nostalgia can be triggered by visual/optical, gustatory, auditory and olfactory senses. A pleasant sight, a photograph or old music may remind one of the “good old days” and evoke happiness, just as the smell and/or taste of good food may remind one of a similar dish that was once cooked by a dear one in the past who is now absent or dead. However, nostalgia as an affect mostly generates a mixed response. Here too, one can see an impasse in the reaction that nostalgia induces— “*Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought*” (472), as Shelley contends in *To a Skylark* and vice-versa. There is a reciprocity between pain and pleasure. Despite nostalgia’s ontological intimacy with *melancholia* and the fact that it is sometimes triggered by a sense of profound dissatisfaction, reminiscences or nostalgic evocations may eventually result in a sense of contentment. A classic example of this in popular culture is the song from the 1965 movie *The Sound of Music*, where the protagonist Maria nostalgically makes an inventory of her “favourite things”. This lifts her spirit as she remembers them in times of trouble or sadness. This song charts the transformation of nostalgia from a disease of an afflicted imagination to a cure. Remembering something pleasant can be panacea for mitigating distress in difficult situations:

When the dog bites

When the bee stings

When I'm feeling sad

I simply remember my favorite things

And then I don't feel so bad.^{xiii}

She sings this song aloud in moments of crisis, such as when she had a harrowing first encounter with Captain von Trapp's mischievous children, who were initially determined to drive her away and, in the process, free themselves from the care of a governess.

Finally, these examples also bring us to the very crucial question: is nostalgia, which shows almost a perverse Pollyannaism in its stress on positive memories, capable of combating negative emotions? How does nostalgia work in contrast to trauma? The therapeutic role of nostalgia and its relationship to traumatic memory is explored in further detail in the next section.

NOSTALGIA AND TRAUMA

Like nostalgia, the term trauma has a Greek origin. The online edition of *Oxford English Dictionary* (1989) notes trauma's usage in modern times since 1684, when it featured in *the Physical Dictionary* (284) as a wound from an external cause. This was around the same time nostalgia was gaining popularity in medical discourse. Throughout the eighteenth century, this understanding of trauma persisted in medicine, and it was frequently used to refer to "physical wounds" from outside injury. However, trauma as it is now understood in branches of psychology and psychiatric literature, and most significantly in psychoanalysis through Freud, is a wound not of the body but of the mind.

William James wrote in a treatise in the first volume of a scientific journal, *Psychological Review*, jointly edited by James McKeen Cattell

from Columbia College and James Mark Baldwin from Princeton University in 1894 about “Certain reminiscences of the shock [that] fall into the subliminal consciousness, where they can only be discovered in ‘hypnoid’ states. If left there, they act as permanent ‘psychic *traumata*’, thorns in the spirit, so to speak” (1,99). In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) Freud talks at length about trauma through his exposition on the death drive (*Todestrieb*). It shows how trauma as a mental wound causes a lapse in the “mind’s experience of time, self and the world” (Caruth 3-4). Drawing from Freud, in *Unclaimed Experience*, Cathy Caruth sums up this occurrence of trauma in response to:

an unexpected or overwhelming violent event or events that are not fully grasped as they occur, but return later in repeated flashbacks, nightmares, and other repetitive phenomena. Traumatic experience, beyond the psychological dimension of suffering it involves, suggests a certain paradox: that the most direct seeing of a violent event may occur as an absolute inability to know it; that immediacy, paradoxically, may take the form of belatedness (92).

Traumatic events rupture the prevalent codes of meaning and render them inaccessible either by contradicting, or by posing a severe threat to existing beliefs and meaning schemes that permeate one’s subjective universe. For trauma victims, meaning-making always occurs retroactively through differential repetitions that lead to “infinite regression” towards the foundation of trauma. To return to the original discussion about the relationship between trauma and nostalgia, this propensity of trauma’s

“infinite regression” towards the originary moment is at a level not very different from the structure of nostalgia. In *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, Derrida locates the origin of “archive” in the Classical term “*arkhē*” whose one of the meanings signify “*commencement*”, “beginning”, or the “source of an action” and according to Derrida’s definition, the *archive fever* is an “irrepressible desire to return to the origin, a homesickness, a *nostalgia* for return to the most archaic place of absolute commencement” (91).

While the psychic impacts differ, the polarities of nostalgia and trauma are, nevertheless not so polarized in terms of their structure. They both accept a dislocation from the origin, the “absent” presence of an “other life”— a lost “elsewhere” towards which they strive to return through an act of compulsive (albeit impossible) repetition. And, while the allusion to *home* in Derrida is also a journey towards the primordial *arkhe* of inanimate life, it may be read as “home” in the most literal sense in the context of 1947 refugees, as we shall see in Chapter Five, whose familiar world suddenly turned *Unheimlich* (unhomely, strange, hostile) due to the Partition. This was simultaneously the source of trauma and nostalgia. The numbing shock of Partition, the mourning for the lost *home*, was twinned with the desire to recover that “legendary peaceful time” (Darwish 81).

Nonetheless, while trauma and nostalgia are structurally characterized by repetition around a lack or a loss, trauma speaks of the occurrence of an event that could not be fully assimilated, which keeps reappearing in the form of displaced hallucinations and fantasies. In contrast, nostalgia often springs from a discontent with the present “that is

not fully accepted, so it is replaced (through a desire for repetition) by a particular vision of the past. [...] [T]hey name two different modes of suffering in the present: one because the past was painful, the other because the past was enjoyable” (Vegso 12). In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Sigmund Freud describes differential repetitions while delineating the structure of death drive. Vegso interprets them to elucidate the structural dissimilarity between trauma and nostalgia:

on the one hand, we have the repetition of a failure (in Lacanian terms, something “does not stop *not* writing itself”), on the other hand, some satisfaction is also repeated (something “does not stop writing itself”)[...] trauma is the failure that “does not stop *not* writing itself” and nostalgia is the satisfaction that “does not stop writing itself.” And it is here that it becomes clear that both trauma and nostalgia can be described in terms of the necessity and impossibility of repetition” (13-14).

The subjective universe of Partition survivors is informed by both “the necessity and impossibility of repetition” (Vegso 14) as trauma and nostalgia co-exist in a complex nexus of cause-effect. The prevalence, presence or absence of each in Partition narratives is dependent on the intensity of the other.

THE EVOLVING NOTION OF *HOME* IN NOSTALGIA

The notion of home is central to my exploration of nostalgia in this thesis. While the medical associations of nostalgia existed in the nineteenth century, the term underwent successive shifts in meaning as a way of accommodating its new complexities. To realize the fuller significance of these changes, one must exhaust some of the possible connotations of nostalgia and its gradual separation from “homesickness” as a fatal disease. Today, the term “homesickness” in the electronic edition of *OED* (1989) is described as “sadness caused by longing for one's home or family during a period of absence.” Nostalgia is generally distinguished as a “sentimental longing *for* or regretful memory of a period of the past, esp. one in an individual's own lifetime”. The online second edition of *The Oxford Dictionary of Word Origins* (2010) marks this shift in emphasis:

As the saying goes, ‘nostalgia isn't what it used to be’. In English, nostalgia first meant ‘acute homesickness’, coined in the 18th century from the Greek words *nostos*, ‘return home’, and *algos*, ‘pain’, as a translation of the German word *Heimweh* or ‘homesickness’. The familiar modern meaning, ‘longing for the past’, had become established by the early 20th century (www.oxfordreference.com).

After the Industrial Revolution in Europe, with the widespread network of rail routes and the advancement of the postal service and telegraph, the *nostomania* or that extreme form of homesickness could be tackled to an extent. Now maintaining contact with one's family became

relatively easy as one could occasionally make short visits even to distant places. Medical practitioners gradually stopped regarding nostalgia as a serious threat to health. At the same time, for scholars like Linda Hutcheon, “home” too as a space lost its centrality in the nostalgia discourse; she suggests that nostalgia is not so much about the lost space as about the lost time as the very “pastness” of the past (“Irony, Nostalgia” 3). Kundera’s hero Josef in *Ignorance* (2000) visits his home after many years in exile and is brought to the agonizing realization that during “his absence, an invisible broom ha[d] swept across the landscape of his childhood, wiping away everything familiar” (Kundera 52).

While this confrontation with the “changed” reality may abate the nostalgia for a certain “place”, the realization of the loss may also heighten nostalgic longings by feeding that lack. Herein lies the clue to the essential difference between the early modern approach to homesickness as an ailment and the subsequent understanding of nostalgia as a mental state: “since space is re-traversable but time is not, the return is possible for the homesick exile in a way that is not for the nostalgic” (Phillips 65). Nostalgia more specifically stresses “[the] human incompleteness in its temporal dimension – the way in which our finitude is conditioned by temporality. It is the self as divided and *split* temporally which is lamented in nostalgia” (Phillips 67). Such assumptions further bolster the affect’s intimate association with temporality, while spatiality clearly takes a backseat. For when nostalgia was stopped being treated as a pathological condition, “it assumed a temporal form” (Clewell 5), an experience, notes Tammy Clewell in his introduction to *Modernism and Nostalgia*, “that

Romantic Poets so famously figured as a sense of wonder, of unlimited possibilities, and even of immortality associated with childhood and youth” (5). Uncoupling nostalgia from external “objects” can certainly bear emancipatory promises, as the interpretations focus on the interiority of feeling in terms of memory and desire.

This gradual temporalization of nostalgia, by ignoring its spatial moorings, however, cannot be dissociated from the global surge of capitalism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. From the last quarter of the 17th century, the rise in the discourse of nostalgia may be ascribed to a conjuncture of several events in the West. On the one hand, the escalation in the phenomenon of “homesickness” or the yearning for the physical environment of the “home” is most certainly due to increased travel, exploration and settlements in the New World aided by colonial missions in far flung locations. On the other, the gradual shift in emphasis to the temporal dimension of this mourning for “lost” time is largely due to the stress placed on linear, chronological time that comes with industrial modernity in Western Europe, displacing other traditional notions of “task-oriented”, sidereal, cyclical or cultural notions of temporality, especially in the cities. This conception of time was eventually transported to other parts of the world primarily through colonialism. While the diminished longing for the distant “homeland” that led to fatal consequences is partially attributed to the new spatial configuration—with shrinking of distances in the modern world—the absolute focus on “lost time” is a byproduct of capitalist society which attached a monetary “value” to time.

E.P. Thompson in “Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism” speaks of how “new valuations of time” superseded other temporal practices. These “taught children even in their infancy to improve each shining hour; and which saturated men's minds with the equation, time is money” (95). Such an understanding of “time” inevitably stressed its irrevocability. The supremacy of this new temporal order emphasized the idea that time could be lost and wasted to one’s disadvantage.

Simultaneously, in Enlightenment narratives of progress that upheld secular chronological time, memory-time was cast off as ahistorical and regressive as it moved in the direction opposite to the chronological clock from the vantage point of the “present”^{xiv}. The sequential logic of memory is non-linear in that it unhinges the clear demarcations between the beginning, middle and end, or Aristotelian teleology. One can manipulate mnemonic time and travel back and forth between various temporalities without constraint. In many traditional or indigenous societies, the past does not precede the present; it coexists and is embedded in the interior of present. The notion of historical time, that was used to propagate the logic of progress had not only jettisoned these alternative temporal understandings as nonrealistic, the modernity project “largely weighted in favour of the present over the past in their theorizations of this radical historical transition” (Pickering and Keightley 919). It asserted “a severe, if not complete rupture between modern and premodern societies” (Pickering and Keightley 919) and strong value judgments were attached to ideas of progress and regress:

Positive valuations of present over past were based not only on views of the inevitability of linear progress forward to an improved future, but were also supported by evolutionism and historicism, and later by static functionalist paradigms and theories of modernization. Belief in the inevitability of progress was bolstered in its orientation to the future by the generation of its antithesis – a nostalgic yearning for the past [...] This not only closed down lines of active relation to the past, but also valorized what was set up as its single, inescapable alternative, facilitated convenient versions of the past in favour of the present (Pickering and Keightley 919).

Because of time's irreversibility, nostalgia became a yearning for the "unattainable" lost in time and was denounced for its pessimistic, defeatist withdrawal from the present into an illusory past. While "progress" narratives condemned nostalgia's fixation with an irrevocable past, but one must acknowledge that nostalgia also emerged in the West as a derivative of the industrial modernity.

Ironically, nostalgic affects have simultaneously functioned as a resistance to this "progress" model, such as in the aesthetic practices of the European Romantics, and at the same time as a safety-valve of capitalism. The idealized longing for a past of prelapsarian innocence was conceived and preserved as a pleasurable antithesis to the accelerated pace of modern times and its relentless striving towards progress.

However, unlike the pathological dimension of illness, nostalgia's connection with home was never fully removed, even though its implications had to undergo several layers of deliteralization to

accommodate the shifting paradigms. My thesis embraces the understanding of nostalgia as homesickness, where the home is both physical and metaphorical. It is both an attachment to a place, a house, city/village and a concept in abstraction that fuses time and space. In the temporal scale, home signifies both the source and the beginning (as in birthplace or a cradle) and the destination or the endpoint of a journey. It becomes that ideal, albeit that impossible elsewhere. Nostalgia articulates our relentless yearning for that ideal destination or the target that we wish to reach. Viewed from this vantage, nostalgia is not static or regressive, as it is commonly perceived to be. By embodying the perpetual quest for home, it pushes the boundaries of the home further to keep alive the process of change that is also at the crux of revolution. Etiologically, revolution, coming from “revolve”, has its root in the Latin *revolver*, variously referring to a “roll back”, “unwinding”, “return”, “happening again” or “repeating”, from re- “back again” (*etymologyonline*). Grounded in these meanings, revolution simultaneously encompasses the idea of rapture as well as that of a recurrence or return. Technically, revolution never stops and the home [destination] is never quite reached. Just when a cycle completes itself and attains fruition, the revolution rolls all over again, with new goals and the search for the “home” continues. Realizing “home” from such a perspective can bring forth radical possibilities. Nostalgia searches for the ideal present within the present itself, or may revel in the yearning for a speculative future taking its course in the horizon. Such readings, along with the more conventional ones, speak of striking diversity in approaching nostalgia, ranging from its traditionally

conservative, regressive status quo-ist understanding to more recent interventions that grant nostalgia a redemptive role as a catalyst of social transformation.

THE EUROPEAN ENCOUNTER AND THE MULTIPLE NOSTALGIA(S) IN POSTCOLONIAL BENGAL

While the experience of nostalgia is common, its practice is always culturally-specific: “Nostalgia is neither an absolute nor singularly universal phenomenon” (Pickering and Keightley 934) and “is subject to circumstance, motivation and interests, and over both time and space, to degree, variation and change” (Pickering and Keightley 929). An important question that emerges in relation to nostalgia’s definition is how could nostalgia be situated—with its complex of emotions, associations and ideas—within the geographical framework of my thesis? In other words, beyond general theorizing, how can nostalgia be conceptualized within the matrix of language and culture in the context of my current research?

In Bengali, nostalgia has been evoked as *swaran-bedona* (*swaran*, from Sanskrit *smaran* = to recall; *bedona*= pain or ache), giving accent to the pain that is embedded in recall. The other expression is *smriti-bedona*, (*smriti* = memory, *bedona*= pain or ache). It is about a memory that causes pain. Among other defining terms, a popular coinage in Bengali is *smriti-katorota*, (*smriti*=memory, *kator* = suffering from pain, *katorota* may also mean, languishing in something). *Smriti-katorota*, therefore, means to

languish in memory, or even to suffer from memory. Here, of course, we must make a distinction between *smriti* (memory) in *smriti-katorota* and *swaran* (recall) in *swaran-bedana* to grasp the subtle shifts in meaning. While the former speaks of memory, the latter concerns itself with recall or the process of invoking a past. While all these words rely heavily on the *algos* or the pain in nostalgia, there is an ambiguity about the location of the pain: is it the memory itself which is painful, or is it the process of recall that causes pain in nostalgia?

None of these phrases directly refer to “home”, which is implicit in nostalgia but lost in verbalization, probably because the terms in Bengali are primarily concerned with the forms of memory and the structure of recall. Again, some of the qualifiers accompanying *smriti* in nostalgia basically speak of the affect that accompanies the memory, ranging from *bedona* (pain), *katorota* (anguish) to *medurota* (mellowness). Thus, they may be called *Smritir rasa*^{xv} or the affective dimension of memory. *Rasa* (meaning “juice”, “sap”, essence or “flavour”) signifies the essence or the finest part of anything. *Rasa* theory emphasizes the concept of “aesthetic flavour” as an essential element in literary as well as performing arts. *Rasa* is “a kind of contemplative abstraction in which the inwardness of human feelings suffuses the surrounding world of embodied forms” (britannica.com).^{xvi} They constitute the fundamental of an emotion, and this can be communicated suggestively through *dhvani*, nuances in language. Now when we identify nostalgia as a *rasa*—or the essence of memory, we are not doing it in the classical sense which lists nine principal *rasas* in Indian aesthetic theory; but we are using it as a derivative concept

denoting affect as Tagore has done, for instance, when he spoke of *oitihāsik* or historical *rāsa* that according to him is a “vital principle of the epic” (195). For Tagore, these are “indefinable mixed rasas which it [rasa theory] has not attempted to name” (195). Likewise, nostalgia too could be one among those unstipulated ones. Nostalgia as a *rāsa* simultaneously speaks of “the climate of memory” to use the epithet mentioned earlier, and at the same time can be viewed as an aesthetic principle that enriches and embellishes a literary creation.

The term that is conspicuously absent as a compound in all standard Bengali dictionaries, including the most widely regarded *Samsad* and *Chalantika*, and yet most commonly acknowledged word for nostalgia, is *smṛiti-medurota* (*smṛiti*=memory, *medur*=spell). *Medur* from which we arrive at *medurota*, has diverse connotations in the dictionary and all of them can be variously used to interpret nostalgia. *Medur*, for instance, may mean “soft”, “mellow” or “tender”. If we go by this meaning, then *smṛiti-medur* comes up with a slightly romanticized understanding of nostalgia as tender memories; or memories untainted by the vicissitudes of time. There are however, other meanings of *medur* that retain the ambivalence of nostalgia without essentially qualifying the memory as tender or harsh. *Medur* according to Kalim Khan’s Dictionary may also be “full”. In that case, *smṛiti-medurota* is the condition of being saturated or filled with memories. The other understanding of *medur* in Bengali lexicon is “to be under a spell” or “a trance-like state”. *Smṛiti-medurota* would then mean something that is under the spell of memory. In Bengali, there is no exact equivalence for the term “nostalgia”; and its linguistic translations are only

tenuously attached to the English coinage. Thus, even though it must be acknowledged that the notion of nostalgia that I discuss has evolved significantly because of the colonial encounter: the Europeans suffered from bouts of homesickness in India under the tropical climate, it might be worthwhile to look at the Indian genealogy of the term before discussing the specific conditions for the proliferation or absence of nostalgia in relation to the modern city.

Although we may not have an exact parallel of the term in Indian languages, nostalgia as an affective condition is universal and it existed for centuries before the expression gained its currency in popular parlance. In the West, the tale of Odysseus is testimony to that fact. In the *Christian-Judaic* tradition, nostalgia in its most customary sense is as old as the story of Genesis that recounts the “original sin”, man’s banishment from the *Garden of Eden* and the subsequent longing for that missing home. This quest for the lost paradise is once again given a different intensity in the homelessness of Cain, the eternal wanderer. Thus, one must distinguish the gap between the birth of the term and the sentiment it denotes.

Like its European counterpart, Indian literature from ancient times records occurrences of nostalgic yearnings. In Hindu mythology, celestial beings such as nymphs are expelled from their heavenly abode by the curse of angry Gods and made to suffer the separation from their home as mortals on earth. In the two major epics in Sanskrit Literature—*Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*—the protagonists are repeatedly thrown out of their homes by scheming relatives or twists of fate. For instance, *Sita*, the daughter of the Earth goddess *Bhumi*^{xvii} and consort of Lord Rama in the

Hindu epic *Ramayana*, suffers multiple separations from her family. These occur when she decides to accompany her husband in exile for fourteen years, away from their kingdom in *Ayodhya*; next, when she is abducted by *Ravana* in their exile in *Dandaka* forest; and finally, after her rescue, when her husband sends her to sage Valmiki's *ashram* (hermitage) permanently after his subjects think that she had been rendered impure during her kidnapping. Eventually, she decides to end her miserable life, which constantly demanded the proof of her chastity and spousal loyalty, by entering the womb of the earth. This unites Sita, with her mother to complete the *homecoming* that was denied in her mortal existence.

Separation and longing endemic to the human condition are fundamental to the epics. In fact, according to Hindu mythology, they are at the root of the creation of *Ramayana* and poetry itself. *Valmiki*, regarded as the *Adi Kavi* or the "first poet" who is credited for having invented *Slokas* (or verse meter; *Sloka* literally "song", from the Sanskrit root *śru*, "to hear") and to whom *Ramayana* is traditionally ascribed, started composing his lines after observing a *Krauncha* bird cut down by a hunter during the act of love-making. The insufferable grief of its female companion made *Valmiki* instantaneously recall the story Rama and Sita and their travails: love, separation and unattainable longings.

Some of the most commonly found examples of nostalgia are traced in erotic literature dealing with *viraha* or separation from Divine love or the earthly lover, which becomes an occasion for intense yearning. In Classical literature, some frequently used expressions are: *hari-viraha* (resulting from the separation from Hari or God); *priya-viraha* (being

aggrieved by the estrangement from one's wife or beloved); *viraha-anale* (the fire of separation); *viraha-samudra* (the sea of separation): *viraha-vedana* (the agony of separation) and so on. They speak of the uncertainty of return which further deepens the misery.

In Sanskrit, another term used to denote amorous love or longing is *smara* that shares the same root with *smaran*, which means memory, remembrance or recollection. *Smara* as memory is related to *smaran* (to recall) and *smriti* (variously means memory or that “which is remembered”). They also refer to a vast body of Hindu religious and legal texts that was passed down orally before being codified in writing). *Smara* in the context of love is often used in compounds such as *smara-griham* (the abode of love), *smara-chakra* (a form of sexual union), *smara-stambha* (the pillar of love, also alluding to the male phallus), or *smara-kūpaka* (the well or the cave of love, referring to female genitalia). In Hindu mythology, god of love *Kamadeva* is also sometimes referred to as *Smara*. Building upon these associations, Charles Malamoud in his critical piece “By Heart: Notes on the interplay between Love and Memory in Ancient Indian Poetry” thus forges an intimate connection between love and memory in Sanskrit literature by arguing that “Memory is determined by love. A being or an object could not occupy my memory were I not bound to it by some form of attachment” (249). He then delves deeper into this connection by referring back to the etymology:

It is the verbal root that bears the primary meaning, which is also the broadest meaning. From *SMAR*, ‘to remember’, is derived *smara*, which is recollection’, with a nuance of ‘love’—which nuance, we must

imagine, comes to wholly mask the primal tonality. *Smara* is that which awakens in us the remembrance of things...desired (249).

Here Malamoud speaks of a love that proliferates in absentia: “love draws its power of seduction from the fact that it is, at the same time, a recollection of love” (Malamoud 250). We remember those we love and the nostalgic reminiscences in turn intensify our longing.

At another plane the conjunction of erotic desire and recollection in *smara* also obliquely comments on how memory can be created through the union of words. Love facilitates copulation of words to produce a chain of signifiers in recollections which eventually goes on to create memory. The words are given a sexual charge to produce remembrance. Every act of nostalgic recall adds something more to the existent repository of memories—memory itself becomes an act of love. In his essay Malamoud alludes to *Smarasi Smara* “You Remember, Love . . .”, the opening alliteration in a passage from the epic poem, *Kumarasambhava* by the legendary poet and dramatist in Classical Sanskrit, Kālidāsa (born around 4th century CE) as:

a symbol of sorts for all poetic reflection on the subject of love as remembrance. Love is itself called upon to recall that which it once was, in a formula that leads one to understand that it only is when it has been” (250).

It is perhaps for that reason, *viyoga* (loss, separation, death), and *viraha* (lack, longing in separation) are considered crucial in themes dealing with

love. We may once more recall the earlier reference to the origin of poetic utterance in *Ramayana* from watching the *viraha* of the female bird for her dead partner that triggered the memory of *Rama* and *Sita's* story of love, separation and the ensuing suffering.

In Classical literature women are the most common subjects, experiencing *viraha*, however exceptions are not rare. A man's lament for his estranged wife is given most enduring expression in Kālidāsa's lyric poem *Meghadūta* or *The Cloud-Messenger* dated tentatively around 375 CE. *Meghadūta* opens with a commonplace situation of an obstruction or prohibition which only enhances the longing in love. The *yaksa*^{xviii} or a semi-divine caretaker of the treasures of Kubera^{xix}, the God of Wealth, is banished from his kingdom in *Himalayas* for neglecting the duties of his lord. The forlorn lover wistfully *pines for* his wife, from whom he has been separated in exile for a period of twelve months in Ramagiri. In Ramagiri in Central India, the poem opens at the onset of monsoon in the Hindu month of *Asharha*:

Where Ramagiri's cool, dark woods, extend,
 And those pure streams, where Sita bathed, descend;
 Spoiled of his glories, severed from his wife,
 A banished Yaksha passed his lonely life:
 Doomed, be his lord's stern sentence, to sustain
 Twelve tedious months of solitude and pain. (3)

As in other poems of Kālidāsa, nature animates in humans, different emotions that are equally sensitive to the rhythmic movement of day and

night, the changes in the season and so on. Thus, suddenly the *yaksha*, who is emaciated and stricken with grief due to the estrangement from his wife, notices a cloud on the mountain-top from his retreat. On seeing this passing cloud, the restive Yaksha offers his obeisance and requests him to be his envoy and carry his tidings to his wife in Alakā on *Mount Kailasha*. To convince the messenger about the benefits of the journey, *Yaksha* illustrates with a great wealth of detail the many beautiful sights that the cloud is likely to encounter on his north-borne voyage to Alakā, where *Yakshapriya* (*Yaksha*'s beloved) awaits his return. His words oozing with nostalgia, he describes his absent homeland with great flourish:

There is the fountain, emerald steps denote,
Where golden buds on stalks of coral float;
And for whose limpid waves the Swans forsake,
Pleased at thy sight, the mount-encircled lake. (7)

From the description of the city, he moves to a description of his beloved's peerless beauty, which is now frozen under the burden of distress. The husband envisions the *vyakul* (a feeling that combines restlessness, anxiety, distress and perplexity) *Yakshapriya* languishing in *viraha* for connubial union like a lone *Chakravaki*: A female bird, also known as the *Brahmany* duck in India. In Hindu Classical tradition, they were represented as the symbol of conjugal love and consistency. These birds are generally seen in pairs during the day but are cursed to remain separate every night for disturbing a *muni* (sage) during his meditation. *Yaksha*

imagines himself suffering from a similar fate when he compares his wife to an estranged *Chakravaki*:

Lone as the *widowed Chakravaki* mourns,
Her faithful memory to her husband turns,
And sad, and silent, shalt thou find my wife,
Half of my soul, and partner of my life,
Nipped by chill sorrow, as the flowers enfold
Their shrinking petals from the withering cold.
(my emphasis; 85)

Incidentally, Kālidāsa's *Meghadūta* became an occasion for another poet centuries later to speak of nostalgia in a short essay. Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), one of the greatest figures of modern Indian literature, muses on the idea of home, exile and nostalgia. Tagore compares his modern readers with the banished *yaksha*, estranged from their idyllic home:

The Yaksa's cloud thus sails over hills, rivers, and cities, and with it go the sighs of the reader, afflicted by the sorrow of separation from his loved one. It was the India of the poet, where the loving-tender eyes of village wives had not yet learnt the artful play of eyebrows, and the town wives' long-lashed dark eyes, adept at beguiling play, sent out curious glances like swarms of bees. We are banished from that India. We have only the poet's cloud to send there as a messenger ("The Meghadutam" 222).

What is intriguing here is the role Rabindranath Tagore assigns to the poet's flight of imagination in bridging the gap between the ancient and the present. This probably stems from his belief that *Sahitya* (literature) which etymologically comes from "sahit" (together) embodies the idea of union. According to Tagore, this is not "simply a union of idea and idea, language and language, book and book: nothing except *sahitya* or literature can establish deeply intimate ties between one person and another, between past and present, between far and near." (Tagore, "Bengali National Literature" 179).

The poet's craft, backed by his imagination thus becomes a substitute of the "cloud" for the modern readers. Only through the mediation of poetry can we break the barriers of time and come closest to the India that once was and is now lost. At another level, Tagore's nostalgia is for the pastoral life of man-nature harmony that he believes is now effaced by urban culture. Urbanity is distancing humans from their original homes amid nature.

The reasons for harking back to ancient India, and devoting some time to the Classical literature, even though my concern with nostalgia is manifestly more contemporary, is to trace the trajectory of our inheritance. The traditions of *viraha*, separation and longing that have been handed down from previous generations has significantly shaped the conceptualization of nostalgia as it exists today. *Biroho* (from Sanskrit *viraha*) is common word used in both literary and everyday speech in Bengali. Modern writers in vernacular variously invoke the tradition of *Viraha* in a diluted and delimited sense, by doing away almost entirely

with its, elaborate, stylized representation in Classical literature, nevertheless, retaining the core of the sentiment. And Kālidāsa's *Meghadūta* has often been a familiar reference point for subsequent writers of all ages because of its iconic status. Among the moderns, Tagore himself wrote a short piece by the name of "Meghdoot" in *Lipika (Letters)* where he dwelt upon the need for separation to facilitate a fuller union. One must embrace distance and absence to understand presence:

I saw only the half of love's union, the other half that is of separation I lost sight of, that is why the never-satisfying seeing of the distance ever remained unseen, the screen of nearness hid it from the view.

Where there is infinite sky between two people, there is all silence; there, words are of no avail; that vast silence has to be filled with melody of the flute. Without the emptiness of a great sky the flute cannot sound (8).

Interestingly, here Rabindranath Tagore defends the separation and the consequent longing or nostalgia not as an inevitable condition, but as a necessity in love. The everyday interactions clouded by "routine activities, duties and words" (Tagore, *Lipika* 8), pushes love further ashore. Caught up in a network of social relationships, exhaustion creeps into love. It is a conviction that Rabindranath reiterates even in his treatise, *Rural Literature*: "The *Meghadutam* is a poem about lovers' separation. It is as though, when separated by a slight loosening of the taut bonds of conjugality, people find anew the leisure to love on their own. The heart's forceful ardour finds space to flow freely where a distance opens up

between woman and man” (134). *Viraha* accentuates the fervor of love. Thus, distance must be invoked to “soar high, far away from this far-extending, impassible banishment that comes from nearness” (Tagore, *Likipa* 8) and fulfillment might be achieved in staying away from one’s beloved as Tagore’s protagonist Amit Ray articulates this belief as a defense in *Sesher Kabita (The Last Poem)* for parting his ways from *Lavanya*, his lady-love to marry another woman, Ketaki:

Most barbarians equate marriage with the union, and look upon the real union thereafter with contempt.... (108)

Ketaki and I - our love is like water in my *kalsi* (jug); I fill it each morning, and use it all day long. But Labannya's love is like a vast lake, not to be brought home, but into which my mind can immerse itself (179).

The strain of nostalgia I am about to discuss around the colonial modernity of the city cannot be merely explained or limited the tradition of *Viraha*, though it aligns with the idea of Calcutta as the beloved, loved and lost, in several contemporary writings where the city-space is clearly eroticized and acquires a gendered identity.

Even while it draws from the pre-colonial roots, the contemporary anatomy of nostalgia reified into its present form is a product of the Indo-European encounter, associated with the changes wrought by the new apprehension of time and space which came with industrialization and formation of new urban centres.

Although the ancient *Puranas* and the epics, largely speak of a cyclical notion of time divided in *yugas* (ages), prior to the European colonization in traditional Indian society one witnessed a coexistence of various temporal registers, extending from cosmological, genealogical or generational to dynastic, and linear. The cyclical time, as Romila Thapar contends, could itself “encompass segments of time consisting of historical chronologies” (8) Further, in agrarian societies, there were also prevalence of ritual time following the rhythm of natural cycles. However, with the advent of the Europeans, the measurement of time that gained centrality, particularly in the industrial cities of Post-Enlightenment era, was the notion of secular temporality that was at once linear and intrinsically associated with trade, commerce and work schedules in the factories. Modern times in the metropolitan centres was primarily linked to factory routines.

The conceptual framework of nostalgia that I intend to develop in this thesis is predicated on the spatio-temporal disjuncture caused by the experience of colonialism in India that not only emphasized a temporal order based on the new work-regimes of capitalism, casting aside all other understandings of time prevalent in non-western societies; it also introduced a new form of urbanity which was markedly different from the pre-colonial cities in the orient. With the gradual decline of pre-industrial economy in the villages, the demands of work necessitated hordes of job seekers to leave their homes in the villages and settle in the burgeoning commercial centres like Calcutta. This experience of disciplining oneself to the new temporal economy, combined with the sense of alienation in the

big cities created a profound disorientation, breeding a form of nostalgia associated with the birth of the Western cities that displaced the old order. In the early phase, as we shall see in the vernacular literature of the nineteenth century, this nostalgia was exclusively for the village, and the yearning for a “home” away from the industrial centres. Gradually, with time, new relations were forged with the urban space. Consequently, the twentieth century literature is marked by different levels of oscillation that layered the equation between the city and the village, and consequently, urban nostalgia. The struggle between the native village and the Western metropolis that persisted throughout the nineteenth century, had its manifestation in twentieth century literature as well, but the categories and the sentiments connected with these spatial originations became internally conflicted with complexities.

The straightforward antipathy for the city by those who had to relocate themselves in the urban conurbation because of work or other compulsions was often replaced by a desire to seek a “home” in the city itself. To grapple with the myriad forms of alienation, people built strong cultures of commensality through different communal activities, sporting cultures, friendship and urban sociality in the public domain to create, however falteringly, a sense of being at home in the city. At times this ended in a failed quest, leading to disappointments and a return to the village. Again, at other times such a return was not possible, especially by a generation of writers whose life-world was centered around the city. Thus, in their critique of the urban life there was a distinct nostalgia for a “home” that was either lost or absent. This thesis not only aims to trace

these perceptual shifts in envisaging the city through this interpretive lens of nostalgia, but also to locate the changing paradigms of nostalgia in time.

Nostalgia in its contemporary frame in the Indian postcolonial context is remarkably polyvalent, enriched by these plural histories and traditions. Cultural hybridization can open a spectrum of possibilities under which the new discourses on nostalgia can be reviewed and re-conceptualized for diverse ends.

THE SCOPE, TOOLS AND STRATEGIES

My work is chiefly textual and archival. While the thesis is predominantly literary, treating the fictional accounts from colonial and postcolonial Bengal—stories, novels and poems—as a cultural event lying between nostalgia and history, it nevertheless pleads for trans-generic motility. The fiction and non-fictional literature mingle in an embedded nexus of material practices, informing each other within the framework of the intellectual-cultural history of a milieu. Socio-historical and literary documents of the same period function here as “co-texts” rather than “contexts” for each other. Thus, fiction is read in intersection with essays, personal memoirs, colonial history or newspaper articles as supporting documents, from libraries and archives located across West Bengal (India), the United Kingdom and Australia.

My thesis takes an issue-based approach to the research topic. Its contribution is not primarily in the field of author studies, but to nostalgia in the context of the city in the literary periods under the broad rubric of

colonial and postcolonial modernity in Bengal. Here the allusions are contextually driven, hence, sometimes a text is taken up in detail keeping the requirements of the narrative in mind. At other times, a certain portion of it is read symptomatically to augment or contradict the conceptual framework.

Finally, if research contributes a voice to an ongoing conversation, translations enrich that voice by making new recourses available to the discussion. In my project, translation is an important tool to access the texts in vernacular, because any work on nostalgia vis-à-vis the memories of a city is incomplete without considering the wealth of its local literature. Thus, besides English texts, I am looking at English translations of literature from their Bengali original. For other untranslated material, I have translated them in parts depending upon their relevance to my work at hand.

In terms of the methodology and the theoretical and analytical rubric, my thesis branches out in various directions. Nostalgia studies is diversely explored in relation to manifold forms of memory, affect, or spectrality in different chapters with South-Asian postcolonialism and theories of modernity and modernism in the context of India. And finally, these are applied to the field of the city to create an urban narrative of Calcutta through the lens of nostalgia. Each of these areas is quite vast in itself; however, as a way of weaving together the disparate strands into a coherent form in the thesis, I have limited my readings to those that are directly relevant to my work.

In the following, I gloss briefly where the key recent contributions to nostalgia studies have been so far to trace the trajectory of my departure. Nostalgia's role in identity formation—both collective and individual, meaning-making and reconstruction of the past—especially after a historical upheaval, migration or an accident due to which the ties with the previous life have been ruptured had been variously explored in Janelle Wilson's *Nostalgia: Sanctuary of Meaning* (2005). Further, Andreea Ritivoi's theorization of nostalgic affects, drawing from divergent disciplines—philosophy, literature, sociology, are explored in *Yesterday's Self* (2002), particularly in relation to the complex intercultural negotiations with familiarity and “otherness” in the lives of exiles and immigrants.

Among the major areas in which the study of nostalgia played a significant role was most certainly in the domain of consumer culture. In readings of Benjamin's *Art in the Mechanical Age of Reproduction*, to more recent theorists—Jameson or Appadurai, nostalgia has been invoked and critiqued for a selective remembrance of the past through a romanticized, rose-tinted glass that takes away the memories of strife or disintegration. Several treatises took up this subject, including the most recent *The Ministry of Nostalgia: Consuming Austerity* (2017) by Owen Hatherley, which investigates nostalgia's propensity towards creating false histories.

Nostalgia presents the past as memorabilia, making it most susceptible to crass commodification, which is further heightened by nostalgia's intimate association with the corporeality of material objects.

The very fact that an old photograph, a piece of antique furniture, a certain smell of home-cooked food can stimulate a strong sense of nostalgia, leads to the objectification of the past by the vendors of kitsch industry. While modern science backed by Western capitalism has given absolute emphasis on the idea of “progress”, it has never really shied away from recreating lost worlds with the latest technologies as consumable goods. It has been exploited, over and over again as the most reliable marketing strategy, be it in tourism as a heritage industry, or in movies, particularly in the form of period films and costume dramas that recreate fantasy pasts. The consumer industry thrives on the economy of desire around a “lack”—a wistful craving for the distant, absent or unattainable. Since nostalgia too functions around a similar desire for wish-fulfillment, it has been easy prey for the capitalist market that to heighten demand for commodities, constantly creates artificial lacks, even when there are none. Nostalgia’s obvious association with the sensuous— or the gustatory experiences— has only enabled this banalization of the past, which is hollowed out of both its ideology and substance. In *Modernity At Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, Appadurai calls this phenomenon “Ersatz” or arm-chair nostalgia where:

Rather than expecting the consumer to supply memories while the merchandiser supplies the lubricant of nostalgia, now the viewer need only bring the faculty of nostalgia to an image that will supply the memory of a loss he or she has never suffered. This relationship might be called armchair nostalgia, nostalgia without lived experience or collective historical memory (78).

Appadurai's observations once again bring us back to the critically misleading stress on the "object" as the primary repository of nostalgia. Sometimes, when we feel nostalgic by looking at something, it is not necessarily nostalgia for that object per se. Rather, the object is merely a trigger that opens a series of signifiers or past associations, leading us to something about which we are nostalgic. Consumer industry effaces this understanding with its singular emphasis on the "object" as an end to nostalgia. Further, industries that devour the past attempt to obliterate the difference between newly-produced replicas in hundreds and thousands, and the original object from the past which carries its own specific history, the history of the body that handled it and all those fleeting moments from the past etched in its body. As Benjamin tells us in *"Work of Art in the Mechanical Age of Reproduction"*:

Even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be. This unique existence of the work of art determined the history to which it was subject throughout the time of its existence (*Marxists Internet Archive*)

Benjamin calls this "uniqueness" the "aura" of the artistic object. For Benjamin, critiquing from a Marxist position, the liquidation of "aura" was not necessarily a bad thing as it challenged the authority of the original and the fascist claims of purity, exclusivity vis-a-vis authenticity. He was speaking in favour of democratizing art and thereby liberating it from its

cultish^{xx}, parochialism. In Benjamin's case, the project was political. He was engaging with the idea of purity of tradition (and perhaps the nostalgia associated with it) with certain immediacy in a totalitarian regime where art was deployed as a means to propagate the Fascist worldview by aestheticizing politics. But what seemed liberating in the wake of technological revolution, soon degenerated into counter-revolutionary kitsch commodities, completely subsumed within the dominant order of capitalism and controlled by exigencies of the market. Thus, in many ways culture became synonymous with "cultural goods" as Adorno would show in the chapter on "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception" in his book *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944).

The nostalgia industry, which is an offshoot of this "Culture Industry", in the age of late capitalism renders the past as an industry through mass "souvenirization" and mythologized representation of past eras. These replicas are merely visual simulations wrenched out of their historical context. Appadurai's critique of the nostalgia industry in fact takes this problem a step further where counterfeit nostalgia is fabricated as a nimble market strategy by aggressively promoting a false sense of loss.

In line with Jameson's "nostalgia for the present" in *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991), Appadurai introduces a turn in the temporal logic where the market to enhance the demand for certain commodities builds a sense of urgency among consumers by dwelling on the notion of transience—"the present is represented as if it

were already past” (83) with the embedded logic of *carpe diem* or seize the day.

In *Nostalgia in Transition, 1780-1917* (2017), Linda Austin, traces this evolution of nostalgic affects from a psychological illness in medical nosology to an “aesthetics of simulation” (4) in its early days when the maladaptive cadets suffering from “homesickness” in military and naval bases were not sent back to their native places due to their failing physical and mental condition, but instead treated by providing or recreating in the work-places, some of things that the afflicted person enjoyed back home. Austen invokes Friedrich Schiller’s treatment of a nostalgic patient—Grammont, in his early career as a medical practitioner— by devising recreational walks in the countryside, arranging visit to the spa, or brief escape into the pastoral and so on, to simulate some of the activities Grammont could have undertaken back home as a substitute for actual return:

The case of Grammont thus stands as a paradigm for nostalgia in transition: it depicts a shift from internal torment to external relief, from the associative impasse that defined the affliction into an enactment of memory, one that would characterize its pleasurable, modern forms. In a substitution of (psychological) remembering for (cerebral) memory, the patient released blocked and obsessive thoughts of home by rehearsing the return in a representative space. (11)

Interestingly, as we shall see in the thesis, it is partially this same logic of semblance and simulation as a way of addressing their afflicted conditions

that impelled the “homesick” British to create their “Little Londons” in colonies as an alternative to their return to the originary place of belonging. However, the impact of nostalgia extended beyond the affective into the realm of the aesthetic, political and the social, integrally linked to the politics of imperialism.

In a more recent past, as an affective discourse, nostalgia made powerful inroad in literary and cultural studies with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the dismantling of the socialist state in erstwhile USSR. In the post-communist regime, *Ostalgie*, a portmanteau of *Ost* (east) and *nostalgie* in German, gained currency to designate this brand of nostalgia for life under socialism in Eastern Bloc countries in Europe in the last decade of the twentieth century into the new millennium. A host of essays and books were written at the wake of post-communist nostalgia such as *Left in the Past* by Alastair Bonnett (2010), a collection of fifteen essays anthologized in *Post-Communist Nostalgia*, edited by Maria Todorova, Zsuzsa Gille (2010). However, the most influential book of this nostalgic turn was Svetlana Boym’s *The Future of Nostalgia*. Here Boym distinguishes between two kinds of nostalgic longings—“restorative” and “reflective”. Restorative nostalgia emphasizes on *nostos* and “proposes to rebuild the lost home and patch up the memory gaps” (41). It attempts “a transhistorical reconstruction of the lost home” (Boym xviii). Such nostalgia creates national memory by relating an individual’s past to a larger collective memory. Reflective nostalgia, on the other hand stresses on *algia*, or the longing itself and “delays the homecoming-wistfully ironically, desperately” (xviii). According to Boym:

restorative nostalgia does not think of itself as nostalgia, but rather as truth and tradition. Reflective nostalgia dwells on the ambivalences of human longing and belonging and does not shy away from the contradictions of modernity. Restorative nostalgia protects the absolute truth, while reflective nostalgia calls it into doubt” (xviii).

My thesis invokes these putative models of nostalgia in the context of colonialism, Partition or postcolonialism in various configurations and complex shaping of meanings.

**COLONIAL MODERNITY: BRITISH “HOMESICKNESS”
AND THE INDIAN CITY**

The other areas pertinent to my project are postcolonial studies in South Asia around British colonialism in India, and discourses on modernism or modernist studies in the Non-European context. In India and particularly in Bengal, historically these two fields shared overlapping concerns, since the institutions of modernity in this context are largely brought forth by colonialism. Thus, the postcolonial theorists, I engage with, such as Ranajit Guha, Partha Chatterjee and more extensively Dipesh Chakrabarty, simultaneously deal with experiences of colonialism and modernity in their work.

However, though their writings widely inquire into the temporal registers of modernity in the subcontinent, debating its belatedness “in the imaginary waiting room of history” (Chakrabarty, *Provincializing* 8),

nostalgia is not their primary concern while studying the politics and cultures of modernity. In fact, Chakrabarty briefly remarks in “Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History” on the perception among the academics about the invocation of nostalgia as the “sin of sins” (*Provincializing* 28) in history-writing, grouping it with “nativism” and “nationalism”. Nostalgia’s relationship with the modern is deeply fraught with conflicts, and more so, when the modern is associated with the coercion of colonialism. Yet, nostalgia diversely manifest itself in the literature of the said time (though not always consciously and sometimes in absentia). Its multifaceted politics becomes an engaging area of study that I aim to explore through my research, by questioning its marginality in literary and cultural studies.

Modernity is a contested terrain and operates from multiple loci even within the South Asian context. Marian Aguiar pointed out in her book *Tracking Modernity* that in the recent past scholars re-envisioned “idea of modernity to places torn by debates about cultural affiliation, theorizing a modernity of alterity, produced by a ‘constitutive outside,’ — usually an imperial power. In describing this alterity, some scholars show an ambivalent modernity or a dialectical modernity riven by difference” (2). So, the use of the qualifier “colonial” here, is also to acknowledge that the specific brand of modernity which my research deals with largely derives from “particular historical experiences in Europe” (Aguiar 2) and is associated with the practice of colonialism in South Asia. A working definition of colonial modernity according to Aguiar, then, draws its meaning:

from the amalgam of practices and institutional forms that had given it solidity in Victorian England. These included the cluster of concepts, practices, and institutions that had substantiated modernity there, including technology, capitalism, urbanization, individualism, secularization, instrumental rationality, alienation, and mobility (3).

In *Provincializing Europe*, Dipesh Chakrabarty specifically emphasizes the political aspect of this modernity, “namely, the rule by modern institutions of the state, bureaucracy, and capitalist enterprise” which is “impossible to *think* of anywhere in the world without invoking certain categories and concepts, the genealogies of which go deep into the intellectual and even theological traditions of Europe” (Chakrabarty 4). Chakrabarty simultaneously, contends that this notion of modernity imported from Europe is both “indispensable and inadequate” (6) in understanding the political, cultural, or material practices under the purview of the “modern” in South Asia. However, this model of modernity is effective in comprehending the forms and manifestations of nostalgia that I aim to discuss in relation to the rise of the Western city under British Rule. Modern nostalgia that was shaped by the Indo-European encounter is a byproduct of colonial modernity, an important aspect of which was the “travel” as Marian Aguiar persuasively argues:

Colonial modernity was born out of travel. Movement opened the possibility of contact with new cultures and fashioned a cosmopolitan world vision. Colonial rhetoric justified its role in terms of travel,

fetishizing a history of exploration, migration, and mobile technologies. Movement became a way of fulfilling and legitimizing the project of modernity undertaken in Europe...The rhetoric of colonial modernity animated such ideas as reason, science, and secularism through narratives of progress and expansion, and in doing so, placed centrally, both materially and imaginatively, the paradigm of movement (9).

This “paradigm of movement” (Aguiar 9) associated with Western modernity generated specific effects, two of which are relevant to the nostalgia at hand. First, the physical movement, or the widespread travel and overseas settlements in the colonial period, bred a certain form of “homesickness” and the consequent desire to create “little Londons” in outlying colonies. Hence, cities like Calcutta that came into being were partially fashioned like the metropolitan centres by the nostalgics away from their homes. The other dimension of this “movement” takes us back to Dipesh Chakrabarty’s argument in *Provincializing Europe* about the “historicist” claims that view Europe as the “site of first occurrence” of modernity from where the ideas, institutions and practices of the modern travel to other “‘rude’ nations” (8) of the orient through Europe’s civilizing mission, which became a cover-up for the colonial exploitation:

Historicism is what made modernity or capitalism look not simply global but rather as something that became global *over time*, by originating in one place (Europe) and then spreading outside it. This “first in Europe, then elsewhere” structure of global historical time was historicist; different non-Western nationalisms would later produce

local versions of the same narrative, replacing “Europe” by some locally constructed center. It was historicism that allowed Marx to say that the “country that is more developed industrially only shows, to the less developed, the image of its own future” (Chakrabarty 7).

This supposed time lag in the arrival of modernity in non-western countries created a window for looking back at Europe with a sense of longing to reach the state advancement they have already achieved. The historicist notion of “first Europe and then elsewhere”, thus, generated a pervasive geography of dependence in the imperialist discourse. It refused the colonies their autonomy or agency in the same way it denied their population citizenship in lieu of subjecthood. In this scheme of things, Indian history of two centuries was subsumed within the metropolitan history of conquests and civilization, its modernity, a derivative of western model, and the subcontinent’s capital city under the colonial rule, a satellite or an incomplete replica of London. The affective condition of nostalgia or “homesickness” among the European immigrants in India, as we shall see in the following chapter, sustained and amplified this cartography of dependency by invoking and initiating comparisons with their European homeland.

CHAPTER OUTLINE

The first chapter develops around Calcutta’s formative years, its birth, nomenclature and expansion into a colonial metropolis. The development of Calcutta as a dominant urban centre was part of Britain’s policy of urbanization for the purposes of trade and defense. However, here at the

outset one must make distinctions between colonies such as the ones in Australia and in India. While the former was a convict vis-à-vis settlers' colony where people had come to stay, the latter was a trader's colony. The key purpose of the English merchants and officials was never home-building in India. While urban sprawl in Calcutta was primarily, what Reverend James Long calls "the child of trade" (100), the affective impulses nevertheless urged the immigrants in the city to eke a "home" away from their metropolitan centre in Europe. The chapter stresses the nostalgic memories brought forth from England by the British residents in the city, that went into building their "Little London" on the banks of Hooghly. It shows how nostalgia passes from an affect to a tool of imperial domination by producing memories that facilitated the recreation of a semblance of the world they left behind.

The arguments draw on the dialectic between the home and the world in the body of Anglophone literature on Calcutta from the late eighteenth and nineteenth century, that were simultaneously invested with loathing and longing for the city such as Richard Atkinson's "A City of Palaces" or to a lesser extent Kipling's *The City of Dreadful Nights*. My interventions in the argument are specifically about the role that nostalgia had in the growth of an overseas empire in the colony. The chapter thus explores the definition of nostalgia as "homesickness" in its manifold meanings in terms of the city's colonial modernity and locates how it underwrites the poetics of urban space in relation to the stratagems of affective memories.

The second chapter, read in dialogue with the first, is about the vernacular response to the colonial city in Bengali literature. In the

eighteenth and nineteenth century, when the Europeans were trying to recreate their home in Calcutta's White Town, vernacular literature reversed the settler-centric hierarchy of the city over the villages in cultural representations, and was largely dismissive about the British capital. This chapter thus looks at Calcutta in Bengali literature of the mid-nineteenth to the early twentieth century till the rise of literary Modernism in Bengal. It seeks to understand some of the probable causes behind the palpable lack of nostalgia in early Bengali writings as opposed to the English narratives of the city. By considering the various causes, I argue that this crucial absence of nostalgia is as significant as its presence for gauging the metropolitan landscape and its contemporary culture in relation to the city's modernity.

Engagement with the city was prolific in both British and Bengali literature of the time. Chapter Two, through its dialogue with the previous one, brings into discussion the contending models of nostalgia and associative memories that played up against each other in representing the city and its affective milieu. As an extension of this argument, the last section probes how different Bengali literary traditions in the nineteenth and early twentieth century offered complimentary as well as contradictory readings of the British cartographic and narrative discourses on urban space, with a special emphasis on the function of memory and nostalgia.

Chapter Three is built around the aesthetic praxis of young Modernist writers in the first half of the twentieth century who reoriented the field of urban representation in literature as the new site of cultural production (though not in an unproblematic way) associated with

capitalism and its new technological advancements. Their writings saturated with the “grayness” and squalor of industrial modernity, soaked themselves in new urban imagery. Unlike the authors’ predecessors in vernacular Bengali, they simultaneously saw the city as the centre of their desire, conflict, passion and memory while struggling to enunciate the “shock” and iterative anxieties of living in a modern colonial metropolis. This chapter primarily centres on poetry, where the changes wrought by literary Modernism were most immediately and significantly felt against the preexisting canon, in the early twentieth century in relation to the city. In the interwar-years with their robust imaginations, these poets introduced a new aesthetics of envisioning the urban ethos that was born out of the “machine based rhythm of metropolitan life” (Britzolakis 73) and found its “home” in the city. The Modernists in colonial Bengal were at once inspired by their European counterparts such as Eliot, Pound or Hopkins and yet markedly local. I would even argue that their literature is manifestly Bengali and distinct from the description of the city that emerged from the writings of contemporary Europeans in India.

Here too, like the other chapters, the engagement with “home” at multiple levels remains critical to the understanding of urban nostalgia. I will specifically focus on the works of Samar Sen and Jibanananda Das among the constellation of young Modernists who made their presence felt in literature to cover the diverse approaches to the city in association with memory and nostalgia.

The fourth chapter discusses the practice of collective night-walking common among the Late-Modernist writers in the mid-twentieth century.

The widespread association of the night with lawlessness, delinquency and danger in countless forms also comes with an exhilarating sense of freedom. In this chapter on Late-Modernists loosely identified with the *Krittibas* generation, I will focus on both the actual practice of night walking in the modern city, and a strong nostalgia for such nocturnal perambulations that upturn some of the assumptions and fears about Calcutta nightlife, largely thriving on the colonial stereotype of the “city of dreadful nights”. The memories of night walking in Sunil Gangopadhyay’s “Smritir Sahar” (“City of Memories”) and Shakti Chattopadhyay’s “Se Boro Sukher Somoy Noy” (“That’s not a cheerful time”) for instance, create an alternative cartography of the city which is both subversive and transformative in its potential. This chapter thus explores some of the unorthodox spatial practices that emerge in the decadent nostalgia for the night among the *Krittibas* generation often recorded and revisited in poems.

While discussing the Modernist city, the third chapter briefly introduces India’s Partition and its impact on the human geography of the city. Chapter Five, specifically focuses on Partition and post-Partition city to understand the transition from colonial to postcolonial metropolis through various memories that were at stake.

Literature dealing with exile, particularly work written about the violent uprooting of people, such as India’s Partition in 1947, generally looks back at such events through the prism of two antithetical memories: traumatic and nostalgic. In Partition narratives, they are placed against each other, even sometimes at the cost of reducing the complexity of

historical memories into a dyad— “memory as destruction, [and] memory as salvation” (Schwarz 42). While one must be watchful of such binaries that attempt to pigeonhole the whole corpus of Partition memory within these two seemingly differential affective registers, one cannot deny the crucial role nostalgia and trauma played in narrativising Partition. Keeping in mind their centrality in Partition literature, this chapter explores two themes: one, understanding nostalgia in relation to trauma in the context of India’s Partition through a comparison of Punjab Partition with that of Bengal; and second, delineate the restitutive role of nostalgia, particularly as affective memories of a place, in the lives of Partition refugees of Eastern India, and more specifically Calcutta.

The final chapter revolving around the metropolitan uncanny approaches different memories entrenched in the postcolonial city through narratives of spectral hauntings from the colonial past. It considers the question of whether the ghastly and the fantastic in the built environment of the city can work as conduits of cultural history to interpret Kolkata’s transition from the colonial to the postcolonial modernity through the affective frames of nostalgia, trauma and other memories that fall between them. Nostalgia itself as an affect is haunted by various temporalities. While it operates in linear time, nostalgia fractures this notion of chronology, for, like the ghost, it neither belongs to the past nor the present. Inhabiting the space between the “here” and “now” and “there” and “then”, in the nostalgic haunting the past comes back with a surplus of meaning. It can never be the same past once experienced, as it is always already altered and infiltrated by the concerns of the present. Similarly, its

hauntings do not fit into present entirely, for the direction of nostalgia, the changes aspired by looking at the past, is towards the future. Nostalgia is always ghosted by other temporalities; its shadow falls on another time.

This chapter is partially premised upon stories of some of the legendary haunted mansions from British Calcutta, and partly on the ghosts of historical personages who have a reputation for haunting the city. I discuss how Calcutta negotiates with traces of its past and carries them into the future by working through the interpenetration of trauma and nostalgia written into the corpus of these memories. Situating the haunted houses as the locus of alternative history in the context of Calcutta is an original contribution of this thesis.

Finally, in the latter half of this chapter, by summoning the spectral Calcutta of Begum Johnson—“the oldest British Resident in India”—in Nabarun *Bhattacharya's Kangal Maalshaat (The War Cry of the Vagabonds, 2003)* that lurks beneath the postcolonial metropolis, the chapter shows how the urban landscape of the city haunted by its colonial legacy not only performs a ghastly simulation of its yesteryears, but how the past impinges upon the present to direct the course of the future.

CODA

All the contradictory epithets that insinuated themselves into the fabric of the city at different junctures serve as keys to Calcutta's multiple pasts and are crucial to its self-conception. They show that the city has travelled a long way from *Calcutta*—the second home of the Anglo-European in colonial India, to the plague-ridden “nightmare city” of refugees; and the

“city of memories” (*Smritir Sahar*) in the last quarter of the twentieth century. One of the myriad ways of charting this journey is by mapping it through the index of nostalgia, or its conspicuous absence, embedded in literature. The thesis explores the city-space not only as a container for events unfolding against its backdrop, but as an event in itself. By placing together, the strands of palimpsestic memories evoking love and disgust, it therefore traces two transitions concurrently: one in the narrative of the city and second, in the transition of nostalgia itself as a cultural aesthetic. Hence, by responding to the problem of nostalgic yearning and its discursive liminality, the research aims to re-envisage the city’s past through stories by discerning themes and ideas that bring out in a significant way the potential of this “always already” present nostalgia within the rubric of literary and cultural studies.

NOTES

ⁱ *Coffee-Houseer adda* (“The gatherings in the Coffee House”) written by Gouri Prasanna Majumdar and sung by the renowned singer Manna Dey in 1983, achieved a cult popularity in Bengal.

For the Bengali lyric, see: <<http://bdsonglyrics.blogspot.com.au/2011/12/coffee-houser-sei-addata.html>>

ⁱⁱ See “If Nostalgia Were a State, Calcutta Would Be Her capital”. *The Citizen: India’s First Online Daily*. 18 June 2015.

ⁱⁱⁱ Western cities are variously invoked in relation to the unfolding of multiple regimes of nostalgia. To name a few, for instance, Boym in *The Future of Nostalgia* speaks about Berlin, Moscow, St. Petersburg and Paris to meditate upon different forms of “reflective” and “restorative” nostalgias. The edited volume, *Post-Communist Nostalgia* (2010) navigates between several East European cities affected by the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Again, European metropolises such as London, Paris, and other urban, cosmopolitan centres in Europe as sites of belonging/non-belonging are discussed in Alastair

Bonnett's. *Left in the Past: Radicalism and the Politics of Nostalgia* (2010) in relation to nostalgia, spatial history and psychogeography.

^{iv} Dipesh Chakrabarty's essays, "Memories of Displacement: The Poetry and Prejudice of Dwelling" in *Habitations of Modernity* (pp. 115-137) and "Adda: A History of Sociality" in *Provincializing Europe* (pp.180-213) touch upon nostalgia in the context of displacement and longing generated by the transformation of intimate spaces and institutions of modernity in postcolonial Bengal.

^vWhile the project is time-bound to keep it within manageable limits, the timescale is not inflexible. It oscillates back and forth. It travels back to the late-seventeenth and eighteenth-century to look at Calcutta's foundational years, and similarly incorporates Nabarun *Bhattacharya's* millennial novel, *Kangal Maalshaat* to discuss within the context of my thesis.

^{vi} It is a term derived from Thomas Moore's book *Utopia* (1516) to support the myth or an originary memory of some primitive when human beings lived in perfect state of bliss in harmony with nature and other fellow humans.

^{vii}Such imagination of nation was of course, couched in an exclusionary religious rhetoric which was incompatible with worldview of the other communities. The Hindu nationalist imagination, could selectively appeal to a certain section, while alienating the others.

^{viii}A revised edition with the alternate title *If: or, History Rewritten* was published by Viking in 1931 with some alterations.

^{ix}From **pine* "pain, torture, punishment," possibly from Latin *poena* "punishment, penalty," from Greek *poine* (see *penal*). (http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?allowed_in_frame=0&search=pinning&searchmode=none)

^x"Calcutta: A Poem", (1811) anthologized in *Poets of the John Company*, edited by Theodore Douglas Dunn

^{xi}Cretinism is a condition of severely retarded physical and mental growth due to Congenital hypothyroidism or deficiency of thyroid hormones

^{xii} See, "Rydalmere Psychiatric Hospital: 1888 to 1980s": Female Orphan School.
https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/femaleorphanschool/home/rydalmere_psychiatric_hospital_1888_to_1989

^{xiii} "My favourite Things." *YouTube*.
www.youtube.com/watch?v=33o32C0ogVM.

^{xiv} See “The Modalities of Nostalgia” by Michael Pickering and Emily Keightley in *Current Sociology*, Vol 54, no. 6, pp. 919–941.

^{xv} In a conversation with Dipesh Chakrabarty about the different formulations of nostalgia in vernacular he used this phrase “*smritir rosh*” (rasa), which I believe extremely helpful in understanding nostalgia both as an affective memory and an aesthetic principal.

^{xvi} *Bhatata* in *Natyashastra* or the *Treatise of Performing Arts* developed the theory of *rasa* somewhere between 200 BC to 200 AD which was further explicated by Anandavardhan and the philosopher, rhetorician Avinavagupta around 1000CE. As aesthetic categories in Sanskrit poetics, while the *alamkaras* (literary and poetic embellishments) are intrinsic to the body of poetry, the *rasas* form the soul or the *atma*. The *rasa* theory thus takes the emotions, the *bhāvas*, as its foundation and asserts that basic human emotions and actions such as sorrow, laughter, fear, astonishment, anger, disgust and heroism can be “recast in a contemplative form” such as erotic (*Sringara-rasa*), compassionate (*Karuna-rasa*) heroic (*vira-rasa*) and so on.

^{xvii} Sita was the princess of Mithila and the wife of the legendary King Rama in *Ramayana*. Her name, Sita/Seeta literally means “furrow”. Her mortal father Janaka, the king Janakpur in present day Nepal, found her while ploughing the field as a part of a ritual.

^{xviii} “Yaksha, Sanskrit masculine singular yakṣa, Sanskrit feminine singular yakṣī or yakṣinī, in the mythology of India, a class of generally benevolent but sometimes mischievous, capricious and sexually rapacious “nature spirits” who are the custodians of treasures that are hidden in the earth and in the roots of trees. They are powerful magicians and shape-shifters. Principal among the *yakshas* is Kubera, who rules in the mythical Himalayan kingdom called Alaka.” (<http://www.britannica.com/topic/yaksha>)

^{xix} “Kubera, in Hindu mythology, the king of the *yakshas* (nature spirits) and the god of wealth. He is associated with the earth, mountains, all treasures such as minerals and jewels that lie underground, and riches in general.” (<http://www.britannica.com/topic/yaksha>)

^{xx} Benjamin uses the phrase “cult value” which is explained as the value of an “artistic production” within the “service of a cult” (Benjamin 257) As opposed to the cult value of art, which confines art in the realm of rituals, he posits, the “exhibition value” transports a work of art in a different “space-time”: “The cathedral leaves its locale to be received in the studio of a lover of art: the choral production, performed in an auditorium or in the open air, resounds in the drawing room” (“The Work of Art”, 221) to allow public to engage with it critically and independently without being restricted by the authority of the original.

CHAPTER I

EMPIRES OF NOSTALGIA: CALCUTTA'S "LITTLE LONDON" AND THE POLITICS OF IMPERIALISM

"Curse on the ship in evil hour that bore

My jolted frame to India's burning shore...."

"Calcutta: A Poem", 1811ⁱ

The outburst of anxiety and frustration inscribed in these lines by an anonymous poet from the days of the East India Company finds its iterations in countless writings of colonial migrants who speak of the "fervid sun" ("Calcutta: A Poem" 21) and the afflictions of muggy weather on the Indian plains. The affective registers deployed in these texts delineate the everyday "experience" of living in a place—the transformation of the body desiccating under the sun—the "shriveling", "sweltering" "dying" or the visceral pain of "boiling" and "rotting"—that became a trigger for the explosion of nostalgia in the European texts from the Raj. It couples with authors' crushing sense of disconnectedness from home in an environment that was so radically different from the place to which they belonged. The poems make a strong case for an overpowering nostalgia for "home" which as an affective framework pervades the writings of the English colonizers in India. The life of suffering depicted in the literary texts evokes this lack in the physical landscape, and thereby plays a quintessential role in shaping affective discourses, as well as

generating opinions in favour of effecting reforms in India. The textualized body of nostalgia embedded in these narratives, pining for the British weather— “Where milder suns on happier seasons shine” (“Calcutta: A Poem” 24) to the craving for family and kinship:

“Where kindred ties the passing hour endear.

Prompt the glad smile, and wipe the falling tear” (“Calcutta: A Poem” 24)—range from poignant recall to delusional rants. This chapter indexes the evolution of colonial Calcutta as recorded in literature through the interpretative lens of this nostalgia expressed by British emigrants in the early accounts of the city. In the body of literature on Calcutta from the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the arguments are substantively built upon the dialectic between the home and the world. These are intersectionally read with contemporary advertisements, newspaper accounts, memorial plaques and other secondary literature from the colonial period.

My observations are predicated on the claim that Calcutta grew partially as an offspring of the expatriate British subjects’ nostalgia for the imperial centre, London. However, there were multiple conflicting nostalgias, speaking in discordant, polyphonic voices in the years of the city’s growth into a metropolis of the Indian Empire. While the notion of “home” is central to the conceptual framework, this chapter is not about returning migrants’ nostalgia for a homeland that has changed over time, and hence their inability to “arrive”/ “return” to the place they had left behind—a discourse crucial to diaspora studies. My interventions in the argument are specifically about the function of nostalgia and other

associative memories in the building of an overseas empire: the ideas of “home” and familiarity that were carried forward to colonies, and the part they played in relation to the growth of Calcutta.

Much of the nostalgia I speak of in this chapter is not about Calcutta, but about memories of other places that had their bearings upon the city. They reveal how nostalgia becomes a two-way transaction that is simultaneously embedded in the past and oriented towards the future. The conditions under which nostalgia for the past impact the habitations of the future are studied by tracing the projection of London’s memory upon Calcutta in the days of its growth as a colonial metropolis under the British. This chapter thus explores the definition of nostalgia as “homesickness” in its multifarious meanings apropos the city’s colonial modernity and locates how it underwrites the poetics of urban space in relation to affective memories. It analyzes the contribution of affects such as nostalgia in urban development in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries—a phase when Europeans were trying to shape a home away from home in the city, as an imperfect replica of London in the East.

To comprehend the intimate ties of memory to a place, I utilize Gaston Bachelard’s *The Poetics of Space* to draw out a series of interrelated reflections in the beginning of the chapter. A powerful advocate of memory’s spatial turn in the mid-twentieth century, the text’s foregrounding of the space-memory can direct us to significant threads of analysis of the city in relation to nostalgia. In 1958, Bachelard’s (1884-1964) *La poétique de l'espace* read “space” through the “localization of

our memories” (Bachelard 8). The text argued for a systematic “study of the sites of our intimate lives”:

In the theater of the past that is constituted by memories, the stage setting maintains the characters in their dominant roles. At times we think we know ourselves in time, when all we know is a sequence of fixations in the spaces of the being's stability—a being who does not want to melt away, and who, even in the past, when he sets out in search of things past, wants time to “suspend” its flight. In its countless alveoli space contains compressed time (8).

Space like containers or pockets holds suspended time—the transient and fleeting moments which are otherwise ephemeral and irretrievable in reality. In Bachelard’s exposition on the spatialization of memory and how it affects us, the role of “daydreams” is pivotal in reanimating the past and in connecting our everyday existence to the “anthropocosmic ties” (5) of the universe. They take us beyond the confines of realism to comprehend a place in its totality. Space is that which is “experienced” in its essence through all the senses and imagination. In his *Poetics*, Lefebvre states that Bachelard’s spatial paradigm brings into discussion the “oneiric” house which is “as much cosmic as it is human” (“Production” 121). He fuses the representational and non-representational aspects of spatial imaginary like the “unique odor” of “raisins drying on a wicker tray” (Bachelard 13) that he recalls from memory. While the raisins lying on a tray are visually perceptible, one cannot apprehend the experience in its entirety unless the reader resorts to his imagination. The smell is “beyond description” (13).

In the context of my argument, I would graft Bachelard's "house" within the field of the city to a specific application. The stress on "specification" is important, for his conception of the "house" was not necessarily reducible to a three-dimensional space that my chapter is largely concerned with. The imagination of Bachelardian house expands to the "cradle"ⁱⁱ of "well-being" before man is cast into the universe. It invokes daydreams that connect memory with the "immemorial". The house is "human beings' first world" (Bachelard 7). This is in line with the Heideggerean notion of "dwelling"— "the contents of the House have an almost ontological dignity" (Lefebvre 121). Its intimate spaces—the attic, the basement corresponds to our psychic interiors, as Lefebvre notes in *The Production of Space*: "drawers, chests and cabinets are not far removed from their natural analogues, as perceived by the philosopher-poet, namely the basic figures of nest, shell, corner, roundness, and so on. In the background, so to speak, stands Nature—maternal if not uterine [...]. From cellar to attic, from foundations to roof, it has a density at once dreamy and rational, earthly and celestial" (121).

In Bachelard's phenomenological meditations, the emphasis on the conjunction between space and memory is persistent:

It is no longer in its positive aspects that the house is really "lived," nor is it only in the passing hour that we recognize its benefits. The entire past comes to dwell in a new house. The old saying: "We bring our *lares* with us" has many variations. And the daydream deepens to the point where an immemorial domain opens up for the dreamer of a home ...
(emphasis in the original; 83)

In my argument, Bachelard's plea for "localization of our memories" sets up the premise for three correlated interpretations: First, and most fundamentally, it enables a realization about how memories are intimately woven into the texture of the space. His observations are useful in exploring the spatial dynamics of nostalgia, as against to the strengthening belief in the twentieth century that it is more about lost time than space, particularly since attempts were made to decouple nostalgia from literal homesickness where "home" encapsulated the embodied physical experience of living in a place, as discussed in the Introduction. However, while Bachelard clearly privileges space over time in his evocation of memories, I would read space and time as collaborative coordinates in understanding nostalgia.

Second, nostalgia which I translate here as a loose variant of the Bachelardian daydream where "memory and imagination remain associated, each one working for their mutual deepening" (Bachelard 5), carries forward the baggage of our "earliest home" to the places we travel and the homes that we successively build. This retrieval of a past of subjective experience that remains outside the historian's domain— "we are never real historians, but always near poets, and our emotion is perhaps nothing but an expression of a poetry that was lost" (Bachelard 6)—and then "carrying it forward" even in the most functional terms is vital in understanding the grasp of nostalgia on the migrants in exile. The resurrection of the past's positive experiences— remembered, dreamt or imagined, and making it part of one's ongoing experience creates a sense

of continuity by bridging the chasm between “then” and “now”. To be disconnected from past memories is to lose one’s bearing in time and space.

Third, Bachelard’s example of the “dried raisins” discussed earlier in relation to the abstract non-representational aspect of space—that which transcends the “problems of description” (3)—is also about memory that cannot be fully inscribed in words without recourse to imagination. The author is unable to communicate the “unique odor” (Bachelard 13) of “drying raisin”— “one that it takes a lot of imagination to smell” (13), unless one suspends his reading to delve into his own past to explore his own “wardrobe” with its “unique smell”. “For it is not until his eyes have left the page that recollections of my room can become a threshold of oneirism for him” (Bachelard 14). In nostalgia too, there is always an excess or an extra-lingual residue that lies beyond the realm of empirical history, whose essence can be partially grasped through a sensual evocation of the faculties of imagination, and partly through somatic and sensory “experiences”. I say only partially, because “we are unable to relive duration that has been destroyed. We can only think of it, in the line of an abstract time that is deprived of all thickness” (Bachelard 9). Thus, homecoming is always incomplete and nostalgia in its traditional framework is insatiable. As we will later see in the chapter, the “little London” which the homesick British citizens wanted to create on Indian soil is only an approximation of the real where the adjectival qualification “little” must be taken in all its seriousness.

While Bachelard's arguments largely focus on intimate spaces such as the house and its various components, I place them in the context of the city. Cities are conglomerations of houses and inhabited spaces in "reality" and "virtuality". They are simultaneously "experienced" in concrete corporeality and in imagination, "thought and dreams" (6). This understanding of the public through the private also illuminates how nostalgia—which is often perceived as a personal, intimate affect—passes from the domain of the individual to the collective, to shape larger forces in the public realm. From replicating English domestic scenes with lilies and roses in the garden to introducing European food culture—by responding to various nostalgias—the settlers gradually extended their control over everyday life in the colonies with their memories of the absent homelands. The notions of "home" and home-building thus assume a larger significance in the management of the colonial space in the empire.

"HOMECOMING" AND NOSTALGIC TRAVELLERS

As I have posited earlier, the wistful desire for "homecoming" forms the *sine qua non* of nostalgia. Thus "home" in both literal and metaphorical senses is central to the rubric of nostalgia studies. To trace the evolution, propagation or the dearth of nostalgia in urban narratives in Calcutta, one must therefore locate the extent to which Calcutta serves as the idea of "home" for its inhabitants at different turns of history from the days of its expansion as a premier city in colonial India to the epoch after Independence. In Calcutta's context, "becoming home" is particularly

relevant because it has always been reckoned as the city of immigrants and settlers.

From the colonial era, a very substantial portion of its population, both Europeans and the “natives” who hailed from different parts of the subcontinent, were essentially outsiders who had left their ancestral houses to come to the city in search of a new life. They had to recreate a home-like environment for their sustenance even when it was meant to be a provisional arrangement. However, to understand what they missed, and what they reconstructed in lieu of that missing centre, one must briefly gloss over what “home” symbolized for the Indians and the colonizing population in India. In *Habitations of Modernity*, Dipesh Chakrabarty explains at length its foundational significance in Bengali religio-cultural psyche:

The word *vastu* (home), [is] a Sanskrit word of Vedic vintage, carrying a special connotation. Monier-Williams defines *vastu* as meaning, among other things, "the site or foundation of a house." In Bengali, the word is often combined with the word *bhita* (or *bhité*), which is connected to the Sanskrit word *bhitti*, meaning “foundation.” The idea of *foundation* is in turn tied to the idea of “male ancestry.” And the result is that the combined word *vastuvita* reinforces the association between patriliney and the way in which one's dwelling or home is connected to the conception of foundation. One's permanent home is where one's “foundation” is (the subject of this imagination being, undoubtedly, male (120).

On the other hand, the English “home” which can be traced back to Old English “*ham*”, coming from Proto-Germanic *haymow* (“home, village”) represents an array of meanings from “dwelling” and “house” to “manor”, “estate”, “village” and “region”. In Hinduism and Christianity, it occupied a sacred place, since family that constitutes the core of any traditional home is the medium through which the divine purpose of procreation is legitimized and carried out. It is the place where our personal experiences can reach fulfilment by integrating “the thoughts, memories and dreams” (Bachelard 6). The house as the physical embodiment of this home is described by Bachelard as “our first universe, a real cosmos in every sense of the word” (4).

After the Industrial Revolution, home, which stood at the heart of the bourgeois moral-universe in Europe, assumed a special significance as a private haven or refuge for working class men from their grueling drudgery in the modern market-place. John Ruskin's essay “Lilies of Queen’s Gardens,” initially delivered as a public lecture before being compiled in his two-essay collection along with “Of King’s Treasuries” in *Sesame and Lilies* (1865) not only reflects upon the meaning of home, but upholds familial values that were fundamental to the Victorian worldview:

This is the true nature of home—it is the place of Peace; the shelter, not only from all injury, but from all terror, doubt, and division. In so far as it is not this, it is not home, so far as the anxieties of the outer life penetrate into it, and the inconsistently-minded, unknown, unloved, or hostile society of the outer world is allowed by either husband or wife

to cross the threshold, it ceases to be home; it is then only a part of that outer world which you have roofed over, and lighted fire in. But so far as it is a sacred place, a vestal temple, a temple of the hearth watched over by Household Gods, before whose faces none may come but those whom they can receive with love.... (77-78)

The affective control that “home” exerted over its inmates from their very childhood probably explains why Britain’s overseas subjects in Australia, India and in the cultural backwaters of other European colonies were so eager to create a home, however contingent, with ideas and practices transported from their native country. And to no surprise, this noble task of home-making was ascribed to women whose role Ruskin categorically defines as custodians of whatever is “most precious in art, in literature, or in types of national virtue” (75). So, saddled with the new duty, the virtuous “angels of the house” accompanied their men as faithful companions in their imperial mission. Braving the tropical weather, the heat and dust of empire, the enduring wives and unmarried maidens in the prospect of a lucrative match slowly ventured into the outlying colonies in small numbers. Abnegating the comforts of home in their native country, in radically different spaces, they tried creating a semblance of that much-romanticized English domesticity in vexing situations. While their men became empire-builders, overseers of trade and commerce, the women fashioned their homes with marks of Victorian respectability. Several “made-easy” handbooks and conduct guides were made available to assist women in their duty. One such account was Maud Diver’s study, *The English Woman in India* (1909) whose epigraph proudly proclaimed:

To these women are due gratitude not only of their country but of the civilized world. Fearlessly the woman of British birth looks in the eye of danger. Faithfully and with willing sacrifice she upholds the standard of the King-Emperor--the standard of culture and of service to humanity (epigraph n.pag).

It was even said that the proficient running of the empire called for the womanly skills of home-management with an eye for detail, and the prized ability to improvise things with limited resources under utterly difficult circumstances. Home was thus central to both political and cultural discourse in the Age of Imperialism. John Tosh notes in his book on masculinity in middle-class homes in Victorian England that:

When the Victorians sang 'Home Sweet Home', when they sagely repeated 'Home is where the heart is', and when they warmly commended the home life of their own dear Queen, it is clear that they were expressing more than their appreciation for food, shelter and rest; they were giving voice to their deep commitment to the *idea* of home. Comport, privacy and time spent in the home, more sought after by the Victorians than by any previous generation, were regarded not as ends in themselves, but as means to realizing a domestic vision. To be without these benefits was to experience 'homesickness'ⁱⁱⁱ (27).

So the European emigrants ended up trying to replicate a model of their country everywhere they set foot. If nostalgia is *homesickness* in a broad sense, to understand its prevalence or absence at different historical

junctures we must uncover to what degree Calcutta could become home to different populations who inhabited the city, creating a complex mosaic of memories.

AFFECTIVE HISTORIES AND THE IMPERIAL POLITICS OF EXPANSION

To assert that the growth and expansion of Calcutta in the British period as the second city of its global empire is owed exclusively to nostalgia would be a factual misrepresentation. It was, foremost, backed by exigent economic concerns to facilitate trade and administration in a place that began as a modest mercantile enclave on the banks of River Hooghly. However, it would be equally erroneous to pin down its prosperity to a couple of factors as a conglomerate of causes played up in the process of its urban development, nostalgia being one of them. In fact, one must be attentive to the Empire's affective histories— “i.e. historical representation that both takes affect as its object and attempts to elicit affect” (Agnew 301)—to foreground the “experience” of living in a place, instead of focusing on the empirical structure of events. Such quotidian “experiences” often backed important administrative decisions in the colonies (such as the shifting of the summer capital to Simla, or the modulation of the architecture according to the weather).

Here, we may pause to briefly refer back to Bachelard's spatial *poetics*, which speaks of space as “experienced” with both sense and imagination rather than merely being a functional platform for unfolding of incidents. “Experience” is the key that unlocks the personal memories

and collective histories woven into the matrix of space. But while Bachelard's musing talks about experiencing a "space" in its essence, affective histories are specifically concerned with the embodied dimension of that experience. Such histories stress "experiences" lived and endured, showing how they always had a critical, though understated, role in initiating change. As polymorphous sites of yearning, desire, aspiration and fantasy, cities as affective spaces were crucial in bringing about significant political and creative transformations.

Driven by nostalgia, the affective labour of home-building in colonial cities like Calcutta, reproducing models of the European metropole, covertly worked as an agent in expanding the geography of imperialist world order. The desire to replicate the known customs, architecture, institutional practices of the homeland, to tame the geographical and cultural "otherness" of the alien land by locating it within familiar reference points is a common enough experience— "Through the act of semblance, human beings asserted their rights of ownership over the alien world of substance" (Austin 13). More true of a people who had always shown strong allegiance to their land, recognizing for long the principles of *jus soli* as the basis of citizenship. But when affects such as nostalgia are politicized, they do something more.

In *Nationalism, Genuine and Spurious*, Ashish Nandy makes an interesting distinction between patriotism and nationalism around the notion of home. Nandy contends, patriotism is "tied to the idea of home and the latter [i.e. nationalism] to be an artificial concoction that looked instrumentally at the former and, indeed, was often built on the ruins of the

former. Indeed, nationalism was partly a reaction to a sense of being uprooted or rendered homeless.” (3501). Nostalgia is both a response and a remedy to this overpowering sense of homelessness. In colonial Calcutta, it was premised on two modalities. It worked towards restoring the authority of the English past. That in turn facilitated the project of imperialism, creating hierarchies of “us” against “them” in the colonies. The “colonial experience made the mainstream Western consciousness definitionally non-Oriental and redefined the West's self-image as the antithesis or negation of the East” (Nandy, *Intimate Enemy* 72), even though there was no consensus about what exactly constituted this Englishness at home. In Europe, the “British” constituted a complex, internally striated and ethnically riven society (Irish, Scottish, Welsh, English), but in the colonies, the discourse of “Britishness” with a longing for imagined common heritage, constructed to “assume a positionality of superiority with respect to the Native” (Brah 191), which “became a code of subordination” (Brah 190-191).

In *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson looks at this birth of nationalism in the Age of Enlightenment and the characteristic “homelessness” posited in this chapter by Nandy, with the larger epistemic shifts, particularly the decline of religion as a major force in the eighteenth-century:

The century of the Enlightenment, of rationalist secularism, brought with it its own modern darkness. With the ebbing of religious belief, the suffering which belief in part composed did not disappear. *Disintegration of paradise*: nothing makes fatality more arbitrary.

Absurdity of salvation: nothing makes another style of continuity more necessary. What then was required was a secular transformation of fatality into continuity, contingency into meaning. As we shall see, very few things were (are) better suited to this end than an idea of nation [...] (my emphasis; 11)

Anderson therefore, claims that while it would be inappropriate to say that nationalism was produced by the erosion of religion, its birth must be understood in the light of the larger socio-cultural milieu that created a favourable climate for its advent and galloping growth in the West across the next two centuries. The diminishing significance of religion in public life, the shift in the economy from feudalism to global capitalism Post-Industrial Revolution, and the breakdown of old belief systems with new scientific discoveries in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries produced a profound vacuum in the spiritual lives of the subjects. The ebbing of the “The Sea of Faith” bolstered the sense of being “unhomed” from the paradise. The affective disposition of nostalgia or “homesickness” became symptomatic of the post-Enlightenment era, responding to the quest for a new faith that could shelter mankind. While religion survived the onslaughts of secular rationalism, its foundational myths were severely challenged. The confusion that accompanied the changes from the old to the new world order by the clashes between the warring forces of religion and rationalism, in consequence, created an Arnoldean melancholy so poignantly summarized in *Dover Beach*:

...the world, which seems

To lie before us like a land of dreams,
 So various, so beautiful, so new,
 Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,
 Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;
 And we are here as on a darkling plain
 Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
 Where ignorant armies clash by night. (256-257)

The poem's nostalgia for certitude and fixed identities is illustrative of the sentiments that often fed new ideologies in Post-Enlightenment Europe, nationalism being one of them. Nation became synonymous with "home", which expatriates tried extending or replicating in the colonies subordinate to that nation. While religion existed in some altered form, nationalism surreptitiously became a new religion. Its agendas and ideas found a favourable breeding ground in the empires where the sense of dispossession was doubled by the distance from the centre. Spiritual and physical alienation from "home" threatened the very sense of being for which nationalism became an effective anodyne. It helped in consolidating the bastion of common collective identity—a "Britishness" in the slimy grounds of the empire where its moorings were routinely challenged, disrupted and destabilized, and the colonizer was reciprocally transformed by the colonized. So the effort to create a "little London" in the colony was at once about stamping the geo-political territory with British identity and claiming its ownership, while simultaneously casting other alternative identities of the city into peripheral spaces.

**“WHOSE CITY IS IT?” CONFLICTING MEMORIES AND
DEBATES ABOUT CALCUTTA’S ORIGINARY HISTORY**

A fundamental way of claiming the possession of a land is through nomenclature. Naming is thus central to the politics of colonial expansion. Like the relentless arguments around the question, who has the utmost claim over the history of Calcutta; or who should experience the greatest nostalgia; there are similar debates about the origin of the British name—*Calcutta* and its Bengali counterpart—*Kolkata* which has now become the official name for the city.

Several anecdotes about the etymological root of Calcutta exist, based on contesting claims about the space being variously experienced, lived and evoked in memory by the different communities that dwelled on the land. Earlier, the chapter delved into the relationality between space and memory, or how “memories are fixed in space” (Bachelard 9). To control a space, its social relations and political organizations, one must gain control over its memories and subsequently its histories. The “spatial history begins”, Paul Carter asserts, “not in a particular year, nor in a particular place, but in the act of naming. For by the act of place-naming, space is transformed symbolically into a place, that is, a space with a history” (xxiv). English settlers often named the streets and localities in the colonies after British places and personages to brand the territory with the memory and identity of their homeland.

A glimpse of the stories and theories associated with Calcutta’s nomenclature may reveal the contested strands of memory in the conflicted

spatial history of the city. The concern here is again not to pin down which of these many versions ultimately stands true, but to engage with the memory-debate that marked the city in its originary moments. It may also shed some light as to why it was felt necessary in Post-Independence society to revert back to “Kolkata”—a name that always existed in history along with its Anglophone variant—by erasing “Calcutta” from the official registers.

Although the name was originally *Kolikata* in Bengali, it is better known by its modern colloquial derivative: Kolkata. Eminent linguist Suniti Kumar Chatterji (1890-1977) put forward the view that this place was renowned for the production of *koli chun* or quicklime, used for plastering the walls. *Kata* may refer to various things. One possible meaning could be places where shells were burnt to extract lime; and hence, it was named *Kolikata*. Chatterji, one of the strongest contenders with this claim, substantiated his theory through his allusions to the thriving trade of lime or *kali chun/chuna* which may even be traced in names of places like *Chunaritola*, *Chunagully* in the city^{iv}. However, the most popular and contested theory about the city’s nomenclature is that *Kolikata* is a derivation of *Kalikkhetrô*, literally meaning the “territory of the goddess Kali”, the sovereign deity of the city.

Now, to focus on the claims of the British origin of “Calcutta”, arguably the garbled Anglicized derivation of the native name *Kolikata* can be traced back to the early English traders who became inextricably linked to the empire-building project in the late seventeenth century. We learn from the accounts of P. Thankappan Nair (1933-), that the first

mention of the name Calcutta found in the English language goes back to a letter addressed to Job Charnock by Charles Eyre and Braddyl on June 22, 1688, furnishing the information: “[...] he (the Nawab) will grant us his perwana [permission] also for building at Calcutta (sic) with ground sufficient for a town or two as you desire” (qtd. in Nair 24). This letter does not adequately explain the history of the name, which first appeared in print in the eighteenth century, about forty years after the city’s British foundation in the travelogue of Captain Alexander Hamilton, *A New Account of the East Indies*, in 1726-27.^v

The British were, however, neither the first nor the only European merchants to come to the trading nodes of and around Kolkata. The province of Bengal that houses the city had long established strong commercial relations with other European powers^{vi} who had their trading posts along the riverbanks in Hooghly, not far from Calcutta. In fact, the land stretching between Serampore and Bandel in the Hooghly region received the moniker, “Europe on the Ganges” for its concentration of European merchant communities in the vicinity. There were Portuguese, Danish, Armenian and Dutch merchants who traded around the city before the English, even though English had the most lasting impact by gradually pushing other European voices to the periphery.

Arbitrarily the British history in Calcutta commenced around 1690 with the arrival of *English East India Company’s* fleet in the village of Chuttannutty^{vii} on the marshy banks of the Hooghly River. Most of the accounts from British sources either completely disregarded or suppressed the fact that this region had thriving settlements, consisting primarily of

fishermen and anglers, forming communities such as *Bagdis*, *Jelijyas*. There were also weavers and prosperous cloth merchants, instrumental in luring Charnock to this place. So, the narrative of Kolkata's British origin has been summarily contested in postcolonial historiography. Questioning its credibility, Nisith Ranjan Ray, in his introduction to A.K. Ray's *Short History of Calcutta* wrote that the colonial historiography by and large relates 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 models imported from their homeland... (vii-viii).

Charnock was lionized by the British historians from the 17th century onwards as the founding-father of the second city of the empire. This was primarily meant to glorify the English as the architects of a great city that formed the nucleus of modern India in the colonial period. However, postcolonialism's own nostalgia for the originary roots of civilization has contributed significantly towards reclaiming "other" histories from the permafrost of forgetfulness. Such battles of nostalgias between colonial and precolonial ownership of the city are crucial in post-independence historiography because of their layered ethical and political ramifications. "Contests over the meaning of the past are also contests over the meaning of the present and over ways of taking the past forward", Katherine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone assert in their introduction to *Contested*

Pasts: The Politics of Memory. So “the focus of contestation, then, is very often not conflicting accounts of what actually happened in the past so much as the question of who or what entitled to speak for that past in the present” (1). Here, nostalgia embedded in the invocation of precolonial past, in short, becomes an ideological tool in a battle over representation of disputed histories to determine how the present is to be understood and interpreted for the future. Precolonial nostalgia, in this case, works as a mode of academic enquiry by going back to the indigenous origins of the city’s nomenclature to challenge the privileged narratives in circulation and give credence to those histories whose existence have been hitherto discounted or forgotten. New findings have thus contested the myth of Job Charnock as the founder of the city.

Sabarna Roy Choudhury Paribar Parisad, a society headed by the Roy Choudhury family of Barisha— the former landlords who transferred the *jagirdari* rights of three villages: Sutanati, Dihi Kalkatah and Govindapur to the East India Company probably on the insistence of Prince Azim-ush-Shan, grandson of Emperor Aurangzeb —filed a public interest litigation in 2001, opposing the birth date of the city that was earlier taken to be August 24, 1690 when Charnock landed in Sutanati. In May 2003, the High Court delivered a historical judgment of what came to be known as the “Calcutta Birthday Case”,^{viii} ruling out the name of Charnock as the city’s founder. Charnock had come to Calcutta twice between 1686 and 1688 before the decisive visit in 1690. It would be erroneous to regard 24 August as the date of city’s foundation based on Charnock’s first arrival on that day.

In precolonial times, there was mention of this place in Bipradas Pipipai and Kavikankan Mukundaram's *Chandi Mangal Kavaya (The Euology of Goddess Chandi)*. Localities around Calcutta served as important trading outposts.^{ix} So to assume that Calcutta was *terra nullius* before the English arrival is equally untruthful. The court thus pronounced that a city grows over a period and no single date can be fixed as its birthday, just as no one person can be called its father, officially stripping off the city's paternal identification with Charnock.

While the court verdict on the "Kolkata Birthday Case", ushered a significant shift in reconfiguring the national past, the history took a course in the seventeenth century with the coming of the British who brought together different settlements and gradually gave it the shape of the city as it stands today. In the next section I will explore how these warring memories and opposing claims of ownership that marked the initiation of the city, write themselves into the history of Calcutta in its formative years. The nostalgia for their past lives which the immigrants carried into the city not only caused a cultural friction, but ushered in a distinctive variant of colonial modernity which emerged out of the Indo-European encounter.

CALCUTTA'S BRITISH HISTORY AND THE TALE OF TWO

POEMS

The two poems by English writers of the Raj discussed in the following pages—James Atkinson's "The City of Palaces" and Rudyard Kipling's

“A Tale of Two Cities”—narrating Calcutta’s journey in history from its foundation in the marshes, are also about the city’s becoming, or its failure to become London. These writings, laden with nostalgia for the European metropole, and occasional disgust with Calcutta, especially in Kipling, are indicative of the extent to which Calcutta was colonized by the memories of Britain’s imperial city.

Like other European writers preceding or following him, James Atkinson (1780-1852)—poet, painter, medical practitioner and servant of the Company in India—who came a century after the British foundation of the city, used a formulaic colonizer’s rhetoric in his poem that is best remembered for its title, *Calcutta: The City of Palaces*, printed by the Government Gazette Press in Calcutta in 1824. Atkinson’s deforming mirror of representation grounded the view upheld by British historians that Calcutta was typically a wilderness turned into civilization. Writing about the pre-colonial times, he paints a fearful picture of the place:

Embowering jungle, and a noxious fen,
 Fatal to many a bold aspiring wight;
 On every side tall trees shut out the sight,
 And like the Upas, noisome vapors shed;
 Day blazed with heat intense, and murky night,
 Brought damps successive, and a feverish bed;
 The revellers at Eve were in the Morning dead.

(Stanza XLIX, 29)

Two centuries after Charnock's feted arrival, a brief history of Calcutta's British origin was again enumerated in Rudyard Kipling's "A Tale of Two Cities". Atkinson's long poem which he chooses to call "A Fragment", is also a chronicle spanning two great cities—Calcutta and London—while the title only indicates the former. These poems give us a general idea of the imperial imaginings about the originary moments of Calcutta's spatial history in colonial poetics. Kipling's poem was first published in the *Civil and Military Gazette* in 1887, the English newspaper where he worked for several years in Lahore. The other city that is named here is, however, not London with whom Calcutta was usually compared in the colonial times, but the hill station of Simla where the British shifted their summer capital to avoid the oppressive heat on the plains. However, even without its mention London lurked in the backdrop as the invisible third. Its omnipresence is hardly a matter of debate in colonial literature, as a touchstone for the homesick British with which they measured the performance of all other cities:

Once, two hundred years ago, the *trader* came

Meek and tame.

Where his timid foot first halted, there he stayed,

Till mere trade

Grew to Empire, and he sent his armies forth

South and North

Till the country from Peshawur to Ceylon

Was his own.

Thus the midday halt of Charnock -- more's the pity!

Grew a City.
As the fungus sprouts chaotic from its bed,
So it spread --
Chance-directed, *chance*-erected, laid and built
On the silt --
Palace, byre, hovel -- poverty and pride --
Side by side;
And, above the packed and pestilential town,
Death looked down.
(my emphases; 81)

Both the excerpts from Atkinson and Kipling not only disregard the existence of any native township prior to the arrival of the English, they deem the place wholly unsuitable for human habitation. While describing the place in the poems, the pile of negative qualifiers in rapid succession—“noxious”, “fatal”, “noisome”, “murky”, “damp”, “feverish”—encrusting the landscape with a morbid gloom, make the task of empire builders appear more daunting than it probably was in this “pestilential” place that sprouted like a “fungus” on the damp rubbish heaps. The “trader” referred to in Kipling’s poem is Job Charnock, a comprador of the Company who was conventionally credited as the founder of the city. While both the poems follow the usual trajectory of an enlightened European, discovering new land in the exotic orient, and thereby bestowing on it a new identity amidst adverse circumstances, Kipling’s tone is more ominous. Even when speaking of Calcutta’s humble origins and its unwholesome living conditions, Atkinson’s poem as the other sections would show,

simultaneously registers the great feat that the empire has achieved, while the latter is much more cynical in his evaluation. Unlike the usual Kiplingesque hyper-masculine Englishman, Charnock is “meek and tame”. In fact, his passivity is emphasized by the double assertion of the attributives “tame” and “timid” in consecutive sentences and the dwelling on “chance” as the reason for the foundation of the empire’s premier city on Indian soil. This itself is a deviation from the popular projection of Charnock as a heroic figure by colonial historiographers.

Kipling’s skepticism is mostly a result of his personal dislike for this “unsavoury capital” (Kipling; *Sea*, Ch.1; 211) and his advocacy of Simla with which the poem concludes: “Let the Merchant seek, /who makes his silver pile, /England’s isle” but “...for rule, administration, and the rest, / Simla’s best” (82). Calcutta might be the chosen city for trade and commerce, for everything else Simla is better suited for the Englishmen in India. This conviction that sees Calcutta as the imperial necropolis, and Simla as a better alternative for a capital, is echoed even in his letters and travelogues such as the one collected in *From Sea to Sea*, first printed in the *Pioneer* and the *Pioneer Mail* in Allahabad, 17 April 1889:

...a man, who otherwise was a nice man, though he worked with his hands and his head, asked me why the scandal of the Simla Exodus was allowed to continue. To him I made answer: ‘It is because this sewer is unfit for human habitation. It is because you are all one gigantic mistake, — you and your monuments and your merchants and everything about you. I rejoice to think that scores of lakhs of rupees

have been spent on public offices at a place called Simla, that scores and scores will be spent on the Delhi-Kalka line, in order that civilised people may go there in comfort [...] I hate Calcutta (211).

The analogy between the city and the “sewer” is worth noting to gauge the extent of the author’s blistering rejection of the city. In the discourse of the modern, the development of metropolitan centres is often measured by the system of sanitation, facilitated by an underlying network of effective sewerage and drainage system. However, such systems work best when they are hidden from the public gaze. The openness or the visibility of “sewers” is thus both revolting, and a threat to civic health. It exposes what is meant to be enclosed and concealed. Kipling, by implying that all of Calcutta is actually Calcutta’s sewerage, bare and unsanitary, shows how Calcutta fails as a modern capital, and thereby extends his support for making Simla the new seat of British government.

The personal prejudices in Kipling largely coloured his opinions about the city in the poem, denying any propitious association with its birth, and rejecting its growth as an entirely fortuitous incidence. His knowledge of the weaknesses of the imperial system might have also replaced the wide-eyed wonder at its “dazzling splendors” (Atkinson 6)—the handiwork of the empire, by a sinister pessimism.

Atkinson’s poem represents the ascent of England’s imperialism in the nineteenth century, while Kipling’s verse was written sixty years after “The City of Palaces” when the Indian empire was past its prime. Its decline was slow but inevitable. Mutiny and popular revolts had already challenged the foundation of the British Raj in India. Witnessing the

workings of imperial government in its later years, Kipling was exposed to the spiraling hardships of keeping together an enormous polity, which probably subdued the effusive expressions at the marvels of the empire despite his much-touted English patriotism and strident support of imperial systems.

A biographical detail might also account for the subtle perspectival difference in the two poems addressing Calcutta. One might conjecture that Kipling presents the empire's capital in a harsher light because he had few attachments to the city. Atkinson was not connected to India by birth like Kipling, but had stayed for a substantial period in Calcutta under the Governor Generalship of Lord Minto, working at the Calcutta Mint and taking an active interest in its affairs. He associated himself with the Orientalists at The Asiatic Society of Bengal which led to him learning Eastern languages. He subsequently engaged in translations from Persian and took up the editorship of the *Government Gazette* for about four years. And Calcutta was at the centre of his active life in India. Kipling, in contrast, went to England after his early childhood in Bombay, returned only to settle down in Lahore and afterwards in other northern cities. His sentiment was probably not very different from the dwellers of other metropolitan centres in the subcontinent who were competing with Calcutta for prominence. Some of these cities like Lahore had a more illustrious Pre-British heritage than the capital that "sprouted" from nowhere to usurp their fame.

Finally, one must also take into account the print history of these poems. Atkinson's *City of Palaces* was a poem about Calcutta, published

from the same city. A substantial proportion of its early readers were the Anglo-Indian residents of Calcutta to whose sentiments the poem had an enduring appeal, be it in the elaborate eulogies for a city that they raised in the eastern shores, or in the poignant nostalgia for the “home” left behind in England. Kipling’s poem instead, came out in the *Civil and Military Gazette* that had joint editions in Lahore and Simla. By passionately arguing in favour of Simla, he was naturally catering to the readership in those parts.

In the two poems above, there is not much nostalgia about Calcutta as such. However, both attribute the city’s origin to the colonial encounter, and in both exists a distinct nostalgia for London as the romanticized “other” of Calcutta. Nostalgia for the English home in Atkinson’s poem, as the discussion in the subsequent sections would show, is overt and effusive like his praises for Calcutta. In the latter, the flow of nostalgia is subterranean and suggestive. It is mainly revealed in Kipling’s condemnations of the failings of the colonial city in its inability to measure up to standards of the imperial centre, or the copious references to daily, bodily experiences of discomfort that were thought to intensify nostalgia which itself had a strong pathological dimension until the early twentieth century. Kipling’s yearning for the congenial English climate is evident in his advocacy for the Anglo-Indian hill town Simla as the British capital over Calcutta in the plains where European population “boil and stew” (a milder version of this appears in Atkinson when he says people “groan and sigh”) in the summer heat. It is this strain of nostalgia for London which is of interest in the following segments of this chapter, showing how

colonial spaces overlain with past memories, and desire to recreate the absent “home” not only provided affective models for cities in overseas empires but also imposed a certain structural uniformity in the vast trans-imperial network spread across the globe.

**“LITTLE LONDON”: HOMESICK SETTLERS AND THE
BRITISH COLONY IN CALCUTTA**

In a country where according to the British brigade-surgeon H. E. Busted’s (1832-1912) estimation,^x “the European from his very arrival, looks and pines for the day when he may be favoured enough and fortunate enough to be able to leave it again” (334) before collapsing under excessive workload, the British colonizers perpetually complained of a “caged irritation” (Kipling; *Dreadful Night* 5). This frustration stemmed from a “reflective” nostalgia for both the English climate and their heritage, which was generated in response to their encounter with the natural (such as the climate, vegetation) and the built environment (like the man-made amenities of the civic life) of the colonial city. It reminded them of all the inadequacies in the far-flung land— be it “an illustration in the *Graphic*, a bar of music, or the light words of a friend” (Kipling; *Dreadful Night* 6). They formed the multiple cartographies of longing that constituted home, loved and lost.

Of course, with writers like Rudyard Kipling, whom George Orwell had once called the “prophet of British Imperialism”,^{xi} the accounts of colonial life are no doubt biased, but as Kipling himself admits, many of his views, like the opinion of several others in a similar situation, sprung

from the frustrated acknowledgment of their “lost heritage of London”. A strong nostalgia for the missing centre widened the gap between the past and the present, here and there:

At home they, the other men, our equals, have at their disposal all that town can supply—the roar of the streets, the lights, the music, the pleasant places, the millions of their own kind, and a wilderness full of pretty, fresh coloured Englishwomen, theatres, and restaurants [...] And we, we have nothing except the few amusements that we have built up for ourselves—the dolorous dissipations of gymkhanas where every one knows everybody else, or the chastened intoxication of dances where all engagements are booked, in ink, ten days ahead, and where everybody’s antecedents are as patent as his or her method of waltzing. We have been deprived of our inheritance. The men at home are enjoying it all, not knowing how fair and rich it is, and we at the most can only fly westward for a few months and gorge what, properly speaking, should take seven or eight or ten luxurious years. That is the lost heritage of London (Kipling; *Dreadful Night* 6).

Kipling, like many other writers of that time, could not envisage Calcutta beyond the reference frame of London, a dyadic relationship playing on the sameness and difference that in Kipling’s case only exaggerated his sense of deprivation in British India. For Kipling, his English nostalgia is only complicated by his subject position as an Indian-born child of British citizens.

His birth in December 1865 took place in Bombay (present day Mumbai) following his parents’ decision to move from England to India.

After spending six blissful years pampered by his Indian nannies, he was sent back home with his sister to commence his education in England. He was lodged with an English family in Southsea, Portsmouth, under the guardianship of the Holloways. Mrs. Holloway and her son, who was a bully, made him miserable. He was already suffering from the estrangement from his parents. Further, his admission to a public school which mostly had children from military families only added to his alienation initially, as he was considered bodily weak and shy, complicated by his relatively darkish complexion due to his exposure to the Indian sun. Ashis Nandy in his study of Kipling in *The Intimate Enemy*, as a colonial figure trying to negotiate with his bi-cultural identity, tells us— Kipling partially resolved this conflict by overtly identifying with the aggressor-culture:

Yet, his oppressive English years inevitably gave Kipling the message that England was a part of his true self, that he would have to disown his Indianness and learn not to identify with the victims, and that the victimhood he had known in England could be avoided, perhaps even glorified, through identification with the aggressors (68).

Like most of the Anglo-Indian children in colonial India, his identity was torn between the affection for the country in which he was born and the allegiance for the British roots. To seek the emotive values of his “English” home, he sometimes returned to its timeless mythological core transmitted across ages as opposed to its more changeable, contingent historical narratives. For instance, his book of fantasy: *Puck of Pook's Hill* (1906), a

collection of verse and prose for children that retells the history of fabled England, is redolent with his nostalgia for the English soil. We may take the final stanza of the poem, “Puck’s Song” for example:

She is not any common Earth,
Water or wood or air,
But Merlin's Isle of Gramarye,
Where you and I will fare! (2)

His loathing for the urban landscape of Calcutta which he thought was an inferior version of London without its heritage, perhaps stems from a similar hatred for a part of himself, which several Anglo-Indians experienced from a sense of ostracism by their counterparts in England for being a poorer version of Englishmen in the colonies. Kipling, “could not be both Western and Indian; he could be either Western or Indian [...] Kipling's avowed values were Western, his rejected under-socialized self Indian, and he had to choose between the two” (Nandy; *Intimate Enemy* 71). Yet, India was the reality that he could not entirely forsake, the mythical Great Britain was the home where he aspired to be. And clearly Kipling was not the only one to wallow in the nostalgia for an imaginary Britain or even its premier city London. For, as Nandy asserts, colonialism eventually destroys the:

wholeness of every white man who chose to be a part of the colonial machine, and to give him a new self-definition which, while provincial in its cultural orientation, was universal in its geographical scope. [...] He could not but be non Eastern; he could not but be continuously

engaged in studying, interpreting and understanding the East as his negative identity” (*Intimate Enemy* 71).

So, he is sucked into this nostalgia for England that he imagines as the fetishized “other”.

The trade imperium of the world in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, London became the model for various colonial cities across the globe. It came to signify different things for different populations in the index of nostalgia. For British subjects in the colonies like Kipling, it was the “unreachable home”, while for the new class of “natives” educated in English, it was the aspiring “elsewhere” on which they perhaps perfected their idea of a model city, even though Post-Industrial Revolution London, infested with crime, poverty, dirt and pollution was far from ideal. Nevertheless, London remained that yardstick against which Calcutta’s performance as a city was constantly judged in the colonial period. It is not a mere coincidence, thus, or a rhetorical jibe when pitted against this long history of colonial encounter, that nearly seventy years after decolonization the honourable Chief Minister of West Bengal in India, chose London as the model for Kolkata’s development. Despite the obvious differences between the two cities, London still enjoys the privilege of that desired *home* or destination that must be reached, even if it means creating a London in Calcutta, or replicating icons of popular culture such as a scaled down version of the London’s historic Big Ben as a part of Kolkata’s beautification drive.

“Home-longing”, intimately woven into the British history of the city, could be traced back to the epitaph of Job Charnock, who died in

Calcutta in 1693, though his gravestone erroneously mentions the year 1692 (see photograph). It was only three years after his arrival to Sutanati in order to establish the trading post for the English East India Company. The writings on his mausoleum bespeak a nostalgia for the “lost paradise”: “He was a wanderer, who after sojourning for a long time in a land not his own, returned to his Eternal Home”.



Figure 1: Charnock’s Epitaph in Calcutta

The epitaph describes Charnock—a wanderer in his mortal existence, who died on foreign earth and was denied the satisfaction of returning to his home in England in his last days. However, it is hoped that at the end of the long wayfaring journey on earth, Charnock would finally reach his heavenly abode—the “Eternal Home” of a true Christian in the bosom of the Father. Something that he was deprived of in this temporal world would be conferred to him in the afterlife for his good deeds.



Figure 2: The octagonal Mausoleum containing the gravestone of Job Charnock in St. John’s Church, Calcutta

To return to the narrative of Calcutta’s early British settlements, the place grew into a fortified township in the 18th century around Fort William,

which was then a “small fort with earth and ballast bastions and brick walls” (P. Chatterjee, *Black Hole* 6).^{xii} Life was far from easy for the first centurion settlers in Calcutta. Homesickness only worsened with attacks of cholera and other tropical illnesses. Phebe Gibbes (-1805), an 18th century English novelist, who had probably spent some time in India, described the East in the opening lines of her novel, *Hartly House, Calcutta* (1789), set in the time of Warren Hastings as “the grave of thousands” (3).

A substantial portion of the new township was built on marshes. While the land was gradually cleared for habitation, driving away the wild beasts from the new urban ecology, the resilient mosquitoes survived the onslaught. These mosquitoes from the swamps of Calcutta were so notorious that a couplet describing the plight of Calcuttans by the satirist, Ishwar Chandra Gupta (1812-1859) became quite prevalent in the nineteenth century:

Rete mosha, din e machi

Ei niye Kolketai achi

Mosquitoes prey at night, and the flies during the day

That’s how in Calcutta, the inhabitants stay. (qtd. in Patri; my trans.; 15)

The Europeans daily succumbed to the attacks of mosquito bites, which the heroine of *Hartly House* recalls in a letter to her friend in England with a great deal of distress: “... muskettos; I must tell you, though I shudder at the bare recollection of so vulgar a nuisance, that, in like manner with the bugs in London, they mercilessly annoy all new-comers, blistering them,

and teasing, if not torturing them continually; and in a great measure spare those who are seasoned to the climate” (10).

While the enchanting vistas of Oriental splendor, the fantastic anecdotes of “*rubies* by the Indian Ganges’ side” (Marvell, “Coy Mistress” 41) inspired generations of fortune-seekers, to make “passages” into the heartland of the Indian subcontinent, those gripping tales of wide-eyed wonders often gave way to disappointments upon the travellers’ arrival following an arduous journey. Thus, several of them were left in what seemed completely alien surroundings. Elegiac passages in Atkinson’s *The City of Palaces* remind us of the woeful state of those whose lives were cut short by their greed for amassing wealth in the East. The corporeal images of emaciation and death in these lines, subtending this particular moral climate are noteworthy. Dissipation ultimately effects physical decay:

How many here in avarice waste away
 The summer of existence; when too late,
 They hurry home, or haply lingering wait
 Till their bones rest beneath a sculptured tomb,
 In that Necropolis, of mournful state,
 Where structures rise, not in sepulchral gloom,
 But as gay temple, tower, light obelisk, or dome.

(Stanza VII, 8)

The verse attributes the untimely death of hundreds in the colony to one of the seven cardinal sins — “avarice”, that destroys mankind. Tempted by the prospect of gathering a huge fortune, or simply driven by the possibility of turning over a new leaf in the colony to improve their economic status, Atkinson’s poem talks about the privateers, profiteers or ordinary griffins—men of different financial standing who came *en masse* to a land that eventually became a death trap for many with its extreme weather conditions. People spend years in exile only to realize one day that they have stayed too long. Some barely managed to return to England in broken health, others were doomed to die in the heathen land.

The poem builds up a discourse of nostalgia that continually feeds upon the dichotomy between the “home” and the “world”. On their way to Calcutta, the headquarters of British India till 1911, the travelers encountered the rural landscape of Bengal which in spite of being lush and luxuriant, seemed totally different from the picture of “Merry England” that they cherished in their hearts. They instantly missed being cosseted by the warmth of the familial atmosphere of an English “home”. Trapped in limbo amidst two radically different lifestyles, the Anglo-Indians in their hyphenated existence in India seemed to suffer from a trauma of cultural displacement that Homi Bhabha describes as “unhomely”. Drawing from Freud’s notion of the “uncanny” or the “unheimlich”, Bhabha’s “unhomely” in *The Location of Culture* is a paradoxical state of “social alienation” (7) which is not a state of conventional homelessness but a realization that the borders between the home and world have been ruptured. As Bhabha puts it in “The World and the Home”: “In that

displacement the border between home and world becomes confused; and, uncannily, the private and the public become part of each other, forcing upon us a vision that is as divided as it is disorienting” (141). And he adds that while "unhomely" constitutes “paradigmatic post-colonial experience” (142), its iterations can be traced “distinctly, if erratically, in fictions that negotiate the powers of cultural difference in a range of historical conditions and social contradictions” (142).

Many Company officials, sent to India, were forced to live in contingent situations such as military camps, administrative outposts that blurred the boundaries between their public and private lives in India: “In the colonies, the circumstances in which the ceremonies of public and private were played out were vastly different from those in the home-country. The distinctions between public and private, while they were maintained, repeatedly broke down and had constantly to be redrawn. Hence, there was little escaping the artificiality of the separation of public and private spheres” (George 41). This aggravated their sense of epistemic dislocation, which generated an acute and insufferable homesickness. In the *City of Palaces* Atkinson, who had spent thirty-five years in India and nearly two decades in Calcutta, articulates a dilemma of double consciousness from the spatial disjunction between the colony and the home at the metropolitan centre:

*From scenes of brightest fortune, brightest joy,
Where pomp and power ensnare us, how we turn
Instinctively to England, and employ
Our minds in retrospection, till we burn,*

With feverish impatience; -- here we learn
To value that which Time can not allay,
The cherished love of home: our bosoms yearn
For that sweet close of life, for that we pray,
To roam o'er sunny fields, where childhood loved to stray.

(my emphasis; Stanzas VIII, 9)

Making the colony habitable for its subjects by imposing a model of familiarly became a pressing need, since affective memories such as nostalgia are embedded in space as Bachelard argues in *Poetics*: “memories are motionless, and more securely they are fixed in space, the sounder they are” (9). So, to assuage their longings the British community in Calcutta attempted to recreate a “home” and its associative memories by reconfiguring the space with ideas, forms and patterns imported from Europe on which they modeled their domestic, and by extension and contrast, their public life in India. They projected upon the city their imaginary aspirations of envisaging themselves at the Imperial Centre London by creating in Calcutta all that was English. From food to sartorial practices, they tried to replicate everything that they thought was in vogue in England. Sometimes their enthusiasm ended up in exaggeration as Rev. Long or Geoffrey Moorhouse would tell us:

For the gents of Calcutta were increasingly mindful of a certain pace that was set in London society. Mr. Hastings might have preferred a plain brown coat but the general taste in such matters ran to waistcoats of gold brocade or blue satin, sprigged and flowered at Rs. 200-300

each. Calcutta, in fact, began to outstrip London in its fancies after a while; by the time William Hickey got home he was given to understand that the wardrobe he had built up in India was, by the most tailored canons of St. James's, just a little too loud (Moorhouse 48).

In matters of dressing, ladies too were not left behind. In *Calcutta and its Neighbourhood*, dealing with the “History of people and localities from 1690 to 1857” Rev. Father James Long (1814-1887), an Anglican priest who came to India as a missionary in 1840, humorously noted that women in Calcutta often closely imitated the fashion and fads London produced, except that fashion was twelve months old. However, that is precisely the paradox of nostalgia. Nostalgic desire generates an impasse. It tempts us to recreate a time which cannot be restored— “we are unable to relive duration that has been destroyed. We can only think of it, in the line of an abstract time that is deprived of all thickness” (Bachelard 9). Past does not remain static. The sameness could only be reiterated with a definitive difference. Grounding his argument on Pierre Nora's *Les Lieux de mémoire*, thus Ian Baucom warns us in *Englishness, Empire and the Location of Identity*, that “even the hardest *lieu de memoire* is mutable”:

because it not only occupies space but is occupied by living subjects who, as they visit, inhabit, or pass through it, leave their estranging marks upon it, the locale also serves as the site in which the present recreates the past, as a “contact zone” in which succeeding generations serially destabilize the nation's acts of collective remembrance, and in

so doing reveal England as continuously discontinuous with itself, as that which may repeat itself but always repeats with a difference (5).

On several occasions, the image of England that one had in mind while departing the country altered substantially before the subject became conscious of the time-lapse. Further, the climate or the socio-cultural milieu of the colony could not permit either exact replications or a continuation of all the mores and customs practiced in England. Nostalgia existed in the interstices between the ideal and the actual, detached from its place of origin or the host country of the emigrant. And one of the purposes of the literary texts discussed so far was to illuminate this “gap” for reinforcing the rationale behind creating the “Little London”.

CALCUTTA’S WHITE TOWN: IMPERIALISM AND THE LANDSCAPE OF NOSTALGIA

For a more comprehensive understanding of nostalgia’s significance in the affective history the empire-building, it may be worthwhile to consider how London’s projections upon Calcutta in the literature of the Raj, were manifest in the built environment and the actual layout of certain parts of the White Town, modelled on European cities.

By the end of the eighteenth century, a number of British settlements developed around the New Fort William,^{xiii} constructed by Robert Clive after the victory in the fields of Plassey,^{xiv} and named after William of

Orange. The neighbourhood earned the appellation “the White Town” or “*Saheb Tola*”, to contrast it with its larger “native” or “Black” counterpart in the north, with the Armenian and the Indo-Portuguese quarters separating the two parts of the city. During next fifty years Calcutta became the paramount seat of British power in the colonies. In one of the largest port cities of imperial Britain after London in the nineteenth century, the river Hooghly (a distributary of Ganges) dotted with numerous *ghats* or the embankments formed the lifeline of the two towns in Calcutta. To foster the city as a centre of trade and commerce around the river like in London was what the colonial administration intended for Calcutta. The homology between the two metropolises, connected by their riverine landscape figured persistently in literary works throughout the colonial period. In “The Art of Living in India”, written in 1800 by John Horsford, the comparison is unequivocal: “In Eastern India’s realm pursue the route, /Where passions burn within, and Suns without. / Calcutta lo! As London o’er the Thames,/Lifts her high head above old Hougly’s streams: (11)^{xv}. By the nineteenth century its meteoric rise earned Calcutta its reputation, the *London of the East*, as appropriately attested by James Atkinson in his “The City of Palaces”:

Yes, thou’rt a *little London in Bengal*,
 A microcosm; loose, and yet compact;
 A snug epitome, a capital
 Concentrating every folly; brief, abstract,
 The essence of all worldliness, in fact

A wonder, formed like island on the main
 Amidst a sea of pagans, to exact
 Allegiance from their millions, not in vain
 For intellect hath power, to bind as with a chain.

(Stanza XX, emphasis mine; 15)

There is an immediate downscaling, signposted by the adjective “little” that makes Calcutta not equal but inferior to London, which becomes the macrocosm or the “cosmos” and Calcutta, its shrunken replica in a nutshell. Daniel White focuses on this aspect of miniaturization of London in the colonies as indicated by Atkinson in his poem. White reflects on the implications of creating such diminutive models of the metropole in the empire:

To reduce London from the world itself to the essence of worldliness, imperial life cuts it down to size and then draws it away, relocating it from one sea to another. If London is the capital of the island nations at the center of the new imperium [...] Calcutta replicates London’s fashions and authority, its folly and intellect, in order to rule the “sea of pagans” that surrounds the landlike “White Town” of the city of palaces (17).

This “*little London*” which Atkinson talks about is Calcutta’s “White town” with the Esplanade at its centre, distinctly evoking memories of a Western city, rooted in the palatial buildings and monuments constructed during the Raj.

Nostalgia often seeks the support of a stable, tangible locus to perpetuate the act of remembrance. Its affects are mediated through concrete objects that could practically be anything—some memorabilia, piece of furniture, architecture or simply a food, that function as conduits of connection to the past life. Their role is primarily prosthetic in “supplementing” the loss of homeland by highlighting the lack and nourishing it. When the “Little Londoners” tried recasting the “home environment” on the banks of the Hooghly River, they naturally attempted replicating the familiar things that were seen in their cities, since human perception of the world—their desires and assumptions—are filtered through the natural, social and cultural habitats in which they grow. Bringing changes to the physical environment such as the weather, soil, or the climate to suit the colonizers’ habits was beyond them, so the immigrants focused on the built-environment or the constructed spaces in the city in which people carry out their chores, rituals and recreations on a daily basis. The nostalgia for European culture found its greatest expression in the public architecture of the White Town. Erecting stately monuments which would stand for centuries, perhaps also stemmed from a willful yearning to outlive the evanescence of mortal lives in a land where hundreds of Europeans died every year sweltering in the sun. They clung to the illusion of permanence and durability around the notion of rebuilding “home” which itself was an unstable, contingent construct for people in exile. With public buildings, the other purpose was a brazen display of England’s wealth and authority in the empire that she secured by supplanting her rivals clamouring for control in the colonial frontiers.

The stately buildings were therefore, an index of her “predominance in the larger world order” (3) as Metcalf purports in his book, *An Imperial Vision* on architectures of the British Raj in India:

In the public buildings put up by the Raj, it was essential always to make visible Britain’s imperial position as ruler, for these structures were charged with the explicit purpose of representing the Empire itself. As precedent for his colonial building, the classically educated Englishman, from the late eighteenth century onwards, looked towards ancient Rome (2).

Thus, it is not surprising that Atkinson looks back at the Classical civilizations in the opening lines of “The City of Palaces” to compare Calcutta with Rome, Babylon and Carthage in their days, and to assert that this city (though inferior to London) towers peerlessly” (5) above all “governments, of old/ [it’s] An empire of the Sun, a gorgeous realm of gold” (5).

The central business district in Calcutta, planned to house all the important offices of the British paramount power in India, had some of the finest colonial constructions in the city. They heavily incorporated elements of Palladianism in their styles which established Britain’s cultural “ties to the continent” (Metcalf 3) and its enduring tradition. It also espoused Europe’s own nostalgia for its Classical heritage that became manifest in the surge of Baroque Classicism of the Italian Renaissance, that was chiefly enunciated in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries through Christopher Wren in England (1632-1723).

England's Neoclassical revival of the mid-eighteenth and nineteenth-century in fields of literature, art and architecture is another instance of their cultural nostalgia which they successfully exported to its colonies. Tracing the European legacy of Calcutta's architectural edifices, Brian Paul Bach contends that the "ideas of Christopher Wren, the order and logic employed in such places as Versailles, and a school of theory that would develop into the Beaux Arts, sprang from the Age of Reason and took hold in Calcutta [...] These effects, seen most clearly around the BBD Bag area, and down to and through the Maidan, are still extant today" (100-101).

Many of these public buildings in Calcutta were in fact, designed after famous architecture in Europe. It is as if, through this act of replication and recreation of archetypes, a part of Europe was bodily lifted and transplanted in another continent. Here the biological metaphor of "transplantation" is important, because anything that is "transplanted" is first dislodged from its original site and then relocated in a new soil in a way that it becomes compatible to its adaptive environment. The Calcutta buildings were not very different; they were at once inspired and removed from their European origins, taking on the characteristics of both worlds.

The most lavishly constructed building in the Little Londoner's White Town was the Government House^{xvi}, a neoclassical building which itself was modelled after Lord Curzon's ornate family mansion of the Kedleston Hall of Derbyshire. Mark Bence-Jones' *Palaces of the Raj* lays down an elaborate plan of the Vice-Regal residence in Calcutta, and,

dwells on its similarity and departures from the Kedleston mansion as a way of adapting to the Indian soil and the effect it had upon the building:

The splendour of its Ionic façades is matched only by the admirable simplicity of its great rooms. *It is a house ideally suited to the climate, catching the breeze from all four quarters [...] a central block containing the state apartments [is] joined to the four wings by curving corridors. The corridors and wings are of the same height as the central block and treated continuously with it, creating a far more palatial effect than at Kedleston where they are subordinate.* (my emphasis; 43)

Close to the Government House, at the heart of the central business district was located the General Post Office (GPO), a nineteenth century structure with a significant European lineage. Raised on Corinthian pillars, the magnificent dome of this lakeside building was seen from afar. It's resemblance with the central dome of St Paul's Cathedral is obvious. Bach commented "Seen fleetingly from ferries on the Hooghly, the mighty, benevolent dome hints at the impact of St Paul's Cathedral in London when similarly viewed from Thames" (133).



Figure 3: The Calcutta GPO by the waterside



Figure 4: The famous dome of St. Paul's Cathedral, London. The present building was constructed in the English Baroque style by Sir. Christopher Wren in the 17th century.

The European community in Calcutta dearly missed the city hall for public meetings, which were held in the taverns, and later in the Old Court House for some time. However, while taverns and ale-houses were suitable for revelry, their atmosphere was not fit for solemn gatherings, state receptions or public addresses. The Old Court House too was demolished in 1792. So, a Town Hall was finally erected in 1813 with the money raised from public lottery.



Figure 5: Town Hall, near Calcutta High Court.

Designed by the architect and engineer Major-General John Garstin, the two-storied structure with a broad flight of stairs leading to the main entrance was raised in the popular Roman Doric style that gained prominence in the early nineteenth century. A poem by Charles D'Oyly on the adventures of a junior cadet of the East Indian Company *Tom Raw: The Griffin* (1828), praises the building as the “far-famed hall, /In which there are of Graecia’s school the traces” (27), but mentions a flaw because of which a part of the Town Hall collapsed: “by its cracking predisposed to fall”. However, the persona ends the description with a note of assurance, “Till patched up, and well tried by many a festive ball” (Canto II, stanza VI, 27), referring to its reconstruction with the money paid from Garstin’s own pocket. While the flaw could only be addressed partially, the building has survived the test of time.

In the neighbourhood of Esplanade, apart from these significant administrative buildings, there was a constellation of colonial churches, including the one dedicated to St. John. The St. John’s church (1784) was among the first public edifices constructed under the auspices of the English East India Company in Bengal. Raised on the land donated by *Maharaja* Nabo Krishna Bahadur—the founder of the Royal Family in Sovabazar, it was a product of the neo-Classical revival and modelled on the “prototype of St. Martin-in-the-Fields, Trafalgar Square, in London” (Metcalf 9) that inspired a series of churches in England and India.



Figure 6: St Martin-in-the-Fields, to the north-east of Trafalgar Square. The present building was designed in the Neoclassical style by James Gibbs.



Figure 7: St John's Church, Calcutta.



Figure 8: A plaque on St. John's Church, acknowledging the donation of the land by Maharaja of Sovabazar



Figure 9: A more austere version of the Gibbsean architecture in Calcutta Andrew's Church at the centre of Dalhousie Square. The Presbyterian church founded in 1815 by the Scottish community in Calcutta, which formed an important segment of the resident European population in the city.

Now to turn our attention from the architecture to the material environment, by the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the localities of Esplanade, Chowringhee, or Dharmatolla were populated with several chic retail shops “with plate-glass fronts—all displaying the well-known names of firms” (Kipling 16) of England. Kipling says that the non-residential Europeans like himself, whom he cuttingly describes in the *City of Dreadful Night* as “savages”, had earlier corresponded “through the V.P.P. and Parcels Post” with these retailers. Now they were “all here as large as life” (Kipling 16). In the area, there were traders selling “Dainty Dress Materials for the Hot Weather” (Elgin Mills Co. Ltd.). Fashionable dressmakers like *Francis, Harrison, Hathaway & Co*, claimed their expertise in men’s shirts, “English made and dressed” (*The Statesman*: Advt. Feb 1895), and women’s dresses that reproduced the best styles of London and Paris.

In the 1870s another feature was added to Calcutta’s crown as a premier shopping centre, when the New Market^{xvii} was built in 1874 in Lindsay Street at the centre of Esplanade. The shopping complex, elaborately designed in the Victorian Gothic style, was for the White population of the city who wished to avoid brushing shoulders with the locals in their traditional *bazaars*. This market was later named after the Chairman of Calcutta Corporation, the Sir Stuart Hogg Market in 1902, shortened to Hogg Market, because of his generous support in building the first municipal market in the city. The locals often referred to this market as *Hogg Shaheber Bazaar* (Hogg Shahib’s Market)—a name that still recurs in everyday conversation.



Figure 10: Hogg Market in Lindsay Street

The Hogg Market not only attracted Europeans from all over India but also the “native” *Babus* and *Bibis* of old Kolkata who flocked in large numbers for fineries of delectable variety. It had under its roof couturiers, hat-makers, perfumers, upholsterers and retail dressmakers like Ranken and Company, Thacker, Spink & Co., the famous stationers, publisher and book-dealers and confectioners like Nahoum & Sons (estd. 1902). Because of these merchants selling wares of premium quality and variety, Calcutta became one of the most adored shopping destinations in South Asia. A Bengali aphorism stated, “*Ja ache, bhu-Bharat e-/Ta ache Kolkata te*” (*What’s in India/ It’s in Calcutta*)—became a nostalgic cliché uttered by old Calcuttans. It had a distinct ironic if not an elegiac ring in post-independence India, when Calcutta was repeatedly accused of indulging in a self-imposed insularity: a reluctance to open to the global market.



Figure 11: *Nahoum and Sons*, the century old Jewish Confectionary, dearly loved by the Calcuttans

Speaking of English nostalgia, one cannot do without mentioning the hotels, pubs and taverns that were so integral to the British culture. In an article published in *Calcutta Municipal Gazette* on 14 December 1946, columnist B. V. Roy alluded to this old British custom of building taverns and alehouses wherever they travelled. In the early days, there were chop-houses and taverns situated in Lalbazar and Cossiatola (Bentinck Street Area). Apart from catering to their food fetishes and demands of entertainment, these provided shelter to newcomers in the city.

By the mid-nineteenth century these taverns started changing their characters, and were often replaced by bigger hotels and boarding houses that had elaborate structures, Neoclassical and Art Deco features. Almost all the cities in the metropole and the colonies had historic hotels such as the Savoy (1889) in London, the Hotel Windsor (Grand Hotel till 1920s),

and the Federal Hotel and Coffee Palace (1888) in Melbourne, the Raffles and The Fullerton in colonial Singapore. The tradition continued unabated with the opening of the Grand and the Great Eastern Hotel in the Little Londoners' Calcutta.

The first of its kind was however, Spence's Hotel in Calcutta which opened to the public in 1830 to accommodate the large number of global visitors to the city. Jules Verne alludes to this hotel in the sixth chapter of his novel *The Steam House* (*La maison à vapeur*, 1880): "Before dawn, on the morning of our start, I left the Spencer Hotel, one of the best in Calcutta, which I had made my residence ever since my arrival" (62). The second one to be established in Calcutta in 1841 was the Auckland Hotel in Old Court Road, later renamed as the Great Eastern^{xviii}, which eclipsed the grandeur of the Spence's, earning the moniker the "Jewel of the East".

In its time, the Great Eastern was also well known for its confectionary and catering services that produced a wide variety of European cuisine for the Calcuttans. An advertisement of the *Great Eastern Confectionary* in *The Statesman* from the 1920s depicts their range of scrumptious gastronomic delights including assortments of pie: "rhubarb pie", "American apple pie", "steak and kidney pie," "pigeon pie" along with a variety of patties, "sausage rolls" "fruit charlotte", "butter biscuits" and "cheese fingers". There is a graphic recollection of the opulence and splendor of the Great Eastern in a long descriptive passage in Kipling's *The City of Dreadful Night and other Sketches*:

The Great Eastern hums with life through all its hundred rooms. Doors slam merrily, and all the nations of the earth run up and down the

staircases. This alone is refreshing, because the passers bump you and ask you to stand aside. Fancy finding any place outside a Levee-room where Englishmen are crowded together to this extent! Fancy sitting down seventy strong to *table d'hôte* and with a deafening clatter of knives and forks! Fancy finding a real bar whence drinks may be obtained! And, joy of joys, fancy stepping out of the hotel into the arms of a live, white, helmeted, buttoned, truncheoned Bobby! (14-15)

The excerpt, however also reveals how images of plentitude and opulence soon gave way to disappointment in Kipling when on close inspection, he was jolted into the realization that the “Bobby^{xix}” patrolling in front of Great Eastern was not “*real*... after all” (15), and by corollary “Job Charnock’s city” was no London. In the age of colonialism, a chain of elaborately constructed hotels such as the Great Eastern or The Grand were built in satellite cities of the empire for travelers from the metropolitan centres whose expectations for foreign locales away from the imperial heartland were coded within the ambivalent desire of experiencing the “exotic” and at the same time not entirely compromising the comforts of the “home”. These establishments were like little pockets in the alien land that created an illusion of the familiar to the tourist who visited the place for a brief period.

For Kipling, the situation was different. He was stationed in India and craved those comforts that were available to his countrymen back home. While his stay at the Great Eastern when he visited Calcutta gave him a taste of what he missed in India, it also heightened his disappointments when he encountered anomalous elements on the street to

realize Calcutta was not his “idealized” London after all. The city duped him by holding out “false hopes” (6). So, the quick turn from admiration to dislike in the previous passage is symptomatic of Kipling’s overall attitude towards Calcutta for which he shared a negative identification that perhaps made him so disdainful towards the city. In England, the construction of the authentic Englishness in the racial discourses of the colonial era required by extension, an inauthentic intra-ethnic “other” which was often projected on the Eurasians and other English subjects in the colonies. Kipling saw a reflection of his own sense of inferiority (earlier expressed in the phrase “we savages” used to distinguish the dwellers in the colonial backwaters from the citizens of the imperial centre) in the city, which was second to London, but *not quite*. Thus, the passionate rejection of Calcutta appears to be a displaced expression of his deprivation and anger with a part of himself in the colonies. This lack or loss of the “other life” in Kipling resulted in a compulsive nostalgia for Englishness. It sometimes became manifest in his quest for authentic Britain in myths; at other times in his vigorous support of imperialism where the longing for the “mythified” home is transformed and reified as a political agenda.

For Calcutta, the lack reveals itself in the desire for becoming London. The exercise of nostalgia by the Anglophone community who constantly craved for everything that was “English” without which they are given to the belief that people could be written off as “savages”, bespeaks a dangerous propensity for creating a cartography of dependence. It also completely suppresses the local influences that always coexisted,

invaded and altered the European spaces, a move that garnered strong criticisms in later years, for the fabric of the city was far more hybrid, complex and open to radical intermingling than ever desired by the Europeans. Calcutta is “Anglicized” but not entirely “English”—this “discrimination between the mother culture and its bastards” (Bhabha, “Signs Taken” 153)—that becomes a *locus classicus* of nostalgia for expatriate British subjects, also creates a site of “ambivalence” which Bhabha posits, is integral to any instance of colonial mimicry^{xx}. It is projected in Calcutta being a diminutive or defective version of London, in its deficiencies and differences from the metropole. Yet it is this “slippage”—dissimilarity or inadequacy— which becomes a potential tool of subversion for the colonized space to assert its own identity by disturbing the “visibility of the colonial presence” (Bhabha, “Signs Taken” 154).

No city survives merely as a congeries of replicas—a “little London” or a miniature Europe, tailored to fit into the land stretching on the banks of Hooghly. During the phase of new urban development in the final years of the British rule, in a message to *Calcutta Municipal Gazette*^{xxi} on its ninth anniversary in 1933, Rabindranath Tagore critiqued this practice of slavishly accepting the European cities as the model for development. He hoped that the new Calcutta would reflect the national character and “artistic sensibilities” of the emerging nation instead of merely holding a mirror to the west:

Cities are organic expressions of culture. Uptil today our cities have grown up, as much of our exterior life has, classically. They have been imitations of Europe and their lives have flowed in channels which have been sometimes tangent, sometimes parallel to our own. Now that India is slowly coming to her own our towns should mirror our national cultures and artistic sensibilities. I would look forward to a Calcutta which would reflect this ideal (112).^{xxii}

For a perceptive individual like Tagore it was not difficult to comprehend the deleterious effects of this constant urge to look to the West for inspiration. It limits self-expression. Moreover, the overwhelming nostalgia for “Englishness” was mostly backed by strong imperialist agenda. This is evident in passages from the *City of Dreadful Nights* by Kipling whom, Ashis Nandy identified as “the most creative builder of the political myths which a colonial power needs to sustain its self-esteem” (37). Even when Kipling praises Calcutta, which he rarely does, it is to vindicate exploitation by valorizing the self-legitimizing narrative of colonialism:

...there is only one city in India. Bombay is too green, too pretty, and too strugglesome; and Madras died ever so long ago. Let us take off our hats to Calcutta, the many-sided, the smoky, the magnificent, as we drive in over Hugli Bridge in the dawn of a still February morning. We have left India behind us at Howrah Station, and now we enter foreign parts. No, not wholly foreign. Say rather too familiar [...] “Why, this is London! This is the docks. This is imperial. This is worth coming across India to see!”

Then a distinctly wicked idea takes possession of the mind: “What a divine—what a heavenly place to *loot!*” [...] adorned, docked, wharfed, fronted and reclaimed by Englishmen, existing only because England lives, and dependent for his life on England (5-8).

This excerpt exposes one of the greatest evils of colonialism. It cripples and ultimately destroys the self-reliance of colonies by expediting what Andre Gunder Frank's 1966 book titles as that “Development of Underdevelopment”. As we see here, Kipling’s praise of the city and the nostalgia that forces him to seek similarities between London and Calcutta clearly deny the colonial city any agency when he states ubiquitously that Calcutta is nothing without England.

For most colonialists, in every expanding corner of the “foreign field” they aspired for the timeless England, notwithstanding the fact that the first world metropolitan centre was itself being imperceptibly transformed by commerce and migration of new settlers from subaltern locations and imperial peripheries. For instance, the division between the prosperous White Town and the congested, unwholesome Native localities in colonial cities finds its counterpart in London. The sharp distinction between the West End, represented by posh public buildings, palaces and fashionable homesteads and the city’s East End where abysmal living conditions in ghettos and slums of industrial workers surrounding the factories, workhouses and the docks built by The East India Company for the import of goods, created an unpropitious sight. Notorious for crime and obdurate poverty, its streets teeming with vagrants, prostitutes, migrants from places like India who came with the goods in the East India Company

ships, homeless and without resources in London. One could see Indian beggars on streets.

Between the London and St Katherine's Docks and Rosemary Lane, there is a large district interlaced with narrow lanes, courts, and alleys ramifying into each other in the most intricate and disorderly manner [...] resident in and well conversant with, the locality. The houses are of the poorest description, and seem as if they tumbled into their places at random. Foul channels, huge dust-heaps, and a variety of other unsightly objects, occupy every open space, and dabbling among these are crowds of ragged dirty children who grub and wallow, as if in their native element (Mayhew 304-5).

Described as the “Dark Continent”^{xxiii} within Britain's heartland, East End's fetid alleys, open sewers and overcrowded houses depicted by nineteenth century writers such as the journalist Henry Meyhew in the three-volume classic: *London Labour and the London Poor* (1851) from a series of newspaper articles in 1840, or a recent study of the outcast women, sexual crimes and predators in Victorian England in Judith R Walkowitz's *City of Dreadful Delight* (1992), are not very different from the picture that Kipling paints of the “great human jungle” in Calcutta. The colonial economy tied the metropole and its colonies in a reciprocal, recursive relationship—one could not change without altering the other. As Daniel White would remind us if London came to Calcutta, Calcutta went to London as well:

With the rise of an active print industry and an ever more autonomous newspaper press and reading public in Calcutta in the early nineteenth century, relationship between the metropolitan and imperial capitals increasingly relied on fluid but unequal movements of people, ideas, books, and other commodities. By the 1820s, many subjects in London and Calcutta experienced imperial culture and space in circulation, defining the two capitals in multidirectional, recursive, or contrapuntal, rather than unilinear terms (White 3).

The two cities by the river were caught up in a porous nexus, transforming each other. And even when the power relations were unequal, it was never unilateral. This, however, only strengthened the persistence of nostalgia for “timeless”, uncorrupted core of England in British subjects so that they could ward off the fear of racial contamination in the imperial centre.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has studied the growth of Calcutta in the literary-cultural history of the early colonial period through the dynamic prism of nostalgia. The Bachelardian poetics of urban space, were conceived in response to the overwhelming sense of destitution in the post- World War decades, when:

nostalgia for the true, natal home...emerged in the face of the massive uprooting of war and ensuing Depression as a mental and psychological corollary to homelessness. It was in this context that philosophers from

Martin Heidegger to Gaston Bachelard wistfully meditated on the (lost) nature of “dwelling,” ... (Vidler 7).

This framework was deployed in the chapter to argue how spatial meanings are generated, when fused with memories. Rootedness of nostalgia to a space, also explains the longing of the exiles to recreate their former homes in space, and ascribe them with familiar social, cultural and personal meanings, since the time lost is irretrievable. Space as Bachelard argues, can hold memories, while time is fleeting.

Tracing the movements of nostalgia on different planes reveals how nostalgia impacts both the affective and political lives of communities. The embodied experience of dwelling in an alien environment produces affective conditions that generate a range of reactions such as heightened longing for the past life, a sense of profound “homelessness” or a crushing loss, even effecting changes in the place. The function of nostalgia in the context of the city that is largely shaped by immigrants is both layered and diverse and often serving contradictory ends. On the one hand, the eminence of colonial Calcutta owed much to the British subjects’ nostalgia for the imperial Centre who went creating “Little Englands” or “pocket-sized Europe” to grapple with the strangeness of the foreign shores. On the other hand, this pervasive nostalgia for London among expatriate British subjects initiated constant comparisons between the two cities, and was detrimental to the self-expression of Calcutta and its growth as an independent city. In their overwhelming desire to see London everywhere, the Anglo-Indian community not only ended up disappointing themselves, as Kipling did; they often ignored or suppressed the influences of other

cultures and communities that coexisted and invaded the space of pure “Englishness”. As a countermove to the over-signification of a “particular” nostalgia in the colonial accounts of the Raj, which had a role in the development of the British capital of the Indian Empire, the following chapter will explore the lack of nostalgia in vernacular literature for Calcutta. Certain people did not experience nostalgia for the city at a certain period because they were nostalgic about another place. The city, thus, became a contact zone not only of different cultures and memories, but the legacies of various nostalgias that played out against each other.

NOTES

ⁱ Anonymous poem, anthologized in *Poets of the John Company*

ⁱⁱ See. Bachelard’s *The Poetics of Space*: “And always, in our daydreams, the house is a large cradle” (7)

ⁱⁱⁱ The author is careful to note that this is primarily a middle-class phenomenon: “pieties of domesticity were a sick joke to slum dwellers, and at the other end of the social spectrum they were scarcely relevant to the aristocratic families for whom large scale hospitality was an extension of political and dynastic activity by other means” (Tosh 27).

^{iv} Among other popular theories, it stands that Kolkata may have had its name in the words *khal* meaning “canal” or a “moat” followed by *kata* which may mean

“digging” in Bengali. The Maratha Ditch (archaic: *Mahratta* Ditch) that marked one of the boundaries of the White Town was dug around 1742 to keep away the formidable Hindu soldiers of the Maratha army from Western India, or *Bargis* as they were locally known. “Natives” often referred to it as “Khal Kata” (i.e. digging of the trench). It is believed that Calcutta is a Hobson-Jobson of that Bengali phrase *Khal-Kata*. Another fantastic myth that links the name to a more recent origin asserts that when the Company’s ship first landed in this locality, a British official questioned a native grass-cutter working in the field nearby about the name of the place. Being unable to understand the Englishman’s query, the bemused grass-cutter interpreted the question to be “when was the grass cut?” to which he appropriately answered, “*kal kata*” or “it was mowed yesterday”. This anecdote is frequently challenged by historians who find references to this name in vernacular literature prior to the British arrival.

^vThe early English spelling was almost the same as it exists today, though occasionally “Colgota”, “Calicata” or “Calicotta” were variously used instead of the standard “Calcutta”. “Colgota”, resembling Golgotha spawned the theory that the inhabitable climate of Calcutta that took heavy toll on English lives, evoked memories of “the place of the skulls” outside Jerusalem where Jesus was crucified. Hence, Calcutta is from Golgotha.

^{vi}From the accounts of Sebastien Manrique in 1628 (*Travels of Manrique Vol. 1, 56*) we learn that every year more than hundred vessels were loaded in the ports of Bengal with, rice, sugar, vegetables, oil, ghee wax and other household and luxury goods. Bengal *muslins* were well known in Europe.

^{vii}Chuttanutty, etymologically derived from *Suta*, thread, *nuti*, a hank, was a “thriving village occupied by weavers” (Blechynden 2), as its name indicates. It is one of the three villages that made up the present day Kolkata. Apart from Chuttanutty the other two villages were Kalikata and Gobindapur.

^{viii} The news of the High Court Order was published in all the major newspapers in Bengal. Cf. *Ananda Bazar Patrika* (17 May, 2003), *Sambad Pratidin* (18 May, 2003)

^{ix}Kuchinan (present day Belegghata area) during the early years of Company’s rule lay outside the *Maratha Ditch*, was an important trading centre. In 11 October 1737, the earthquake that accompanied a severe storm, raised the ground level which in turn blocked the flow of Vidyadhari river flowing through the area, and reduced the salt water lake to an enclosed water body. This hampered the trade in Kuchinan. The locality was soon reduced to a jungle (*Bada*).

^xSee, *Echoes of Old Calcutta (1882)*

^{xi} See. George Orwell: “Rudyard Kipling”. First published in *Horizon*. GB, London, February 1942.

<http://orwell.ru/library/reviews/kipling/english/e_rkip>

^{xii} Old Fort William in the eighteenth century contained “the trading hall or factory, warehouses, governor’s residence, armory and magazine, barracks, and officers’ lodgings of the East India Company...Outside the fort, there was a settlement of private British houses, a church, a mayor’s court, a hospital and a playhouse” (Chattopadhyay, *Black Hole* 6).

^{xiii} There were two Fort Williams. The first one was built by the British East India Company under the command of John Goldsborough and Sir Charles Eyre, Charnock’s son-in-law. The construction that commenced in 1696 was complete around 1706. The Fort became the temporary seat of British power in Bengal. However, in 1756, when Sirajud Daulah, Nawab (an honorific title given to the Muslim rulers of the princely states during the Mughal era) of Bengal, marched against the British, both Calcutta and the Fort was captured, which became the site of the infamous Black Hole massacre—a tiny dungeon in the fort (probably a guard’s room) where the troops of Nawab held the British prisoners of war after the siege on 20 June 1756. Several people died in suffocation and exhaustion.

In the following year after the decisive victory of the English East India Company under the leadership of Robert Clive over Nawab, the old Fort was subsequently dismantled and a new one built. The construction took little more than twenty years from 1758-1781 and around two million pounds were spent in building the Fort. It soon became the nerve-centre around which the “White Town” spread itself.

^{xiv} The Battle of Plassey, under the leadership of Robert Clive brought a crucial victory of the British East India Company over the Nawab of Bengal in 1757. The battle cemented the presence of the Company in Bengal which gradually consolidated its control over the rest of India in the next centuries.

^{xv} “Poets of John Company”.
<https://archive.org/details/poetsofjohncompa00dunn>

^{xvi} See. *Palaces of the Raj*: “During the first half of the nineteenth century, Government House dominated the Calcutta scene in a way that no other building did; standing stark behind its railings, in grounds that were devoid of even a single tree” (43).

^{xvii} It is also known as *Hogg Market*.

^{xviii} For a photograph of the Great Eastern Hotel from the “View of Calcutta and Barrackpore” by Samuel Bourne in the 1860s, see <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Great-eastern-hotel.jpg>
In this photo, one can see the shop of the renowned shoe merchant, Cuthbertson & Harper, next to the hotel.

^{xix} Bobby: a colloquial term for “Police officer” (British English)

^{xx}According to Bhabha, mimicry in the colonial context, upholds “the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, *as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite* (Bhabha, “Of Mimicry” 126) The discourse of mimicry is built around an “ambivalence” or a double bind: “to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference”. “The authority of that mode of colonial discourse... mimicry is therefore stricken by an indeterminacy: mimicry emerges as the representation of a difference that is itself a process of disavowal” (Bhabha 126). See Homi Bhabha’s “Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse”.

^{xxi}*Calcutta Municipal Gazette* run by Calcutta Municipal Corporation, was founded under Amal Home in 1924 who remained its editor till 1949. It played an invaluable role in recording the socio-cultural life of Kolkata. Scientist CV Raman in a message, published July 4, 1931 called the Gazette “A power in the land” under the editorship of Mr. Amal Home.

^{xxii} Facsimile of a hand-written message dated 19. 11. 1933, on the occasion of the ninth anniversary of the Gazette. It was reprinted in *The Calcutta Municipal Gazette, Tagore Memorial Special Supplement*, 1941.

^{xxiii} See, *City of Dreadful Delight* by Judith R. Walkowitz.

CHAPTER II

**THE “WESTERN” CITY AND VERNACULAR NOSTALGIA IN
COLONIAL BENGAL**

...the nineteenth-century Bengali bhadralok seldom wrote about Calcutta, and tended to emphasize the negative features of its life even when they did [...] Despite the novelty of the metropolitan experience, cityscapes entered rarely into imaginative literature, unlike, say, in Dickens or Baudelaire.

Sumit Sarkar, “The City Imagined” 177

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries when Europeans were trying to fashion a home away from home in the city of their creation, vernacular literature was largely dismissive about Calcutta. The most significant expressions of the city’s urban life in modern Bengali occurred mainly from the nineteenth century onwards. This chapter thus looks at the representation of Calcutta in vernacular literature of the mid-1800s to the early twentieth century until the arrival of the Modernists on the literary scene. It seeks to understand some of the probable causes behind the obvious lack of nostalgia for Calcutta in early Bengali writings, and what this absence tells us about “place-making” in relation to the city’s history as the colonial capital in British India. When nostalgia is simultaneously deployed as an aesthetic and analytical tool, its palpable lack becomes as crucial as its presence in literature.

The first part of the chapter discusses the emergent “Babu” culture and the Anglicization of the Bengali youth in nineteenth century Calcutta,

which was significantly responsible for the strain of anti-nostalgia in the representations of the city in Bengali culture as it endangered the traditional values of Hindu society.

Through an engagement with the “native” perspectives on colonial Calcutta in Bengali tradition, this chapter dwells on the *mêlée* between the “mechanical” city where life was consigned to the new industrial clock time and the villages from the pre-colonial past, still harnessed to the ancient tradition and customs of the Bengalis. The literature reflects the dilemma of early urban subjects in Calcutta, who vacillated between belonging and non-belonging in the new city with their divided loyalties to the past life of habit and familiarity, and the promises of a flourishing metropolis of the future.

It also examines how a certain nostalgia for the village was generated at this juncture in vernacular literatures as a response to the growth of Western cities that initiated a new spatio-temporal order with the capitalist regime and transformed the everyday life of the colonized. While discussing rural nostalgia in individual texts is beyond the scope of this thesis, the chapter focuses on the discourse: how, from the praise of simple virtues of village life, nostalgia for the rural idyll was appropriated and subsequently radicalized in the anticolonial struggle. Concurrently, in the light of the satiric overtones in early vernacular writings and the apparent lack of nostalgia for Calcutta, I address the discursive ambiguity about the ways in which the city was projected in the nationalist struggle, given its heterogeneous, hybrid character.

This chapter, which should be read as a dialogue with the previous one, reinstates the different memories and competing models of nostalgia that rubbed up against each other in narrativizing the city and its affective milieu. To extend this argument, the chapter examines multiple literary genres from satires and street poems to children's fantasy, exploring how various literary traditions in vernacular Bengali culture in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries offered complementary as well as contrapuntal readings to the British cartographic and narrative discourses representing the colonized space, with a special emphasis on memory and nostalgia.

**“*AJAB SAHAR KOLKATA*”¹- THE CITY OF VICES AND
WONDERS**

A belief that remained strong among the Bengali middle class who relocated to Calcutta for various reasons, was that the city-space was essentially inimical to the values of domesticity. This perception of the city gained traction with the breakdown of the traditional system of Indian joint families¹ to give way to smaller units in urban settlements. While financial and spatial constraints in the city demanded the change, it was often not without regret and an intense nostalgia for the passing away of the old family structure that symbolized wholeness and unity. The “natives” often disapprovingly looked at the new urban lifestyle modelled on Western cities by deploying the familiar binaries of tradition/modernity, east/west

¹ Literally translated as “a strange city, Calcutta”

or urban/rural. Vernacular Bengali writers distinguished their villages from the British city by emphatically dwelling on the point that people came to Calcutta to earn their livelihoods, but their “homes” were in the villages. Buddhadeb Basu briefly summarised this distrust of city life that ran down for generations in his essay, published in the *Calcutta Municipal Gazette* in 1934:

Those who, for the sake of dear livelihood, were forced to live there, resented every day of their existence and pined for the open spaces of the country. We attributed a pastoral freshness to the village, and branded the city as ‘satanic’, where men are choked by filth and maddened by noise and hurry (24).

With the economy changing from pre-colonial feudal society to the industrial modernity following European colonization, the basic rhythm of everyday life underwent a transformation. It not only necessitated an adjustment with the new temporality induced by disciplinary time; one was forced to acknowledge the ever-growing importance of emergent urban centres. Coming to the city for employment was now a compulsion for many rather than a volitional act. Yet this forced transition into capitalism could not entirely purge the old spectres of feudalism or its values. While industrial cities became indispensable to the new economic order of the Empire, for a long time villages continued to enjoy their authority over the social customs in the private lives of the “natives” who seldom called Calcutta their home. In the vernacular imagination, a distinction between *basha* (a temporary residence) and *bari* (ancestral home) was discretely

preserved. So for “rituals marking life-cycle changes (such as marriage), middle-class Bengali Hindus of Calcutta often refer[ed] to the ancestral village in explaining where their *bari* is even if their *basha* bears a Calcutta address” (Chakrabarty, *Habitations* 120).

Bengali literature in the nineteenth century shows that its characters seldom felt overtly nostalgic for Calcutta, which was too alien to Indian sensibilities, but engaged with the city nevertheless. The rising fortunes of Calcutta never ceased to attract hordes of job seekers. There was steady internal migration from the interiors to the metropolis. From cultural producers such as artists, entertainers and poets to unskilled labourers for the docks and industries, agents, businessmen, students, brokers, contractual workers, artisans, middlemen and clerks, all came with different aspirations and yet felt a strong pull in the opposite direction—the desire to flee its mechanical monstrosity prevailed equally in the minds of people. There was something “unhomely” or strange about the city. A poem in Purnendu Patri’s *Chhadai Mora Kolkata (Kolkata Wrapped in Rhymes)* captures the popular sentiment about British Calcutta in the nineteenth century. It is a curious *mélange* of awe and disdain with occasional expressions of outrage at the rupture of a traditional value system:

Dhonyo he kolikata dhyono he tumi

Joto kichu natun-er tumi jonmobhumi

Deshi chal chede diye bilater chal²

² *Chal* has a dual meaning in Bengali. *Chal* simultaneously means *rice*, as well as style. While it is most likely that the poet is referring to the latter, i.e. alluding to the new class of native dandies who took up the British ways in the city, the former

Nokol e Bangali babu holo je kangal.

Ratarati borolok hoibar tore

Ghor chhere Kolikata giye bash kore.

Salute to you Kolkata, salute, O thy city!

You're the birthplace, the cradle of novelty.

By forsaking old customs, you've braced the British styles.

For which Bengali babus turn into paupers, their imitations go futile.

Those who run behind instant fame and wealth

Leave their homes, in Kolkata they dwell.

(my trans.; 35)

Such a juxtaposition of wonder and aversion is quite common in nineteenth century writings on Calcutta by vernacular as well as by European writers. Atkinson, in his "City of Palaces" addressed Calcutta as the nurturer of "opulence and vice" (XVIII, 14). In native representation, Calcutta "was often portrayed as the heart of Kaliyuga, the last and the most *degenerate* of eras in the traditional upper-caste Hindu notion of cyclical time, in which aliens (*mlecchas*) rule and hierarchies of caste, gender and age are inverted" (Sarkar; my emphasis; 177). Though the colonizers and the locals viewed the city from two ends of the spectrum, their opinions concurred in this respect, while their reasons differed.

Both the English and the Bengali populations were left to reconcile with the city's entrenched foreignness which complicated the insider-

is also plausible. *Chal* as rice is a synecdoche, a part for the whole representing British food and lifestyle that was used as a model for several urban youths, much to the alarm of the traditionalists. The poet may have consciously used the word as a pun referring to both.

outsider equation. This was partially because colonialism thrust an encounter with strangeness by forcing an uneasy dialogue between two confronting communities. The city became a contact zone of two foreign cultures whose everyday habits and customs were vastly different from each other, aggravating the sense of disaffection. For the “natives” there was something alienating about the grandeur of the colonial city, to be called a “home”. As the aforementioned poem in Bengali implies, Calcutta was for traders, privateers and agents dealing in money. It fostered a class of sycophants (*moshaihs*) and tuft hunters who leeches on influential men to secure their own interests. *Hootum Pyachar Naksha* (*Sketches by Hootum, the Owl*) by *Kaliprasanna Sinha*, published in 1862 consists of a series of vignettes on the urban life of nineteenth century. The *Naksha* talks at length about these bootlickers:

There were a few unemployed opportunists in the city of Calcutta who liked to make friends with whoever was flourishing at a particular time. They proclaimed that this was the greatest man in the entire race and worshipped him, taking him to be unique. As soon as somebody with greater influence came along, they dumped the person they used to fete and sided with the new star that was rising (*Hootum*, 179-180).

Among the Indians, Calcutta soon earned the reputation as the city of the *Sahibs*, the *nouveau riche* and their parasites, and not the least, the decadent babus who worked in collusion with the British. What eventually

became prominent as “Babu Culture” in Bengal witnessed its greatest efflorescence in nineteenth-century Calcutta.

Babu was originally a Persian designation. Subir Raychoudhuri in his essay “The Lost World of Babus”, cites Gnanendramohan Das’s derivationⁱⁱ of the term from a Persian lineage, Ba-with, and Bu-fragrance/or smell: “apparently lawyers from Bengal would anoint themselves with costly perfumes when attending the Mughal courts” (68). Alternatively, it may have been coined either from Persian or Turkish *Baba*, meaning father or master or Sanskrit *bapta* “the one who sows the seed, i.e. father” (see Raychoudhuri 68). However, the “Babu culture” that subsequently flourished in colonial Bengal was a result of the Indian elites’ encounter with the European lifestyle. The babus were British loyalists who often posed as the substitute for the Whig gentry in England. But they seldom displayed the Wigs’ political zest as Gopal Halder discussed in his 1938 article for *The Calcutta Municipal Gazette*:

In Britain too, no doubt, the bourgeoisie had developed, frequently after making a fortune in the City, into great country gentlemen or even landlords, or property –owning class, depending on the returns of the East Indian trade and plunder. They, however, were the real revolutionary force there in so far as they were out to create the conditions for the coming of industrial revolution, by liquidating the old and deadening bonds and introducing the new principles of democracy and individual liberty, for a release of productive forces. Indian bourgeoisie in Calcutta under Imperialist hegemony were, on the contrary, semi-feudal, in that they returned to land, and Imperialism

demanded of them no politico-economic part to play like British Whigs.
 [...] They had only leisure-and pleasure (67).

While many of these wealthy babus lacked education apart from a rudimentary English, there rose a class of anglicized “intermediaries” among the Bengalis who were fashioned by colonial education in India. Their role, according to Macaulay’s *Minute on Indian Education* (1835), was to act as “interpreters” between the British and the “millions” whom they governed. Many among them not only embraced the knowledge of Western science, art and culture from their exposure to English education but also followed their lifestyleⁱⁱⁱ, in keeping with Macaulay’s desire for “a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect” (Macaulay, *Minutes* n.pag.).^{iv} This class of gentlemen was roughly divided into the elites of the older order who had amassed their fame, fortune and land in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as agents of the British privateers; and the *grihasta* (householder) or the *madhyabitta*, the new salaried middle-class who sought benefits of English education to enter a respectable profession as doctors, lawyers or clerks. It is the latter group that came to be coupled most eminently with the term *bhadralok* (from the Sanskrit word *bhadra*, meaning refined or gentle) while the former remained the greatest patrons of the British in India. Within shifting cultural paradigms babu slowly gathered deprecatory associations in the colonial period. In common phraseology, compounds such as *babu-giri*, *babu-yani* were used pejoratively to remonstrate foppish and extravagant habits.

Rajnarayan Basu (1826–1899), an educationist, public intellectual, and a venerated member of the Brahmo Samaj^v in his treatise *Sekal ar Ekal* (*Those Days and These Days*) that was originally conceived as a lecture and published in 1873, made a trenchant criticism of this “Babu culture” in Calcutta. Through his nostalgic invocation of the past (*sekal*) against a decadent present (*ekal*) whose representatives are the new breed of babus, Basu registers his concerns for the progressive decline of the Bengali society in the nineteenth century. He makes a discrete distinction between *sekal* (those days) and *ekal* (these days) by using the foundation of Hindu College where Basu studied, later renamed as Presidency College^{vi} in 1855, as the watershed to mark the dichotomous divide between past and present ethos in colonial Bengal.



Figure 12: Presidency College from the neighbouring Hare School

By *sekal* or “those days” Basu referred to the period commencing from the foundation of the British rule in India till the beginning of English education in Hindu College that was established in 1817—a turning point in the history of Europeanization of Indian education—and designates *ekal* or “now” as the period following it. The first batch of young graduates, after receiving their degrees from Hindu College, were involved in several radical reforms within Hindu society much to the discomfort of the conservatives.

Throughout his treatise, as an emissary between the two times, Basu oscillates between “now” in the present, and “then” of his childhood and elders. He recalls several anecdotes to augment his views which in turn make *Ekal ar Sekal* a delectable repository of the cultural practices of the Bengalis, past and present. The nostalgia that is affected by this temporal disjuncture, however, had a definitive educative, or restorative purpose. He meant to reflect on the ideals for right conduct by following the model of the earlier times. In contrast, most of his stories about *ekal* or the present are indicative of the ensuing denegation of Bengali people whose vanguards were typically the wayward Derozians^{vii}. They were the young crop of Hindu College graduates, known after their teacher Henry Louis Vivian Derozio (1809-1831) who acquired a mythical aura as a champion of Post-Enlightenment rationalism during the period that was debatably termed as *Naba Jug* (The New Age) or *Naba Jagaran* (Renaissance) in Bengal.

Derozio and his followers were often held guilty of committing excesses on the pretext of defending the cause of progressive ideals.

However, it would be erroneous to use the term Derozians and babus interchangeably. “Derozian” was generally a sobriquet given either to a follower of Derozio in spirit or more specifically to “the Young Bengal”—a title ascribed to a group of young iconoclasts from Hindu College in the late 1820s and the 30s who among other things adopted the European lifestyle to challenge Hindu conservatism. “Derozio’s students signified the emergence of a class, composed almost entirely of those who had received an organised public instruction in the English language, that could be defined for the first time as an intelligentsia in the Western sense of the term” (R. Chaudhuri 19-20). Later, Sivanath Sastri recorded in what was widely regarded as one of the most authoritative texts on this period with its publication in 1903, Ramtanu *Lahiri O Tatkalin Banga Samaj (Ramtanu Lahiri and his Contemporary Bengali Society)*, the cultural topos of Bengal during the Young Bengal Movement. It showed, how the Derozians, despite their limited success, were associated with significant social reforms at that time, including the dismissal of Brahmanical customs through the rejection of the sacred thread by Ramtanu Lahiri, the advocacy of female education and so on. However, the Young Bengals were only a small coterie who facilitated Westernization of Bengali culture. On the other hand, babu is a generic term. Many of those who lived in the city followed the Derozians only superficially.

Upbraiding what he considered the incontinence of the young babus of Calcutta, Basu writes that these errant youths were misled into thinking that:

every glass of wine they consumed marked their victory over superstition. Some of them impertinently approached different [Hindu] shopkeepers in the city and asked them repeatedly, “Will you eat beef?” In this fashion, they went around bragging and insulting the prevalent customs (my trans.; 26-27).

While what might appear a faltering, and perhaps a juvenile step toward overcoming religious stigmas and ossified social customs, to Basu the urban youths in their unfettered hedonism were weakening the moral fibre that had held the society together for ages. The Western diet endorsed by these young men, their consumption of beef and alcohol in particular, created a furor in the orthodox circles of the nineteenth century. Basu too mordantly censures what he holds as an irrational fondness for beef among the Europeanized babus through a comic anecdote. He narrates an instance where two men visited the famous Wilson’s Hotel in Calcutta, a favourite haunt of the babus where they would gobble down the foods forbidden by the Hindu religion. In fact, there went a popular Bengali aphorism which enumerated the three main causes—or the three “Sens”, curiously similar to “sins” behind the degradation of Hinduism: “*Jat marlo tin-Sen-ey/ Kesab Sen-ey, Will-Sen-ey, Isti-Sen-ey*” (“Our religion is robbed by three Sens/ Kesab Sen, Isti-sen and Wil-Sen”). The first “Sen” is the Brahmo reformer Kesab Sen; and the third “isti-seney” is a hobson-jobson of the English word “station”, a place where segregation of caste and religion could not be followed rigorously as people from diverse backgrounds were compelled to commune as co-passengers; and finally, Wil-Sen is the

allusion to the Great Eastern Hotel, also known as the Wilson's Hotel after its founder David Wilson. In Basu's story:

One of the babus, who could not survive without beef, asked the bearer while placing the order: "Do you have Beel (Veal)?" The bearer replied, "No Sir". The babu next enquired, "Do you have beef steak?" The bearer replied once again, "No Sir". But the babu was indomitable. He asked again, "Do you have Ox Tongue?". "No Sir, not even that", came the reply. "What about calf-foot jelly? do you have that, at the least?". The answer was once again in negative. "No Sir". But the incorrigible babu would not stop. "Do you serve nothing from the cow on the menu?". The other person who accompanied this babu into the restaurant and took a dislike for beef, now spoke aloud, addressing the bearer in sheer irritation: "Why don't you get some cow dung for his satisfaction, if you have nothing else!" (My trans.; 35-36).

Rajnarayan Basu rationalized his critique of the consumption of beef among Bengalis by stating that the youth in their indiscretion and unqualified devotion to the West has failed to recognize that a beef diet is unsuitable for the Indian climate, and affects the health adversely^{viii}.

Many babus of Calcutta eventually became outcasts in both societies for their immoderations in consumption habits and lifestyle. They were both condescending and irreverent towards their own traditions; on the other hand, their caricature-like imitation of the English became an object of mockery among the Europeans as well as more self-reflexive educated Indians who saw through the inanity.^{ix} Among the satirical prose

published around that time, poet and journalist Bhabanicharan Bandyopadhyay's *Kalikata Kamalalay* (*Kolkata, the Abode of Laxmi*), Naba Babu Bilash, (*The Entertainments of the New Babus*), Dinabandhu Mitra's *Sadhabar Ekadashi*^x (*The Wife's Widow-Fast*), or the promiscuous lifestyle of the Bengali babus sketched in Peary Chand Mitra's^{xi} *Alaler Ghorer Dulal* (*The Rich Man's Spoilt Son*, printed in 1857) through its protagonist Matilal, courted wide critical attention. Michael Madhusudan Dutta (1834-1873), a trailblazer of modern Bengali literature and a student of Hindu College, wrote a scathing satire, *Ekei ki bole Shobhyota?* (*Is this called Civilization?*) on the lack of morals among the reprobate young men who used the pretext of imbibing liberal values from the West to vindicate their debauchery.

In Dutta's play, the protagonist is fittingly called Naba Kumar. The choice of the name is contextual. *Naba*, coming from Sanskrit *Navya* means new. As Partha Chatterjee points out in *Empire and Nation*: "The word *adhunik*, in the sense in which we now use it in Bengali to mean 'modern', was not in use in the nineteenth century. The word then used was *nabya* (new): the new was that which was inextricably linked to Western education" (137). Naba, son of an ardently religious father takes to drinking under the influence of his friends— new age babus of Calcutta. However, due to their families' restrictions, these men were forced to drink under cover. They thus formed a society called *Gyanotarangini Sabha* (*gyan*-Knowledge, *Tarangini*-River; an association meant to encourage the flow of knowledge) where members met regularly under the pretense

of learning Sanskrit, to drink covertly in the company of *nautch* girls and concubines.

In the climactic scene of the play, Naba Kumar comes home inebriated after one such meeting of the *Gyanotarangini Sabha*, and under the spell of liquor starts misbehaving with his family. His father, both shocked and outraged by his son's behaviour, decides to leave the very next morning for the holy city of Vrindavan with his family. In the end, it is Calcutta that is held responsible for sending the young men astray in the Kaliyuga:

Naba Kumar's Father: This Calcutta is the capital of vices in these evil times. Can any good man live in such a place? ...tomorrow I shall travel with all of you to Vrindavan....

Nabkumar's Wife: ...Ah! Calcutta is responsible for the miserable fate of so many wives like myself whose suffering has no bounds. Oh God!...

Prasanna: Did you see this for the first time? In the Meetings of the *Gyanotarangini Sabha*, this is the kind of knowledge that they acquire.

Hara: Indeed! Nowadays those who get an education in Calcutta, this is the only thing that they learn well. Is there any difference between having a husband and not having one at all?.. Shame! After all these, those impudent men claim with a brazen face that we have become civilized as the Sahibs [White men]. Oh, my misery! Does anybody ever

become civilized simply by the virtue of consuming meat and alcohol?
Is this what you call civilization? (my trans.; 254).

The epochal notion of temporality evinced in Hindu cosmology speaks of four ages *yugas*—Satya, Treta, Dvapara and Kali—each running for several thousand years. In the arc of time, these epochs are distinguished from each other in terms of the moral quality of life practiced during each age. The present, known as Kaliyuga is deemed most immoral of the four *yugas*. However, since ancient times, *Kali* is also a generic term that embodies all the anxieties which plagued humanity about the present, such as the scarcity of rainfall, the damage of the livestock, loss of virility and height, and so on (see Bhaduri 13). Again, the allusions to *Kali* which represent disjuncture between a morally and qualitatively superior past and a degenerate present, also carry an implicit assumption or longing for better times in the distant pasts.

In colonial Bengal, both notions of Western chronological time and Hindu epochal cycles coexisted with their separate spheres of application in secular and religious domains. On occasions, the two would coalesce to justify each other. For instance, vernacular texts in Bengal often referred to Kaliyuga to explain the misery and debasement of man under colonial rule and presented Kalikata (which is colloquially called Kolkata, as the dangerous space of modern civilization and the capital of corruption, frequently punning on the “Kali” in its nomenclature. So, when Naba Kumar’s devout father, blames Kolkata as the “capital of vices in these evil times” (254) with a veiled reference to Kaliyuga, he is enfolding two different orders of temporally— mythical and material/historical—to

explain the changes wrought by colonialism and its culture of consumerism in a moral terminology. In its opulence, the modern city houses all the evils of the demonic times, ensnaring youth into a life of heedless dissipation. So, a pious man, such as Naba's father, longs to leave the city that unmoored the morals of Hindu society, for Vrindavan—one of the time-honoured homes of Hindu culture—to restore the orders of ethical living.

The values, including the new English education, imparted by the Western city that displaced the traditional centres of learning, are antithetical to those of the Indian home. In fact, as the above extract shows, the actions of the new Anglicized gentlemen jeopardized the very foundation of domestic bliss and the sanctity of *garhastya* (household). Their wives lived under constant apprehension as the profligacy of their husbands ended up threatening their conjugal life. Several writings of the period, like Dinabandhu Mitra's *Sadhabar Ekadashi* reflect upon the concern about how the licentiousness of young babus destroyed marital bliss and household happiness. *Sadhaba* refers to a married woman, but the ritual of penance on *Ekadashi* or the eleventh day of the moon, is generally performed by widows in the Hindu tradition. The title of the play is itself suggestive of how the wives were widowed even before the demise of their husbands.

Complementing this textual field of production, the *Pat* paintings of Kalighat, also known as the "Bazaar paintings" among the Europeans that became prevalent in nineteenth century Bengal made "Babu culture" popular in visual representation. These were cheap watercolour compositions executed by *patuas* or professional scroll-painters from the

villages, settling in the city in search of a job. Their shops were set up around the Hindu temple in Kalighat, a thriving pilgrimage centre, from where they earned the name “*Kalighat-er Pat*”. Their pictures apart from depicting scenes from religious scriptures, historical events, nature and still life, focused on a wide range of contemporary issues, particularly, the foppery of the babus and bibis of Calcutta in what came to be known as “Babu-Bibi Pats” of Kalighat. Art Historian Tapati Guha-Thakurta noted that:

The Kalighat lampoons of Calcutta’s degenerate *babus*, corrupted womenfolk and licentious Sadhus thrived as a part of the wider literary culture and social ethics of ‘native’ Calcutta. The satirical images and nuances in the painting found their parallels in contemporary Bengali novels, in the popular bawdy farces published from the Bat-tala presses, and in the songs, doggerels, pantomimes and entertainments that made up the street culture of the Black Town (19).

In these *pats*, the babu was sometimes presented as a cheating husband, a womanizer whose foremost entertainment was whoring and drinking; other times, in paintings that were overtly misogynistic, he was shown being trampled upon by his mistresses or his educated wife who took him around like a dog knotted to a leash.

The babus, who were ambassadors of urban life in literature and art were laughed at almost everywhere for their duplicity and debauchery; while their influence was often considered potentially dangerous for the uncorrupted minds in the villages. So, the creative genres that engaged

most extensively with the everyday life in Calcutta at that time had deliberate satirical overtones.

For a large part of the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries, the experience of colonial modernity in Calcutta did breed a distinct brand of home-sickness among the “native” immigrants in the city. However, this nostalgia was not for the British city, but for the villages and pre-colonial towns, morally distanced from the metropolitan heartlands. Conversely, their dominant sentiment for Calcutta, far from being nostalgic was one of bemusement, shock and even disgust, censuring under the veneer of humour: the extravagance, immorality and the intemperance of these “native” minions of the Englishmen in the city.

ARCADIAN NOSTALGIA AND THE WESTERN CITY

I bow, I bow to my beautiful motherland Bengal!
 To your river-banks, to your winds that cool and console;
 Your plains, whose dust the sky bends down to kiss;
 Your *shrouded villages*, that are *nests of shade and peace*;

Tagore, “A Half-acre of Land”; my *italics*; 56^{xiii}

As Calcutta grew into a global metropolis in the late eighteenth century, it was thought to be “‘inferior only to the first capitals of Europe...’, and estimates of its population suggest that it was then larger than any British city apart from London” (Home 63). Its accelerating status as one of the largest port cities controlling Asia’s seaborne

commerce naturally garnered attention in the public and private accounts of residents and imperial travellers. Nonetheless, vernacular writers envisaged the village and not the flourishing metropolis, as the hallowed seat of Bengali culture for their creative musings. The reason why nostalgia was cultivated for the village in literature that came to represent the quintessential face of the emerging nation can be partially explained by the cynicism towards “Babu culture” in the city and what it stood for. Equally pertinent is Bill Ashcroft’s observation about cities being multi-textured spaces of hybridity, dissent and cultural contamination:

Cities exist in an interstitial space between the nation and the world, which prohibits them from playing any central part in the national psyche. National mythologies are always located in the rural heartland, and postcolonial studies have inevitably been concerned with the contest between the nation and empire in its various forms. Cities, on the other hand, all appear to be, if not similar, at least similarly messy irruptions of global modernity (497-498).

Cities could be far more nebulous and inclusive than ever desired by cultural purists. Therefore, they are deemed inimical and even disruptive of the myth of national identity that allows a singular, totalized narrative of the nation. Buddhadeb Basu’s essay “Calcutta in Bengali Fiction” published in the fifteenth anniversary edition of *Calcutta Municipal Gazette*, resonates with some other concerns behind this apparent contempt towards the city in vernacular fiction:

Until recently, our novelists have been interested in Bengal village, and not in the great and restless city where some of them were born and all of them lived, if not continuously, at any rate long enough to form adequate impressions. The reason is simply this: Bengal being an agricultural country with traces of feudalism still lingering, the village continued to be the centre of our social life for more than a century following the impact of the British [...] It seems that we (speaking collectively) felt the strictness of the city life as somewhat alien, forced upon us by some inscrutable and malignant process of history. (24)

The enforcement of the disciplinary regime induced by the clock time (most significantly grounded in the firing of the canon, stationed in Fort William at every hour) and the labour time in the factories and urban organizations, in the wake of industrial modernity that we associate with the city, brought forth new anxieties in the everyday life of colonial subjects that are iterated in Basu's choice of words like "hurry" (in the previous section), "strictness" or "forced". The subordination to the new temporal order in public life led to a craving for more leisurely existence amid the tranquillity of the village, away from the stress and drudgery to a time-bound routine in the city.

Among educated Indians, this skepticism about urban life only deepened with their scholarly engagement with the English Romantics and Victorians, as much of the conflict between *home* and the *world* after the Industrial Revolution revolved significantly around the city-village dichotomy. As opposed to the simple virtues of the village life, the cities stood for avarice, worldliness and ambition, with poets such as Blake

lashing out in the late eighteenth century against the “mind-forg'd manacles” of the city in “London”. Thus, the antiquarian interest in the Middle Ages and the utopian nostalgia for the “Deep English Landscape” gained a new currency in England in the Industrial Age. In painting, John Constable’s famous landscapes of the Dedham Vale on the Essex-Suffolk border— what is now known as the “Constable Country”— such as *The Hay Wain* (1821), *Dedham Vale* of 1802 bearing the eponymous title, *Wivenhoe Park* (1816), and *The Cornfield* (1826) did much to revive the aura of the agrarian rural England.

Throughout the nineteenth century, experiences of industrial urbanity filtered through the knowledge in English literature and culture; and the systematic, daily exploitation of rural economy to cater to the insatiable demands of city both in the colonies and the metropole only fed into the prejudices in cultured minds and deepened their nostalgia for the village. With the consolidation of nationalist sentiments in the latter part of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, it eventually contributed to the larger debate about the “home” and the “world” in the anticolonial struggle.

Partha Chatterjee’s oft-quoted distinction about the inner and the outer spheres of national culture in the colonial period may help to extend our understanding about some of the political implications of this debate, which may have a direct bearing upon the evident lack of nostalgia in vernacular writings and mnemonic accounts of colonial Calcutta. In *Nation and its Fragments*, Chatterjee succinctly notes that anticolonial nationalism in India carved out its own domain of sovereignty within the

colonial state even before it staged its political battle with the ruling power by dividing social institutions and practices into two broad realms—the “material” and the “spiritual”:

The material is the domain of the “outside,” of the economy and of statecraft, of science and technology, a domain where the West had proved its superiority and the East had succumbed. In this domain, then, Western superiority had to be acknowledged and its accomplishments carefully studied and replicated. The spiritual, on the other hand, is an “inner” domain bearing the “essential” marks of cultural identity (6).

The religious associations of the village with *vastu* (home), “ancestry” and “foundation” formed the infrangible, inner core—the affective and the “spiritual” *home* of Indian culture in the nationalist representations. In contrast, the city became the “outside” other—the “material” domain of “economy and of statecraft”, science and technological progress of Western modernity. Village was thus celebrated propitiously in political and literary writings of the period which drew simultaneously from the local traditions and the socio-cultural movements within Europe that condemned the city as an industrial dystopia.

A nostalgia for suburban life and culture was also invoked in literature as a deliberate strategy to combat the urban sprawl that attempted to subsume its neighborhoods within the ever-expanding metropolis. In nineteenth century Bengal, despite Calcutta’s galloping growth, the city

had not entirely engulfed its hinterlands. In spite of their declining glory, Calcutta's neighboring districts, like Hooghly, with their suburban towns and smaller villages had a distinctively vibrant cultural life. For instance, a popular aphorism about Hooghly, whose recorded history dates substantially ahead of Calcutta's, and which remained a reputed centre of learning even during the colonial period went: *Gangar paschim kul/ Baranasi samatul*. (Ganges's western banks/In its eminence, equals Varanasi's rank).^{xiii} As a move against cultural obliteration, during the high tide of the anti-colonial movement several ideologues insisted on preserving memories of the village and suburban life to resist the imminent encroachment of the city which might lead to the inevitable erasure of indigenous folk traditions in the villages of Bengal.

Calcutta's cultural supremacy, largely dominated by the expressions of a handful of Europeanized elites in the city, has been a bone of contention in both colonial and Post-Independence India. It was not merely the indigenous culture, facing decline in the rural pockets; the proletarian forms of entertainment in the city that were ensconced in folk traditions, were also denounced. The popular culture of the Calcutta streets and marketplaces, largely endorsed by labourers and the working class, and often brought forth by migrants from the villages, fell into disrepute with the emergence of the new class of urban genteel or *Bhadraloks* in the nineteenth century. Drawing from the vast inventory of indigenous traditions, musical compositions such as *Kobi gaan*,^{xiv} *tarjas* (the battle of the poets), *panchali* (verbal recitations) and *brata kathas*, i.e. "various types of songs, recitation of rhymes during rituals [...] which were

performed by women with a view to fulfilling their aspirations” (Banerjee 84), or theatrical performances such as *jatras*, pantomimes or *sawang*s, had strong elements of orality, making them accessible to the masses. They were sometimes laced with racy humour, quick-witted repartees and often explicit sexual overtones. The performers mainly represented the city underclass. For instance, the pantomime shows were acted out by players hailing from the artisan colonies of the Black Town like *Kansari Para* (the colony of braziers), *Jele Para* (the colony of fishermen) and so on. Similarly, some of the renowned performers of *kobi gaan* and *tarjas* that were held in the sprawling courtyards of distinguished households during festive occasions, patronized by wealthy landlords of the Native Town throughout eighteenth and early quarters of nineteenth century, belonged to the caste of sweet-makers (Bhola *Moir*a), cobblers (Kesta *Muchi*), cow-owners (Gonjla *Guin*) by birth or their profession.

These performative expressions which took satirical digs at *status quo* or made topical references to current affairs and local scandals, incurred the ire of the colonial administration. Their content was based on a wide array of subjects, ranging from mythological stories, historical events, to contemporary incidents and characters, outraged the prevailing standards of Victorian morality. Consequently, some forms of entertainment such as *Kobi gaan* started losing patronage; the others lost their audience among the educated upper class. Sumanta Banerjee argues that:

The development of the elite cultural forms of the Bengali *bhadralok* society in nineteenth century Calcutta thus appeared to be moving along

a course which was increasingly drifting away from that particular aspect of the common heritage which was rooted in folk culture... The nineteenth century elite culture that emerged was shaped by two prevailing attitudes—one, the tendency to despise the folk tradition and the popular literary forms under the influence of English education; and two, the desire to discover a cultural identity with the upper class literature, music and fine arts of the past based on Sanskrit classics and Mughal court culture (197-198).

By the twentieth century, most of these folk traditions in urban society either waned, or became restricted among the poorer sections of the city, with people who were commonly termed *Chhotoloks* or lower classes, as opposed to the *Bhadraloks* who dictated the norms of the culture industry and set down rigid language etiquette. While some forms of entertainment such as *Jatra* (from Sanskrit *Yatra*, meaning journey) or open-air theatrical performances, survived this onslaught, they were relegated to the rural margins where they could perform with some impunity. Thus, rallying against Calcutta's cultural monopoly, the Marxist writer Gopal Halder in his essay "This Calcutta Culture", published in *The Calcutta Municipal Gazette* (1938) lambasted the city's claim as the "home of Bengali culture": "Of course Bengal lives in its villages; and with 93.5 percent of its population in country-side, it would be ridiculous to maintain that what is known as Bengali culture should be concentrated into the microscopic fraction that lives in this city" (65). He attributes the gradual demise of many *mufassil* centres as a probable cause behind Calcutta's cultural monopoly especially in the twentieth-century.

At the heart of this contention against Calcutta's intellectual hegemony that wielded command over the most powerful press, literary and cultural institutions, was a pressing question for survival of local indigenous traditions in the villages and the city, which had to be protected against the avalanche of the westernized metropolitan culture. Consequently, the village was launched as the site of cultural nationalism and remained at the centre of the ideological debates that reached its zenith during the Anti-Partition demonstrations of 1905, snowballing into the *Swadeshi* (Home-Rule) Movement. A distinctive nostalgia for the rural or "*palli*" Bengal emerged in both political orations and literary writings of this period. Subsequently, the transformation in Indian nationalism from an elite movement dominated by the discontented bourgeoisie of the urban centres to a popular mass uprising against the colonial government under Gandhi remained tilted towards this "ruralism" and valorization of Indian villages.

In Bengal, the principal literary figures, starting from Rabindranath Tagore (notwithstanding his urban upbringing), Bibhutibhusan Bandyopadhyay (1894-1950), Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay (1876-1978) and Tarashankar Bandyopadhyay (1898-1971)— wrote predominantly about the rural. While Tagore was thoroughly vocal about superstition, parochialism, casteism, greed and other embedded forms of social malaise within traditional Indian society in his prose fictions such as his short stories in *Galpaguccha (Collection of Short Stories)*, his body of poems and songs mostly created a timeless, idyllic picture of the village. Dipesh Chakrabarty attends to this bivalence in "Nation and Imagination" by

alluding to Tagore's diverse approach to nationalist discourse in prose and verse as a conscious strategy:

The prosaic and the poetic thus came to share a division of labour in Tagore's writing. [...] The former was amenable to historicist and objectivist treatment; it stood for the familiar political desire of the modern to align the world with that which was real and rational. The poetic, argued Tagore, took us outside of historical time. Together prose and poetry posed and answered the question of the two ways of seeing in Bengali nationalism (153).

Chakrabarty's opinion is corroborated by the clear distinction Tagore makes between the purpose of poetry and that of prose. Tagore associates prose with the birth of democratic consciousness in his essay "Bengali National Literature"^{xv} (1895), while appraising the contribution of Raja Rammohan Ray as its modern progenitor in Bengali: "In this way, a new age dawned in Bengal under the rule of a new Raja. The first Bengali of a new Bengal anointed the common people as king, and set up a royal palace of literature on a deep, firm foundation on the extensive soil of Bengal" (183). Because Rammohan realised that "the language of sensibility and beauty, the idiom of the connoisseur of the rasas" in poetic verses, was not sufficient, Tagore asserted, "the language of reason and statement, a language that could discourse on all matters to all people, was what he needed. Till then, there had existed only poetry for gatherings of contemplatives; there now appeared prose for the concourse of the people" (181-182). In approaching the manifold nuances of the nationalist

imaginary that were taking shape around the turn of the century, Tagore's prose and poetry complemented each other with their individual domains of application. In "Nation and Imagination", while delineating the specific functions Tagore accorded to different literary mediums in the dissemination of nationalist ideas, Dipesh Chakrabarty also attends to the imperative of "imagination" in nationalist discourse. Like Benedict Anderson, Chakrabarty posits that "imagination" is integral to the conception of nation:

It does not take much effort to see that a photographic realism or a dedicated naturalism could never answer all the needs of vision that modern nationalisms create. For, the problem from a nationalist point of view is this: if the nation, the people, or the country were not just to be observed, described and critiqued but loved and adored as well, what would guarantee that they were indeed worth loving unless one also saw in them something that was already lovable? What if the real, the natural and the historically accurate did not generate the feeling of devotion or adoration? An objectivist, realist view might lead only to disidentification. Nationalism, one might then say, presents the question of vision and imagination in ways more complicated than what a straightforward identification of the realist or the factual with the political might suggest (178).

Extending Chakrabarty's argument, it can be posited that nostalgia is an essential catalyst in shaping the affective imagination of nationalism. Nostalgia upholds the image of a collective past that a community may use as a model to envision their future. And literature here becomes an

important channel facilitating the circulation of such nostalgia. Gifted with the faculty of imagination, literature and nostalgia can work together to move beyond the factual plane, to embrace an ideal past for a future desired and anticipated. This collusion between imagination, nostalgia and literature shows why the leaders of the anticolonial movement in India emphasized the development of a body of national literature that could connect the nation's past and the present to create a notion of seamlessly continuous historical time: "[...] literature joins one human being to another, one age to another, with the bonds of life. The growth and diffusion of Bengali literature will not only unite the hearts of Bengalis with the most intimate ties: it is already becoming apparent that it will one day attract the other races of India to the hall where the feast of its knowledge is served to guests and the nectar of its ideas freely dispenses to all" (Tagore 184).

At the dawn of the *Swadeshi Movement*, Tagore had composed a series of songs enshrining the village in reaction to the Bengal Partition in 1905, such as *Amaar Sonar Bangla, ami tomay bhalobashi* ("I love you, my golden land of Bengal"), *O amar desher maati* ("O the blessed earth of my country") or "*Banglar mati Banglar jol, Banglar bayu Banglar phol, Punya Hoyuk, Punya Hoyuk, Punya Hayuk, he Bhagaban*" ("Let the soil of Bangla, the water of Bangla, the air of Bangla, the fruits of Bangla be blessed, O Lord!")" In the nationalist debate, this aesthetic engagement with rural nostalgia was posited as an alternative to the colonial government's sole preoccupation with mercantile cities as the nerve centre of civilisation.

The enshrining of the village as the archetypal seat of Indian values—spiritual and cultural, in the body of vernacular writings, political oratory and social discourses, thus became a maneuver against the propaganda of British writers and historians about Calcutta in the early years of the twentieth century that were typically characterized “by the persistent intertwining of pride and nostalgia” (S. Sarkar 164) about all the glorious achievements of the colonial regime in the past two centuries. Partially to alleviate their own uncertainties and concerns about the future of the Empire against spiraling anti-colonial agitations, Calcutta was claimed by the British as the triumph of their civilization in the East that forced the “passive” colonized Bengalis into the light of modernity. The move invariably invited a flurry of criticism about the city as the child of Western materialism and greed; with the village with its strong cultural moorings in local tradition, imagined as an alternative site of agency for the Indians claiming their own history for the nation.

**LITERARY MAPS AND MEMORIES—CHARTING THE LIMITS
OF THE WHITE MAN’S CITY**

British Calcutta may have failed to impress the entire cross-section of urban society on varying personal or political grounds, but it did not stop the “natives” from presenting their own version of the city, which as creative maps challenged any monolithic understanding of the urban landscape implied by the colonial rhetoric. In the colonized space the mottled maps of the city sketched, both literally and in the extended sense, by the vernacular writers sometimes reinforce, but most often creatively

challenge the limits of knowledge of the zealous cartographers, surveyors and illustration-artists of the Empire.

Cartographic interests in the context of colonization, of course, has a long and chequered history. The scientific engagement with cartography—the “epistemological impulse to find out, to settle upon, to uncover” (216), as Edward Said puts it in *Orientalism*, emerging among the principal disciplines in the imperial order of knowledge, defined the colonial figure of the land-surveyor in British Empires as:

the instrument for imposing a whole new economic and spatial order on the territory. In the process he usually extinguished precolonial land rights (or at least restricted them to defined areas), so that he was a figure regarded by the native people with little enthusiasm. The land surveyor was an explorer, resource appraiser, town-planner, delineator of routeways, and the shaper of landscapes both urban and rural (Home 37).

In consonance with the role that Home delineated, the surveyor would typically perform in Britain’s overseas territories as a key player in instrumenting the colonial administration. *The Statistical Atlas of India* (1886) outlined some of the agenda for which such land surveys were carried out at regular intervals. This ambitious project undertaken for the Colonial and Indian Exhibition of 1886 held at South Kensington in London whose declared purpose pithily enumerated by the *Prince of Wales* at its inauguration, was “to stimulate commerce and strengthen the bonds of union now existing in every portion of her Majesty's Empire”^{xvi}.

In imperial geography, maps were drawn to treat nature as a resource for Britain. They were primarily meant to facilitate the revenue assessment by furnishing a statistical analysis of the extent and possibility of “wealth production” under the guise of “Moral and Material Progress and Condition of India”^{xvii}. Likewise, for the imperial government, the particularity of Calcutta as a prosperous port and the nucleus of trade and administration from the mid-eighteenth century provided the extra impetus for extensive mapping of the city and its suburbs dotting its peripheries. Barring a handful, from the earliest known British map of the city in 1742 called the “Plan of Calcutta” to the several of those subsequent maps in the next two hundred years, the cartographic ventures were sponsored by different wings of government corresponding to various requirements of the colonial administration. However, in these maps that clinically erased the empire’s pre-colonial geography there was no room, argues Ranajit Guha, for “any indigenous will or interest or activity that is not slotted into the grand imperial design” (351). Even though, ironically by marking the boundaries of the “White” Town they inadvertently acknowledged the existence of its “other” that was always already present at the margins of colonial consciousness.

Through the nineteenth and into the first quarter of the twentieth century, apart from the memoirs and travelogues by European visitors that flooded the market, Bengal witnessed a swelling growth in the publication of almanacs, guidebooks, directories and registers that were often accompanied by vivid illustrations. However, in these maps the congested Native Town and their slums in the unsanitary or hideous shapes were

either quickly glossed over or conspicuously ignored to the extent that the overstated emphasis on the European neighbourhoods was sometimes panned even by the survey officials of the Empire.

Swati Chattopadhyay working on the architectural history of colonial Calcutta shows us that like the maps, paintings, lithographs and the famous aquatints of the city by European artists fulfilling the “special role for art in colonial exploration” (35) too neglected the native quarters. Among the first twelve aquatints on the panoramic View of *Calcutta* by the uncle and nephew, Thomas (1749-1840) and William Daniell (1769-1837) who specialized in architectural landscapes: a “branch of landscape painting which depicted country estates and the surroundings” (Almeida and Gilpin 183), only two of them exclusively founded on the Native Town. Almost similar was the case with James Baillie Fraser’s series of watercolour aquatints, *Views of Calcutta and its Environs* (1824–6). Such views of the city, notes Donald Gray, while classifying the art genre:

characteristically depict its public buildings, churches, parks, principal thoroughfares, and often, in an opening or summery plate, a panorama of the city [...] The architecture, especially in early-[nineteenth]century views, is drawn clearly and accurately. Often there are people in the picture, sometimes in static poses to furnish balance or to provide scale, sometimes walking, driving, and working in the streets. For all this detail of architecture and figure, the effect of these city views is typically one of order and firm composition (43).

In the case of Calcutta, its representation largely revolves around the grandeurs of the White Town bears the stamp of Raj's dominant ideology. Their purpose was to furnish a pictorial commentary that would vindicate Britain's civilizing mission qua its architectural and material achievements in the East. Appropriately, the vast, barren emptiness against which some of these colossal Palladian architectures were conceived in Thomas Daniell's Calcutta aquatints produced dramatic effects in augmenting this claim of "a thriving metropolis in India where the English lived, worked, and continued to build" (Almeida and Gilpin 184).

Here, the locals typically representing the labouring "low life", often depicted in their exoticized bare bodies looked puny and dark against the monumental white architecture. Set apart from the brilliant buildings and fashionable esplanades of the White Town, the portrayal of Chitpur in *Plate 4*, populated with Indians, bovines and emaciated pariah dogs fighting over morsels in the garbage looked starkly different, almost echoed what Kipling designated as the "great human jungle of the native city" (18). This contrast between the two localities—the brightly lit colonial town and "human jungle" of the "native" quarters lying in close propinquity created a sense of unhinging disorder which partially accounted for the strangeness that the Europeans attributed to the city.

The unease of the colonial rulers became most evident in their fear of contamination through physical contact with Indians. So, the spatial perceptions and the exclusions in the early maps of the Europeans to a large extent reflected these "incommensurable realities" (Jameson 59) in the cities of the empire. In early nineteenth century, English travel writer

Emma Roberts (1794–1840) in her memoir on India, *Scenes and characteristics of Hindostan* (1835) notes the disturbing physical proximity of the hideous looking huts of Indian servants to the British house:

[a] mud hut, or rows of native hovels, constructed of mats, thatch, and bamboo, not superior to the rudest wigwam, often rest against the outer walls of palaces (Vol. I, 3).

Almost literalizing Kipling’s description of “Palace, byre, hovel – poverty and pride – Side by side” (81) in “A Tale of Two Cities”, Roberts describes the Black Town as a “wretched” stultifying place lacking basic municipal amenities, “dirty, crowded, ill-built, and abounding with beggars and bad smells” (3). While the desire for a gated community that is often reflected in such accounts sometimes solidified in the actual construction of “elaborate artifices of delimitation –wrought-iron railings, masonry walls, and gates— often designed after European pattern books” (Chattopadhyay 92) around British residences, Swati Chattopadhyay points out the paradox embedded in such practice that upturned the myth of *terra nullius* on its head:

As territorial markers, these protective devices that secluded the world of British inhabitants also worked to create a fractured public space that could never be gathered within a single imperial gesture. If the symbols and spaces of imperialism had to be carefully bounded to prevent native intrusion, it also meant that the native threat had to be placed at the

center of colonial life, disfiguring and delimiting the colonizers' desire for unbounded and unpeopled territory (92).

The interventions into imperial maps of Calcutta becomes evident in the illustrations^{xviii} drawn by the natives in contradistinction that duly questioned the pugnacious assertion of the colonizers: “we know [the Orient] and it exists, in a sense, as we know it” (Said 32). Intending to differentiate between the official and the indigenous ways of representing Calcutta, these maps can be broadly categorized as religious, topographical, literary or cosmological^{xix}. Each of these offer a unique way of reading the city as a text—its people, objects, ideas, plying in space and time—from multiple vantage points.

In the following, I engage more specifically with literary maps, which constitute an amorphous body, ranging from the general use of cartographic lexicon in literature to the application of actual maps and images to various ends (as Franco Moretti has done in the recent past by using maps, charts and graphs to develop his notion of “distant reading” in the study of literary histories and cultures^{xx}). In this thesis, mapping is used in an extended and creative sense to refer to the reimagining of the everyday landscapes within textual spaces such as songs, stories and poems, without using actual illustrations such. Here the examples are chiefly taken from three distinctive genres—street poems and songs drawn from the oral tradition, fantasy in children’s literature, and in the *nakshas* of the nineteenth century. This list is by no means exhaustive, but it does give a sense of the corpus of literature on Calcutta that existed in the vernacular in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. The colocation of

textual examples as divergent as these is thus deliberate, as a way of examining the different orders of literary maps that existed during that period.

Since the nineteenth century, vernacular literature has produced prolific maps of city. Some of the most imaginative ones come from folk literature of the urban mnemonic culture, mostly consisting of verses and songs composed by oral street performers. In many of these local chartings cartography became an interpretative tool created around the way communities lived and “saw” the place. For “seeing” is both relational and reciprocal. You “see” and you are “seen” and when we see, “we are always looking at the relation between things and ourselves” (Berger 9). Anchored in the spatial framework of the city, the ideological, conditional and sometimes contrastive ways of “seeing” the urban reality traverse each other in literary spaces. Their affective properties imbue meaning and value to the physical space a community inhabits and the social, quotidian spaces in which they interact. Based on their own everyday experience of the place, a people can potentially challenge the projected hegemonic “representation of space” and some of these values are conveyed across generations even when the physical surrounding alters and the models of representation change over time. Nostalgia has always been a significant tool in transmitting such mental maps and retaining their enduring images in our spatial imagination. Thus, in certain circumstances even when the physical map disappears or the community is deracinated from their home due to a change in the political situation it can still draw its sustenance by nostalgically summoning the imaginary map of homeland.

In the case of Calcutta in its early days, it is this “mental image” the British subjects carried with themselves that became blueprints for their “little London” overseas, while the communities whose world was profoundly affected by urbanization were prompted by a similar bout of nostalgia among other compelling reasons to provide a counter-narrative through their own maps.

STREET POEMS, SONGS AND DOGGERELS

A rooted understanding of the urban space came from pantomime artists and street musicians and poets, whose songs presented the urbanscape of British Calcutta but by evoking constant analogies from indigenous sources. One such song that became well known was Rupchand Pakkhi’s *Dhonyo dhonyo sahar Kolkata* (“Sing praise to the city of Kolkata”), titled, “*Kalikata Barnan*” (“The Description of Kolkata”). Rupchand Das Mahaptra (1814- 1890?), better known as RC bird (punning with bard) or *Rupchand Pakkhi* hailed from Orissa but was brought up primarily in metropolitan Calcutta. His education was from the famous Hare School. He subsequently became attached to the famous “hemp-smoking club” of Bagbazar whose members called themselves “*Pakakhir Dal*” or the “Association of Birds”. Rupchand cuts a striking figure as one who not only called himself a bird, but dressed like one. While he received training in classical music, he also had an expertise in the folk musical traditions of *panchali* or *kobigaan*.

Rupchand was adept in composing short lyrical pieces on the usual themes of love and friendship together with exigent issues like the custom of dowry, female education or widow remarriage that had fueled vigorous debates in nineteenth-century Bengal. He used a patois of Bengali sentences that were densely peppered with English words such as: “*Amay fraud kore/Kalia damn tui kothay geli/ I am for you very sorry...*” (“Where have you gone, damned Kalia after deceiving me...”)^{xxi}, adding to the gay humour in his songs. Adorned in the costume of a bird, Rupchand sat inside a huge bamboo cage drawn by a hand-pulled cart, in which he travelled to different places, often singing his verses on Calcutta streets.



Figure 13: A model of Rupchand Pakshi in his caged-cart in Calcutta Town Hall Museum.

“*Kalikata Barnan*” (“The Description of Kolkata”) was one of his better-known songs on the city which oscillates between his inimitable humour and a sense of astonishment at the new wonders of the modern metropolis. A gamut of emotions and affective responses to the city is borne out by the literature of the age, and this song bears testimony to the fact that not all were univocally critical of the British capital.

Dhonyo dhonyo Kolkata sahar

Swarger jestho sohodor.

Poschim-e Jhanavidebi, dokkhin e Gangasagor.

(Pube Bada Chingrihata Podda nodi toduttor)

Hastings bridge Bagbajar ei ayoton tar,

Sorcular Road pormitdhar, chotushsheemar,

Atulyo mortyo bhubon-e, boikuntho jai har mene,

Here telegraph, bole bap,

Laaje lokay Purondor.

Tare-e tar, borno bistar, dhonyo shilpi karigorh [....]

Indrer bahan oiraboth, Kolkatar phiton roth [...]

Poriskar poth naiko, moila

Sari sari, gaslight ala,

Chandra deber solokola hote ujjala[...]

Sing praises to the city, Kolkata

Heaven’s elder brother

To its west flows the Jhanavi³, to its south is Gangasagar

(In the east is Bada Chingrihata, to the North is the Padma River.)

³ Another name for Ganges

Hastings bridge, Bagbazar is its length

Circular Road is built along the four borders.

An incomparable place on earth, to which even the God's abode can be no match

Looking at the telegraph

Indra hides his face in shame.

Watching how letters transfer, spreading from wire to wire [...]

The Airavath of Indra are the phiton-cars of Kolkata [...]

The clean roads without dirt

The streets are lined with gaslights

Which are brighter than the sixteen phases of the moon

There is no darkness in its presence [...]

(*Bangalir Gaan*, my trans.; 404-405)

Throughout this laudatory verse, the mise-en-scène of the city is couched in the religious idioms of Hinduism, initiating a curious dialogue between tradition and transformation wrought by modernity, by coalescing the order of the mythical and the secular.

Rupchand who assumes the identity of a bird, *Khagraj* or the “king of birds” (khag: bird; raj: the king or the supremo) or sometimes simply *Khag bor* (a bird) is both a creature of the heaven and earth. His equal access to the territories of the sky and the realms below the firmament places him in a privileged position to allude to the celestial domains. After mapping the boundaries of the city from an imagined altitude, he asserts: “*Kolkatar ki nichoni, bornite asokto bani*” (“to draw its comparison, or describe its beauty in words, my vocabulary seems inadequate”). Here

nichoni encompasses both comparison and description. By calling Calcutta an “earthly paradise”, he introduces a series of spatial metaphors that are culturally encoded in Hindu cosmology to establish his point. For instance, as a way of initiating comparisons, he refers to *Vaikuntha*, the abode of the Hindu divinity *Vishnu*; or *Nandankanan*, the celestial garden, to which he likens the greens of Eden Gardens in Calcutta. Marking the city as an emporium of technological wonders, he catalogues a long list of new civic amenities from rail, to telegraph, to fire brigade and crematorium while trying to find parallels in the mythology for his enraptured inventory. The bard equates the shining phiton-carriages that ply the streets of Calcutta with *Airavath*, the magnificent white elephant who carried *Indra*, the king of the Gods in Heaven on its back. The song also alludes to *Indra* by his other name *Phurandhar* while speaking of the telegraph. The songwriter believes that this wondrous innovation could even shame *Indra*, the God who wields the thunderbolt like Jupiter, because it enables the transmission of news faster than a flash of lightening.

To explain the novelties introduced by the colonial administration both in terms of their newness and scale, the poet customizes the understanding of the colonized space to make it accessible to common man on the streets. He makes it more inclusive using domestic and familiar reference points from the local religious traditions. However, what is of interest is also the way in which memory as a cultural tool is deployed within the narrative frame of the verse. By repeatedly making mythological allusions, the song not only invokes cultural nostalgia around myths and legends, it initiates a spatial dialectic between “here” and

“elsewhere” (the earth and heaven, the celestial and the mortal) which is at the crux of nostalgic reminiscences—where “elsewhere” is always the desired destination. However, this dialectic is subtly inverted when the poet rejects the alternatives. His spatial imagination conjures all the traditional metaphors of *Nandankanan* and *Vaikuntha* that are used in popular rhetoric to describe places of peerless beauty, only to establish how they pale before Calcutta, “Heaven’s elder brother”. None are adequate to the splendours of the city that outshines the ideal by defeating every benchmark of comparison. Thus, it is through the negation of the “elsewhere” of nostalgia, the singularity and the desirability of Calcutta is firmly grounded and celebrated through the song.

Besides such verses coming from well-known poets of the time, there were plenty of anonymous doggerels on native localities in the popular traditions of the urban culture. The Black Town or the *Bangali Tola* (*Tola*, *Para*, *Goli*: are different designations of locality) in its early days of formation has been divided into discrete neighbourhoods either based on profession or its specialty. *Sankhari Tola* (*Sankhari* or conch-shell makers;), *Kumor Tuli* (*Kumor* are the artisans who work with clay), *Kolu Tola* (*kolu*: one who extracts oil from the seeds) *Jeliya Para* (*jeliya*: fishermen), *Patua Tola* (*patua*: the pat artists). Most of these names still exist, bearing the history of the locality for which they were known. In old Calcutta, aphoristic verses that were widely in circulation would signpost the defining features of these quarters. Sumanta Banerjee recognized a few common characteristics shared by these aphorisms in couplets: “like nursery rhymes, we find different versions of the same doggerel or rhyme,

which suggests that while the rhythmical structure remained the same, the words changed from mouth to mouth according to the mood of the composer or the relevance of the situation” (89). For example:

Moirā, Mudi kolakar/ Ei tin niye Bag-bazar

(The sweet-seller, confectioner, performer/The trio makes Bagbazar)

Jahaj kuli chitegur/Ei tin niye Khidirpur

(Ships, potters, sweet-jagery/For Kidhirpur, stand the three.)

Rong mati tuli/Tin-e Kumortuli

(Colour, clay, and brushes for paint, / Three-together, Kumartuli represent.)

Places around the city were also designated by such poems. For instance, here is one for Bali, a suburb near Calcutta:

Doyat kolom kali/ Ei tin niye Bali

(Ink-pot, pen and ink/Trio, with Bali we often link)

Several of these rhymes from anonymous sources index the particularity of places have now become an integral part of popular repertoire of nostalgia. Like the lost maps of the city salvaged in memory, they are evoked by the inhabitants from time to time to speak of what those places were previously known for. These rhymes preserve the distinctiveness of a locality especially in the days of their vanishing glory, when the shades of difference are mown down and the distinguishing traits that marked these places^{xxii} are flattened out by the invasive culture of shopping malls and multinational brands.

NAKSHAS

In other literatures, such as those combining the picturesque and social satire on colonial Calcutta, there existed extensive representation of urban space. This literary genre that overtly identified itself with a map or *naksha* became particularly popular in the latter half of nineteenth century. Probably, the earliest known example was a piece, “*Babur Upakhyan*” (“The Chronicle of the Babu”), published in the Bengali Weekly, *Samachar Darpan*, (1821)^{xxiii}. Later it was Bhabanicharan Bandhyopadhyay who gave this a certain popularity through his satires, *Kalikata Kamalalaya (Kolkata, the Abode of Laxmi, 1823)*, *Naba Babu Bilash, (The Entertainments of the New Babus, 1825)* without using the appellation *Naksha* in the title as such.

These writings were not only plotting the urban landscape; they were maps of the social mores of the rising metropolis in the nineteenth century under the veneer of satiric humour. The picture of Calcutta—its civic life, streets, modes of transportation, festivals, gossips fads and neologisms—that emerged from these writings form some of the most reliable records of the city. One such early instance of Calcutta’s *naksha* was *Swachitra Guljar Nagar (The Illustrated Account of the Splendid City)* by Kedarnath Datta who used the acronym *Bhnar* or “the Jester” for his satire. While “Swachitra” in the title suggests that there would be illustrations illuminating the narration, there are no pictorial images as such. The text on the cover page reads: “*Roshe makha, Borne Anka hoye, Horbola seje dekha dilen [Bhnar]*” i.e. “soaked in *rasa*, and painted with words, the

comedian comes as a ventriloquist”, thus indicating that the images in this book are pen-pictures of the city by the mottled comedian who speaks in multiple voices. It also stresses that the predominant temperament that governs the writing is that of humour.

The *bhnar* or the entertainer invokes another comic tradition in vernacular with which the native population of the city was intimately acquainted. In early nineteenth century stories and comic legends of Gopal *Bhnar* (Gopal, the jester) became immensely popular in Bengal. Gopal is identified as the comedian or fool in court of the Raja Krishnachandra (1710-1783) of Nadia, a prosperous seat of Hinduism in Bengal. Krishnachandra was one of the biggest patrons of Hindu art and culture in the late Mughal period. In the stories, Gopal is known to be his favourite courtier who was deeply loved by the king for his sharp wit and presence of mind. While the historical existence of such a character in Krishnachandra’s court has been cast into doubt, his comic exploits, sometimes discredited for its bawdy humour, published in books such as *Koutuk Bilash* (1843?) by *Dwija* Shyamcharan who charted the adventures of Gopal *Bhanr* within the life and times of Krishnachandra, were widely popular in Calcutta.

One of the many reasons for its eminence in colonial Calcutta can be attributed to the nostalgia for the pre-British Hindu court culture among natives, with which these stories were intrinsically associated. Like the British who cultivated their nostalgia for London in Calcutta by reprising its mores and customs, the native settlers too carried with them the manners and memories of pre-colonial court culture into the city, that

became manifest in these stories. While *Bhand* or Bhnar was a popular figure in folk performances, the circulation of Gopal Bhnar stories gave it a new valence in urban culture.

To return to the category of *naksha* or urban satires, the best-known work to have perfected this genre is Kaliprasanna Sinha's *Hootum Panchyar Naksha* whose English title appearing with the second edition of the book was: "Sketches by Hootum Illustrative of Everyday Life and Everyday People", strongly evoking the memory of "Sketches by Boz: Illustrative of Every-day Life and Every-day People", published twenty-five years earlier in London. Alluding to this similarity induced by the influence of the Metropolitan culture, in "A Colonial City and its Time(s)" Ranajit Guha locates a chain of reciprocity when he contends that while Calcutta was just as:

incipiently urban [compared to the Paris of Balzac or London of Dickens that has a long urban history]. But that did not take away from its importance as an issue of that historic movement which requires every modern empire to site a colonial city. Caught up in that web of complementarity, the latter [i.e. Calcutta] and its restless muse, both children of their time, had to have a Hutom to match the metropolitan Boz (338).

A "*naksha*" is variously translated and interpreted as a map, a plan, a layout, a design or photographic sketch. True to its name, *Hootum* brings out the changing colours of cosmopolitan Calcutta which itself becomes a

character evolving and expanding with its sprawling narrative. As the English subtitle identifies itself with literary “sketches” that became particularly popular in nineteenth century Europe in their realistic depiction of exotic locations in travel literatures, Kaliprasanna Sinha’s *Naksha* bears the characteristics of the genre. It comprises a series of short literary vignettes of Calcutta life with a tenuous plot and episodic characters and storylines. In this otherwise sporadic and fragmentary narration the city eventually turns out to be the protagonist that holds the plot, if there is any, from the beginning till the end. But what Sinha brings to the genre is a brand of humour which is immediately reminiscent of the cerebral eighteenth century English satires, but its expressions also bear the influence of the indigenous comic traditions espoused by *Bnars* (jesters) songwriters and performers.

By assuming the persona of a barn owl, Hootum not only has the unique privilege of peeping into any household, as a nocturnal bird he has access to the secret night lives of Calcuttans. That Hootum is not one among the common men is quite evident from the aerial identity the author chooses for his narrator. This also works well to distinguish the “narrator”, from the real-life persona of the author who appears as one of his characters caught up in the currents of the age.

Unlike humans, Hootum’s ability to soar above the ground level also allows him to look at the city from atop. He sees things without necessarily being seen, that gives him a command over other earth-borne beings. Viewing quotidian lives from a high elevation facilitates a certain grasp of the city’s human cartography. Hootum is thus able to create like his

contemporary, Rupchand Pakkhi (RC Bird), an assortment of maps cutting across a vast cross-section of the nineteenth century urban society from a “high-altitude” perspective. Yet, despite this bird’s-eye-view and admission to things kept hidden from the public gaze, the satirist himself maintains a critical distance from everyday life for their dispassionate evaluation. We may take for instance, this snippet about street life in Calcutta:

The trader’s shop at the four-point crossing was packed with visitors toggled up in all sorts of outfits. One of them wore a shirt with cuffs and collars, sporting silver buckles fastened on shining leather. Another one had donned a Chinese coat in combination with shoes made of Indian rubber, a crepe shawl and a guard chain made of horsehair around the neck [...] Calcutta was like a treasure trove. There wasn’t a single type that you would not find here. [Just look at the] people, determined to get their share of entertainment, lined up on either side of the road. Lawyers from the Small Causes Court, section writers, moneyed spice sellers, oilseed grinders, blacksmiths who were natives of Dacca and Brahmins who made a living by officiating at household pujas and consuming *folars* comprised most of the crowd; someone was carrying two daughters, another had three sons [in tow]. A clergyman distributed Bibles by the basketloads, with a catechist by his side (Tran. Chitralkha Basu; 26-27).

The attention to detail captured in this excerpt about the sartorial culture, food habits and practices on the streets, almost resembles a series of the Victorian narrative paintings, particularly the tradition of “sketches” as the

subtitle suggests, whose “scale is usually that of a human figure, alone or in groups, often placed against a well-known building or in a familiar or representative urban setting” (Gray 43). They often focus on “eccentric detail of figure and setting, on odd costume, unusual types, and the quaint look of out-of-the way places in the city” (43). Here, against the setting of a bustling “native” locality, the sequence of events and characters unspool in a single moment that is broken up into numerous fragments to map the variety of activities carried out in a busy street at a same instant. Most of the chapters centre around some Hindu festival: *Charak*^{xxiv}, *Durga Puja*, *Rath* (Chariot Festival) etcetera. Hootum’s vivid descriptions not only captured the verve and timbre of the swarming streetscapes, jostling with people and their banter, mannerisms and customs; but also, the ever-expanding contours of the city as new populations were brought within its terrain.

Now to get to the question of nostalgia and its functions, one must acknowledge, it is not the predominant affective mode in this genre. However, that itself merits a discussion for an understanding of the life and times of *naksha*, which formed a major branch of city literature before the Modernists came into the scene the following century. *Nakshas* form an important repository of urban memory that was reprised in subsequent literatures as we will see in the final chapter. These writings that emerged from of a great social ferment, were a result of the colonial encounter that produced a “hybrid city”. Sambudha Sen in an incisive intervention in “Re-visioning the Colonial City”, proposed as a dialogue with Ranajit Guha’s essay referred to above, pins down the effect of hybridization on the

emergent vernacular literature in modern Bengali with *Hootum* as the case study for his observation:

The British reluctance to document the hybridizing effects of colonialism on a city like Calcutta stands in sharp contrast to the response of local writers and artists. Bhawani Charan Bandyopadhyay, whose Brahminical aversion to the possibility of contamination must have been as intense as that of any British settler, found it impossible to deny that Calcutta had been thoroughly ‘churned’ by the colonial encounter (Bandhopadhyay xiv). For Bandhopadhyay, the most obvious evidence of this churning was the increasing number of English and hybrid words that were becoming part of the vocabulary of Calcuttans. Other chroniclers of Bengali life in the 19th century who sought to cultivate a wider, often unlettered audience worked not only with foreign words but also with new images, modes of representation, commodities, and news that colonialism threw into circulation (31).

Standing on the cusp of tradition and Bengali modernity, *Hootum*, a product of a time, is like the colonial city itself: youthful, irreverent and holding a mirror to a Calcutta that was riding high on success by responding to the exigencies of the Empire. The language of *naksha* is chatty, urbane and crisp. Comedy is deeply cerebral, rather than sentimental. While the text took digs at the supercilious new age babus, the invectives against old customs and superstitions are equally sharp, bereft of sentimentality.

Yet one might approach nostalgia obliquely from an entirely different perspective in the evocation of different literary and cultural models from the past, which are transformed by the literary genius of Kaliprasanna Sinha. Authors are often in dialogue with the works of their predecessors, and find their “home” in different literary traditions which are carried forward in some way through intertextuality. The *Naksha* too sought inspiration from numerous sources from the West whose literature and culture were made readily available through English education; and the robust tradition of humour in oral, street culture. By stitching the different ends of a spectrum in its narrative universe, and bringing to life a world that equally echoed the anxieties of a growing metropolis with the everyday, humdrum realities of a place—Hootum creates a “portrait gallery” of the protean city in its prolific diversity.

CHILDREN’S LITERATURE

Speaking of ways of mapping of the city-space in vernacular literature, the breadth as we see is, quite vast and diverse. We may move from literary realism in street poems and *nakshas* in the nineteenth century to an entirely different genre of fantasy in children’s literature in the early twentieth century to find dynamic maps of the city. But creative literature need not necessarily record “what is”. It may also suggest alternatives, i.e., “what if” or “what could have been”. Literature that “homes” our desires can be intrinsically nostalgic in its relation to its reality in the sense that it can potentially create the essential “elsewhere” of nostalgia within the diegetic

world of the text itself when the “real” disappoints or disintegrates. One such visionary map of the city is laid out in Abanindranath Tagore’s novella *Khajanchir Khata* (*The Treasurers’ Register*), written for children in 1921. In the story, as opposed to the cash keeper’s notebook where the nitty-gritty of everyday income-expenditure is minutely recorded, we have a make-believe register of a magical child, Putu. It documents with similar precision the treasures of his fecund imagination by subverting the rationalism of hard numbers in a treasurer’s account. It is in the pages of this “green notebook” that we have a creative landscape of Calcutta which comes alive at the dead hours of the night:

What were you thinking while looking at those houses of the city from the roof-top? All those thousands of houses and factory chimneys that you see during the day transform into gardens, markets and ponds with the sound of the cannon-ball at nine [...] if you can stay awake after two, you’ll realize the truth in my claim. Then, the moment a hoard of *sheyals* [foxes] in the neighbourhood of Sheyal-dah shout *Hookka Hua!* All the concrete and stone turn into garden and forests. And as Putu starts playing his flute, the angels appear one by one with their fire-fly lights. You still don’t believe me, isn’t it? You must be wondering how brick, wood and stone can change into trees. Why don’t you make a visit to the museum one day, and you’ll see how trees have turned into stones and stones into trees. The stars in the night sky look like scintillating flashes of light! But only the other day a star fell on the ground. Now it is locked up in a glass box in our museum. It is no longer a fiery-flower but a lump of solid iron (A. Tagore; my trans.; 129).

The visionary map that sprawls before our eyes is born of an alchemy of lush imagination with nostalgia for places that had once existed or could have existed, but have now receded behind the asphalt maze of the modern metropolis. Indeed, a “part of nostalgia's wager is that it is possible to become present again to our favourite periods, places, or episodes of the past by achieving a kind of ideal, mnemonically infused temporality where such experiences would be infinitely retrievable” (McIntire 59). Here fantasy becomes the operative instrument of nostalgia to creatively transform the space by reversing the order of “tempo-reality”.

When Abanindranath Tagore wrote *Khajanchir Khata* (1921), the city of Calcutta was undergoing a series of major makeovers as a part of the urban expansion and development project, undertaken by the colonial government. Under the aegis of Calcutta Improvement Trust (CIT), a statutory body set up in 1911 for the implementation of the Calcutta Improvement Act of 1911, extensive maps were being rolled out that would change the cityscape significantly. Allister Macmillan in his *Seaports of India and Ceylon* compiled in 1928, observed the drastic transformations effected by the new urban planners. He proclaimed that a visitor from 1900 “would today experience many visual shocks...a few years after an improvement has been effected it is exceedingly difficult to recollect a locality as it appeared previously.” (20-21).^{xxv} But even before the 1900s, the compulsive drive towards urbanization caused great consternation for the inhabitants. Rabindranath Tagore, the uncle of Abanindranath who came from the same illustrious Tagore family of Jorasanko, records a dream in June 1891.

I had a most extraordinary dream last night. The whole of Calcutta seemed enveloped in some awful mystery, the houses being only dimly visible through a dense, dark mist, within the veil of which there were strange doings. I was going along Park Street in a hackney carriage, and as I passed St. Xavier's College I found it had started growing rapidly and was fast getting impossibly high within its enveloping haze. Then it was borne in on me that a band of magicians had come to Calcutta who, if they were paid for it, could bring about many such wonders. When I arrived at our Jorasanko house, I found these magicians had turned up there too. They were ugly-looking, of a Mongolian type, with scanty moustaches and a few long hairs sticking out of their chins. They could make men grow. Some of the girls wanted to be made taller, and the magicians sprinkled some powders over their heads and they promptly shot up. To every one I met I kept repeating: "This is most extraordinary,-- just like a dream!" Then some one proposed that our house should be made to grow. The magicians agreed, and as a preliminary began to take down some portions. The dismantling over, they demanded money, or else they would not go on. The cashier strongly objected. How could payment be made before the work was completed? At this the magicians got wild and twisted up the building most fearsomely, so that men and brickwork got mixed together, bodies inside walls and only head and shoulders showing [...] *A curious dream, was it not? Calcutta in the hands of Satan and growing diabolically, within the darkness of an unholy mist! (Glimpses, 34-36).*

The magicians in the dream are the unscrupulous goblin men of the consumer culture who lure the denizens with their perverse promises of urban expansion only to encase them in prisons of brick and mortar. They are manipulative, carrying out dubious dealings in the miasma. The dream is expressive of some of the profound anxieties that perplexed civil society. The development rhetoric which called for the unrestrained sprawl of urban conurbation was a distortion of gigantic proportions, which defaced, twisted and melded the city into a malformed monster. Over the years, the loss of the old landscape by the cutting of trees or bushland to make provisions for new settlements, and covering the bodies of water by landfills and rubbish heaps, became an occasion of both concern and nostalgia. The model of new urban development, further taken up by CIT in 1911, brought in strong criticism on several accounts, particularly for its policy of land acquisition and the consequent displacement of thousands. According to a statistic given by C.H. Bompas, the first chairperson of CIT of 1927^{xxvi}, 50,000 people were already uprooted from their homes since CIT undertook its development plans.

It was not merely humans who were displaced; animals, birds and insects were also forced to migrate from their habitats even since Calcutta's urban plans were set in motion. So, to supplement what was missing and lost in the developer's blueprints, Putu's ingenious map uses fantasy to foreground a different order of spatial imagination. The fantastic, as Rosemary Jackson puts it in her seminal text *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*, pursues "the unsaid and the unseen of culture: that which has been silenced, made invisible, covered over and made

‘absent’” (4). In this narrative that seeks wish-fulfillment the “repressed” landscape is brought into the domain of representation with its transformative potential to mark the limits of the actual and the visible:

Just because the houses conceal the gardens, don't think they do not exist. The football ground that you see on the other side of our circular garden, has a huge pond and a banyan tree beneath its ground. In our childhood we sat below the tree and caught fishes from the pond. I can still see the pond and the tree sometimes. It must be there, otherwise why will that egret hover around that place. A bird is not a cow. It cannot survive on grass. There must be a pond hidden below somewhere. When it reappears at night, the egret catches fish from the water and fills its stomach. That's the only reason why it has survived so long (A. Tagore 129).

At midnight when humans are asleep, the urban landscape metamorphoses to its old form for the birds, animals and insects to reclaim their “home” from which they were unceremoniously driven out. While Enlightenment epistemology dichotomized the split between rationality and irrationality, nostalgia and fantasy worked its way in the opposite direction to resist that dominant social order, governed by mercantile and capitalist regimes which singularly glorified the absolutism of reason. *Khajanchir Khata* alludes to these conflicting registers where the treasurer's notebook stands for the hard knowledge endorsed by capitalism; and Putu's diary, its obverse. The rigorously organized work-schedules of the capitalist system that equated time with money, invariably bred its opposite that broke into

the “real world” with the irrational and the fantastic, trying to fill-in for the “lack” in the present. Both fantasy and nostalgia, emanating from a common ground of desire, seek imaginative freedom in alternative worlds. And when nostalgia is tethered with fantasy as happens in Putu’s story, it becomes capable of proposing “latent ‘other’ meanings or realities behind the possible or the known. Breaking single, reductive ‘truths’, the fantastic traces a space within a society’s cognitive frame” (Jackson 23). In Putu’s narrative, the pliant walls between memory and imagination, the authentic and magical become so flimsy that the “single” absolute truth dissolves to give way to multiple, anachronistic, and impossible “truths” that direct us to other spaces. As fantasy enters the text by breaking the incarceration of reason, the real map of Halisahar (a place near Calcutta) becomes a guide to Putu’s imaginary kingdom:

Now look at the old map of Halisahar in Putu’s notebook. Where is the city? All of it is covered with gardens, ponds, *ghats* and open fields. In the west, along *Boro ganga* there are three huge wharfs; *Babu Ghat* in between *Koyla Ghat* to its south and *Jaggannath Ghat* in the north.
(ibid)

The narrator tells us that the wharf at the *Babu Ghat* is lined with the pleasure boats and barges of the babus. Similarly, in *Koyla Ghat* one can see the steam ships of the merchants running with *koyla* or coal. The map also speaks of lakes and gardens full of animals and birds who coexist with the humans in the city:

At the centre of these gardens, there are two huge lakes. In Raja Bagan [the King's Garden], you have the Lal Dighi [the Crimson Lake] with *Swetdwip* [The White Island] in the middle, and in Ray Bagan (Roy's Garden), there is Gol Dighi [Circular lake] with Jambu Dwip at the centre. Jambu Dwip is the shelter of Bhusundi Kag [The dark crow] and his family, and the family of other birds. And in Swet Dwip dwell the angels. (my trans.; 130)

And the charming inventory of the author's playful innovation continues:

Next to *Jorashanko*, you have *Shinghir Bagan* [Shinghi-Lion, Bagan-Garden; literally a sanctuary for lions]. To prevent the lions from coming out into open the area is covered with iron bars or *Shiks*, and thus we have the *Shik-dar Bagan* [Shik-dar-Bagan is garden surrounded with bars] in the adjoining area, where boys and girls can see the lion from other side of the fencing without any fear. Then there are two ponds or *pukur*, *Shyam Pukur* and *Monohor Pukur* [*Monohor* literally means pretty]. In between the ponds you have *Maniktola* [Manik-treasure consisting of precious stones] where children climb the tree of gold bearing fruits made of pearls and flowers carved with precious stones (my trans.; 131).

Likewise, one has *Peyara Bagan* (Guava Garden), *Bansh Tola* (The Region covered with Bamboos) and *Bag Bajar* (*Bag* literally means garden, but phonetically it is close to *Bagh* or tiger, *Bajar/Bazar* is market) where the tiger's milk is sold and purchased in the marketplace. Interestingly, all these are real streets and localities in Kolkata. While the

relationality between social topographies and their nomenclature might be of abiding interest to an onomastician, the author takes the signifiers in these descriptive place-names literally as a child would do, and reconceptualizes them into something fantastic. In certain editions of the story, this section is accompanied by a map drawn by the poet-cartoonist Sukumar Ray (1887-1923)^{xxvii}, as a visual counterpart. In this ekphrastic transference of textual images from one representational medium to another, Ray retains the literalness of names by substituting normative cartographic symbols with miniature paintings. For instance, the locality *Murgi Hata* is represented by a hen (as *murgi* is a Bengali word for hen), *Badur Bagan* (the garden of Bats) by a bat and so on.

The passages and their visual paratexts blend fantasy and nostalgia with a savory wit to beat back the arbitrary claims of realism in the adult world. The construction of this imaginary universe however, is “neither entirely ‘real’ . . . nor entirely ‘unreal’ . . . but located somewhere indeterminately between the two” (Jackson 19). And indeed, a common ground between fantasy and nostalgia which is conflated in Putu’s narrative is the “construction” of this liminal zone that is “neither entirely real” nor “unreal”. Like other memories, nostalgia invents facts, as Mahmoud Darwish tells us in its evocative defense in *Absent Present*: “Nostalgia lies, never tires of lying, because it lies with the truth. Lying is the trade of nostalgia” (82). However, the “lie” in nostalgia always deals with the ideal: “no one is nostalgic for grief, alarm, a funeral. Nostalgia is memory’s special way of beautifying the hidden parts of the scene, of

repairing a window which has fallen out” (Darwish 82). It is memory’s own way of mending things through belated constructions.

As imagination mixed with memory intrudes on the actual world through “fantasy”, the precision of scientific-cartographic knowledge, and the hard law of numbers, statistics that is used at the aid of the colonizing government is toppled on its head to be replaced by a law of desire that governs Putu’s magic kingdom. Such pursuits, despite the limitations, Jameson argues in *Marxism and Form*, bear a promise for change as opposed to “practical thinking’s” predilection towards factuality, truth and scientific objectivity. The latter is used by the state to perpetrate its exploitation, like the cartographer’s maps in this case are used to facilitate the colonial regime:

now it is practical thinking which everywhere stands as a testimony to the power of that system to transform even its adversaries into its own mirror image. The Utopian idea, on the contrary, keeps alive the possibility of a world qualitatively distinct from this one (111).

Putu’s map is informed by two fundamental qualities in children’s literature—the gift of imagination and instructiveness. We have an instance of nostalgia for a lost city fusing with fantasy to create an inclusive urban ecology where the environment has not been completely ravaged by the reckless proliferation of concrete constructions.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has analyzed the reasons behind the obvious lack of nostalgia for the city in early writings on Calcutta. If conceptions of city-space and its civic-life are affected by nostalgia as the previous chapter shows, its absence tells us where Calcutta falls short of the ideal, or where its growth has been stunted. This absence, far from invalidating the usefulness of nostalgia as an analytical framework for the city, is telling also because the lack is only relative. Certain people did not experience nostalgia for the city during the early period of colonization because they were nostalgic about some other place or culture, which they tried incorporating into their daily lifestyle. The city became a melting pot of different memories and cultures, creating an anarchic diversity which became a rich source of inspiration for umpteen creative expressions. By transforming and fusing different memories into its lived experiences, the city created its own.

In a different way, the apparent invisibility of nostalgia for the British city in the folk literary and cultural repertoire that contain some of the first records of Calcutta, show the perplexity of the inhabitants at the frenzied, chaotic rhythm of the post-feudal industrial landscape. The random perils and shocks of urban life generated a sense of anxiety in a big city like Calcutta, which strengthened the identification with the pre-capitalist societies among the natives. Their disapproval of the Europeanization of elite culture, equally reflects folk tradition's conflicted relationship with the colonial government and their native agents—the *Bhardaloks*, who came to develop similar contempt for the demotic expressions of street culture inherited from rural Bengal.

The marginalization of folk traditions not only distanced the city from its villages but also alienated a large section of its own population for whom the city was both magnificent and menacing. With the change of perspective from the colonizer to the colonized, the locus of nostalgia thus shifts from the city to the village. This chapter shows how subsequently nationalist discourse played upon the dichotomous relationship, drawing upon the repository of cultural nostalgia, associated with country-life to subvert the supreme importance accorded to the city by its colonial rulers. This counter-hegemonic move however, extends beyond the conventional clashes between “traditionalism” and “westernism” represented by the village and the city. Colonial world order, entrenched in capitalism, widened the gap between development and underdevelopment within a specified region. Big cities like Calcutta as administrative and commercial hubs of the European Empire, enjoyed the most advanced means of production, trade and communication. Calcutta’s culture gradually came to dominate the rest of Bengal. In contrast, the villages were left battling with poverty, while their resources were regularly exported to the colonial centres through the newly developed network of roads and railways, to facilitate production in the city and immediate neighbourhoods. The indigenous, small-scale industries in rural hinterlands faced a protracted death. Having lost their self-sufficiency, the villages increasingly succumbed to the city for survival. Gopal Halder’s essay emphasizes the role of the imperialist economy in the aggressive destruction of fringe cultures by the capital:

[...] Calcutta the seat of the new merchant capital, led a dual existence, and became the clearing house of Imperialist economy. [...] as Imperialist economy came more and more to dominate the life of the country, Calcutta its native agent, came also to have an increasing share in determining the socio-economic background of Bengali life. The result was a Neo-Bengali culture with its headquarters in Calcutta (65).

Thus, through the invocation of the rural past, its folk heritage, nostalgia was discursified as an act of resistance—a strategy of opposition—in the nationalist struggle, by developing the village as an alternative centre of gravity to critique the colonial model, responsible for uneven growth in the colonies.

These threads eventually bring us to the final section on the local narrative of Calcutta which became a “locus of productive dissimilarity” (Huggan 408), spawning a great variety of literature when read in dialogue with the British writings of the colonial space.

Like the city, maps themselves that exist in various forms, can be open-ended, experiential, and riven with contradictions. Based upon the multifarious understandings of the urban ethos discussed above, the chapter culminates in the vibrant variety of literary maps drawn in vernacular literature, which simultaneously acknowledges and charts the limits of the European imaginary of the “Little London” in Calcutta.

NOTES

ⁱ A traditional Hindu joint family in India typically comprised a large unit with extended family members, and multiple generations living under the same roof. With the growth of the European urban centres in the British period, the exodus of population from rural areas to the cities in search of jobs and better living standards largely contributed to the breakdown of the joint family system. When the family members moved to the cities they started living in smaller units with their immediate relatives instead of bringing the entire family along. The scarcity of space in the cities, and the rising expenses were inimical to the sustenance of large joint families in urban conurbations.

ⁱⁱ Raychoudhuri alludes to the citation used in Abantikumar Sanyal's monograph *Babu* (1987) for reference.

ⁱⁱⁱ In a short introspective essay: "Confessions of a Young Bengal" (1872) the eminent author, Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay who was himself a product of the new English education, speaks critically of the phony Europeanization of the Indians:

That, in the outward circumstances of social and personal life, English-educated Bengalis are rapidly getting Anglicised, few English-educated Bengalis will deny. The stamp of Anglo-Saxon foreigners is upon our houses, our furniture, our carriages, our food, our drink, our dress, our very familiar letters and conversation [...]

[...] English civilization has pulled down the three-hundred and thirty million deities of Hinduism, and set up, in the total space once occupied by them, its own titular deities, Comfort and its brother Respectability. (42-44)

^{iv} Thomas Babington Macaulay, *from* "Minute on Indian Education" (1835). *The Norton Anthology of English Literature: The Victorian Age*.

https://www.norton.com/college/english/nael/victorian/topic_4/macaulay.htm

^v Brahmoism was a reformist movement within Hinduism that prospered during the Bengal Renaissance in the nineteenth-century.

^{vi} Currently known as Presidency University.

^{vii} The followers of Henry Louis Vivian Derozio (1809-1831). Derozio was a flamboyant personality. A radical thinker, a poet and a teacher of Hindu College,

he was much loved by his students. He encouraged them to debate on issues that were considered taboos in Bengali society. He was subsequently dismissed from Hindu College in 1831, which coincided with the year of his death. After his demise, he became a cult figure as one of the progenitors of Bengal Renaissance.

^{viii} Elucidating upon the beef dispute that divided the society, Rosinka Chaudhuri in her book, *Freedom and Beef Steaks* purported that the intake of the right kind of food for a construction of a virile, “active” masculine identity was a major concern among Indians who were often subjected to racist ridicules for their sedentary lifestyle and feeble nature. For early reformers, adhering to European food habits was as crucial as a Western education. Radhanath Sikdar, one of the eminent Derozians believed, “beefeaters were never bullied” (see Chaudhuri 23). Later, nationalists like Gandhi censured beef-eating as a sign of servitude to the British race.

^{ix} *Hootom Pyachar Naksha* contains some of the most cutting invectives against this “Babu culture”:

These days the Westernized Babus of the city belonged to two groups. The first could be called ‘the stylish Englishman’s cow-dung bust’. The second were an abominable prototype of the declassed white man. The first did everything in English style. [...] They had a lot of positive qualities, such as sympathy, generosity, philanthropy, modesty and so on. It was just that they were ill all the time, having drunk themselves to decrepitude. They were slaves to their wives and had banished all the feelings of enthusiasm, unity and the desire to improve completely from their hearts. They belong to the old class [meaning old school]

Among the second group, Bagambar Mitra and the likes were more dangerous than a snake and more ruthless than a tiger. You could say they were a monstrous breed of animals. Just as thieves put a little alcohol on their lips to pass themselves off as drunks when they go out to steal, these people pretended to work towards the country’s welfare with only their own benefits in mind. (25)

^x The eleventh lunar day of the *shukla* (bright) or *krishna* (dark) *paksha* (fortnight) of every lunar month is known as Ekdashi, an auspicious day in Hindu Calendar when widows observed fasting as a sign of penance.

^{xi} Interestingly, its author Peary Chand Mitra (1814-1883) was himself a member of the *Young Bengal Group*. This Bengali novel which used an earthy colloquial language or *chalit bhasha* in Bengali writing for the first time came out serially in a monthly magazine, *Masik Patrika* under the pseudonym Tekchand Thakur, which the author had adopted for this novel.

^{xii} This poem, originally “Dui Bigha Jomi” in Bengali by Rabindranath Tagore was published in 1896. This English rendition is by the renowned Tagore translator William Radice, collected in Tagore’s *Selected Poems* by Penguin.

^{xiii} Varanasi or Banaras in North India is the venerated seat of learning in Hindu Culture.

^{xiv} *Kobi gaan*, sometimes known as *Kobir Lorai* is a musical contest where usually two groups of poets perform against each other. The leader of each group is called *Kobiyal* and is accompanied by his assistants or *dohars*. Originally, they were performed in village gathering. This performative tradition became equally popular in the city in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, where such contests were held in wealthy households during festivities.

^{xv} It was delivered as a lecture on 7 April 1895 as “Bangla Jatiya Sahitya” at the annual meeting of Bengal Academy of Literature established in 1893. This was published in printed form in *Sadhana* (1895) and later included in *Sahitya*.

^{xvi} See, National Museum of Australia: Object Explorer. collectionsearch.nma.gov.au/object/232858

^{xvii} Statement Exhibiting “The Moral And Material Progress And Condition Of India” (1891-92). See, <https://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.511905>

^{xviii} These are mainly illustrations and not necessarily cartographic maps like the ones produced by British counterparts. In fact, Keya Dasgupta notes that one has not been able to locate any indigenous map of Calcutta till 1884. However, there has been a series of directories and guidebooks with place names and their details approximately from the third decade of the nineteenth century that catered to the Bengali readership.

^{xix} A pioneering endeavour in this field is Romanauth Dass’s “Bengali Hand Map for General Use” or *Kalikatar Manchitra* in vernacular, published in 1884 that served the dual purpose of a guidebook and directory covering names of companies, offices, banks, courts, workplaces, European and Indian dispensaries, school bookshops, doctors, midwives and so on.

^{xx} See Franco Moretti’s *Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for Literary History*. Verso, 2007.

^{xxi} Archived in: “Rupchand Pakkhi”. *Milansagar*. <
http://www.milansagar.com/kobi/roopchand_pokkhi/kobi-roopchandpokkhi.html<

^{xxii} The flattening out of the cityscape caused both by intense cultural and social intermingling and commercial chains such as MacDonalds, KFC, Inox, spread across the city have equal share of advantages and disadvantages. On the one

hand the places are losing their distinguishing characteristics; on the other hand, certain places named after a community of people belonging to a profession, had a stigma attached to the name as the professions was not dignified enough. Due to the cultural flattening backed by economic necessities and scarcity of space in the city, these prejudices attached to a locality are greatly being reduced.

^{xxiii} Cf. The introduction to *Sateek Hutom Pyanchar Naksha*. Ed. By Arun Nag.

^{xxiv} *Charak* is a folk festival that marks the last day of the year in Bengali calendar.

^{xxv} Cf. *Seaports of India and Ceylon: Historical Descriptions, Commercial and Industrial Facts*. As quoted in Partho Datta's "Calcutta on the Threshold of the 1940s" anthologized in *Calcutta: The Stormy Decades*.

^{xxvi} C.H. Bompas, "The Work of Calcutta Improvement Trust". *Journal of Royal Society of Arts*, 75, 7 January 1927, 213 (as qtd. in Partha Datta)

^{xxvii} Sukumar Ray was an acclaimed writer of children books, humourist and illustrator. He is well known for the collection of nonsense-verse *Abol-Tabol* (*Gibberish*), and *HaJaBaRaLa*. He was also the editor of Magazine for children, *Sondesh* [the name has a double meaning. *Sondesh* means "good tidings" but it also refers to a popular variety of sweetmeat extremely popular in Bengal]. He hailed from the illustrious Ray family. His father, Upendra Kishor Roychaudhuri was a poet and fiction writer and his Satyajit Ray is a renowned filmmaker, author and artist.

CHAPTER III

“STRANGELY BELOVED”: CALCUTTA AND MODERNIST NOSTALGIA IN TWENTIETH CENTURY BENGAL

The rapid crowding of changing images, the sharp discontinuity in the grasp of a single glance, and the unexpectedness of onrushing impression: These are psychological conditions which the metropolis creates. With each crossing of the street, with the tempo and multiplicity of economic, occupational and social life, the city sets up a deep contrast with small town and rural life with reference to sensory foundations of psychic life (Georg Simmel, “The Metropolis and Mental Life” 25).

The human geography of the cities bears a complex affiliation with affects that crisscross and influence one another continually, from the repeated bombardment of variegated stimuli generated by the modern urban experience. To gauge how nostalgia flows through interstices of urban life, this chapter will pivot around the aesthetic praxis of young Modernist writers who deemed the urban landscape the loci of their desire, conflict, passion and memory in the first half of the twentieth century. The frame of reference for such city-writings extended from the Modernist poets in England and France to a more organic indigenous tradition in the previous century.

A thread that runs through my thesis is the trope of “mapping” the city in relation to space and affect. The argument takes off from a

discussion of different literary maps of Calcutta that were produced in the vernacular writings in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (see Chapter Two), which offered complementary as well as contrapuntal readings to the British cartographic discourses. This chapter demonstrates how Modernist writers in the late colonial period were influenced by, and yet departed from this tradition in urban literature.

Modernism as a creative paradigm is conceived through its long battle with tradition that engendered a sense of rootlessness, and the consequent longing to secure one's bearings in the city. Thus, through the shifting lens of nostalgia, enacted around notions of home-longing and homecoming, the present chapter traces how the abiding interest in Calcutta crystallized into a rooted engagement with the city-space in Modernist writers whose imaginations were entrenched in urban reality.

To substantiate my argument, I will focus on poetry within the rubric of Modernist literature. This chapter will simultaneously engage with some of the debates about what "Modernism" meant for the new generation of poets who also thought seriously about their position culturally and contextually in relation to the "modern" in their writings. This is significant in locating the relationship these Modernists shared with tradition, memory and nostalgia, and eventually, the transformations they initiated in the literary practices of the twentieth-century.

For the convenience of discussion, I will tentatively mark the Modernist era from the emergence of *Kollol* generation in the mid-1920s to the eminence of the *Krittibas* poets (discussed in the next chapter) in the fifties and early sixties. As elsewhere, the nostalgia for the city in the

writings of Bengali Modernists is punctuated by a sense of ennui, the historical consciousness of war, a disgust with the colonial rule, and the aborted dream of independence marred by the fratricidal violence of Partition in the Indian context. This chapter therefore maps nostalgia in relation to its multiple entanglements with other memories in the city which act as a check and balance upon the excesses of nostalgia.

**RECONCEPTUALIZING “HOME”: THE DIALECTIC OF TRADITION
AND MODERNITY IN TWENTIETH CENTURY LITERATURE**

While engagement with the urban space existed throughout the nineteenth-century, it was only in the 1920s and 30s that a new trend became prominent within the discursive field of vernacular literature which contextualized the city as the site of desire. In his essay, “Calcutta in Poetry”, Samar Sen affirms this thematic turn which became a formative feature of the making of Bengali Modernism in its protracted battle with the Romantic tradition. In his treatise published in the fifteenth anniversary number of *The Calcutta Municipal Gazette* (1939), Sen asserts that:

It may be said without injustice that Calcutta was a very neglected theme in Bengali Poetry until very recently. The poets coming after Tagore wrote about love and nature, and though most of them lived in Calcutta, the City was a pariah subject and remained outside their work. Nature had the sanction of the sacrosanct ideal and immutable principles of Satyam Sivam Sundaram; but interest in city-life was ruled

out as morbidity and bad taste. It was with the Kallol group that Calcutta entered Bengali Poetry (45-46).

However, before exploring the Modernists' longstanding association with the city on different affective planes, especially their convoluted relationship with nostalgia, this segment attempts to give a rudimentary understanding of Bengali Modernism in the literary context. To examine how the shift of emphasis from the village to the city contributed to creation of urban nostalgia, it is imperative to locate the Modernists' within the aesthetic tradition in terms of their relation and departure from the literary precursors.

The polemical turn from the from village to the city in the generation of poets such as—Samar Sen (1916-1987), Buddhadeva Basu (1908-1982), Premendra Mitra (1904-1988), Sudhindranath Dutta (1901–1960), Amiya Chakravarty (1901-1986), Bishnu De (1909-1982) and Jibanananda Das (1899-1954)—who came immediately after Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), was a part of their strategic attempt at breaking away from Tagorean conventions in literature. This was however, not because of a dislike for Tagore in most cases, in fact, it was quite the opposite. Poets like Buddhadeva Basu had a deep reverence for him at a personal level. In May 1942, a year after Tagore's demise, Basu dedicated a poem to him in which he mourned his insufferable loss. According to Basu, it meant a passing away of an era of faith:

I remember you today—in these times of total terror—

O friend, most beloved! Civilization lies on its funeral sheets

and an epidemic spreads to man's bone-marrow, to his inner spirit...

Life stifled. Song silenced. On India's gentle coast
 greed's saliva dribbles. So much suffering, such intolerable disdain—
 could I have endured this hell at all, my friend,
 had not my blood seeped, to my innermost core penetrated
 your imperishable message? Your words have I received within me,
 and that's why I'm not afraid, and know that life will win.

(“For Rabindranath” 30)

Yet it was felt that the Tagorean influence—his lyrical verses on love, his idealization of village and the worship of nature—which was followed slavishly by so many who came after him, was impeding the growth of new poetry. For the Modernists, Tagore became a critical father figure with all the complications such parental authority poses. In Bengali, Tagore is originally pronounced as *Thakur* (Tagore being the Anglicized version), which is synonymous with “Lord” or “Master”. As the first Nobel-laureate in Asia, he literally enjoyed a godlike stature in the Bengali literary circuit.

Tagore's presence in Bengali literature was so overwhelming that Buddhadeva Basu, his ardent admirer and yet a critic of the Tagorean school, observes in an essay, anthologized in his prose-collection with a Yeatsian title, *An Acre of Green Grass*:

I do not know that any single poet in history so completely permeated the language and the literature of his country and his time as Rabindranath in his later years. Inevitably and rightly, young poets were steeped in him; but what was neither inevitable nor right was that many, instead of journeying with him and in him, were led to use him as an anchor. For these, it was impossible not to imitate Rabindranath, and it was impossible to imitate Rabindranath. Thus the illusion grew that one could achieve Rabindranath's sweetness by jingling a large enough number of rhymes, and his almost ethereal tenderness by plunging headlong into sentimentality (45).

For the poets who succeeded him the greatest challenge was to distance themselves from the Tagorean tradition that dominated poetry in the early twentieth century. Yet tradition itself is sometimes more fluid than being a monolithic construct. Despite being posited as clashing polarities, Modernism's break from the "Romantics" was not as sudden as is generally perceived. It is difficult to demarcate poetry chronologically into discrete conceptual categories as Modernist and Romantic, since latent streaks of Romanticism can be traced in the works of Modernists like Jibanananda Das.

Poet, novelist and critic, Sanjay Bhattacharya (1909-1969) who was also a contemporary of Jibanananda Das and the editor of the acclaimed magazine *Purbasha* where several of Das's poems were published, saw clear resonances of Shelley in early Jibananandaⁱ, or poet Arun Mitra read "romantic agony"ⁱⁱ even in the poems of Samar Sen who called

“romanticism” a disease (see “On My Birthday”). Nevertheless, it would be appropriate to say stylistically and thematically Bengali literary Modernism grew in the 1930s and 40s largely as an overt reaction to the soggy lyricism that overwhelmed the writings of the Tagorean era as it was deemed stilted and inadequate for expressing the thoughts and concerns of the new generation of writers.

However, this should not be viewed simply as a rejection of the “Romantic” predispositions. On one hand, it was a battle with tradition, propelled by the need to extricate oneself from that Tagorean lineage that saturated them— a battle lost and won, for even in their rejection they returned to Tagore and the world that he represented. On the other, there was an implicit nostalgia of the Post-Tagorean (*uttar Raibik*) writers for the passing away of an era of wholeness and “faith”— as Sanjay Bhattacharya calls it— “Rabindranath belonged to the age of faith” (136), when such lyrical poetry was possible. However, this nostalgia at the loss of cultural moorings was soon turned into an analytical tool for critiquing social anomalies, whose expressions were cerebral rather than sentimental. Stylistically, Buddhadeva Basu, identified as one of the distinguishing features of Modernist poetry, the practice of writing what he calls “prose poetry” (*gadya chhanda*) in rugged and conversational style to experiment with new metrical patterns in unrhymed verses.

At the same time, there were major disputes about what was meant by “modern” or “Modernism” for that matter. There was no unanimity even when it came to the formalist innovations introduced by new writing. Thus, several writers wrestled with the definitional ambiguities while

trying to come up with their understanding of “modern” (*adhunik*) and their own place or that of their contemporaries in the pantheon. Buddhadeva Basu opined that modern “is an unconformable word, a cause of confusion and a brewer of battles”:

Quite a considerable section of literary thought is inclined to give it a qualitative connotation: one often comes across phrases and sentences where ‘modern’ is intended to mean a new *quality* which is the exclusive possession of recent literature. I myself am generally content to use it in a more modest and restricted sense: that of the chronologically recent. In critical jargon, ‘modern’ is used indiscriminately in at least three distinct senses: firstly, the broadly historical, as when we say that Kalidasa is an ancient and Rabindranath a modern; secondly, as denoting contemporaneity; and lastly, in that abstract, qualitative sense which permits the use of such uneasy nouns as ‘modernity’ or ‘modernism’ (43-44).

Several others, including Jibanananda Dasⁱⁱⁱ, Samar Sen and Sanjay Bhattacharya articulated their views on poetic art and what constitutes modernity in literature.

Sanjay Bhattacharya who adds a positive valuation to the word “modern” in his treatise, *Kobi Jibanananda Das (Jibanananda Das, the Poet)* makes a crucial distinction between modernity and contemporaneity. Modern can potentially be a marker of relationality, i.e. Tagore is modern in comparison to many of his contemporaries and his predecessors; similarly, a writer could be more modern than Tagore himself. Then how does one affix a permanent, intrinsic value to the “modern”?

Bhattacharya's book on Jibanananda Das, proposes that modern must be dissociated from con-temporary, for a truly modern text finds its "home" in every age. It matures in time by shedding off the external and provisional adjuncts that pins it to an era, and retains the "eternal matter" (*chira padartha*, Bhattacharya borrows the term from Jibanananda Das) of humankind that is relevant in every age. A modern text transcends the temporal specificities, and thereby its limitations. So, every great writer—be it Shakespeare or Tagore—is always already modern (see Bhattacharya 20-22).

In socio-political spheres, however, the implications of "modern" do not necessarily match the understanding of the term in literary circles. Also, the lines of separation between the various taxonomies associated with the "modern" such as *modernization*, *modernity* or *Modernism* are not always very discrete in the Indian context. It is often argued that in India, the birth of modernity is linked with colonial experience and is preeminently political. It came "by way of an intense awareness that modernity stood for the condition of subordination as much for a mode of resistance against it" (P. Banerjee 44). Consequently, "modernity" as the social and intellectual, and "modernization" as the scientific-economic component of the "modern" are intrinsically related to the colonial encounter with Europe and the consequent influence of Enlightenment rationality upon Indian subjects.

Modernism, both as an intellectual project and an aesthetic/formalist paradigm in the early twentieth century spawned the ideals of industrial modernity, linked with the global onslaught of capitalism. It is equally a

reaction to *modernization*, or what Stephen Spender calls by radicalizing the claim, the “contempt for progress” (211). It represents the symptoms of a particular age. In places like India the aesthetic criteria pertaining to Modernist practices and the reaction to the “modern” are complicated by the writers’ position as colonized subjects. However, a commonality that most of them shared, nonetheless, is a strong urban consciousness, and the attachment to the grime and filth of the city life—a corollary of industrial urbanity.

As recipients of English education, Jibanananda Das, Amiya Chakravarty Achintya Kumar Sengupta, Buddhadeva Basu, Bishnu De and Samar Sen had imbibed the influence of Yeats, Eliot, Pound and Hopkins under the colonial framework that brought two linguistically distinct cultures in close proximity. The presence of the Anglophone poets can be clearly traced in the early poems of the interwar generation in Bengal. So, while the Preludean cacophony in the footfalls of the evening or the dissonance of nightmare city under the London Bridge pervades Sen’s *dhusar sahar* (the grey city), Eliot’s exposition of the “intractably unpoetic” (Eliot; *To Criticize the Critic* 126) tedious turn of roads becomes palpable in Jibanananda Das’s portrayal of the night’s sordid images (see “Night” 91).

Poet-critic Sankha Ghosh, one of the foremost Bengali literary figures of our times, casts light in his article “*Nisshobdotar Chhondo*” (“The Rhythm of Silence”) on the Modernist fixation with the “degeneration into darkness” in Samar Sen. Sen called Eliot the “best poet of our wayward generation”^{iv} (qtd. in Ghosh 16). Sankha Ghosh shows

how the worlds of Eliot and Sen converge in their works as their cities talk to each other in the transcultural space of poetry. He evokes Eliot's line from "Gerontion"— "my house is a decayed house" (*Selected Poems* 31) to explain Sen's preoccupation with the decadent middle-class in urban centres. Like Eliot, Sen's poems are suffused in stark images of the barren land, and lands infested with cactus. From the empty desert of mercantile civilization ("A Useless Lover" 74) to the wilderness "of the soft body" ("The Four Chapters" 87) the barrenness is pervasive; and from the tenement above our heads to time itself, everything becomes a desert— sterile and bleak. Again, as with Eliot's "Portrait" and "Prufrock", the dull yellow hue of the smog in the city covers the creative landscape of Samar Sen. While drawing analogies between the works of the two poets, Ghosh posits that in "Farewell to Paradise" we are reminded of Eliot not only because of the rhythmic enunciation in lines such as "O city, O grey city!" (*O sahar, dhusar sahar!*) that resonate with *The Waste Land's* "O City city" (Section III, line 259), but also for the other paraphernalia attached to the evocation. In the mist-covered "unreal city" of *The Waste Land*, the persona speaks of the invitation of the merchant "To luncheon at the Cannon Street Hotel / Followed by a weekend at the metropole" (Section III, lines 213-14) and in Sen's "grey city" the protagonist is seen in "in a car or in a bar / or on Sundays at Diamond Harbour" ("Farewell" 25). The flowing crowd "over London Bridge" (Section I, line 62), in Samar Sen becomes footsteps^v "on the Kalighat Bridge" ("Farewell" 25).

Yet despite the influence of English Modernists, it would be incorrect to mark this new Bengali poetry propagated by the likes of Samar

Sen as an imitative or “alternative” Modernism, as Harry Harootunian warns us against the term. “Alternative,” implies “the existence of an “original” that was formulated in the West followed by a series of “copies” and “lesser inflections”” (163) elsewhere. Modernism was a transnational phenomenon whose iterations occurred in different parts of the world from the last quarter of nineteenth century, as a reaction against the global precipitation of capitalism mired in the carbon economy and the new notion of fragmented temporality. The city:

becomes the home of a peculiarly modern kind of subjectivity involving the apprehension of time as empty repetition, and the transformation (or deformation) of patterns of experience by technology. Shock becomes the basis of a new kind of poetic method based on the tearing of objects out of their usual contexts and their reassembly in new contexts (Britzolakis 75).

Industrial cities that were at the heart of capitalist regimes naturally took centre stage in Modernist literature, as opposed to the Romantics’ preoccupation with country and sublime nature.

In Bengali literature, the emphatic shift from village to the city followed a similar trajectory in the early twentieth century. In India, capitalist exploitation worked in collusion with colonialism where big cities such as Calcutta or Bombay (now Mumbai) represented the dual faces of the aggressive mercantilism and imperialist coercion. An

important contribution of the Bengali Modernist poets, sometimes very loosely tagged as *Kollol*^{vi} writers—which identifies them with the Bengali literary magazine in Calcutta that became the mouthpiece of an entire generation in Post-World War I Bengal—is the reconfiguration of this city-space.

Poets such as Samar Sen or Buddhadeva Basu, in the decades of 30s and 40s with their robust urban, and characteristically masculine imagination (which the chapter would subsequently explore) had therefore, talked about new ways of envisioning Calcutta in a manner that was at once inspired by their European counterparts such as Eliot or Baudelaire and yet markedly local. They also demurred in their description of the city that emerged from the musings of contemporary Europeans in the White Town, who saw Calcutta either as a poor cousin of London or as Lord Curzon, India's viceroy who proverbially proclaimed in an address in 1903: “a European city set down upon Asiatic soil”^{vii} (qtd. in Moorhouse 272). In their writings, Calcutta as a space which the British modeled after their own cities, was re-drawn from a native perspective by taking the ideological mantle of a Western cultural paradigm. They transformed the Modernist “formal project radically, while still retaining a distant family likeness to its imperial variants” (Jameson; “Modernism and Imperialism” 60-61).

Kallol's literary experiments were endorsed by several journals which shared its Modernist approach, such as *Uttara* (1925), *Kali o Kalam* (*Pen and Ink*, 1927), edited by Premendra Mitra and others. Some other significant names were Sajanikanta Das' *Sonibarar Chithi* (*Saturday's*

Letter), Sudhindranath Datta's *Parichay* (*Identity*, 1931), Sanjay Bhattacharya's *Purbasha* (*The East*, 1932), and Buddhadeva Basu's *Kabita* (*Poetry*, 1935). While it might be reductive to impose a blanket term upon the writers of the interwar generation—which was rife with rivalries between different ideological factions and resisted any collectivization—those, best known among the new crop of poets contributing to these magazines, except Jibanananda Das, often endorsed a characteristically urban sensibility. One may consider, for instance Buddhadeva Basu's advocacy of the city in *Calcutta in Bengali Fiction*:

Naively medieval, we thought with poor William Cowper that God made the country and man the town, forgetting that the contrast was all in favour of man. What a poor show God's country is, with its lack of hygiene, comfort and security, compared to a scientifically organised modern city. Where God can maintain (and, precariously too,) scarcely fifty souls in a square mile, man has devised the means to keep a thousand people in more or less satisfactory condition. To carry on this metaphor, God conceived a poor haphazard world with generations of slaves crawling on it, whereas man has realised, or is on the point of realizing, an infinitely rich world based on co-operation and organisation with all the forces of Nature fully under his control (25).

This passage itself marks a major swing in literature of the time, for homesickness or nostalgia now no longer meant a compulsive yearning for

a village, real or romanticized, in the rural heartlands of Bengal which was the standard practice in earlier poetic traditions.

The previous chapter evinced how in the nineteenth century we witnessed an upwelling of rural nostalgia in vernacular writings, because the new work-regime brought forth by industrialization necessitated the labour-force to travel away from homes to new urban centres like Calcutta. Dislocation in space and time bred a particular affective reality in people that was expressed through the nostalgic evocations of the village while at the same time, new immigrants strove to acquire the skills of survival in the city. Accordingly, the village was romanticized, worshipped and venerated in Bengali literature and politics. This convention was so strong that it was taken up even by those with a decidedly metropolitan upbringing in the cities.

It is indeed paradoxical, while a section of the urban Bengali *Bhadraloks* under the influence of Western education displayed strong contempt for rural and folk aesthetic practices, casting them aside on the basis that they were low-browed entertainment, they did not hesitate to idealize an imaginary bucolic life in the villages. The result was not necessarily favourable. In the novel, *Sohor Basher Itikatha (The Chronicle of the Urban Life)* published in 1946, Manik Bandyopadhyay (1908-1956) builds the plot around the dialectical worldview of two intimate college friends, Mohan and Chinmoy, with both sharing contrary opinions on modern urban existence. Mohan, the eldest son of a wealthy rural householder hopes to embrace the life of an urban *bhadralok*. To fulfil his dream, he sells his ancestral property and sets up a new home in Calcutta.

On the other hand, his friend Chinmoy, who has been raised in the city idealizes the village. He nurtures deep fantasies for a pristine arcadian life amidst the earthy rural communities in Bengal. To get a flavour of that un-lived experience Chinmoy decorates his personal parlour with items that one would usually find in a village home. Unlike other modern drawing rooms in urban spaces, the room has no electric connection. Yet its transformation is far from complete. Chinmoy soon realizes that he has only replicated the rural ambiance externally; the essence of that life is still missing. So, he removes all the furniture and keeps the room bare. Sitting in that empty parlour one evening by candlelight, his friend Mohan reflects upon the futility of this whole endeavour:

In the evening, a servant came with a light—he was carrying a big clay candle. Looking at its flickering flame, Mohan felt that the city has really receded afar. But the village has not come close (my trans.; 26).

The writers in the city who idealized the village from a distance, denying their urban breeding, almost suffered from a similar predicament—and this disconnect between lived experience and aesthetic exercise was sometimes responsible for the manifest artificiality in their form and content.

In the twentieth century, the Modernists, several among whom were brought up in urban localities, or whose sensibilities were shaped by new scientific and technological discoveries in the post-sacred, industrial cityscape, sought to resolve this dichotomy by accepting the city as their

home perhaps for the first time. This move is emphatically marked in Samar Sen's literary piece on "Calcutta in Poetry":

...the younger poet who is to-day almost obsessed by the City does not advocate a return to nature. The sounds of traffic, the confused delirium of life in Calcutta have made their influence increasingly felt in his rhythms and language and there is a hard and disillusioned quality about much of his work. Most of the poets belonging to the older generation had come to Calcutta from distant parts of Bengal, and though they settled in the metropolis for livelihood they carried in their minds the green and quiet of Bengali villages. *But now we have one or two generations, born and brought up in Calcutta, for whom pastoral memories provide no escape.* (my emphasis; 46).

His position was to a varying extent shared by many other exemplars of Bengali literary Modernism. Thus, taking his cues from Marshall Berman's *All That Solid Melts into Air*, Dipesh Chakrabarty defines Modernism in his essay, "Nation and Imagination" as an "aesthetic means by which an urban and literate class subject to the invasive forces of modernization seeks to create, however falteringly, a sense of being at home in the modern city" (156). These writers who simultaneously contributed to, and were sustained by the intellectual milieu of the metropolis imagined a "home" for themselves and their poetry in the city.

For a nuanced understanding of urban nostalgia, it is important to discuss the gradual shift from the main body of urban literature that existed

before the Modernists altered the literary landscape. Given that the nineteenth century social satires and interwar Modernist writings come from two entirely different literary genres, the stylistic dissimilarities are obvious. However, my concern revolves around the mappings of the city-space. It was the *naksha* or the semi-satirical writings about the city that enjoyed a short-lived fame in the literary scene, and formed the bulk of mainstream urban literature before the Modernists took a serious interest in the city. A major departure from these writings in the previous century would be the way in which the Modernists saw the fraught urbanscape in general. For example, a narrator like Hootum (see Chapter Two) always looked at the city from a certain elevation. This omniscient aerial view invariably lifted one “out of the city’s grasp” as de Certeau posits in *Walking in the City*:

One’s body is no longer clasped by the streets that turn and return it according to an anonymous law; nor is it possessed, whether as player or played, by the rumble of so many differences [...] When one goes up there, he leaves behind the mass that carries off and mixes up in itself any identity of authors or spectators. An Icarus flying above these waters, he can ignore *the* devices of Daedalus in mobile and endless labyrinths far below. His elevation transfigures him into a voyeur. ...it transforms the bewitching world by which one was “possessed” into a text that lies before one’s eyes. It allows one to read it, to be a solar Eye, looking down like a god (156).

Change in viewing position inevitably alters the perspective of seeing things. Unlike the aerial, all-seeing narrator in *Hootum*, Modernist artists in the next century viewed the city from ground level. And in contrast to *Hootum*, or the nineteenth century city-satirists who adopted the style of newspaper reportage from the position of a detached spectator, these writers were participants in the gritty reality of the everyday in complex interactions between different communities and classes. The Modernists, too, provided a map, but the map was that of a pedestrian, walking the streets, lanes and by-lanes of Kolkata, exploring the city's putrescent arteries.

When the Modernist poet, Jibanananda Das describes an experience of the night in the city, the persona is a participant:

A leper opens a hydrant-pipe and licks up the water;
 or the pipe was already yanked loose, maybe.
 Night's deep sinks in hordes upon the city.
 A motor-car goes by, coughs yobbishly [...]
I too go out of Phears Lane—walk recklessly
 mile upon mile—at a wall in Bentinck Street
 come to a standstill—by Territy Market.
 The air's as dry as a peanut [...]

(“Night”; Trans. Joe Winter; my emphasis; 91)

Here, the inclusion of the persona in the poetic scene imbricates him in the map as a partaker in the unfolding of events. Unlike nineteenth century satirists who were aloof onlookers of urban life and spoke from the

position of omniscient narrators, the understanding of the city by the Modernist writer is affective and personal.

The following section would argue that rather than being anti-nostalgic (because of their anxious relationship with the aesthetic traditions of the past) Modernism introduced a new understanding of nostalgia and longing in literature whose register is deeply critical to combat the turbulence of the big city and the chaotic tempo of modern life.

THE MODERNIST MAP AND THE DILEMMA OF NOSTALGIA

The Modernists sought their roots in the city which had a profound impact on the flowering of urban nostalgia; however, this nostalgia—unlike the romantic longing for the village—was deeply conflicted. This, as the previous section explains, partially resulted from the change in the linguistic and formalist register brought about by social transitions which altered the conventional expressions of nostalgia. It also came about because the city of Modernism was an unpropitious place. It exposed the ugliest side of mercantile capitalism and moral dereliction. The Modernist poets who had an affective engagement with the city thus responded with a sense of immediacy to urban deprivations.

In “Farewell to Paradise” as the sign of this degradation, Samar Sen conflates love with the pecuniary concerns of the Market to address the eroticized landscape of his “grey city”. Here the decay of love most obviously relates to the debased conditions of urban life, which is generalized by attributing epithets such as “lecherous” or “lascivious” to

faceless collectives representing the urban population. The pervasiveness of this corruption is perhaps also apparent from the fact that while the poet is critical of the relentless process of commodification, his narrator nonetheless, participates in the compulsive “commercialization”—as if it is inevitable for Modernist subject in the city to be sucked into the ever-expanding reach of the capitalist economy that swamped the urban culture and its “everyday”. The act of loveless fornication with the prostitute is another face of the commodity-culture that couples with the crushing human alienation endemic to the modern cities:

The perfume in my handkerchief
 has faded
 O city, my grey city.
 Do you hear lecherous footsteps
 on Kalighat bridge,
 do you hear the march of time
 O city, my grey city?
 This is the time
 to writhe before the lascivious crowd
 for a few rupees
 O my Urvashi bought by the hour
 to arouse passions
 in an orgiastic flow of sari and spirits
 enchanting these enraptured children of God
 Their lustful blood aboil.
 In the distance
 the fiery moon rises

O city, my grey city.

(Sen, "Farewell to Paradise" 25)

In Sen's poem, the city assumes a sensate visceral dimension. By conjuring together, the auditory, the olfactory and the visionary faculties in his address that emphasizes his embodied experience of the city, the persona shows almost a misogynistic loathing towards female sexuality around the image of the prostitute in an urban landscape. The prostitutes are concurrently portrayed as victims and agents of that hollow fetishized consumer culture where everything, including love can be "procured by the hour" at the market place: "For a few rupees / In a car or in a bar" ("Farewell" 25), or at Diamond Harbour, a cheap tourist destination near Calcutta.

The city where love has been eroded to a mere venereal passion gratified with money can itself be imagined as a harlot he describes in "Chitrangada": "Come let us go /you and I/ till fatigue overtakes us/ let me remain imprisoned in the dark/ between your lovely breasts" (27). Like those mythical beauties, the transvestite Chitrangada, or Urvashi in "Farewell to Paradise", Calcutta has drawn several men towards her. But as the poet reminds us that this love offered is not real but treacherous like a "sandbank": "The passions of a prostitute/ our brilliant world" ("Chitrangada" 27). After the fulfilment of the libidinal desires, it falls apart. Then the illusion of love is replaced by an unbearable fatigue in the "tired thighs" ("Home and the World" 84). The poems indicate the poet's unease with the new social configuration in the city, induced by capitalism

that engenders such (non)relations, and his underlying longing for emotional stability that emerges in his critique of the soulless copulation.

Certainly, in the parodic comparison to *Urvashi* or *Chitrangada* while describing the sex-workers in the city, one can read a nostalgic irony. Legendary beauties of the epic, who had once charmed Gods and warriors, in the present are forced into “whoring” for quick money. A similar fate has befallen Calcutta. Styled as the city of palaces, the crowning glory of the Empire in the era of *Pax Britannica*, Calcutta like the exhausted prostitutes in Sen’s “A Useless Lover”, is stripped to rags by the exploitative mechanisms of colonialism—only the skeleton of the former self remains in the “ruinstrewn land”.

Those who considered Calcutta to be their home, increasingly felt like internal exiles with the environment changing rapidly in the final years of colonial rule, which possibly intensified their homesickness for the lost city. First, Calcutta lost its premiere position when the administrative capital was shifted to Delhi in 1911 to avert the violent anti-colonial campaigns in Calcutta. This decision was backed by the city’s susceptibility to external enemy attacks during World War I. Moreover, the cultural eclecticism of the nineteenth-century fin-de-siècle Calcutta was replaced by a milieu of sustained communal animosity which almost became civil unrest in the 1940s. During the World War II, the city was once again shaken by the eminent threats of air-raids. The Japanese bombing in December 1942 that killed two and injured about fifteen people in Calcutta was a minor skirmish in global history considering the monstrosities of the World Wars; it nevertheless created a massive stir

locally by confirming the paranoia about Calcutta's vulnerability to *Axis* attacks. An anonymous oral verse comically expresses the alarm that Japanese bombing in Calcutta created among the British residents in India:

Sa Re Ga Ma Pa Dha Ni

Bom pheleleche Japani

Bomb er modhye keute saap

British bole baap re baap

Sa Re Ga Ma Pa Dha Ni^{viii}

A bomb has been dropped by the Japanese

The bomb had a cobra inside

which made the Brits shriek out in fright.

(Source unknown; my trans.)

There were constant speculations about how powerful the “Japanese bombs” were and the extent of damage that could be caused by them. However, for the masses, imagination could not function in a vacuum for long: thus, threat had to be given a concrete shape. It is interesting how in one such expression of demotic culture—a street poem—the potential hazard from these unknown objects is explained away by introducing the familiar form of a venomous snake nestled in the bombs that is known and feared by all.

Several people left the city on the occasion of Japanese bombing. Apart from the risk of direct attack, the War had other dire consequences. For years, the heedless exploitation of the resources that gradually

impoverished Calcutta now joined forces with the global economic downturn from the World Wars to leave the city crumbling. The avarice of European civilization and the reports of the “superhuman inhumanities” (Owen; “Spring Offensive” 53) in the battle made the Modernist artist restive. And the city became the ideal setting for staging that conflict by embodying the incomprehensible nullity that almost every sensitive mind of that generation experienced. The news of the mangled corpses in the bloodied fields of Europe, the escalating communal riots in the country haunted poets like Jibanananda Das with apocalyptic visions:

...in the foolish rapture of dawn, I have felt myself a creature of the earth...
 All my heart has filled with hate, pain, and anger;
 Assailed by the sunlight, the world seems to start a festival
 With the shrieks of millions of pigs.
 Alas for festivities...
 I have wished to sleep again,
 I have wished to lie merged like eternal death in the bosom and the womb of
 darkness.

(“Darkness”; trans. Indrani Halder; 30)^{ix}

With an “imperiled awe” (*bipponno bishwoy*) he looked at the world that is “gravely, most gravely sick” (“Suchetana” 39). The celebration of inhumanity unhinged his mind. Thus, through death he yearned to return to the nadir of that primal darkness of the prenatal life. In seeking the mother’s womb, he longed for the security and wholeness of his first home, which was lost in the world.

While the sense of the benumbing failure of human civilization in War and existential isolation had drawn the Bengali Modernists towards their European counterparts, they were equally aware that their alienation was simultaneously shaped by the excruciating experience of colonialism—the knowledge of the dirty, divisive politics of the Empire on its last pins:

In Southeast Asia the owners call their last stake;
 humbled, the British have already settled in Burma;
 the French have left Indo-China;
 the Dutch roam Java, unable to exploit anymore:
 independence is imminent in India. (Sen, “Jai Hind” 56)

And, yet the irony was, one realized that the “imminence” of this long-cherished freedom from colonial rule would not be an occasion of unsullied happiness. Two terrible human tragedies—the famine of 1943 a few years before India’s Independence; and the Partition that came with decolonization, left indelible marks on minds and bodies. The scourge of the famine that ravaged Bengal in the 40s killed at least three million people through starvation and disease when men in power joined hands with the forces of nature to wreak havoc on humanity^x. *Nabanna* (literally means *New Rice*, but it also refers to the agricultural festival in rural Bengal, celebrating the winter harvest of *Aman* rice) was a play on the Bengal Famine by the noted theatre personality, Bijon Bhattacharya. It was staged by Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA) of the Communist Party under the direction of veteran theatre personality, Sambhu Mitra in

1944 and became a landmark. It toured all over India, earning a few lakhs that were donated towards relief. Almost all the major writers of the time, like Samar Sen, had responded to the famine in their own way:

I leave my village for another:
skeletons litter the countryside.
The gold corn burns in this heat

(Sen, 22nd June 59)

Clearly the romantic portrayal of villages was now a thing of the past. With the decimation of lives in the famine—artisans, agricultural workers, labourers, small traders from the rural areas walked into the city in large numbers for succor, searching for “scarps, some dying by the wayside, the rest arriving half-dead. There they dragged their emaciated bodies from door to door begging for *phyan*, rice water, the starchy liquid left after boiling rice that is usually poured away or used for stiffing clothes” (K. Dutta 163-164). City streets were filled with starving multitudes and festering dead bodies that were half eaten by vultures, dogs and jackals^{xi}.

The Partition which came with India’s Independence in 1947 only worsened the situation even before the city could recuperate from the impacts of the World War and the famine. In the Post-Independence era, the refugee influx brought a massive change in the urban climate and its demography. The human geography of suffering transformed the urban space of Calcutta into “the nightmare city”. So, to trace the map of nostalgia in the Modernist city, one must work its way through this landscape, embedded in layers of pain and trauma. Indeed, nostalgic

longings for the city were wedged between other, and often contradictory affects, which sometimes muted, or at the least, checked any ostentatious expressions of nostalgia.

The opprobrious cynicism that often resonated in the poems of Samar Sen or his contemporaries was, thus, not necessarily a rejection of Calcutta but an outcome of their uneasy relationship between longing and disgust. Yet, despite the overpowering pessimism that sprung from a crisis of faith, poets like Samar Sen, Buddhadeva Basu, were undoubtedly a product of the urban and the modern. That the city constituted both their life-world and their thought-world was evocatively acknowledged by Sen in his essay in *The Calcutta Municipal Gazette*:

Calcutta is indeed a very resourceful background for modern Bengali poetry. It affords strange contrasts to a sensitive observer. One cannot, for instance, but be struck by the weird silence that pervades Dalhousie Square, where silence has to be observed for money-making. The sunset is suffocating in winter, but it is gorgeous in other seasons. The rainy season is bleak and inconvenient, but at times, huge, majestic clouds gather in the sky, shaped like a towered citadel or a pendant rock. Nobody can forget the beauty of the Ganges as seen from the Howrah Bridge in the early morning and evening when all the apparatus of industrialism cannot efface glimpses of the peace that passes understanding. Nobody can also possibly forget the filth of narrow winding portions of the Burrabazar and Chitpore and the hovels where workers pass their lives (47).

For the Modernist artist, the city formed the epicenter of the creative life. However, to love a place, one need not deny its failings. As Mohan's doubt, that was pitched like a rhetorical question about his friend Chinmoy's distant and abstract idealization of the village in the previously mentioned novel *Sohor Basher Itikatha*, would explain: "How can you love the village, its tranquil life, without taking into account the problems of peon Netai?"^{xii} How do you imagine a rural life without being attentive to the chills of penury, illness, dolourous sufferings, illiteracy and superstitions? (Bandyopadhyay 28-29) Love for a place, be it the village or the city, does not necessarily entail a disavowal of its inadequacies. So, a criticism of the shortcomings of the urban life can stem equally from a sense of disappointment and a resilient nostalgia for a better future, as Samar Sen's take on his compatriot poet Bishnu Dey elucidates:

Bishnu Dey's 'Janmastami' also opens with a picture of the confusing multitudes of a modern megalopolis in the evening where the fury of sight and sound bewilders the senses. There are descriptions and reminiscences of various places of Calcutta in the poem, including a Stock-Exchange scene, and it ends with allusions to a hymn of Universal brotherhood. The, Kidderpore Docks have a special fascination for the young, politically conscious poet. Perhaps, the bustling crowd of workers satisfies his urge for action; the ships and the long-drawn sound of the sirens, we suspect, have much to do with his *nostalgia for a new and better order*. (my emphasis; 46)

However, these expressions of nostalgia for the imagined past or a projected future are not articulated in Romantic clichés. The Modernist artists primarily engaged in the literature of doubt and dirt and their nostalgia for the city is located within the aesthetic paradigm they espoused. As pointed out before, in their subjective experience nostalgia shared a complex correspondence with trauma. Stephen Spender tells us in *The Struggle of the Modern*: “The modern nostalgic feels that an irreparable break has taken place between the past and the present, in society and in man’s soul. The dubious material gains of progress have been made at the cost of stupendous spiritual loss. The nostalgic modern sensibility, looking back on the past, is like Othello viewing Desdemona strangled on the bed” (209). Being encompassed by a world of violence, they waded their way through the blood swamps of genocide. So, their expressions of nostalgia, could no longer evince an untainted romanticism. Modernist literature in Bengal, reflective of the historical trauma and anxieties of colonial experience needed a new vocabulary—ironic, skeptical, introspective and self-reflexive at the same time—for codifying nostalgia and other affective realities of the urban space. The Modernists who were simultaneously fascinated and horrified by the urban reality, thus sought and condemned the city simultaneously.

With poets like Jibanananda Das, one can mark a discrete change in the voice while speaking of the village. The body of poems on rural Bengal such as the sonnets in *Rupashi Bangla (Bengal the Beautiful)* are comparatively more lyrical when contrasted with the poems that deal with the fraught landscape of modernity in the city. They also reveal that the

city-village duality was not entirely resolved in Modernist poetry in spite of the city taking the centre stage.

However, thematically in Bengali literature, between “Romanticism” and “Modernism”, the differences in approach towards the city-village dialectic is that, in the former generally the movement is from the village to the city, where village is the centre (the home of Indian culture)^{xiii} and the colonial city is its “other”; while with the Modernists, it is usually the other way—the metropolis forms the locus, and the village is posited as the alternative. Sibaji Bandyopadhyay argues that in the portrayal of the village, Jibanananda Das:

rather than fixating on the creation of an authentic identity his depiction of rural life is propelled by the need to produce an opposite of the urban environment, something that would provide a respite by forging a shelter that would safeguard the poet from the unliveable experiences of the city. In his poems composed during the period of *Rupashi Bangla*, his emotions around nature and the bucolic scenes were born out of a disgust with the metropolitan life, he saw the village by placing the city at the centre (my trans; 30).

So, even with Das, whose love for the city is more ambivalent than his other literary counterparts who are placed under the rubric of Modernism, one sees that his involvement with the urban reality is profound. Both his prose fictions and poetry powerfully reflect the angst of the interwar generation living in the cities^{xiv}.

There is the strain of melancholy that matures and ripens through Das' poetic oeuvre, be it at the passing away of the old-order in the "sound of the village-fall" ("The Earthly Borne" 75) or his nostalgia for mythical lost city in a fabled elsewhere:

On the Indian Ocean shore
or else beyond the Mediterranean coast
or out beyond the Sea of Tyre
not now, but once, a certain city stood,
a certain palace,
a palace of the richest furnishings:
Persian carpets, cashmere shawls, round-sheer pearls and coral
of the Bering wave,
my lost heart, my dead eyes, my extinct dreams and desires,
and you lady—
All was once in that world.

("Naked Lonely Hands"; trans. Joe Winter; 65)

Das' nostalgic longings that sometimes become manifest as escapist fantasies, are symptomatic of a deeper disorder. The poems collected in three of his major anthologies, *Banalata Sen* (name of a woman), *Maha Prithibi* (*The Great Earth*) and *Saat-ti Tarar Timeer* (*The Darkness of Seven Stars*) came out in the forties, the decade when Bengal saw the World War, famine and the Partition—a chain of disastrous events, sufficiently calamitous even to dampen the joy of India's long awaited freedom.

Gray or “*dhusar*” is a recurrent colour in Jibanananda Das (He named one of his anthologies in the thirties as the “*The Gray Manuscripts*”). It sometimes symbolizes a hoary past covered in a pall of mystery (“the gray world of Bimbisara” in the poem, “Banalata Sen”); at other times, it becomes representative of death and decay (“gray death” in “Before Death”) as opposed to golden, his other favourite, that stands for fullness and fertility. For Jibanananda Das, the Calcutta which permeated his poetic universe is a gray city, distant from his ideal, even though he hopes the city would become the “wave-melodious-beauty” (“*kollolini tilottoma*”) someday. Tilottoma is a celestial nymph in Hindu mythology. Her name forms a compound of “*tila*” and “*uttama*”. In Sanskrit, semantically “*tila*” has two meanings: one, a sesame seed, and second, a minute speck [as small as a sesame]. *Uttama* on the other hand alludes to something superior. *Tilottama*, therefore, refers to a being in which the tiniest particle bears the finest quality. Tilottama was also the legendary beauty in Bankim Chandra Chatterjee’s historical novel, *Durgeshnandini*. In Bengali, the name is often bestowed as a compliment to someone who is exquisitely beautiful. Again, *kollolini* speaks of a melody generated by the rolling of the waves.

In his poem “Suchetana”, Das uses the phrase— “*kollolini tilattoma*”—longing for that unrealized potential of the future when Calcutta would reach that supreme state of perfection with the “skill of tired tireless sailors” (trans. Joe Winter; 54), despite its present misery. Chidananda Das Gupta, one of Das’ English translators observes that the “word ‘yet’ is one of the most frequently used in Jibanananda’s

vocabulary. It provides the nexus between his agony over the present human condition and his faith in man's deliverance from it" (21). While the nostalgia for that distant tomorrow keeps his hopes afloat, he knows that the journey is steep. As this redemption seems far off, to convince himself—he enunciates his faith in "Suchetana" that "this world's wars-of-blood, its winnings/ are its truth; but at the last not true" (53) because of the good deeds of men—Buddha, Confucius—our ancestors in the past (see "Suchetana" 53). Yet this hope cannot sustain him during times when he is overwhelmed by the present. The claustrophobia of the modern metropolitan life— "prison of dying millions" ("Azure"; my trans.; 17) as he calls it, makes him anxious. So, his poems about the city are a shade darker, dismal, and frequently verges on nihilism when placed against his poems about rural Bengal.

Interestingly, his poems in *Rupashi Bangla (Bengal the Beautiful)* were composed in the decade of the thirties, when the world was witnessing an economic downturn. It was during the same time that his poems in the other collection *The Gray Manuscript* were published (1932-1936), informed by bleak images of death, separation and morbidity that reflect his despair at the world. In *Rupashi Bangla*, home that he crafts for himself in the enduring images of the Bengali village in its harmonious wholeness amidst the most humdrum objects of everyday, becomes his only space of refuge when he is denied peace in the city: "I do not know where it is that the world seeks interest /...In this countryside of Bengal I have built my home, my nest" ("Sonnet 10" 20). His nostalgia for a stable world unaffected by the vicissitudes of time, disasters wrecked by man and

nature, finds a “nest” in the luxuriant landscape of Bengal where he taps the pulse of timelessness against the human destitution in history:

...on the grass of Bengal I would lie,
 after so long on the world’s way, with all its trials to travel through,
 at last where the Dhansiri^{xv} flows to Bengal’s burning-ground, to flow there
 too
 where with her hair loose Ramprasad’s^{xvi} Shyama^{xvii} still comes by,
 where the body of a beautiful woman in a *kalkapar*^{xviii} sari is interred
 in a sandalwood pyre-on a mango branch a *shuk*^{xix} is silent, that talkative
 bird—
 where beauty at its greatest, sadness at its deepest, belong”

(*Rupashi Bangla*: Sonnet 3; trans. Joe Winter; 13).

The poet’s nostalgia endows the smallest things of nature with a sensuous and magical quality, which is also achieved by the integration of mythical characters, birds and beasts (such as fairy-tale bird *Shuk* in the above quoted lines) from the Bengali folk culture with the quotidian and the common.

Nonetheless, the grotesque reality of “now” and the city suddenly invades the blessed landscape of Bengal “with the screams of millions of pigs” (“Darkness” 30). The peace is ruptured and he is thrown out of his reverie with a jolt, thus wishing to go back to that sleep where he would be cosseted in the “breast and womb of darkness” and lulled into an “eternal death” (“Darkness” 30). Nostalgia for the primordial natal home

from which he has been cast out into this alien world as an “unaccommodated man” becomes overwhelming in the poet, against an anxious apprehension of “unhomeliness” when the imagined “homes” of civilization are either riven by war, or pulverized under the burden of subjection.

The interwar generation upholds a schizophrenic reality in the city where the soulful tunes of raga “Purvi” playing on a radio are interrupted by the “mechanical arrogance of the plane” (Sen; “22nd June” 59) cutting ominously through the air. Their nostalgia for “other times” carved in the interiors of the present, is pitched against the backdrop of a plague-ridden, famine-stricken human wasteland where:

all day I hear the rumble of rollers
 and in the distance
 far, far away
 I see a sudden streak of *Krisnachura*
 as the wind
 brings a smell of melting tar.
 (Sen; “He, from the City” 36)

The use of the rhetorical device of antithesis in jarring juxtaposition of two starkly contrasting images heightens the sense of horror. *Krisnachura* or Gulmohor, which bears bright orange flowers in spring is known as a “Flame Tree” because its blossoms look like tongues of fire. The flamboyant *Krisnachura* against the “pallid” skylines of the city create an ethereal sight, but in the poet’s mind this association with the flame is

correlated to the fire in the factory-furnace and their infernal chimneys releasing noxious toxin in the air. The pungent smell of the molten tar wafting in the breeze, overwhelms the beautiful sight of the flowers. Yet there are “rare moments” when even though the “skies are cruel as rocks/ over the chimneys of jute factories”, the poet sees “green trees flooding either side/ of the tawny tracks” (“He, from the City” 36).

Sankha Ghosh in “*Nisshobdotar Chhondo*” (“The Rhythm of Silence”) emphasizes on this dialectical interplay of opposites. The careful ordering of contrastive ideas in a phrase—rigidity with softness, loquacity with torpor, darkness with flashes of lightening—does not allow the absolute sway of negative emotions in his poems. The “hope” is never entirely absent, despite the encompassing gloom. Sen’s poems are immersed in a stillness or silence (*nishobdota*) that permeates his corpus. But as Ghosh asserts, this “stillness” sets the stage for an impending storm, a “dream of a new world”, some “appearance like an unruly cloud” (Ghosh 17). The opposing possibilities animate the “stillness” and puts it into rhythm. Thus, along with “greyness” another oft-used word “brightness” (*ujjwalota*) is also favourite with Sen. (see Ghosh 17).

MODERNIST NOSTALGIA IN THE “GRAY CITY”

Despite the dichotomous relationship, nostalgia had its takers among the citizen-poets for rendering the uniqueness of their urban experience. Buddhadeva Basu, an unabashed lover of Calcutta, calls the precipitates of his nostalgia in the mind as “memory’s gold” and acknowledges its

immutable relationship to the city. Addressing the city in “Calcutta” he thus writes:

... what I had to give up for your sake was trivial,
of no value in the long term. And in return you endowed me
as grandly as a queen—in every layer of my being I have absorbed
your munificence.

Whatever is deposited as memory’s gold, whatever gives meaning to the past,
friendship, love, struggles, the joy of keen toil,
my work, my vacation, my life—all, all I have had
because I had you, Calcutta.

(trans. Ketaki Kushari Dyson; 63)

In this long poem written in Mysore in April 1953, the poet in his mid-forties retraces the city of his youth – “hazy, luminous, incredible”—primarily through the lens of nostalgia with the longing of a man for his estranged beloved:

Once upon a time Calcutta was matchless, marvelously beautiful in my eyes,
like the beginning of a dream, a flower blossomed from imagination’s stem
In its dust, in its wind, in its hot metallic breath
My passions have screamed out loud.

(62)

Like Jibanananda Das who could say, because he has seen the luminous face of rural Bengal his desires to see the rest of the world has been

satiated, Basu standing at the other end of the spectrum, expresses a similar sentiment about the city when he declares: “you have given meaning to my existence—my Ujjayini, my America, /--Calcutta!” (64). Thematically the narration reminds us of the tradition of *Kunstlerroman* or “artist’s novel” in the way the poem unfurls the blooming of his artistic sensibility in the city. However, along with the poet’s own journey of self-discovery, the city that held him with a magnetic charm too evolves with time. This becomes an occasion for nostalgic evocations of the fond yesteryears, even though he admits the inescapability, and perhaps, the necessity of change to discover newer facets hitherto unknown:

Oh, it’s been a long time. Like yellow leaves the years fell down.

In the stormy winds of the end of an era history shed its pages.

You decked yourself in a new dress—perhaps it was necessary

that we should know each other better...

(64)

In this ode to the city, Calcutta is the beloved who, the poet sometimes feels, has grown apart with changing times, and experiences the pain of *biyog* (from Sanskrit *viyoga*: death, separation) and *biroho* (Sanskrit *viraha*: longing in estrangement) for the city he had once known. Both these elements of *biyog* and *biroho*, constitutive in his nostalgia recalibrates the fervor of his love:

Everything that we had cherished—the aura of intellectual aristocracy,
friendship, love, courtesy, the flowering of individual personality—
all broke up, one by one, and collapsed on the stones of your pavement.

(65)

Calcutta that the poet remembers here, was the microcosm of a vertiginous, fluid world that marked movement for the artist. He who came to her “as a guest” (62) was fascinated by this city which opened before him the door to the wider realm of experience, constituting his *rite of passage* from a precocious youth with “the shyness of virginity” (62) to a man of the world— “[you] broke the ice/and flung yourself on me—just as the boundless ocean opens itself/suddenly before our eyes” (62).

For the poet, the city signifies liberation, both artistic and libidinal. He foregrounds the distinctive role of the city shaping the journey of Modernist artist as a young man, who like Joycean Stephen in *Portrait* aspired “to live, to err, to fall, to triumph, to recreate life out of life” (150):

Liberation! —Yes, that’s just what I wanted of you, and obtained it too:
 the dynamic of living, the freedom to be articulate. A river’s liberation
 when it hits its banks, a poet’s when he finds his melody, and a short-
 lived insect’s on a joyous spring.

You never promised me anything, only sent me a[sic.] summons;
 And I too had no special present for you, except my eager uncertainty.
 Yet—or precisely that’s why—at the turn of your roads the doors
 Of my future swung open before my eyes.

(63)

The city where the poet pursued the fruition of his aesthetic impulses, freed him from the trammel of tradition that tended to incarcerate the creative practices.

While the Modernists yield to the undeniable seduction of the “infinitely mysterious” city that does not “soothe like a mother” but like a charmer asks, “to be won over” (Basu; “Calcutta” 64), we have seen in the previous section, that they are also conflicted about its contrastive realities. This intensifies their dilemma of representation. So, their nostalgia is hesitant instead of being swept by the “spontaneous overflow” of emotions. They seek an epistemology, which is deemed appropriate to accommodate the “disorder” in their cluttered existence. To abandon the elaborate embellishments of Romantic poetry, often poets like Samar Sen use short sentences with staccato words, and sharp punctuations. In Sen’s poetry, the passions about the city are checked by bitter cynicism. Yet, unlike his contemporary Jibanananda Das or his Romantic predecessors, village does not provide a space of retreat for Samar Sen :

I walk away from the city
 towards a distant village;
 there I see the shrewd moneylender
 watching with his third eye,
 knowing that skeletal oxen
 will never bring a golden harvest;
 daily the war in the west intensifies.
 (“Funeral Procession”^{xx} 97)

Everywhere, he finds the shadows of imperialism, war and the famine. Pralay Kumar Deb writes about Sen that while “he was a pray to psychic insecurity” like other urbanized intellectuals of his time, the poet in him was also “nostalgically enamoured of the dim world of romance. He was tormented by the failure of civilization and yet tried to cling to the rippling enchantment of the multiple phenomena of the created universe: the fragrance of flowers, the sigh of distant sea or the sharp blue flame of a star, shining in the unyielding loneliness of the pallid sky” (117). However, these fleeting visions do not guide us to any transcendental reality or a moment of epiphany that elevates the mundane to the metaphysical, as one experiences in Tagore’s verses.

Chronologically, Rabindranath Tagore stood at the cusp of nineteenth-century Romantic tradition and Modernism in the early twentieth century, but his ideological relationship with Anglophone Modernism was steeped in conflict. Although he translated Eliot’s *The Journey of the Magi* into Bengali and held Yeats^{xxi} in high esteem, he had reservations about Modernist poetry that depicted a world that was “crumbling, dustblown, and choked with *rubbish*.” (Tagore, “Modern Poetry” 290). This view had often drawn strong criticism from the younger generation of poets who showed a greater engagement with the trappings of the modern metropolis. In his piece on Modern poetry published in *The Calcutta Municipal Gazette* Samar Sen asserted that: “Tagore in a recent article, had ridiculed those young writers who think that to describe the dirt and dustbins of the city is to become modern and progressive. City life is, on the whole, alien to Rabindranath” (45).

In “Flute-Music” Tagore comes closest to the Modernist preoccupation with city low-life reeking of “fish-gills” and “dead-kittens” in a vapourous rubbish heap. The poem goes on to describe the everyday of a merchant-office clerk (*Kerani*) in his squalid pigeon-hole. The persona lives in one of those modest localities in Calcutta where hundreds of industrial workers and migrants from villages with their meager income sought temporary housing:

Kinu the milkman’s alley.

A ground-floor room in a two-storeyed house,

Slap on the road, windows barred.

Decaying walls, crumbling to dust in places

Or stained with damp.

Stuck on the door,

A picture of Ganes’a, Bringer of Success,

From the end of a bale of cloth.

Another creature apart from me lives in my room

For the same rent:

A lizard.

There’s one difference between him and me:

He doesn’t go hungry.

I get twenty-five rupees a month

As junior clerk in a trading office.

I’m fed at the Dattas’ house

For coaching their boy.

At dusk I go to the Sealdeah station,

Spend the evening there

To save the cost of light.

Engines chuffing,

Whistles shrieking,

Passengers scurrying,

Coolies shouting.

I stay till half past ten,

Then back to my dark, silent, lonely room.

(trans. William Radice; 96-97)

Cramped in his rented-room, in moments of loneliness he is often overwhelmed by a sense of longing for a woman whom he had wished to marry at his aunt's village by the *Dhalesvari* River. His paltry income became an obstacle in getting into wedlock, but he often saw her in his dreams with vermillion in the partings of her hair, and draped in a delicate *Dhakai sari* like a wife in a traditional Bengali household. In spite of his moribund existence in this dingy alley, the moment of redemption comes when this neighbourhood suddenly resonates with the melody of *Kantababu's* cornet:

At once the alley is a lie,

False and vile as the ravings of a drunkard,

And I feel that nothing distinguishes Haripada the clerk

From the Emperor Akbar

Torn umbrella and royal parasol merge,

Rise on the sad music of a flute

Towards one heaven.

The music is true
 Where, in the everlasting twilight-hour of my wedding,
 The Dhalesvari river flows,
 Its banks deeply shaded by *tamal*-trees,
 And she who waits in the courtyard
 Is dressed in Dacca sari, vermillion on her forehead. (97-98)

An elevating experience which can transform a damp and fetid alley into something that lifts the soul to another domain, is not very frequent in Modernist literature. Despite its engagement with city-space, the traces of Romantic poetry are clear in these lines. While profession demands the persona to live in the city he dreams of home in a small village by the river—a nostalgia common in Bengali Romantic literature. The only time he finds beauty amidst the urban squalor is when the flute music transforms the alley into another place. Otherwise, there is neither attachment nor identification with the metropolitan landscape as such.

To extend our understanding about the differences in approaching squalid city life that sets the Romantic and Modernist traditions apart, this poem may be discussed in relation to “Madhubangshi’s Alley” or “Madhubangshi Lane” by the Communist poet Jyotirindra Maitra (1911-1977). The poem imagines life in a similar fictional working-class ghetto in Calcutta. In contrast to “Kinu-the-milkman’s alley” in “Flute-Music” where the dark and putrid locality assumes an extraordinary dimension when it is stirred by the mellifluous music of the flute, Madhubangshi Lane in a poem by the same name, commands the love of the narrator for being what it is. The poem is set against the highly charged political atmosphere

in the first quarter of the twentieth century when the city was simultaneously experiencing the violent tumult of the nationalist movement for India's Independence in its final phase, and frequent outbreaks of communal clashes among Hindu and Muslims over the claims of Partition.

Maitra speaks of a time in "Madhubangshi's Alley", when people were fighting among themselves without knowing who "the real enemy" was because of Britain's imperialist ploy of "divide and rule". This was also the period of the World Wars when the middle class reeled under severe economic slump. Profiteering and black-marketing in the war economy became rampant everywhere. Yet in the midst of the turmoil and the shadow of imminent air-raids, when:

The groaning of military trucks

The anklet-bells of the rickshaw, the rustle of the distant trams

A running motorcycle's klaxon horn

The sound of airplanes

Tears through the sky...

[and]

Those tall and dark street lamps

Cloaked in fear,

Invite the shadowy figures of the night.

(my trans. 15)

His apartment in Twenty-Five Madhubanshi Lane becomes a little island of comfort for the narrator amidst the hurly-burly of existence. It motivates

him to sail through the tedious chores of the market in which he is forced to partake:

I had your inspiration
That gave me frequent bouts of joy
And my sky resonated with the din of life absolute.
O number twenty-five
Madhubanshi Lane,
That is why, let me tell you.
After drudging through the day drenched in the sun
For those spineless men--
Whom I honor,
And I hate while being jealous of their lives
I earn the naked trifle evening....

(12-13)

The poet addresses Twenty-Five Madhubanshi Lane like his lady-love and almost experiences a *viraha* or a sense of longing, having been separated from it. The name “Madhubangshi” itself resonates the sweet sound of the flute (*madhu*-honey, *bangshi*-flute). The name is a music to his ears. He feels a desperate urge to return to it after another futile day of frustration in the marketplace:

Money, money and money,
After the empty business of the day.
In slow and tired steps,
I come back to you,

O my un-concealed,
Un-hesitant beauty
Number twenty-five
Madhubanshi Lane
Let me thus whisper to your ears:
Your attraction, there are many to be named,
In your cold, decrepit room,
Dark like new-moon night
Those oily fingerprints
On the mucky walls exposing the bricks, weave
Old Dream

(my trans.; 13-14)

In Maitra's poem, the home or the *nostos* of nostalgia for the narrator is not a distant hamlet by the river, or a woman in a village, but it is his own Number Twenty-Five, Madhubanshi Lane. Unlike the romantic imagination of Tagore that looks for transcendence from the manacles of industrial city through ordinary experience, the poet in the latter poem is rooted in the run-of-the mill reality of the metropolis.

The aesthetic movement which began as a reaction to the industrialization and development of capitalism, became an escapist art for the Modernist artists whose practices were anchored in the cities, "which, for various historical reasons had acquired high activity and great reputation as centres of intellectual and cultural exchange" (Bradbury 96). For the narrator of "Madhubangshi Lane" the "elsewhere" of nostalgia is not about another place in another time, but about discovering the potential

“other spaces” in the space that he inhabits and in unraveling the radical possibilities lurking in a place of everyday experience. So the thought of returning to Twenty-Five Madhubanshi Lane enlivens him after an arduous day. Despite his mediocre, uneventful existence, it is here that he makes imaginary blueprints of future revolution, or dreams of a new social order portending “the tyrant’s suffocating, ignominious fall” (22).

Twenty-Five Madhubanshi Lane, the microcosm of his city torn in thousand directions signifies what Calcutta encapsulates: dreadful failures, and equally robust hopes. And it is this hope that once again, fostered a resilient courage for thousands of migrant lives in the city in the decades after Partition against the oppressive living conditions. It created a desperate urge for building a new home in the city — “Natun Bari”— a phrase immortalized by the filmmaker Ritwik Ghatak in *Subarnarekha* (*The Golden Line*) in the city. It is through this process of continuous struggle, Post-Independence Calcutta rediscovered itself from the abyss of chaos in the closing years of the colonial era.

The other important aspect that this poem and many others bring up is the imagination of a feminine space that is imbricated in a relationship with gender and nostalgia in Modernist poetry. The representative faces of Bengali Modernist literature in the 30s and 40 were largely male. They created an essentially masculinist cult of poetry. Women were still cast into the old dyadic structure — either as angels or as prostitutes. Home with a woman remained the locus of nostalgic longings, to the extent that women themselves became metaphorical embodiments of “home” or vice versa (as in “Madhubanshi Lane”). The fall of women (like we see in

Samar Sen) thus frequently became an index for the debasement of the city or its “unhomeliness”. When it was about homesickness, or the loss of the familiar in an eruption of strangeness, the identification of the “ideal” woman with the “home” and the gendering of the familial space forged a strong connection between nostalgia and feminine figures in poetry.

The most prominent example here is Jibanananda Das. In his poems, his recurrent yearning for homecoming, often merges with search for the quintessential woman whose countenance becomes one with that beautiful face of rural Bengal—the poet’s ultimate refuge that is unaffected by the travails of historical time. In poems such as the iconic “Banalata Sen”, the eponymous heroine from Natore—a small locality in Eastern Bengal—with her “bird’s nest eyes” (“*Pakhir neerer moto chokh*”) is explicitly identified as the final destination for the wayfarer poet. He had walked the earth for a “thousand years”—traversing the length of human civilization across a vast time-space from “the sea of Ceylon” and “the ocean of Malay” to “the ashen worlds” of Bimbisara and Emperor Asoka in 250 BCE (see “Banalata Sen” 59). Now the poet aches to return to Banalata’s comfort in her nest when the birds fly back home after the day’s toil:

...evening is here at last

In syllables of the dew; and a kite cleans its wings of sun’s smell;

The world’s colour is all out; then a shimmering script is traced

in a sparkle of fireflies, a story to tell.

All birds make for home—all rivers—ended is all day’s regimen;

Darkness is all there is –and I face-to-face with Banalata Sen.

(trans. Joe Winter; 59)

Banalata is an archetypal beauty who embodies the marvels and mysteries of antiquity. Her face is a sculpture of the ancient kingdom of Shravasti associated with the life of the great Gautama Buddha, and in her long, black mane that is like the dark night in the Ashokan kingdom of Vidisha, she ensnares the enigmas of the past, now in ruins. In the poet's search for home, amidst detritus of history, Banalata is like the fragrant cinnamon "isle" for a navigator who has travelled rudderless for many days "on far seas". This image of the sailor, seeking the shelter of the cinnamon-forest island (*daruchini bananir dweep*) states a desire for submission and repose in the lap of the verdant nature who like the woman provides shade, (or the woman is nature herself. The name *Banalata* literally means a forest-creeper). However, the lines may also subliminally suggest the opposite. The spice-island, evokes the image of the colonizer's discovery and the subsequent urge to conquer the feminine space of the island. All our colonial narratives began from that point, and it is unlikely that Jibanananda Das with his profound sense of historical bearings would have missed the dichotomy entirely. The lines subtly retain the ambivalence of desire to submit and possess the woman one loves.

Be it the space of poetry or the embodied landscape of village/city, the poet is inseparable from his muses—Banalata, Suchetana or Suranjana. As extensions of the poet's mind, they also represent the feminine principles of creation and "nurture" of his androgynous imagination, to which the poet must submit and master simultaneously in order to foster

his creative practices. In fact, in sonnet 19 of *Rupashi Bangla (Bengal, the Beautiful)*, the poet compares himself to *ardharnariswar*—the androgynous Hindu God Shiva—who embodies both the male and female in halves, combining the masculine (*purusha*) and feminine (*prakriti*, also the Sanskrit term for nature) energies of the universe, necessary for the completeness of creation.

All the iconic women in Jibanananda Das, in contrast to his contemporary Samar Sen's prostitutes devoid of love, are care givers—shelters from the “world's wars-of-blood” (“Suchetana 59)—and the “culmination of the death-wish in the darkness of the womb” (Dasgupta 23). Chidananda Das Gupta, notes, that in the later years, this “woman-soul” becomes a “chaste image of the dedicated life, a vision of purity lying beyond the ugliness of the immediate” (23). So in the eternal “woman” who in her various incarnations—Banalata, Suranjana, Sudarshana or Suchetana—merges the rhythm of the timeless and the temporal, the poet seeks his refuge. She forms the immutable centre of his otherwise volatile universe. In “Suchetana”, the poet addresses her as a “distant island near the Evening Star;/ you are in the midst of a cinnamon forest/solitude is where you are” (trans. Joe Winter; 59). In the same poem, his ascription of feminine attributes to Calcutta as “*kollolini tillotama*” conflates his search for the ideal woman who's often deemed as that missing “home” with the yearning for that ideal city that has become in the poet's imagination, a woman incarnate.

Nevertheless, the women in Das are distant, and the poet only hopes to find them at his journey's end. They embody that elusive elsewhere, that

mythical space of freedom from the grime and squalor of everyday existence. In them, the poet retreats in his nostalgia for the lost world when his expressions of pain and disgust fail to give him sufficient agency either to reverse or to confront the demonic times.

CONCLUSION

There is little doubt that the scene of the twentieth-century colonial city has been indispensable for the emergence of early Modernist literature that is marked by an ideological rootlessness—estrangement from tradition—while the postcolonial urbanscape entrenched in the struggle of the Partition refugees, food crisis, raging poverty and unemployment been integral to the growth of late Modernism in Bengal. This chapter endeavored to locate the cultural history of Bengali Modernism through the evolving lens of nostalgia in its multiple modalities, to ascertain the transformation of the city and its reception in literary history.

It also showed how Modernism initiated a break from the Romantic conventions, to introduce in literature a register of nostalgia that is cautious, critical, dark and self-reflexive, through new experiments with form and content. The attempt to analyze Modernist literature in the light of nostalgic affects is crucial, given Modernism's troubled relationship with nostalgia. The Modernists are deemed anti-nostalgic because of their fraught connection with the past. Joyce's classic statement in *Portrait* about his determination to free himself from the entrapment of "home",

“fatherland” and “church” and his proverbial declaration— “When the soul of a man is born in this country there are nets flung at it to hold it back from flight. You talk to me of nationality, language, religion. I shall try to fly by those nets” (Joyce 179)— finds its resonance trans-racially. Like their Anglophone counterparts, almost everywhere the Modernists had an embattled relationship with tradition. However, their rejection of their old habitats did not cure them of homesickness altogether. In fact, it only increased their longing to find new homes in new places. “Modernism is as much a break with tradition or with the past as it is an oblique selection of it... ‘each break confirms tradition and continues it; each innovation is nurtured by the innovations of the past; each rupture is an homage to those who have gone before’^{xxii}” (Zecchini 62). For the Bengali Modernist, the denunciation of the Tagorean tradition, for instance, was as much a strategic opposition of the calcified literary conventions, as much a question of personal preference. As Sunil Gangopadhyay professes:

To deny or to disregard Rabindranath [as a poet] is like an addiction among his successors. Yet it is nonetheless, necessary. While writing a piece when confidence falters, such disdain [for authority] comes handy. Moreover, such reactions were also a check against the excesses of Tagore’s admirers (29).

The *Kollol* generation found their allies in the amorphous Anglo-French tradition of Modernism; while the latter writers in the *Krittibas* group gave

poets like Jibanananda Das a new lease of life by pitching him as their model against an institution like Tagore.

The Modernists also tried redefining the concept of “home”. By locating themselves in a global map beyond the national ambit, they forged literary connections with Latino, American or African writers. They articulated a strong desire for transcultural mobility, which was achieved not only in their writings, but also in their regular practice of translating other literatures into Bengali. Just as Buddhadeva Basu’s translation of Baudelaire into vernacular, *Charles Baudelaire O Tar Kobita* (1961) brought him to the attention of the vast Bengali readership, in the same way the translations of Pablo Neruda’s poems by Subhash Mukhopadhyay or Rilke by Shakti Chattopadhyay made them popular among the Bengali audience. Hence, even though the critical interest in the Global South or the South-South connections in postcolonial studies has been a relatively recent phenomenon, intellectual exchanges have been occurring for quite some time in history.

Dwelling in multiple homes in their trans-national psychic space, the Bengali Modernists had established a thoroughfare between the axis of the global and the local in spite of being physically rooted in Bengal. This is what we may call their paradox of translocality: the desire to be global, while being irreducibly local. One extreme example of this is Jibanananda Das, who was always reluctant to travel outside Bengal even when it meant taking up a job in Punjab or Shillong in the face of severe financial hardship. For a brief period, he taught in a Delhi college but left the job within months to come back to Bengal. His poetic idioms too are couched

in what may be called a quintessential Bengali experience. In his poems, nomenclature is often not generic but specific. The names of seasons and months like *Hemanta*^{xxiii}, *Kartik* or *Aghrayan* and the cornucopia of proper nouns such as *Dhanshiri*, *Kirtinasha*, *Khanjana*, *Shyma*, *Hijal*, *Akanda* are redolent with the smell of rural Bengal. Das' works are replete with untranslatable phrases and, metaphors that are ensconced in the cultural memory of the land in which he invites his readers to partake by the way of reading his literature. And yet his poems travel seamlessly between Calcutta, Egypt, Libya, Babylon, coasts of Mediterranean or the Sea of Tyre, beyond the geographical situatedness of his anchored existence. Take an example from his poem "Windy Night" to see how he compresses multiple temporalities and localities within four lines: "The stars that went out in the sky thousands of years ago/yesterday ushered in innumerable dead skies through the window; / the beautiful women I have seen die in Assyria, Egypt, Vidisha, /yesterday stationed themselves on the far edge of a distance sky" (71). In the mental cartography of the Modernists and their successors, Calcutta, London and Cairo became a part of a large, interconnected map.

Calcutta, the chosen home of several Modernist artists, addressed the contradiction of this "rooted cosmopolitanism" precisely by keeping the conflict unresolved. Acting as a passage between the continental and the local, the city as a global metropolis opened up windows to other nations, fanning the urge to explore the world beyond its immediate surroundings. At the same time, it contained and anchored that exploratory urge within itself by infusing heterogeneous, incommensurable or colliding spatial and

temporal realities inside the city-space. There are cities within the city, and there is infinite conglomeration of maps, real and imaginary, distinct from each other. This keeps nostalgia's dialectic between "here" and "there" perpetually open. The city remains an inexhaustible enigma with "elsewheres" yet to be explored, maps to be perfected, and "the home" never to be reached.

NOTES

ⁱ See, *Kobi Jibanananda (Jibanananda, the Poet)*. P. 25

ⁱⁱ See, p.5. "*Kobi Samar Sen*" ("Samar Sen, the Poet") by Arun Mitra in the special issue of *Anustup* on Samar Sen (*Anustup: Samar Sen Bishes Shankhya*)

ⁱⁱⁱ See Jibanananda Das' expositions on poetry such as "*Kobitar Katha*"ⁱⁱⁱ ("On Poetry"), "*Robindranath O Adhunik Bangla Kobita*" ("Rabindranath and Modern Bengali Poetry")

^{iv} In a letter written to Buddhadeva Basu, dated (24/5/41)

^v see Ghosh 15.

^{vi} While Kollol generation is used as a blanket term for the interwar poets, the association of the Modernists with *Kollol*, is nonetheless tenuous, since there were a host of other writers associated with *Kollol* who are not exactly identified as Modernists.

^{vii} This was delivered in 1903, as a part of Curzon's speech to the 15th Anniversary banquet of the Bengal Chamber of Commerce

^{viii} *Sa Re Ga Ma* is the Indian equivalent of *Do Re Mi*. The poem on Japanese bombing is transmitted orally across generations.

^{ix} From the anthology, *A Certain Sense*, edited by Sukanta Chaudhuri

^x In his poem “22nd June 1944” (different from his other poem which is titled “22nd June” without the year), Samar Sen spoke of the plight of millions dying in this disaster:

The curse of two crore people starving
unites Bengal.
Thieves work hand in hand:
moneylenders and vultures
are intimate friends.
Cease trying to export suffering
For some time
O lord
and save us from your terrible pity! (173)

The destruction of *aman* rice crop due to epidemic and tidal waves, unnatural hoarding of food grains for the colonial army at War, collapse of legal entitlements contributed directly towards the famine of 1943. Further, during World War II the Japanese occupation of India’s neighbouring country, Burma from where India imported large quantities of cheap rice whenever production dwindled in the country, became irregular. The crisis accelerated due to negligence of the government to stop malpractices related to profiteering and hoarding of food grains. This led to scarcity in supply, causing unnatural hike in the price of rice which is the basic subsistence food for millions in Bengal.

^{xi} See Samar Sen’s “Lament at Home”: “When dogs devour human flesh/ and vultures are everywhere / waiting amidst the autumn dusk/...does the song of an ancient river/still echo in your blood? /Does the perfumed garden ever bear poison!” (Stanza 3, 183)

^{xii} Netai was peon in the village post office, who once tried killing his unborn child in the mother’s womb being unable to cope with the hunger in his ever-growing family with six children within ten years of his married life; yet he refused taking birth control measures out of superstitious beliefs.

^{xiii} See Chatterjee in Ch. II

^{xiv} Despite his distinct Modernist proclivities in Jibanananda Das’ handling of imagery, language and themes, there are strands of Romanticism especially woven around the rural Bengal. It is nonetheless different from Tagore, whose poetry is essentially Romantic in spirit, even though he occasionally deals in Modernist themes.

^{xv} A river that flows through Eastern Bengal and North Eastern regions of India.

^{xvi} Ramprasad or Sadhak Ramprasad as he was called is an eighteenth-century saint in Bengal who identified himself to the devotee of Goddess Kali or Shyama. He had composed several devotional songs which are known as Ramprasadi after his name.

^{xvii} Shyama is Another name for the Hindu goddess Kali. Both Shyama and Kali refers to her dark complexion (*shyam* and *kalo*)

^{xviii} “A stylized leaf motif” (paisley) in the borders of the sari or the drape.

^{xix} *Sukh* is a mythical bird in Bengali fairy tale. His female companion is *sari*.

^{xx} Original version, translated by Pritish Nandy, pp. 94-99.

^{xxi} In his essay “The Poet Yeats”, published in *Prabashi* in 1912, Rabindranath posited that:

If Yeats has won particular appreciation in English poetry today, it is [because]...his poetry, instead of echoing the poetry of his time, manifests the feeling of his own heart. We must understand clearly what is meant by ‘his own heart’. A diamond manifests itself by manifesting the light of the heavens. So also with the human heart. It cannot manifest itself in that greater light and also make that light manifest. In the poetry of Yeats, the heart of Ireland has found utterance (Tagore 321)

Tagore’s opinion on Yeats is not entirely inconsistent with his position. The entire creative oeuvre of Yeats cannot be square bracketed as Modernist.

^{xxii} A quote in the excerpt is taken from “The Other Voices: Essays on Modern Poetry” (1992) by Octavio Paz (126-7).

^{xxiii} Jibanananda Das and Sakti Chattopadhyay are two prominent Bengali poets who conspicuously celebrate the sights, sounds and the ‘mellow fruitfulness’ of *Hemanta* with their pen-strokes. However, *Hemanta* does not feature in the European seasonal-cycle. The English autumn is an improper equivalent, since it roughly encompasses two Indian seasons— *Sarat* and *Hemanta*.

CHAPTER IV

**“ROGUES AND REBELS”: NIGHT WALKING, NOSTALGIA
AND DECADENCE IN THE LATE MODERNIST TRADITION**

The *thick, greasy* night shuts in everything. We have gone beyond the ancestral houses of the Ghoses of the Boses, beyond the lamps, the smells, and the crowd of Chitpore Road, and have come to a great wilderness of packed houses—just such *mysterious, conspiring* tenements as Dickens would have loved (Kipling; my emphasis; 58-59).

The excerpt, from the titular anecdote of Rudyard Kipling’s experience of Calcutta in *The City of Dreadful Nights* stitches together a string of connections between night and opacity, and by extension a world of deceit, crime and criminality in the colonial metropolis. Conjuring an atmosphere of mystery with the nefarious activities of night in the seamy quarters of the city, he gives an ominous picture of the nocturnal urban space which is substantiated in the following pages. *The City of Dreadful Nights* provides an account of his narrator’s visit to a musical soiree in the house of a courtesan who had in the past reduced rich men to paupers; an opium den around the red-light district; and finally, to a shady “native” neighbourhood where local rogues diabolically rob the sailors after getting them thoroughly intoxicated. The epithet “the city of dreadful night” that the author uses for recounting his nocturnal adventures in the city’s underworld, eventually turns out to be the name for Calcutta itself—a

negative appellation that subsequently becomes intrinsically associated with the city's history.

The combination of “dread” and “night”, revealing the other countenance of “vice”, of course rests on the clichéd and yet most effective justification behind Britain's civilizing mission—the barbaric “other” in the “dark continents” had not experienced the benefits of European enlightenment. Kipling seeks to distinguish between Calcutta and London, the White Town and its “Black” counterpart in the city. This is achieved by incorporating the discourse of modernity into his account as a “temporal position (modern is that which is definitionally ahead of time)” (P. Banerjee 2). The evocation of the infernal darkness, anonymity and intrigues in Kipling's city shows, as Prathama Banerjee argues in the *Politics of Time* that “the ‘primitive (as an idea and as a concrete being) always already inhabits the regime of the modern” (2), just as the dark and backward “native” town constitutes a part of the modern colonial metropolis in Calcutta. “This creation of the ‘primitive’ on which modernity is predicated is demonstrable as a process both within modern Europe as well as in the colony” (2) onto which Europe casts its notion of primitiveness to resolve internal differences and claim “an unconditional modernity for itself” (P. Banerjee 3).

Thus, for an advocate of Britain's imperialism like Kipling, to establish the undisputed modernity of London (as opposed to Calcutta's “derivative” modernity from the West), the colonial city must bear an iniquitous seed of darkness. Functionally based on the binaries between “light”/ “dark”, “day”/ “night”, “White(Town)”/ “Black Town”, this

conception of the colonized space was not only crucial in determining the colonizer-colonized relationship, but an important structuring principle behind bifurcating the city into two distinct sections: “You'll understand that this part of the world is shut to Europeans—absolutely” (Kipling 63). The author emphasizes this separation while describing the native localities or the Black Town of Calcutta. Starkly different from the White quarters, this part of the city is a separate world in itself with serpentine lanes and dingy houses that are caught up in its “time-rotten” (63) primitive “wilderness”. Kipling’s assumption is semantically cemented by the accent on “absolute”, after a brief pause signified by the “hyphen”. However, beyond the reductive judgments about the locals, the general picture that emerges about the nocturnal life of the native town has a resonance in the following passage from a Bengali writer Kaliprasanna Singha’s nineteenth century masterpiece, *Hootum Pyanchar Naksha*:

The bells and gongs indicating the arrival of evening had stopped ringing. All the street lamps were lit now. [...] The liquor shops were shut, in keeping with the laws of the excise department, but it was not as if the customers went back [empty-handed]. Soon it was dark enough to conduct business under cover. It was difficult to tell the *bhadraloks* on the street from the lowly folks. They all wore English shoes, striped wraps from Shantipur and Shimla-style dhotis. Smart-assed *yaars* went around in groups, knocking on people’s doors, laughing raucously and spitting out English words, fast and furious. The house lights coming on in the evening were their cue to step out. [...] Huge crowds assembled in the pots and pans market of Mechhuabazar, the crossing

of Chorbagan, Poddar's shop at Jorasanko, Natun Bazar, Battala, the lanes of Sonagacchi and the four-point crossing of Aharitolla (17).

The “undercover” business of the night obliterated the distinction between good citizens and knaves. The clandestine visits to the prostitutes' quarters in Sonagachi hint at the corruption that is embedded in the perverse pleasures of nightlife. Indeed, in the popular imagination, night's opposition to daytime is often perceived by linking it with lawlessness, delinquency, darkness and danger. The threat posed by society to itself is projected onto the night which paradoxically evokes images of anarchy and terror (hence the need for surveillance and control), and at the same time an exhilarating sense of freedom from routine.

Taking off from these thoughts, in this chapter on late Modernists, I will focus on both the actual practice of night walking in the modern city, and a strong nostalgia for such nocturnal perambulations that overturned some of the assumptions and fictive fears about Calcutta nightlife, largely built upon the colonial stereotype of the “city of dreadful nights”. The suspicions were carried forward from pre-independence Calcutta with its vivid memories of riots, anti-social activities after the blackouts during the World War years, and conspiracies against the government in the thickness of the night. These were grafted onto the Post-Independence urban nightscape in tumultuous times of social unrest after the 1947 Partition. The nocturnal Calcutta was, for instance, fertile setting for several Bengali colonial and postcolonial crime-fictions in the popular genre. The *Krittibas* writers, discussed here, challenged this colonial imaginary of “dread” and fear in the appropriation of the night city through their longstanding

practice of night walking and merriment on streets. Thus, this chapter shows, how in postcolonial Calcutta, poems such as Sunil Gangopadhyay's "*Smritir Sahar*" ("City of Memories") and Shakti Chattopadhyay's "Se Boro Sukher Somoy Noy" ("That's not a very joyful time") create an alternative cultural cartography of the urban terrain, which is both subversive and transformative in its potential.

The emphasis in the third chapter was on the literary aesthetics of the first-generation Modernists: the shift from the village to the city, and the stress on seeking a "home" in the chaotic metropolis. This chapter specifically focusses on the ways in which the second-generation Modernists tentatively in the mid-fifties to the late-sixties further radicalized the city-space that was reconfigured by their predecessors in the early twentieth century. This chapter thus explores some of the unorthodox spatial practices that emerge in the decadent nostalgia for the night among the Post-Independence *Krittibas* generation of writers, often recorded and extensively revisited in poems.

Krittibas, a little magazine published in 1953 under the joint editorship of Sunil Gangopadhyay, Ananda Bagchi and Dipak Mazumdar as a platform for young experimental poets, eventually became a trailblazer of a literary subculture in the next couple of decades following independence. The poets of this generation were known for their strident opposition to literary establishments in their creative practices, and their transcultural friendship with the Beat poets of America. These positions locked them into an inexorable conflict with canonical traditions. They discovered a heady joy in jousting and showing blatant irreverence to

paternalistic authorities and institutions through a repudiation of bourgeois moralism.

In this chapter, the exclusive stress on their nocturnal adventures is deliberate, not only because it is central to the creative life of the *Krittibas* poets, but also because nighttime brings out a different visage of the modern metropolis, hitherto unexplored in the thesis. Among the Modernists, the act of urban perambulation was steeped in a nostalgia for the nineteenth-century figure of the flâneur as the “ubiquitous icon of urban dwelling and creativity” (Suárez 854). This chapter shows how the practice of night walking among *Krittibas* generation, tenuously drawing on the tradition of the flâneur, not only re-mythologized the nocturnal landscape of the city but modified the tradition itself. Night-walking which was sometimes deemed an expression of their male sociability in Calcutta streets also brings into focus another longstanding practice of the Bengalis, the *adda*. In their writings, the nostalgic invocation of these *addas* in most unlikely places such as Burning Ghats (Hindu crematoriums) in the motely company of *Sadhus* (monks), social renegades and miscreants. In the final segment, the discussion of two memory poems, one of which makes a powerful pronouncement on nostalgia, decisively bring forth how the urban cartography is radically configured through an act of “double mapping”—first through the spatial practice of walking, and subsequently, in the reinscriptions of these experiences in literary spaces as creative reminiscences.

The milieu in which the *Krittibas* generation prospered after independence, was that of an intense financial and social instability. The

city was reeling from the aftermath of colonialism, India's Partition, and the sufferings of refugees. Young people, despite university degrees, remained unemployed due to an oversupply of qualified young professionals and widespread nepotism in public offices. Deborah Baker in her book on the Beat Poets' visit to India, *A Blue Hand*, recounts a joke that circulated among the young crop in the Coffee House about the condition of unemployment in postcolonial India¹:

After the death of the orangutan in the Calcutta Zoo, the story went, the zookeeper decided it would take too long for a new one to be sent from abroad. A postgraduate in Sanskrit grammar answered the ad he placed in the *Statesman*, and the zookeeper showed him how to wear the hide of a dead monkey. The youth soon learnt how to jump around and keep the spectators happy. The higher he jumped, the faster the coins came. One day, in his enthusiasm, he jumped right into the tiger cage. The tiger crept up to him, and though nearly dead with fright, he heard a voice whisper, "*Dada!* Don't be scared, I'm an MA in Bengali Literature" (156).

This fictitious tragi-comic account of the predicament of youth in Bengal is indicative of the dehumanizing situations that young men and women had to endure for paltry money in odd jobs to support their often-overpopulated families with extended relatives and friends from East Bengal in the Post-Partition years. Youth who came-of-age under the shadow of Partition felt restless with the daily death of ideals on which the

new Indian state was founded. In big cities like Calcutta, the seething discontent against the government and the social establishments, finally snowballed into the ultra-left Naxalite Movementⁱⁱ in the late 60s and 70s. Unemployment and rampant poverty became a significant trigger in mobilizing the educated youth against the feudal-bourgeoisie institutions that still carried the legacy of the colonial government in its administrative, judicial or education systems. Young college students, university graduates, left-intellectuals and teachers participated *en masse* in the urban counterpart of the Movement that originally started as a peasant revolt in a small village of Naxalbari in North Bengal in 1967. They aimed at a proletarian revolution that would overthrow the current order that failed to mitigate oppressions of class and caste or the unequal distribution of wealth in the villages and cities. The confrontation with the state, led to police-crackdown. There was pervasive violence, incarcerations and deaths.

The Krittibas generation came into prominence in the turbulent decades of labour unrest, mass agitations and police-coercion between the Partition and the incipient Naxalite Movement. While their disenchantment with the present drove them towards nihilistic death-drives; it also honed their literary talents. The “*Krittibasis*”, as they called themselves, were widely known for their nonconformist lifestyle and professed bohemianism. Some of the greatest names associated with this movement, Sunil Gangopadhyay, Shakti Chattopadhyay, Sarat Kumar Mukhopadhyay, Dipak Mazumdar, Samarendra Sengupta, and Sandipan Chattopadhyay who excelled in prose, powerfully engaged with the

metropolitan landscape like their predecessors in the *Kollol* generation, particularly through their nocturnal activities.

“WALKING” AS A FORM OF RESISTANCE

In *A Philosophy of Walking*, Frederic Gros asserts that “walking” evinces a sense of the “primitive state of freedom”:

So we are a moving two-legged beast, just a pure force among big trees, just a cry. For often, while walking, we shout to assert our recovered animal presence. No doubt, in the great liberation exalted by the beat generation of Ginsberg and Burroughs, in that debauch of energy that was meant to tear up our lives and blow sky-high the dens of the submissive” (Gros 7).

Walking is a useful “tactic” to combat the numerous tangible and intangible nets of discipline that regulate and controls our “everyday” in the “iron cage” (181)ⁱⁱⁱ of capitalism, to use the phrase coined by the German sociologist Max Weber.

Responding to the urgency of resisting this “violence of order” (xiv) in *The Practice of Everyday Life* Michel de Certeau looks at “popular procedures (also “miniscule” and quotidian) [to] manipulate the mechanisms of discipline and conform to them only in order to evade them” (xiv). According to de Certeau, walking becomes one of those mundane spatial practices that poses a challenge to the classifications of urban cartographers who interpret the city with a goal of disciplining its

population, and thereby controlling its resources. The act of walking can thus potentially confront these rational narratives with their embedded ideologies authored by the geographers, surveyors and other agents of Government by “enunciating” alternative, and often contradictory maps drawn from subjective experience.

However, the practice of night walking has a more acute transgressive dimension in the way it clashes with the regimes of discipline associated with the nine-to-five work routine. In the recalcitrant act of night walking, both “night” and “walking” doubly affirm the subversive potentials inherent to such practice of ambulation. Strolling in the night is distinct from the navigation of the city on foot during the day, when walking for the labouring masses in the big cities imply travelling to and from their workplaces: “going to business meetings, rushing to deliver a package or get to a rendezvous” (Gros ibook). The swelling crowd plying the streets, as Gros notes, “hostile to all its members” vivifies the the atomization and alienation of humanity in large urban centres. Under the capitalist work-regime, everyone is in a mad rush driven by the time’s tyranny and everyone else is “in their way”. The leisurely and often purposeless sauntering of the night-walker is an anathema to this mechanical workforce of the modern city. The night walker is thus a “modern antihero” (11) as Matthew Beaumont calls him, often indulging in little acts of transgression with the purpose of reclaiming the city space that makes him a misfit during the day amidst the hostile faces: “So if the nightwalker is a fugitive from the ordinary, everyday life of the city, his half-illicit activity obscurely reclaims, redeems or transfigures it” (Beaumont 11).

The tradition of night walking in Bengali literary culture reached its acme with the *Krittibas* poets of the fifties. Their yearning for exploring the city where their “dreams were first unchained” (Gangopadhyay 14) has ineluctably influenced the creation of subversive spaces, synonymous with artistic freedom from the dictates of discipline that held citizens in its thrall.

NIGHT WALKING AND THE URBAN LANDSCAPE

In this chapter, night walking is read against the specific climate in postcolonial Calcutta within a broader tradition of strolling in the nocturnal hours in large post-industrial cities of the world. In fact, the nightwalker in the city is a stock character in modern literature, harking back to the flâneur who became a cult figure in the streets of fin de siècle France, variously associated with an aristocratic dandy wandering in the streets and arcades of Paris, an indolent idler, a man of the crowd, or an explorer of cityscape. In *The Painter of Modern Life*, Charles Baudelaire gave us the most comprehensive picture of the flâneur both as an “artist-poet” and a disengaged observer of the minutes of metropolitan life:

For the perfect *flâneur*, for the passionate spectator, it is an immense joy to set up house in the heart of the multitude, amid the ebb and flow of movement, in the midst of the fugitive and the infinite. To be away from home and yet to feel oneself everywhere at home; to see the world, to be at the centre of the world, and yet to remain hidden from the

world—impartial natures which the tongue can but clumsily define. The spectator is a prince who everywhere rejoices in his incognito (9).

Drawing on the writings of Baudelaire, Walter Benjamin, who made *flâneur* an object of academic interest in the twentieth century, marked him for his quintessential urbanity, in being both a spectator and an “investigator” of urban scenes. While Benjamin demonstrated that the true *flâneur* gradually died out with the avalanche of consumer capitalism, the figure of the *flâneur* left a lasting impression as the face of the modern metropolis, in its disconnectedness and alienation. Several writers and artists have nostalgically invoked the *flâneur* both in their aesthetic praxis, as well as in their personal lives by engaging in the art of mapping urban space on foot. The spectre of the *flâneur* haunted the Modernist artist beyond European cultures. Walking became a regular habit among several writers who were strongly influenced by the literary archetype of the artist-poet in the crowd.

However, despite the deep-seated nostalgia of the Modernist poets for the iconic urban-walker, the translation of the practices of the *flâneur* in the postcolonial city-space of the third world can only occur with a definitive difference. Further, since the days of Baudelaire, cities themselves had undergone major shifts. With the introduction of electric street-lights, and lighting in shopfront windows, the nocturnal landscapes of the city were radically altered, dispelling much of their mystery. Consequently, the new crop had to sometimes seek out places in lesser-known localities, shady neighbourhoods and cremation Ghats to recover

the enigma of the night. Simultaneously, their engagement with the city was characteristically different from the lonely, disconnected spectator in the flâneur who lost himself in the crowd. Such figures were common among first-generation Modernists, who while remaining anonymous observed the different collusions and encounters, made discoveries in unlikely corners and knitted together a stream of images.

In contrast, the poets of the *Krittibas* group were driven by the charm of the old-world flâneur-figure no doubt, but their practice of night-walking was an extension of their homosociality. Their walks were largely carried out in a group. Their night-time revelry was both emancipatory and disruptive, and instead of being concealed in a motley multitude, these poets declared themselves the monarchs of empty streets. Besides being observers, they were participants and performers—their drunken theatrics altered the literary imagination of nocturnal Calcutta. Contrary to the voyeuristic alienated city-watcher—the original flâneur—these men took the streets by a storm with their picaresque mis-adventures. Consider this humorous account of the drunken writer, Sandipan Chatterjee's^{iv} return to a North Calcutta apartment in a wintry night in his autobiographical novel, *Kolkatar Din Ratri (The Days and Nights of Kolkata, 1996)* recollecting the days and nights of *Krittibasis* in 60s and 70s:

I am standing in Shyambazar at one in the morning.

There is no hope again tonight, apart from the footpath...

At this point, I suddenly see four, yes four, elephants coming down B.K.

Paul Avenue. Elephants? On B.K. Paul Avenue? At one in the morning?

...But I know that on such a hair-raising winter's night this pack of

elephants is meant for none other than me, and that they have been sent by God Himself. When they get nearer, I stand on unsteady legs and raise my hand to hail the first elephant.

Believe me, it stops, together with three more elephants. Then this dialogue:

Where are you going, young man?

Sinhi More.

Where?

Sinhi More.

Sinhi?

The circus will pitch its tent there. The Olympic Circus. These elephants belong to them. That's where we're going, sir.

It is just before Christmas. I have seen large advertisements in the papers. 'Coming: The Olympic Circus. Famous All Over India.' Gosh, this is like having the moon! I gesticulate with a packet of Wills Filter, asking him to make the elephant sit.

Hey, that's right next to our house. Take me there.

This is almost like the beginning of *Alice's Adventure in Wonderland*, when Alice, seeing the Rabbit take out a pocket-watch to look at the time, had cried out 'Wonderfulest!'. I realize that the elephant had sat down (Trans. Aweek Sen, 255-256).

The nocturnal Calcutta became the *mise-en-scène* of all that was repressed and fantasized during the day. The impossible seemed normal. The elephants roamed lazily in the urban jungle, transforming the streets into a midnight spectacle.

The proverbial declaration that delineated the *Krittibas* writers' relationship with Calcutta's night-space appears in Sarat Kumar Mukhopadhyay's poem, "Motto Obosthyay Rochito" ("Composed While Drunk"). This poem became an iconoclastic statement for the entire generation of anti-establishment writers: ("*Raat barotar par Kolkata shashon kore charjon jubok/ Chowringhee Bhabanipur theke Shyambajar bwadweep*").^v:

After midnight Calcutta is ruled by four young men
 Chowringhee, Bhabanipur to Shyambazaar delta
 Only the insomniacs hear the sound of the galloping horse...

(Trans.; Rosinka Chaudhuri; 322)

These deracinated youths of the Post-Partition generation, who suffered a sense of marginalization (this "marginality" was also a self-conscious posturing, embraced by these writers in hostility to the stranglehold of middle-class respectability) amidst the din of the day, found their home in the desolation of the night. So strong was their attachment to the streets at night that they envisaged themselves as the overseers of the nocturnal city mounted on their imaginary horses. Thus, in the poem and elsewhere, such as the recent interview in *Boier Desh (The Book-World)*, Sarat Kumar Mukhopadhyay in his reminiscences about the different gestures of sociality— be it in the form of drinking in pubs and country liquor shops, or through the collective act of walking the

streets—reaffirmed the ownership over the nights in the city by repeatedly invoking the metaphor of “ruling”:

Around 1966-67, the thought of *ruling* Calcutta that crossed our minds came from an indomitable courage. Till very late in the night we would ramble in the nooks and crannies of the city. [after a pause] let me tell you something. There seems to be a lot of confusion regarding the identity of the “four”. Who were these four men? [...] The *Krittibas* group had about twenty odd people. Anybody out of them could have been the four [in my poem]. There were no definite names. But yes, Sunil and Shakti were a constant presence. Our sojourn would generally start between half past seven to eight; from *Khalashitola, Chota Bristol* to somewhere else. Later in the night we would visit the country liquor shop in North Calcutta. Initially six or seven of us would gather in a place, and then gradually disperse on our way back home. In the end there would be only four of us. Sometimes in a cab, sometimes in rickshaw, or simply by foot we would roam around the whole city. North to south nothing was left untouched. In those days very few people were seen on the streets of Kolkata at night. We had police patrolling the streets with red headgears. They would stare at us but say nothing. This was how we *ruled* the city! We would romp around on the empty streets like a *ruler*. (my emphasis and translation; 122-143)^{vi}

The *Krittibasis* not merely find their bearings in landscape of the night; there was a strong sense of possession or authority over the nocturnal city.

Another important aspect that gets underlined in the passage is the stress on bonding on the plane of male friendship. The public night-space

was remarkably gendered. Women were hardly a part of their night-time revelry, even though they were sometimes invoked in the context of *Krittibas* as faithful companions for their husbands' literary ventures. Mukhopadhyay, while relating some of their early escapades in the interview recalls that in those days all of them were "unmarried" and under "thirty". The poets of the alternative tradition, repeatedly dwelled on the intimacy of a self-enclosed community of friends and peers which arose from their common interest in literature^{vii}.

KOLKATA'S *ADDA* AND NOCTURNAL SOCIABILITY

A cardinal expression of the homosociality evoked in the writing of the *Krittibas* generation has been in the longstanding practice *adda*^{viii}, a dying art deemed quintessential to Bengali identity. The term *adda* probably had a non-Sanskritic origin. In the modern lexicon, it refers to a custom of informal get-togethers where long and laidback conversation between friends occur in a social space. Drawing on various sources, Dipesh Chakrabarty in his exposition on "Adda: A History of Sociality" in *Provincializing Europe* translated the word as "a 'place' for careless talk with boon companions" or the "the chats of intimate friends" (180).

Adda simultaneously refers to the place where such exchanges take place and the practice of it ("*adda deoya*" or giving/practicing *adda*). Its parallel may be found elsewhere in coffee house conversations, or the French salon culture that prospered in Post-Enlightenment Europe. However, *adda* is generally perceived as a uniquely Bengali experience

that became their defining trait. As Nipendranath Chattopadhyay claims in his essay “*Adda, aro Adda*” (*Adda, and more Adda*): “Everywhere in the world Bengalis are known for one thing—we are the best when it comes to the practice of *adda*. No other race had succeeded in building an institution like *adda* which can stand above all principles of utility” (17). Responding to changes in the social ethos that generated new economies of entertainment and sociality, *adda*’s slow and yet steady disappearance from the life of Calcuttans, “has now produced an impassive amount of mourning and nostalgia. It is as if with the slow death of *adda* will die the identity of being a Bengali” (Chakrabarty 181). In the preface to the anthology, *Kolkatar Adda* its editor, Samarendra Das laments that:

The coinage *addabaj* ascribed to the assumption that men of business are seldom infatuated by this practice. This however, is untrue. Those who have read Tagore’s *Idle Talk* or *Fifteen Pence* would agree that if every moment of our life was filled up with work, there would be no shortage of food grains anywhere, but the world would have no flowers. Cramming up human life with work would only produce a mechanical civilization. We would become mirthless creatures. Yes, it is true that the winds of change have affected the lives of the Bengalis in a way that it is becoming increasingly hectic. The amount of leisure that we previously enjoyed has been reduced from our daily lives. So the current generation is both self-centered and enclosed within the cocoon of their nuclear family [...] Loneliness is gradually creeping into their lives.

There was a time when Kolkata, the capital of India, made the Bengalis proud of their city. It is around this city their culture reached

an efflorescence. Many would agree Calcutta is a city driven by culture, faith and intense passion [...] And the lifeline of this city had always flown around various *addas* (preface; my translation).

Indeed, some of these *addas* in which eminent writers had routinely participated became sites of scintillating intellectual conversation. The passage draws attention to several interrelated issues associated with *adda* and urban modernity, and how it shapes the cultural environment of the city that is nostalgic for its heydays. The central argument also brings forth the importance of leisure that is not driven by principles of the utility of capitalist-labour. It dismisses the claims that *adda* promotes indolence and laziness by tracing its formative influences in the cerebral and affective life of Bengalis. While *adda* may not have had an urban origin, its forms certainly evolved in the city under the intellectual climate of capitalism, as a way of coping with its drudgery and monotony. As a “way of dwelling in modernity”, *adda* provided a breathing space like “a zone of comfort in modernism” (Chakrabarty 213).

This practice of *adda* was not exclusive to the male-members of the society, as it was commonly perceived, yet its predominant expressions, or those which are documented, are chiefly male in the public sphere of modernity. Such homosocial gatherings, as Dipesh Chakrabarty points out, could be seen in domestic environments such as the meetings in the portico or “*rawk*” of the house^{ix}, or at local tea-shops (*cha er adda*). There were more informal *addas* that Chakrabarty does not enumerate, such as sustained conversations with friends, neighbours and shopkeepers at the market-place to more transgressive ones, which entailed the intake of

psychedelic drugs and marijuana at night-time in cremation grounds. Sunil Gangopadhyay in the “City of Memories 1” evokes the memories of such *addas* in Nimtala Burning Ghat near the Howrah Bridge in Calcutta of 60s:

Now festive burning ground I see,
 Hibiscus flames and murmuring crowds,
 Shadows’ tumult, shadows’ uproar
 As frantic bodiless multitude [...]

Ganja seeds crack in lighted chillums
 Shiva’s followers sit in a circle still
 Twin tridents glow red in the flame
 Fireflies sparkle upon the river.

(16)

Spending hours in the cremation grounds of the city with *Sadhus*, whom the narrator describes in the poem as the followers of Lord Shiva (who is also the Lord of the *smashana* or the cremation grounds; *shma*-dead body, *shana* from *shanya* or bed) was a common experience for these writers, especially in the company of the Beat Poets when they visited India in the early sixties. They observed the mendicants who sat in circles around the fire with their tridents traditionally ascribed to the Hindu god Shiva, and performed their rituals while smoking pot and intermittently breaking out in loud chants, *Byom Byom Mahadev*^x. Watching the spiritual practices of the *Sadhus* smeared with ashes, and sitting next to the burning pyres where bodies are consigned to the flames, became an occasion for these poets to meditate upon the intensity of life and “the profound comedy

of Death and Birth” (Gangopadhyay 15). Like Gangopadhyay, the Beat poet. Allen Ginsberg, who visited Calcutta with his partner Peter Orlovsky, records his experiences of the cremation grounds in several of his entries consisting of poems, sketches, notes dreams and reflections in his *Indian Journals* between March 1962-May 1963. Consider this snippet from the poem “Hotel Amjadia Restaurant, Calcutta”,

I steal out with long hair to find Paterson^{xi} near
 the Ganges bank Nimtalla burning Ghats
 to see the meat-dolls burn,
 Spread toes hanging out the end of the woodpile.... (60)

In several other entries, Ginsberg gives a visceral description of the corpses turning to ashes, and in the note that follows the poem he once again compares the human body to a “meat doll”:

Boys poking the corpses with bamboo poles, a lawyer’s shoulders and head seared and puffed up over the flames, pushed by attendants so it falls into the central red coals—

Ten feet away a group of Saddhus and devotees around improvised mandir with flowers & incense and prasad on a cloth, shouting loud Boom Boom Mahadeva! lifting faces to sky eyes closed hands clasped to mouth as if in prayer, except in their hands little red clay pipesful of Ganja—passing round the pipe with great mantras...

Corpses heaped with flowers in a litter carried through streets.... disappear right in front of you like burning a big meat doll or pillow or Sofa—

Dolls of meat—with feet and hair (62-63).

Witnessing the flesh returning to its bare fundamentals—bones and ashes, organs slowly dissolving in the raging fire, is a quintessential lesson for one to be dispassionate about either its finitude or the corporeality of the human body. In Hindu philosophy, shedding off the mortal frame in death, when the immortal spirit leaves the body, is like casting away a tattered cloth (*vasamsi jirmani*)^{xii} or an “old pillow” that wears out in time.

Equally captivating to a Westerner is the humdrum nature of death, as Ginsberg explains in a 1993 interview with Suranjan Ganguly. He draws a comparison between the cultural practices in the west where death’s visibility “is hidden and powdered and rouged and buried in a coffin”:

To suggest the opposite, the openness of it, is like an education which is totally different from the cultivation of the notion of the corpse as still relevant and alive and “don't kick it over”. There they just lay it out and burn it and the family watches the dissolution; they see the emptiness in front of them, the emptiness of the body in front of them” (26-27).

The Hindu rituals of death and the spectacle surrounding the cremation in Burning Ghats had always fascinated the Western minds, but the urban poets of the 60s and 70s in Bengal and their American friends made it commonplace. Despite the moral shock, they incorporated in the urban imaginary the habitat of the cremation grounds in graphic detail. The visually arresting descriptions of the corpses, with the smell of burning

bodies and the stench of urine and alcohol mixing with the whiff of stale flowers, incense and the “thick” odour of hash pervades the readers’ senses. Their writings invoked stark images of death amidst the flow of life in a busy city, and the multiple forms of lived practices, rituals and traditions that thrive around the eddy of dead bodies in the *Ghats*. “After all death is half of life” (27) Ginsberg asserted in his interview, and the poets chose to describe life in the city as they saw it.

In popular psyche, death in its mystery and unknowability is most intimately associated with the opacity and fear of the night. Along with their acceptance that “death is half of life”, these writers embraced the night into their writings, which is “after all” a half of day. The recounting of the experiences in the *ghats* and other night-time haunts by the *Krittibashis*-Beats in literary spaces, thus in a way familiarized and “domesticated” the landscape of nocturnal Calcutta to its readers, which overturned the clichéd projection of the “city of dreadful nights”, largely imbibed from colonial literature.

However, these visits to the cremation grounds at night and the *addas* which followed, again belonged to the male territory. This striking absence of the women’s participation, makes the reader think that the nights in Calcutta were still not friendly to its female flâneur (flâneuse). Even the gatherings of the *Krittibashis* in more social spaces such as pubs and bars in the city during the day were also largely male, set aside from the more general *addas* in the Coffee House and restaurants where everyone participated irrespective of gender (as a matter of fact, there were certain pubs in Calcutta which only permitted male visitors).

A succinct projection of homosocial bonding occurs in the anecdote from Sandipan Chattopadhyay's *The Days and Nights of Kolkata*, where he fondly recalls the old intellectual gatherings in the country spirit bar at *Khalashitola*, rechristened KT by its frequenters, around the legendary figure of Kamal Kumar Majumdar, a vanguard of the underground literary tradition in Bengal:

Stories about KT are innumerable. My own stock would exceed the thousand and one tales of the Arabian Nights. The high-priest of KT was Kamal Kumar Majumdar. [...] Every Sunday around eleven in the morning, Kamal *da* sat in one of those long wooden tables with his head upright like an open-hooded snake in its full glory. His posture was always calm and erect. He would smile ethereally like a Snake-God as we gathered around him one by one [...] The *adda* would continue almost till two in the afternoon. Even when Kamal *da* left we would linger behind (my trans.; 248).

The writers such as Sunil, Shakti, or Sandipan generally spent long hours in KT, and in other bars of the city like the "*Tower*" or the "*Chota Bristol*" in Moti Sil Street. And before trudging back home at the dead of night, they often prolonged their nighttime *adda* on the streets. Their nostalgia for Calcutta's decadent night life almost attained a cult status in poems such as Shakti Chattopadhyay's "*E boro Sukher Somoy Noy*" ("It's not a Very Happy Time, Not a Very Joyful Time")^{xiii} and Sunil Gangopadhyay's series on Calcutta, *Smritir Sahar (City of Memories)*.

Sunil Gangopadhyay (1934-2012), a leading Bengali writer in the second half of the twentieth century, was born in Faridpur (now in Bangladesh) in undivided Bengal. As a child, he moved with his family to West Bengal. While still a student, he founded the poetry magazine *Krittibas* with his friends. Gangopadhyay's first novel *Atmaprakash*, whose title can be literally translated as the "debut" or the "first appearance" was published in *Desh Magazine* in 1964. Gangopadhyay had also widely written for children. In the course of his prolific career spanning over five decades, he worked in several literary genres, received numerous awards and accolades and was widely translated into other languages. His novels *Aranyer Din Ratri* (*Days and Nights in the Forest*) and *Pritidwandi* (*The Adversary*) were made into films by the renowned director Satyajit Ray. Gangopadhyay's poems addressed to his mysterious lady-love, Neera^{xiv} that he had "continued composing over decades, and which, in their bizarre juxtaposition of reminiscence, image, the sensual, the political (in particular, the turbulent Naxal era), literary allusion, local slang, and especially in their repeated, immutable point of reference, represent a history of Calcutta" (A. Chaudhuri 245) like his twenty-seven poems of varying length grouped together as *Smritir Sahar* or the "City of Memories". Published in 1983, these poems follow the haunted trails of memory to reconfigure a city traversed extensively by the poet and his friends in their youth.

His Friend, Shakti Chattopadhyay (1933-1995) was perhaps the most acclaimed among the poets who loosely came under the banner of *Krittibas*. Along with his poetry, as a figure he was equally romanticized

and condemned for his Bohemian lifestyle, which he followed till death. The fabled accounts of friendship between Sunil and Shakti attained a cult status in Bengal. Chattopadhyay's first collection of poems *Hey Prem, Hey Naisabya* (O Love, O Silence) was published in 1962. He received Sahitya Academy Awards for his book of poems, *Jete Pari Kintu Keno Jabo?* (*I Could Go but, Why Should I?*). "*E boro Sukher Somoy Noy*" ("It's not a Very Happy Time.") was anthologized in *Sonar Machi Khun Korechi* (*I Killed a Golden Fly*) in 1967.

NOSTALGIA AND THE ALTERNATIVE CARTOGRAPHY OF THE URBAN NIGHT-SPACE

In *Placing Nostalgia*, Allison Hui brings to our attention that affects like nostalgia have an enduring relation to "material spaces" (65), Drawing on this notion, I show how spatial conjurations—through their interaction with the everyday events of an urban subject—engender specific nostalgia, which in turn affects the topography of representational spaces^{xv} and alters its alignments.

The configuration of the alternative space that emerges in Shakti Chattopadhyay's poem "That's not a cheerful time" is a vertical one. The poem's refrain "It's not a very happy time, / Not a very joyful time" itself encapsulates a nascent nostalgia for its antithesis, but this nostalgia is not comforting. It unhinges the persona's mind and heightens the sense of suffocation in the city. He seeks escape routes.

The body shakes all over, walls crash into walls, cornice into cornices,
 The midnight pavements change places.
 It's the hour of homecoming, home inside home, leg inside leg.
 Ribcage inside ribcage,

(trans.; Arvind Krishna Mehrotra Jyotirmay Datta; 201)

The poem reenacts the unsteady footsteps of a drunkard swaying from head to foot. However, his movement does not generate a horizontal sense of space, for there is no movement at all but a feeling of tumbling into a depthless abyss through the repeated emphasis of sinking into spaces inside a space in the refrain: “home inside home, leg inside leg. /Ribcage inside ribcage” (201). The poet-persona is also trapped in his body, which becomes a metaphor for a stifling “home”. While he is caught in stasis with his inability to move on the surface, the city is given an agency: the pavements are seen to be changing their positions at midnight, “the platform gaining speed” against the stationary train (The Bengali original goes “*gari rekhe istition dourocche*”; “rekhe” clearly indicates that the train is left behind, while the station runs), “the feet not moving and the sandals walking away”. These propositions open at least two contradictory prospects, both plausible. The first suggestion forecloses the possibility of movement with the indication that while the shoes are technically moving, the feet remain rooted in the same place without any change of position. Thus, any mapping of the horizontal expanse becomes impossible. There is an overwhelming sense of claustrophobia, indicating that there is no escape from the “unhomely” city, and hence it is neither a cheerful time,

nor a blissful time. The idea is solidified in the image of the marriage garland tightening up like a noose around the throat:

Unknown to you, hidden like a firm bud behind leaves,
She waits with a garland, the wedding noose,
In her golden spider hands.
Your wedding's at midnight when pavements change places—
The body shakes all over...(201)

The poet is wedded to the city, but this marriage^{xvi} is also a trap. Like a fly caught in a cobweb he cannot flee. It gradually suffocates him, taking away his agency to move. This sense of stifling discontent has a greater political relevance when read against the socio-political backdrop of late nineteen-sixties Bengal, which propelled the youth to erupt in violent protests against the state machinery during the Naxalite insurgency. The startling image of the encounter with the patrolling police van at night is strongly evocative of a common phenomenon during those tumultuous years:

'Stop!' And you freeze. Your hands go up,
And you're bundled into a van.
Black Maria, inside Black Maria inside Black Maria...(201)

Young boys on streets were cornered and picked up by police vans at night for interrogation when authorities became suspicious of their

alleged association with Naxalite revolutionaries. Many of them disappeared forever.

Another explanation for the spatial dynamics charted in the poem springs from a similar sense of claustrophobia. Because there is no escape from the city and its punitive legal system, the poet looks for alternative configurations of space. He projects spaces within spaces, or depths beneath depths by plotting a vertical movement, to resist this notion of a cartographic enclosure.

“The nighttime city is another city” (3), Matthew Beaumont posits in *Nightwalking*. It is *an other* city or a series of “elsewheres” in nocturnal Calcutta that become the setting of some of the most intense nostalgic reminiscences in Gangopadhyay’s string of poems, titled the *City of Memories*. They delineate his intimate and evolving interaction with the streets, mostly by plumbing the depths of nocturnal Calcutta. Some of these poems, referring to a city transposed into memory, go back to his tryst with the place in his early youth, responding to the seduction of its nightlife. These poems unfurl the gradual discovery of the forbidden arteries of the red-light areas and “secret hells” of:

Kolabagan, Goabagan, Ponchanon-tola, Raja Bazar

Chitpur Tunnel, paradise of Chinatown,

Brothels of Sonagacchi, Wattgunj, Meteburuz.

(“City of Memories 21” 26)

However, it may be worthwhile to take a note of the title that the poet chooses—“City of Memory”—since memory vis-a-vis nostalgia operates in multiple layers in the literary landscape of these poems. For the “literary walker”, nostalgia as an aesthetic device creates a narrative by plucking out from that vast, amorphous repository (“litter”) of memory, parts of the past and arranges them in a manner that inspires poetic utterances. And again, since these maps of Calcutta are invoked from memory, they are given a leeway for the inaccuracies in their recollection. This allows the narrator a greater liberty in charting personal routes and even generating counter-factual ones within the real city-space. In these poems, nostalgia is deployed to conjure a city of the imagination that is laid over the actual one to counterpoise the authority of empiricist cartography put down by the planners, architects, geographer, and technocrats, using codes and symbols. Literary nostalgia thus incorporates imagination and affect into this map to illuminate the hidden, neglected or marginalized landscapes, histories, and characters that “charge” the urban environment.

The opening poem of the series comes up with a formulation of nostalgia as the enjoyment (*jouissance*) of memory combining pleasure and pain, which may be used as a template for understanding the rest of the poems in the series. He refers to nostalgia as a “*Hridoy khunre tola maya khonij*” (14). In Bengali, “*hridoy khunra*” would be digging into the depths of the heart, while *maya khonij* might imply an illusory mineral. *Maya* variously means illusion, sorcery, imagination, infatuation, and even tenderness and compassion depending on the context. The English translation of the poem reads the sentence as the “conjured gold dug from

the heart” (15). I would argue here *maya* simultaneously alludes to both senses of the term— “conjuring” as well as “tenderness” because nostalgia incorporates elements of both illusion/imagination and gentleness. As I have indicated earlier in the thesis Introduction, nostalgia or “*smriti medurota*” in Bengali summons tender memories as well as being under the “spell of memories”. Therefore, nostalgia in the poem becomes those tender as well as illusory deposits dug from the nadir of the heart:

The night hag’s call, a ghostly beckoning
 These are the seeds of sorcery—
 Such enchantments that all seem nothing
 Conjured gold dug from the heart (15).

What is also noticeable in these lines is the use of temporal markers for affixing nostalgia. It is not only an affective condition associated with the night, but there is also a “night”, an opaqueness or mystery intrinsic to nostalgia which enhances the enigma around it. This nocturnal identification is strongly grounded in phrases such as “night hag’s call” (“*nishi daak*”) and “seeds of sorcery” (“*kuhoker ajana beej*”). Again, the “ghostly beckoning” (“*mriyter haatchani*”) alludes to nostalgia’s hauntings that seduce us to engage with the dead (*mriyo*) past.

However, the last two lines containing the figuration of nostalgia, are more ambivalent in the Bengali original than they appear in the English translation: “*Emon mohomoy kichui kichu noy/Hridoy khure tola maya khonij*” (Such enchantments that all seem nothing/ Conjured gold dug from the heart”). In translation, the implication seems to be that there is

nothing more enchanting than the magic mineral dug from the heart, which could indeed be one of the definitive meanings of these lines. The other meaning is equally probable. If we pause after “*Emon mohomoy*” (such enchantment...), and then read the rest together “*kichui kichu noy/ Hridoy khure tola maya khonij*” (It is nothing, /an illusory mineral dug from heart), the meaning alters. It suggests nostalgia is enchanting and yet it is a chimera, a fantasy nurtured in the depths of the heart. The second interpretation forges a relationship between fantasy and nostalgia, which is also used to conjure subversive spaces. Both the poems, this and the previous one by Shakti Chattopadhyay where strange visions of interior spaces are induced by drunkenness, engage with fantasy in some form to sketch the alternative vis-a-vis dissident cartographies of the city.

Following the formulation of nostalgia, the “City of Memories 1”, presses forth its quest for elsewhere:

Yet I must leave, I must go far
 A ghostly vigil waits for me
 Where yearning rocks to rhythm of waves,
 Sounds gather to devour memory (15).

In Shakti Chattopadhyay’s poem, while there is walking without progress, leading to vertical movements, in this poem the movement occurs at two different levels, one, a horizontal movement on the physical surface of the city and the other, into the mindscape of the poet. The physical movement gestures towards a journey that expands beyond the confines of the urban conurbation into the infinite, symbolized by the

recurring references to the sea and the sea-smell. On an intellectual level, it is an inward voyage into the elsewhere of nostalgia within memory's inner folds. The nostalgic yearnings come and go like waves, hitting against, and eventually corroding the plain of memory.

In the last line—“Sounds gather to devour memory”—the complex imagery of sounds eating into memory opens a trail of questions. Is it about the form emptying out the content through a repeated performance of memory? Do endless recapitulations of a past dilute the memory, rendering it vacuous and filling it with imagination? Just as every act of recall is a performance in difference, adding something to the corpus of memory, it is also an act of deferral. With every surge of memory, the actual home in the past thins out, which is then replaced with imagination.

It is at this question of “imagination” the empiricist “History” is at loggerheads with nostalgia in retelling the past. Nonetheless, while the profusion of affective imagination makes nostalgic reminiscences untenable for a “rationally- defensible” (Chakrabarty 473) historical narrative, it is an important tool for a literary artist in shaping a story that could fill the gaps with what could have been. Thus, memory and nostalgia function as a creative supplement to “History”, both filling in the lack and enriching it. There is always a transgressive potential invested in such narratives which cannot be pigeonholed within the paradigm of rational and evidential truth. They even sometimes deliberately jettison the efforts of historicization. This also makes them better equipped to deal with marginal narratives including “minority pasts” which Dipesh Chakrabarty defines as the:

constructions and experiences of the past that stay ‘minor’ in the sense that their very incorporation converts them into pasts ‘of lesser importance’ vis-a-vis dominant understandings what constitutes facts and evidence (and hence vis-a-vis the underlying principle of rationality itself) in the practice of professional history (475).

While in this specific instance, Gangopadhyay’s poem does not exactly engage with “minority pasts”, it is about marginal spaces and characters in the city whose existence is obliterated in the brightness of the day. In the “City of Memories I”, the stanzas assume the corporeal body of nostalgia by fusing different time, space and subjective histories in their oscillations in the spatio-temporal orbit. And like the actual body, the textual body is pervaded by affects that are generated by the sense stimuli. Thus the “City of Memories 1” opens with a distinctly tactile description of nostalgia in the first few lines:

At me *tugs* night’s sleepless river,
 At me *pulls* the secret dark
 Breaks my sleep and opens wide
 The locked doors of midnight.

(my emphasis; 14)

The choice of words like “tug” or “pull” demonstrate how nostalgic affects impinge upon the persona’s body, drawing him out of slumber to explore the secret recesses of the night as he has done in his youth. Again, the condition of sleeplessness itself influences the deciphering of space

(“familiar roads turn labyrinths/ My *beguiled eyes* touch horizons”^{xvii}) and he is given into “illusions”. However, it also stretches his imagination. As he rushes forth into the darkness, the desolate streets of the city stretching into the infinite (“roadways filled with sky”^{xviii}) open the window to the horizons of the world that connect the “here” to the “elsewhere”:

Through whores’ neighbourhood and crashing glasses
 I walk beyond the rivers edge
 A new odour pervades the city
 To west and east, the world lies open (14).

Next, while delineating his walking tours of Calcutta in the map of nostalgia, the poet instantiates a whole new ecology of nightlife (“Now awakens the worm and flowers” or “The pariah dog in soundless stare”)^{xix} in the urban landscape that shows the Modernist artists’ predilection is for the dark and the damned. In the silence of the nocturnal hours, the hum of night city becomes audible. To nightwalkers, the streetscape reveals “other” spaces and subterranean communities that remain unnoticed during the day. Sandipan Chattopadhyay writes in *The Days and Nights of Kolkata*:

On the wide footpaths at Shyambazar crossing, household after household can be seen lying down. Straw mats, mattresses, blankets--they have everything. In the light that pours down on them from the flock of halogen posts, these people are indeed supposed to glow. And they do. Coming

upon them after a bout of rain, it looks as if yellow flowers are strewn about everywhere (Trans. Aweek Sen, 253).

While the night conceals the familiar under its pall, unseen forms now become perceptible. The night brings into visibility the precariat living on the edges of the city:

In the deeper night I saw a myriad families on sidewalks,
On Howrah Bridge the carefree, terrifying laugh
Of the naked powerful madman.

(“City of Memories 21” 26)

The outlying and the peripheral population, whose existence has been discounted, forgotten or obscured, reemerge in the night city along with the deviant and the non-normative bodies. “Who walks alone in the streets at night?” Beaumont poses the question his book. The answer is hardly unknown:

The sad, the mad, the bad. The lost, the lonely. The sleepless, the homeless. All the city’s internal exiles. ‘The night has always been the time for daylight’s dispossessed’, writes Bryan Palmer, ‘– the dissident, the different.’ Solitary strolling at night in the city by both men and women has, from time immemorial, been interpreted as a sign of moral, social or spiritual dereliction (Beaumont 3).

It is, thus, not unnatural that the nocturnal landscape would become the chosen haunt of dissident poets whose rebuttal of the sclerotic social

order, comes together with their love for the “invisible population”—the outcasts, loiterers and vagabonds and the poor who take over the night city. A nostalgia for the decadent figures in literature, and the prototype of the Bohemian artist has inevitably drawn them toward the Dionysian energy of city underclasses in impoverished neighbourhoods. And in narrativising their encounters with forbidden places and transgressive subjects (addicts, alcoholics, lepers, madman, pimps and prostitutes), they altered the representations of the city, as a drive to decolonize the mental landscape from the prohibitions and prejudices by normalizing the “otherness”.

CONCLUSION

In these poems, the convention of nocturnal revelry and the endless walks through the city translated into a performance of nostalgia within literature of the time. The literary landscape of the textual city thus became a simulation of the lived spaces and cities of the mind. They brought forth a new interpretative geography of the urban space, first, through the act of night walking, and then through the inscription of these urban explorations in literature. By reconfiguring (and regularizing them in their lives) the subversive practices of the night, the dissident “literary walkers” wrote back to the colonial imaginary of the “dreadful” city in the nocturnal wilderness.

Simultaneously, they fostered a subculture of rebellious youth who often shook the core of bourgeois morality to assert their difference. So, by casting aside the questions of sin or virtue in their heterodox practices,

they ventured into seamy localities, caroused with drunkards, broke out in midnight brawls, smoked pot in Burning Ghats, and then turned each of these into a formidable aesthetic experience that inspired a resistant and recalcitrant creativity.

NOTES

ⁱ The unemployment crisis ran for many decades after independence, and was powerfully captured in literature and films made at that time. Veteran filmmaker Satyajit Ray's Calcutta Trilogy, Mrinal Sen's *Interview* among many others, grappled with this issue in films.

ⁱⁱ The Naxalite Insurgency in the late 60s and 70s got its name from the armed peasant uprising (1967) in Naxalbari, a small village near Siliguri in West Bengal. While in Naxalbari, the revolt was jointly led by the tribal and communist-Maoist leaders of North Bengal against the persecution of the local landlords, the movement rapidly spread in other parts of Bengal.

ⁱⁱⁱ See Talcott Parson's translation of Max Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, 1905

^{iv} Sandipan Chattopadhyay (1933-2005) is most significant prose writer of the Krittibas group, who emerged in the 60s with his book of short stories, *Kritadash Kritadashi* ("Kritadash" literally means slave and "kritadashi" is its feminine form). He adopted an experimental avant-garde narrative style for his prose. Born and raised in Kolkata, Chattopadhyay's novels and stories are about the lives in the city, caught in various cross-currents of metropolitan existence. His writings dealt with the crises and "wounds" of urban civilization and he famously proclaimed in his introduction to *Upanyash Samagra II*, that the task of the novel is to open the bandage and lay those wounds bare.

Chattopadhyay was awarded by Sahitya Academy for his novel *Ami O Banabihari (Banabihari and Myself)* in 2002 and Bankim Puraskar 1995. Some of Chattopadhyay's notable works include *Ekhon Amar Kono Asukh Nei (I Have No Illness Now)*, *Cholera Dinguli Te Prem (Love in the Days of Cholera)*, *Ami Arab Gourilla der Samarthan Kori (I support the Arab Gourillas)*, *Kukur Samparke Duto Ekta Katha Ja Ami Jani (The One or Two Things I know about Dogs)* or *Dhangsher Madhya Diye Jatra (Journey through the Ruins)*.

^v Sarat Kumar Mukhopadhyay, 'Motto Obosthyay Rochito' (*Composed under Intoxication*), *Shrestha Kabita* (Kolkata: Dey's Publishing, 1999)

^{vi} Sayam Bandyopadhyay, 'Interview with Sarat Kumar Mukhopadhyay' (*Boier Desh: 'Sakhyatkar'*, www.desh.co.in/story/%E0%A6%B6%E0%A6%B0%E0%A6%A4%E0%A7%8D%E2%80%8C%E0%A6%95%E0%A7%81%E0%A6%AE%E0%A6%BE%E0%A6%B0-%E0%A6%AE%E0%A7%81%E0%A6%96%E0%A7%8B%E0%A6%AA%E0%A6%BE%E0%A6%A7%E0%A7%8D%E0%A6%AF%E0%A6%BE%E0%A7%9F).

^{vii} This connection often extended to other anti-establishment and avant-garde literary/artistic communities across the world. For instance, several poets of the *Krittibas* group developed a great camaraderie with the Beat poets of America such as Allan Ginsberg when he visited India.

^{viii} c.f. Dipesh Chakrabarty, 'Adda: A History of Sociality', *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* for a detailed study of Calcutta's *adda*. While looking at the institution of *adda* in its contemporary form Chakrabarti points out that there is a nostalgia inherent in the structure of *adda* for old forms of sociality such as musical soirees or majlish. "The democratic *adda* carries within its structure a nostalgia for *Majlish*. (194)

^{ix} Centred on the imaginary conversations of *rawker adda* immortal characters and stories were created in Bengali literature like the anecdotes of *Teni da* and his three companions by Narayan Gangopadhyay, Premendra Mitra's *Ghona da* stories etc.

^x Lord Shiva, one of the principal deities of the Hindu pantheon is also referred to as the *Mahadev/Mahadeva* (loosely meaning the "Great God". In the Hindu trinity, he is the supreme "destroyer" of both evil and living beings, to regenerate the process of creation. Apart from being worshipped in the form of the *linga* (phallus) which represents "male creative energy" (S. Gupta 2), the other representations of Shiva in popular religious iconography, include an ascetic figure, deep in meditation:

Shiva is three-eyed, wears the crescent moon as a diadem on his forehead and carries the celestial Ganga called Mandakini, an emblem of purity, in his matted hair... the matted hair of Shiva are complications in the affairs of the world. Ganga is the ceaseless flow from the beginning to the end of Time... Shiva's body is smeared with ashes... he wears a garland of pearls and snakes and has a tiger-skin for a loin cloth. (S. Gupta 9)

^{xi} Ginsberg recalls in an interview with Suranjan Ganguly in 1993 that when he was twelve years old, he heard an American “give a lecture on yoga in Patterson, New Jersey” which intrigued him immensely and was “vivid in his mind” till date. See, “Allen Ginsberg in India: An Interview” (1993).

^{xii} See, *Bhagavad Gita*, Sloka 2.22

^{xiii} Shakti Chattopadhyay, ‘E Boro Sukher Somoy Noy’, *Shrestha Kabita* (1973; Repr. Kolkata, Dey’s Publishing, 2012), p.48.

^{xiv} It has been held that the name *Neera* indicates several “Ni”-s or *Ni ra* (*ra* represents a collective) and *Ni* is a common suffix in women’s name in Bengali as in *Banani*, *Sarbani*, *Malini*, *Nalini*. So *Neera* is not just a woman but an amalgamation. Sometimes *Neera* poems are read as odes to the city itself.

^{xv} In *The Production of Space* (1974), Marxist philosopher Henri Lefebvre proposed a spatial triad, delineating three orders of spaces—the “representation of spaces” (conceived spaces), the “spaces of representation” or “representational spaces” (lived spaces) and the “spatial practices” (perceived spaces). The “representation of spaces” addresses the dominant spaces in any society that are conceptualized and constructed by architects and planners. They are invariably marked by ideologies, jargons and other discourses of power wielded by different authorities and institutions. In contrast to these “conceived spaces”, there are spaces of everyday experience that Lefebvre calls the “spaces of representation” that are “directly lived through its associated images and symbols” and hence, they are “space of “inhabitants” and “users”” (Lefebvre 39).

^{xvi} The marriage metaphor might have a personal association. The poem was composed around the time of his marriage, which he cancelled trice before entering wedlock.

^{xvii} “City of Memories 1”, p.14.

^{xviii} p. 14.

^{xix} “City of Memories 1”, p.15.

CHAPTER V

“THE INHERITANCE OF LOSS”: NOSTALGIA AND TRAUMA IN THE NARRATIVES OF INDIAN PARTITION

When I was younger, I used to see my maternal grandmother, who was a partition refugee, ask everyone who came to her house, "Tomar basha kuthai silo? (Where was your home?)" A question that I found funny and often embarrassing to be honest.

Now many years later, as I come back to my home in Kolkata and I see this crow's nest perched on our window grill, I think maybe I understand that question.

(Dibyadyuti Roy: *Facebook Timeline*, June 6, 2014)

The partitioning of the subcontinent by the British government in 1947 into two nation-states—India and Pakistan—at the end of their colonial rule, uprooted nearly fifteen million people from their homes across the borders. Literature grappling with such histories of coerced migration, violence and exile often looks back at these events through the prism of two antithetical memories: traumatic and nostalgic. The “traumatic” alludes to a lack or a “hole in the narrative of the past” (Vegso 12). Nostalgic re-inscriptions, in contrast, are characterized by excess that adds something to this past “which is not necessarily there” (Vegso 12). In the narratives of Indian Partition, trauma and nostalgia are poised against each other, even sometimes at the cost of reducing the complexity of historical

memories into two supposed binaries— “memory as destruction, [and] memory as salvation” (Schwarz 42). Such dyadic structures, which attempt to contain and conceptualize the whole corpus of Partition memory, might be regarded with a degree of suspicion. Yet it is impossible to deny the crucial role they played in the discourses surrounding the Partition.

Keeping in mind their centrality in Partition narratives, this chapter sets out to understand nostalgia in relation to trauma. This is achieved by examining the affective memories of a place and community in the lives of Partition refugees in Eastern India, and more specifically in Calcutta. This chapter studies the complex cartographies of nostalgia that pervaded the Post-Partition city against the refugee crisis in the 50s and 60s.

The accounts of Bengal Partition here mostly speak about its aftermath in Calcutta in view of the refugees’ struggle and their acculturation in the swarming city, particularly, through Sunil Gangopadhyay’s 1971 novella, *Arjun*. The name is an allusion to the epic hero Arjun in *Mahabharata*, which becomes an underlying reference point in the unfolding of its layered narrative. Such invocation of the epic universe was common practice in writings on the Partition. Dharamvir Bharti’s play *Andha Yug (The Dark Age)* looked at the devastation of Partition through the great Battle of Kurukshetra in *Mahabharata* where the warring brothers stood against each other, leading to the annihilation of humanity. In the context of *Arjun*, Debali Mookherjea-Leonard posits in her essay “The Diminished Man” that:

...Mahabharata—that tangled skein of narrative whose date, place and purpose of composition seem destined to remain forever enigmatic. The enigmatic character of Mahabharata is compounded by the dark mystery of its content, the narrative's near complete lack of moral orientation.... The epic relates the dissolution of human bonds, contestation over territory, and a massive senseless loss of human life. Like the postcolonial present, at the Mahabharata's narrative core lies an irredeemable act of violence against civility, brotherhood and women (50).ⁱ

Arjun is thus a scaled-down, contemporary version of the ancient epic against the chaos and savagery of the Post-Partition years. While the plot covers the years between the Partition and the inception of the Liberation War in East Pakistan for the state of Bangladesh in the 1970s, mostly in flashbacks, the main events occur in a period of two months. It is set between two failed attempts on the life of its eponymous protagonist in a refugee settlement in the outskirts of Calcutta (like so many that cropped up in the 50s, 60s and 70s). Arjun is a young man pursuing his doctoral research in chemistry. His academic achievements—for which his picture featured in the newspaper when he received a medal from the president of India—makes his disenfranchised community, battling with poverty and neglect for their subsistence, extremely proud.

In his colony, Arjun stands against the powerful local entrepreneur and his men to protect its inhabitants from being banished from their homes for the second time. After unremitting hardships for several years, the immigrant community to which Arjun belongs manages to rebuild their

homes in the host country. However, the security of their dwellings is once again endangered by the greed of a conniving industrialist, Kewal Singh. He attempts to procure the colony's land for a plywood factory by burning down the houses of the refugees, just the way it was done in India or Pakistan after the Partition to drive away minorities from the new nation. As most of these settlements around Calcutta were for a long time considered illegal occupations, the law enforcement personnel were often reluctant to help them in crisis. In the novel, Arjun eventually manages to save the colony through the intervention of his university supervisor Abaneesh, who succeeds in mobilizing the media in favour of the refugees after Arjun is injured in a violent encounter with Kewal Singh's men. Thereafter, the government is forced to register the ownership of the land in the residents' names (as was done with several squatter colonies, years after their occupation). Gangopadhyay's novel bears testimony about this unflinching battle of displaced people against their treatment as disposable—as groups who could be moved from one place to another like expendable objects. The novel explores “home-sickness” against the aftershock of Partition, when “home”, which is founded on the notions of permanence and security, itself becomes *unheimlich* and contingent for religious minorities.

Along with the crisis of refugee resettlement in Calcutta wreaked by the Partition, this chapter glosses over the significant growth of the football subculture in the city in 1950 and 60s. It extended the hostilities between the refugees and the hosts to the sporting fields of the Calcutta Maidan. In the Pre-Independence era, similar rivalry between football teams

represented by the British and the Indians embodied the struggle between the colonizer and the colonized population for mastery over a sport that was undoubtedly a gift of colonial modernity in South Asia. After 1947, this competition primarily between *Mohun Bagan* (deemed India's national club) and East Bengal Club (upheld by the refugees from East Pakistan after the Partition), significantly elicited cultural nostalgia built around the rhetoric of nationalism and the discourse of the Partition. Consequently, there ensued a war of memories, and by extension, a war between irreconcilable nostalgias that impinged upon social identity, nation building and citizenship in the postcolonial Indian state, where divergent voices resisted any monolithic assumptions about a national culture.

In the last part, the chapter culminates in a study of the restitutive role of nostalgia in literature, particularly after Partition. It is seen that in specific localized contexts an evaluation of the past through the lens of nostalgia can mitigate mutual animosity or conflict between communities with a history of co-habitation. The final segment therefore interrogates how the attachment to a shared past that united the Bengalis across the borders in Calcutta or Dhaka for the cause of Bangladesh or a Bengali nation in the 60s, itself became a panacea to Post-Partition trauma.

After Partition, nostalgia has been a major component in both public and literary discourses. Despite the repeated acknowledgment of its overpowering presence in Post-Partition societies, a sustained interrogation of nostalgia as an affective category has been rare in the critical literature about Partition, unless it is read as an appendage to

traumatic memories. This chapter addresses this gap and looks at the different, and often conflicting shades of nostalgia that informed the discourses of nationalism, nation-building, belonging and loyalty in Post-Partition India. However, before moving into these variegated functions of nostalgia, I shall explore the relationality between traumatic and nostalgic affects by comparing their depictions in Punjab and Bengal Partition respectively. The following section will, thus, locate how the portrayal of trauma impacted the representation of nostalgia in Post-Partition literature.

THE TRAUMA OF PARTITION: “BODY MEMORIES” IN THE REPRESENTATION OF VIOLENCE IN PUNJAB PARTITION

In this section I will discuss trauma in the light of different categories of violence manifest in narratives of 1947 Partition. Geopolitically, the Partition line demarcating the boundaries between India and Pakistan executed on the eve of Independence by the British architect and the chairperson of the Border Commissions, Sir Cyril Radcliffe, primarily affected the provinces in the North-West and the East. The Radcliffe Line cut through Punjab and Bengal, with the Muslim majority areas in the north-western region, forming the new state of West Pakistan and its eastern counterpart dividing Bengal, as East Pakistan (now Bangladesh after the 1971 war of Independence). In the following, I analyze why the bulk of work on Partition from Punjab is perceived as the *literature of violence* in popular understanding and the Eastern section as *literature of nostalgia*.

Reports of genocide that followed Partition in Punjab often emphasize the massive bloodshed and horror that dominated the event. For many, the memories of inter-communal violence in Punjab were so strong that the immediate effects of the Partition eclipsed strains of subterranean nostalgia. Also, tales set in the Punjab have concentrated mainly on the event. In contrast, the Bengal Partition stories have focused more on Partition's afterlife, which gives them greater scope to explore nostalgic affects. In the past, historians, literary scholars and social scientists such as Urvashi Butalia in *The Other Side of Silence* (1998), Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin in *Borders and Boundaries* (1998), and Jashodhara Bagchi and Subharanjan Dasgupta in *Trauma and the Triumph*, an edited anthology from Eastern India in 2003, made significant interventions to anchor the multilayered and often "incompatible" genealogies of silence around the forced migration of the Partition. Their projects often aimed to encourage survivors to work through their trauma by articulating them so that they were "able to distinguish between past and present and to recall in memory something happened to one (or one's people) back then while realizing that one is living here and now with openings to the future" (LaCapra 22).

Human memory has the cognitive capacity to achieve conscious "mental construction" by which familiar and recognizable experiences are automatically accommodated within an existing flexible meaning-scheme. In contrast, there are terrifying memories coded as trauma, which resists assimilation in existing mental structures and remain irretrievable under ordinary circumstancesⁱⁱ. They can never be located within a rational

historical narrative. The language that constitutes the human subject, falls short in its mimetic possibilities in traumatic human conditions like a genocide, which exceeds our comprehension and resists assimilation. So, to engage with trauma in literature and culture:

is to be concerned with the tension between what is known and what is not known, and with the impact and dynamics of the woundedness [...] not only its purely physical instantiation, but in all its reverberations. This is what brings the study of trauma to the uncertainty of truth, the impossibility of bearing absolute witness to catastrophe, the multiplicity of historical narratives. (Atkinson & Richardson 5).

Partition testimonies—both fictional and non-fictional, are thus replete with traces of perplexing silences. Characters fail to speak, and instead, their gestures become conveyers of the traumatic affects.

To contextualize our understanding of the nature of trauma and victimhood and concomitantly their representation in Partition literature, we may take an example from Saadat Hasan Manto (1912-1955), one of the finest chroniclers of Partition in the Western frontier. His story, “*Phundane*” (meaning, a fringe or tassel made of thread), which I have deliberately chosen to initiate a brief study of violence in Punjab, is not a standard representation of Partition in its lack of direct reference to the event and the rejection of a realist narration. Instead, Manto radically rewrites the lived-reality in his story to evoke the all-encompassing chaos and the meaningless violence that inundated the everyday existence of ordinary citizens in times of the Partition.

Subaltern historian, Mushirul Hasan, working in the field of Partition history, in a foreword to *Bengal Partition Stories: An Unclosed Chapter*, hailed literature as “an alternate archive of the times” which articulates “what is peripheral to recorded history—the actual impact of official decisions on the everyday life of the people” (xiii). Manto’s short story indeed creates an “alternate archive” as Hasan proclaims, but not so much as a reflection or a mirror in the “realist dispensation” (Hasan xiii), but by embedding the very process of violence in the narrative of trauma. The writing itself becomes an utterance of the insane interlaced with spurts of macabre violence, almost lacking any coherence like the madness that was raging everywhere during the Partition:

a cat gave birth to several kittens behind the bushes, all of which were eaten by a tomcat. Then came along a bitch who gave birth to pups in the same spot [...]. They were poisoned one by one, as was their mother. Had the father been alive, he would have been poisoned too [...]. In the same garden, a young man had murdered her maid in cold blood. He had strangled her with a red silken cord with pompons,¹ the cord that she had purchased from a street vendor a week ago for eight annas and which was used to hold her trousers in place. The murderer had strangled her so savagely that her eyes had nearly popped out of their sockets (242).

¹ A **pom-pom**, **pompom** or **pompon** is a loose, fluffy, decorative ball or tuft of fibrous material. Pom-poms that come in many colors, sizes, and varieties are generally used to decorate a dress by tying them to the loose ends of chords or strings and then stitching to cloths. They generally dangle like bells.

The story lacks a conventional plotline apart from a series of strange deaths, births, and marriages, but its principal events occur in a house with a garden. The proliferation of incidents within the premises of a single home with occasional references to the outside world, only makes the ambience more stifling.

Phundane talks about an unknown woman, who had witnessed several traumatizing incidents, including the murder of her maid, probably followed by a rape. The sight of her dead servant left her in a state of shock: “So high was her fever that she had fallen unconscious” (Manto 242) and since then she had not recovered from the trauma. The statement from the narrator that “Perhaps she was still unconscious” (242) is suggestive of her mental debility as an aftermath of the trauma. Then there is an uncanny recurrence of the pom-pom with which her maid was strangled at every site of violence. Its spectral presence haunts the protagonist till the very end, finally choking her to death. The story makes powerful correlations between body and affect as “body memory” or “pain memory” with allusions such as “body gushing out tears” (Manto 246), breasts going dry, and “eyes popping out” or being embedded in the socket. Then of course, there are references to the protagonist’s friend who develops “two bellies, one old, one new” (244), probably referring to her pregnancy, but then we realize there is something perverse in that too when we learn that her friend’s milk had gone sour. Indeed, through recurrent flashbacks and repetitions, the narrative establishes a vicious loop of marriage, birth and death, all of which are caught in a circuit of intractable violence. Thus, the site of birth and the most gruesome death become mutually

interchangeable: in the garden where the kittens were born and killed by a tomcat, a young man murdered the maid in cold blood” (242). Next on the same ground a wedding is held: “The bride was a bitch with a pretty red dupatta ² with sequins draped around her. Her eyes had not popped out; they had become even more deeply embedded in their sockets” (Manto 242)—the events central to in one’s life are not only desacralized in the narrative but home, the very anchor of one’s security and protection is violated in an abnormal world, where both the private and public are in a grip of uncontrollable madness.

While talking about trauma novels, Robert Garratt asserts that:

Plot, by which we mean the development of interrelated events and incidents that determine the story, is intermeshed in varying degrees [...] with the voice of imagination that attempts the reconstruction of incidents. The emphasis [...] on the traumatic voice or point of view frequently stretches conventional fictional methods towards certain stylistic innovations, especially in treatment of reality and the limitation of perspective (6).

Phundane, engages with similar stylistic experiments within the narrative space, for realism is not sufficient to accommodate the chaos that lies “within” and “without” in the Post-Partition landscape. The story’s intentional non-referentiality, makes the violence appear more vivid and pervasive. At times, the author creates false effects of verisimilitude by giving us some vague names like the *Ajanta Art Studio* or the poet Meeraji

² A scarf or a stole

who is as “obscure” as her poetry. These signifiers do not lead to signifieds. They add nothing to our existing knowledge apart from confusion. The story in its sheer absurdity is perhaps a fitting response to the lunacy of Partition and the cycle of violence it unleashed where brothers drew “the last drop of blood from their brothers’ veins” and shed tears “because they had been unable to kill their humanity entirely” (Manto, “To My Readers” 656).

By withholding any allusion to time or place names apart from the oblique use of the referential signifier *Pakistan Mail* in a couple of places, the text employs a narrative strategy that universalizes the experience. It is nowhere; therefore, potentially it is everywhere. Nevertheless, the reference to *Pakistan Mail* limits the spatio-temporal domain to an extent. It is possibly a period after 1947, the year in which Pakistan came into being, and the place could be somewhere in India or Pakistan, the countries between which such trains travelled regularly, carrying refugees and their mutilated, dead bodiesⁱⁱⁱ. Nonetheless, without conclusive details, the place could be anywhere in the subcontinent like *Hamlet’s* entire “Denmark’s a prison”. After Partition, the subcontinent had become a human Golgotha stinking of putrefied corpses in streets and homes. The overwhelming allusions to all sorts of eschatological bodies in *Phundane*, and the scattered descriptions of violence including rape, assaults, or murder that saturate the text, instinctively remind the readers of Manto’s chronicle (*kissa*) of the Partition.

After a series of fuzzy details of mindless violence, the final moments of the story are revealing. As words fail the protagonist, she

literally acts out the scene of trauma by inscribing it on her body through painting. The body becomes the surface upon which the traumatic events write themselves:

She was tired of painting and her paint brushes and colours had remained boxed since long. One day, she had opened the box, mixed the paints in separate bowls, washed and cleaned the brushes and gone and stood naked in front of her mirror. Then she had painted her body because she sought absolute nudity.

It had taken her all day to paint the front of her body. Without food or drink, she had stood facing the mirror, confidently painting her body with strange lines and loops... (trans. Khalid Hasan; 247)

This bodily performance of her memories through painting itself involves a certain form of violence which is transmitted through “the strange lines and loops” (247) and folded into the body:

She had stood in front of the mirror wearing a necklace with pompons, but it was not a real necklace; she had painted it on.

Suddenly she had felt the necklace tightening itself like a noose around her throat, cutting into the flesh. She had stood there watching her eyes bulge out and the veins in her face become visible. She had screamed and fallen to the floor on her face. (248)

The entire story, including its failure to hold an intelligible plotline becomes the narrative enactment of its protagonist’s mental debility from trauma. Through the very act of narration, the story “both describes an

external violent action and portrays the mind's attempt to remember it" (Garratt 6), with its incapacity to respond to it adequately.

Indeed, Manto's short story shows the engulfing violence that filled Partition literature from the north-west, forcing nostalgia to take a backseat. In fact, several survivors were often trapped in the loop of compulsive repetition of the traumatic memory, which not only prevented them from looking beyond the distressing past but also made them resist the processes of "working through". They developed what LaCapra calls a "fidelity to trauma" in the form of an interminable mourning often with a feeling that "in working through the past in a manner that enables survival or reengagement in life, one is betraying those who were overwhelmed and consumed by the traumatic past" (LaCapra 22).

In Partition literature, while there is a tendency to homogenize the whole corpus by bringing Bengal and Punjab under the same rubric, there are discernible differences in the thematics, especially in the treatment of violence and trauma which exhibit distinct region-specific characteristics. It has been argued by scholars such as Jayanti Basu in *Reconstructing the Bengal Partition* that without trivializing the riots in Khulna, Dhaka, or Noakhali around the Partition, it may be said that "violence, at least in terms of sheer slaughter, was significantly less in Bengal than in Punjab" (99). Unlike Punjab, where actual instances of physical brutality were staggering, in Bengal the fear of aggression— the dreadful stories of carnage floating in the air, and consequently, the responsibility of the male members of the family to shield the honour of their women from the imminent threat – often resulted in the uprooting of families from their

homes. However, this does not mean that instances of rape, violence or murder in the Eastern frontiers were insignificant. Indeed, there are chilling accounts of communal vendetta in Noakhali, Bihar and even in Calcutta. Nonetheless, the migration in Bengal was not an overnight process. People came in successive waves through the 50s, 60s and the 70s, unlike Punjab where the borders were practically sealed for migrants few years after 1947.

Thus, it is no accident that the body of work on Partition that comes from Punjab has been labeled as *literatures of violence*, counterpoised against what is known as *literatures of nostalgia* from Bengal. Such compartmentalization is partly lazy labeling, based on sweeping assumptions, but this difference in approach must also be attributed to the circumstances under which these two regions were partitioned. In the East, the Partition involved two communities—the Hindus and the Muslims, whereas in the west, the presence of a third sect—the Sikhs with their own ethnic loyalties and marginality, complicated the matter. Most importantly, in Punjab as the bulk of exchange was restricted to a period of two to three years, primarily from 1947-1950, there was a massive chaos along the borders during the swap, as both India and Pakistan were sending out and receiving the refugees at the same time. In Bengal, the process was more protracted. It began in small numbers before August 1947 and went on for many more years after the Partition in varying intensity. A few rich Hindu families already had a house in Calcutta apart from their ancestral mansion in East Bengal. Further, India and Bangladesh (erstwhile East Pakistan) have always shared porous borders. Apart from two major waves of

migration during the Partition and the Bangladesh Liberation war in the 1970s, the migrants kept trickling into the country in small groups under various appellations— asylum seekers, economic migrants, refugees or infiltrators, depending upon India's diplomatic relationship with its neighbour at that point.

Following these discussions on Punjab Partition through Manto's story, the next segment will interrogate the nature of violence, trauma and mourning in Bengal to see how they have impacted the representation of nostalgia in the latter.

“SOFT VIOLENCE”: TRAUMA AND NOSTALGIA IN THE CONTEXT OF BENGAL PARTITION

Most of the Hindu migrants who resettled in Calcutta and other places of Assam and Bengal claim that even though they had not experienced direct physical violence, they were nonetheless, compelled to move out of East Pakistan due to an inhospitable political climate. As for minority women, their position became extremely precarious. The popular conception of women as the custodians of culture and religious values rendered them vulnerable during communal vendettas. Violating a woman during riots became equivalent to the desecration of her womb, and consequently her motherhood. Simultaneously, putting a woman to shame was implicitly an insult directed at the masculinity of her male guardians—husband, brother(s) or father — those who are traditionally ascribed the role of protecting her in the patriarchy. During Partition, the security of their

women thus made the male members of the family anxious, fueling the decisions to depart.

Jayanti Basu in her book, *Reconstructing the Bengal Partition*, qualifies the violence in the Eastern frontier as instances of “soft violence” to distinguish it from the bloodbath in North Western territories, and claims that there is difference in the psychological impact that each category generates:

Direct experience of violence leaves a lasting scar on the personality and identity of the individual; at the same time, it provides a clear marker, a sort of binary distinction between the 'we' and the 'they', between the good and the 'bad', between the before and the 'after'. When there is no such event of demarcation, but only suggestion of events, the certainty of evil is lost, though negative feelings persist. The absence of a defined boundary can sometimes be worse than its presence, even if that boundary is drawn with a brush of suffering. Under anchorless and ambiguous conditions, pain becomes relatively indefinable, difficult to locate, yet it remains incessantly throbbing within. (99-100)

The prevalence of violence as a “cause” of displacement for the ethnic minorities in disadvantaged positions is an established fact in the history of Partition. However, Basu notes that the “soft violence” challenges such a straightforward cause-effect schema. It is the lingering realization of the familiar world gradually turning “unhomely” with the breakdown of

intimacies and interpersonal bonds between communities on which the security of the home was grounded.

In Sunil Gangopadhyay's *Arjun*, the protagonist recalls such an instance of violence that indelibly altered his childhood in East Pakistan, prior to his family's departure to India from their ancestral land. Arjun, who belonged to a lower-middle class Hindu family in a small village of East Bengal, was raised in chronic poverty. He had two possessions which he held extremely dear as a child. One of them was a red and blue pencil with an engraving "Made in Germany" and the other was a silver harmonica brought from Germany, by an uncle in Arjun's neighbourhood who worked with the Navy. Nobody was ever allowed to touch those gifts except for Arjun. He would only occasionally underline very important passages in the textbook with the pencil, in the fear of eroding it too soon.

While Arjun was loved by his teachers for his academic performance, especially the school headmaster Amjad Ali, he was bullied by stronger kids in class. Yakub, the headmaster's son who took a dislike for Arjun, one day snatched away his red and blue pencil by overpowering him physically. When the boy tearfully complained about this to his elders, instead of having the comfort of their support, he was advised to keep quiet. The Hindus feared Amjad Ali because he was not only the headmaster of the village school but also the President of the Union Board. So, his son could behave in any manner that pleased him.

At this point, the narrator notes ironically, in the days when the Hindu *zaminders* or landlords were powerful, nobody ever dared to stand up to their sons or family members: "Who would have dreamt of denying

them something that they demanded? People like Amjad Ali and his family were present-day landlords” (36-37). However, while the elders chose not to attach much importance to the child’s grief over losing his dearest possession, they did discuss the incident at length among themselves, possibly fearing the consequences of a Hindu boy who belonged to the minority in the East Pakistani village, getting into an altercation with the son of an influential man in the community. This changed the world for the boy as childhood crumbled around him. Much later, in Calcutta while recalling this incident in his hospital bed, *Arjun* reasoned that:

I found it perfectly understandable that in itself, one boy taking away a bit of pencil from another in school would not seem anything but trivial to an adult. But in my case, they were definitely perturbed enough to discuss it at length. And yet, they never did anything to retrieve that pencil. That meant that the taking away of a pencil symbolized many other kinds of deprivation to them. But I was not to realize those implications at that age. All that I experienced was the frequent tearfulness of hurt, bewilderment and the ever-present sense of loss because of the red and blue pencil, so evocative of strange and mysterious lands (trans. Chitra Banerji-Abdullah; 37).

Being unable to bear the weight of his sorrow after the pencil was robbed from him, Arjun did report the incident to Amjad Ali against the advice of the elders. Infuriated by his son’s misconduct, the headmaster chastised him severely in front of his classmates and asked Arjun to box Yakub’s ears as a punishment. But this only brought worse repercussions. While

Arjun was walking back home from his school one day, Yakub with his gang “waylaid” him and took away his pencil once again, this time with his books and his harmonica. The miscreants also boxed the boy’s ears badly before leaving the place with a threat that if he ever complained to Amjad Ali about this, his body would be found in the jute fields: “All those boys boxed my ears so hard that they turned red. They also took care to inform me that it was a great pleasure for them to treat a Brahmin’s son in this fashion. Then they knocked me down and went off, one of them playing my harmonica” (40). Even without entirely comprehending the complexities that altered human relationships at the wake of the postcolonial nationhood with Partition in the subcontinent, in the child’s universe the loss was the first significant impression of violence in the adult world:

The partition of India meant many losses for many people. Some lost their lives, some everything they possessed. So if I say that I lost my pencil and that harmonica, it can sound surprisingly inconsequential. But you see those were my only cherished possessions. Along with them, I lost the red and blue and silver dreams of my childhood (trans. Chitra Banerji-Abdullah; 40).

After so many years, Arjun’s recollection of this childhood story in the hospital bed in moments of physical pain is an example of the “soft violence” on the psyche after the dissent between ethnic communities disrupted the fabric of trust and community in close-knit societies.

For minorities, a persistent fear of an impending disaster haunted their imagination. The Partition not only shattered their normative image of the home as a sanctuary of protection, but they were also forced into the realization that they would be denied justice in case of an injury. Losses would only double on registering a complaint or a protest. The “soft violence” that one refers to in narratives of Bengal Partition was the violence, predominantly done to one’s faith. It was largely a breach of trust which induced Hindu families to take that decision previously thought “unthinkable”.

As it appears, this decision, if viewed in isolation, may not seem entirely justifiable unless it is contextualized against “the omnipresent fear mentioned by all of them. One might say that the immediate persecutor was their mental state rather than an event” (Basu 103). Most felt it was impossible to stay on in East Bengal, because of the threat of torture at the hands of their Muslim counterparts. Some left with other upper-caste Hindu families in the neighbourhood, as they resented the idea of being left behind amidst communal rage. In Gangopadhyay’s novel *Arjun* recalls:

I had never seen a riot in my village. Riots never do happen in villages, they are usually entirely urban happenings.... But though we had never had to witness a riot in our own village, we could not avoid hearing about riots in nearby Narayangunj, or even Dacca. And every time that happened, a pall of fear would descend on us. The ultimate terror was to hear of a riot in India. And it was this terror that was so unbearable. Day and night there was only one apprehensive expectation—when will

it come, when will somebody attack us? (trans. Chitra Banerjee-Abdullah; 40-41).

Indeed, what was performed by brutal action in so many places in Punjab was achieved in Bengal predominantly by threatening the minority into submission.

Jayanti Basu classifies four different elements in the practice of terror: the source, the agent, the target and the victims of violence. She categorically differentiates between the source and the agent. The former may chalk out a plan of killing and execute the same, or else may appoint somebody to accomplish the task on its behalf. Basu observes that usually the people who plot the riot are different from the hoodlums and mercenaries who carry out the slaughter. In the same fashion, the victim and target of terror attacks are distinguishable. The victim is annihilated, the target may not be. It is alarmed by the action. "In this sense, the target consists of those who witness the violence and react spontaneously to the news or the spectacle of destruction with some kind of submission or accommodation, by withdrawing or inhibiting potential resistance" (106). In Bengal Partition, Basu avers, this difference between the victim and the target of terror essentially creates two sets of sufferings and sufferers: first, those who personally experienced the butchery and, second, those who were ousted by fear. "In this sense, the majority of the refugees on the western border were victims and many of the migrants in the east were targets" (Basu 106) who left their homes by preempting certain threats from the future, which may or may not have actualized in reality. The lack of a clearly identifiable enemy or an instance on which one could fix the

responsibility of violence left different (non)possibilities forever open. In this case, the only way one could fully justify one's decision about migration is by a preventative action based on the presupposition of a potential danger. While such reasoning propelled by "fear" backed the departure of several migrants in Bengal, it generated a trauma which has a less defined contour than what is represented in literature of Punjab Partition. On the Eastern frontier, we see, an event is not always a necessary "precondition" for trauma. It may be a "product of fantasy, of things that did not happen as well as of things that did" (Hodgkin and Radstone 97). In the case of several Bengali refugees, the trauma resulted from a baffling incomprehension and the anxiety about certain imagined situations. They started believing bad things would have certainly happened to them if they stayed behind. It is distinct from those who experienced and participated in direct violence in Punjab or Bengal, and found themselves permanently attached to that incident.

In East Bengal, a substantial number of the Hindu minority who later migrated to Calcutta were school teachers, headmasters/headmistresses, or were part of the administrative or ruling class as *zaminders* (small landowners), bureaucrats and government officials. Many among them were also members/leaders of nationalist parties in East Bengal. In most places, it was a case of a Hindu minority ruling a Muslim majority from whom they commanded an unquestioning loyalty for generations^{iv}. The turn of events due to Partition grossly unsettled this relational dynamic and indeed, many failed to understand how the Hindus and the Muslims, the two communities who despite their differences resisted Curzon's scheme

of partitioning Bengal in 1905, changed so much in another forty years that they could not see eye to eye.

For those Hindu families who were left in East Bengal at the time of country's vivisection (the Partition has often been described with a biological metaphor of dissecting a body), the situation worsened when they reached West Bengal, particularly in the overcrowded city of Calcutta. Here they not only faced extreme financial hardships, but had to make immense adjustments in lifestyle, ranging from social customs to culinary habits. Smarting under the everyday humiliations in their new dwellings, the refugees fondly recalled the past in their estranged homeland which seemed more idyllic against their harrowing present. It is generally this trauma of cultural marginalization that is most vividly depicted in Bengali literature where nostalgia emerges as a significant theme. As the editor of *Mapmaking*, a collection of Partition stories from the two sides of Bengal affected by the arbitrary drawing of the borders, explains:

...madness is not a trope in the Bengla stories, rather it is nostalgia and a constant dazed search to know how and why and wherefore. Instead of a pathological experience, Partition is seen as a cosmological occurrence, a loss of a world rather than a loss related to prestige. (189)

Likewise, in the anthology of Bengali stories in translation, "Homes in Emptiness" the editors, Sumanta Banerjee and Rani Ray justify their selection of Partition stories from the East that are "conspicuous" in the absence of "gory details" for a similar reason:

...the tragedy of a people threatened with loss of homes brought upon them by the decision of politicians made far away from their homes, is no less poignant [...] In fact, their emotional experiences, which may be quite often dismissed by some people as less important than the physical sufferings undergone by the direct victims of the bloodshed, could have been equally traumatizing for them. The various emotions and concerns that overpowered the people even when they were away from the scenes of bloodshed at such times—fear and panic about possible attacks on their homes, anxieties about the near ones left behind in their old homes, apprehensions about an uncertain future in the new homes, anguish over parting with friends who were forced to remain divided by communal riots, nostalgia about a home in the past from which they were forever exiled

(Introduction, n.pag).

With Partition, “home” acquires multiple implications in the socio-political discourse of the nation-state. When Partition narrative talks about being “unhomed”, it includes the exclusion from history of the homeland “made sacred by the habitation there of the ancestors” (Chakrabarty 121). The term *utvastu* or refugee that is integral to any writing on Partition, encompasses a whole new complex of affective dispositions from horror, pain, nostalgia to bewilderment and a sense of benumbing blankness. As the above passage suggests, there is a trauma encoded in nostalgia itself, for it reminds the dispossessed population about the impossibility of regaining their paradise. It hints at those intangible acts of violence

impinging upon the memory that cannot be discerned or proved empirically.

In literature of Bengali migrants, “nostalgia” is often sublimated into a desire to return to the verdant greens of East Bengal. For the refugees settling in the urban fringes where life was marked by violence and uncertainty, such imaginary forays into the rural landscape of Bengal became necessary for survival. For them, the Bengali village with all its associations—roots, stability, wholeness, and sanctity—was the site of nostalgia as opposed to a city like Calcutta, which in Partition literature and films became culturally symptomatic of the fractured and neurotic modern existence. Nonetheless, while the bulk of work on Bengal Partition primarily talks about the migration of refugees from the village to the city, there are a few accounts and memoirs which specifically focus on the nostalgia of those who left Calcutta after 1947 like the Bangladeshi novelist, Rizia Rahman. She moved with her family to East Pakistan in her childhood. In her reminiscences, she vividly recalls the Pre-Partition city:

My first understanding of belonging to a ‘country’ was born of my memories of Kolkata. That hospital in Bhawanipur. Benimadhav Street, Harish Mukherjee Road. Jogubabu’s Market, Dwarik’s Sweet shop et al. Memories flood my mind with those evenings, afternoons, and twilights at dusk. I can still hear the cars honking in the busy street of Harish Mukherjee Road. The daily commotion in Jogubabu’s Market. And the sweet curd from Dwarik’s shop, can I ever forget its taste? (Rahman, my trans.; 106).

Nostalgia awakens a feast of “sensory memories” appealing to taste, smell, sight and sound to rekindle the relations severed by the Partition. Probing the question “What is homeland without access to the materiality of land?” (43) while discussing nostalgic affects, Tonya K Davidson posits that “in cases of exile or forced relocation, both home and land become virtualized” (44). The home becomes sights and sounds in memory, as is the case with Rahman. It is a place that is defined “not by its materiality, but rather through its loss” (Davidson 44). To surmount the unbridgeable distance engendered by political maps, nostalgia crafts its own cartography, connecting cities or countries separated by time and space:

Whenever I visit London, old memories splash against my mind. I always feel that I have seen this city elsewhere. In certain monsoon afternoons, I felt as if I have come to a city that I have known for long. But I have never stayed in London for a long time. Then? While I had the experience of living in several other big cities of world, London reminds me of something more familiar. After giving it a close thought, I felt that the rains in London remind me of Kolkata in monsoon. The British I presume had built Kolkata in the model of London. Long avenues and tram lines, wide crossings, squares and parks, look exactly like London. Like London Kolkata too has those marvellous statues of British administrators, carved out in Black stones. Be it the Victoria Memorial or the architectural patterns of aristocratic houses in Chowringhee, the railings in Outram Ghat or the gas lights in Esplanade, they were all modeled after London (Rahman, my trans.; 109-110).

Nostalgia, as the poet Mahmoud Darwish explains from his own experience of exile from Palestine, becomes a form of “conversation of the absent [exile] with the absent [homeland]” (*Absent Present* 81). For the dispossessed, it assumes the task of maintaining a continuity between different temporalities and preserves a more fundamental, innate connection to the land. This makes nostalgia historically relevant, though the manifestations of nostalgia do not necessarily work parallel to history. In fact, nostalgia often turns history on its head, not only by switching historical metanarratives with *microstorias* and “private or collective mythology” (Boym xv), but also by “revisiting” space and time against history’s progressive linearity.

So far, the chapter has talked about the relationship between traumatic and nostalgic affects and the way these were reflected in the representation of nostalgia in literature against the backdrop of Partition violence. The following sections will now focus on various figurations and functions of this nostalgia in Post-Partition years.

TWO CARTOGRAPHIES: THE NATIONALIST NOSTALGIA AND THE COUNTER DISCOURSE OF THE “LANDSWEPT” PEOPLE

Freedom came with a sense of dislocation after the British left the country in 1947. The nation had to grapple with an acute identity crisis, torn as it was between its precolonial cultural past and the more recent colonial lineage. To create a legitimate historical narrative of Indian (primarily

Hindu) identity, the nation-building project often urged its citizens to look back into the myths and tradition of the past through the tattered tapestry of its indigenous culture, which was damaged by the colonial encounter. In postcolonial India, a certain nostalgia was discursively harnessed to draw upon a “tradition” that was “invented during an [anti-imperialist struggle]” (G. Kapur 267). An important aspect of this Indianization was the rewriting of the nation’s history in the twentieth century with 15 August at its centre. In this narrative, the historical data was *emplotted* to generate a nostalgia or a recall value for 15th August 1947 as the day of our deliverance from foreign rule. Beyond doubt, it is an important date in the history of Indian nation, but its unadulterated valorization, quelling the collective trauma of Partition, denies the history of millions who were rendered homeless due to India’s vivisection. In this project of producing nationalist subjects, nostalgia about a heroic struggle and redemption was directed towards the promise of a brighter future. It was selectively evoked to match the political rhetoric of nationalism after decolonization in South Asia.

This narrative, however, failed to pronounce the foundational trauma of postcolonial nationhood that was predicated upon the violence of Partition. The refusal to incorporate the multiple voices within mainstream public discourse in post-1947 India, especially the pain, shame and the guilt associated with the fragmentation of the subcontinent, resulted from a fear that admitting these polyphonic narratives could destroy the seamless fabric of nationalism. In turn, the silencing of these voices placed the identity of the refugees at odds with their new citizenship.

Consequently, the rift between home and nation created two distinct cartographies of nostalgia. On one hand, there was the state-generated nostalgia that fed on India's glorious past and valiant struggle of Independence; on the other, the subversive nostalgia of migrants, dispossessed from history, challenging the statist narratives of cohesion and unity.

Unlike empirically grounded historical narratives, as Dipesh Chakrabarty explains in *Habitations of Modernity*, that lead up to the event to find an explanation for why it happened and why it happened at the time it did, a memory generated from the Partition trauma remains "fundamentally inexplicable" (117). It emanates from a stunned disbelief at the fact that it could happen at all. Partition destroyed the sense of continuity between the past and the present. It is also the reason why nostalgia as a "prosthetic memory" figured so significantly in these narratives of Partition.

Nostalgia often has a therapeutic function which attempts to restore continuity from a past that is unreachable due to a disaster. "Prosthetic memory" helps subjects realize a sense of "equilibrium", which as Tristan Garcia asserts in *Form and Object*, entails "the necessity of feeling equal to what is no longer and to what is neither more nor less than what one was, than what always was" (297). In crises like the Partition, nostalgia bridges the irrevocable yesteryears and an equally uncertain future-present by attempting to retrieve the wholeness of the former self. In this landscape of nostalgia, the image of the "home" is not a static entity. Its shape transforms and mutates with the pathological dimensions of

displacement and the imperatives and constraints of the present. “Home” is thus an ongoing “process” of creative recollections, whose reconstructions are part of a long temporal sequence, where memories of the past abide with dreams for the future. By invoking the images of the past home, nostalgia restores the broken conduits between two seemingly irreconcilable temporalities.

It is often seen that the trauma of Partition is passed on transgenerationally as a form of *postmemory*—a term that was introduced by Marianne Hirsch to delineate very specifically the relationship between the memories of holocaust survivors and children who had not been witnesses to the event. The nature of *postmemory*, which is now used more generally in the context of traumatic events of a similar nature, is defined by Hirsch:

The distance separating them from the locus of origin is the radical break of unknowable and incomprehensible persecution; for those born after, it is a break impossible to bridge. Still, the power of mourning and memory, and the depth of the rift dividing their parents' lives, impart to them some-thing that is akin to memory. Searching for a term that would convey its temporal and qualitative difference from survivor memory, I have chosen to call this secondary, or second-generation, memory “postmemory” (659).

In the case of East Bengali refugees, the insufferable loss that was entrenched in the deep-rooted nostalgia for the Pre-Partition “home” has been transmitted across generations through reminiscences and collective

mourning. This “postmemory” takes the form of a transgenerational nostalgia, where the second or third-generation exiles find a string attached to their parent’s homeland even without seeing the place. One of the ways in which such nostalgia is conveyed across generations is through stories that create a “transferential space” (Allison Landsberg 120) or “metaphoric bridges across times and place, allowing a virtual place to be felt and remembered” (Davidson 48). Through anecdotes, what is transmitted, is not merely the experiences of the parents’ deep nostalgia for their lost object of desire, but the ownership of the past with its abiding legacy of loss. So, in the subversive counter-discourse of nostalgia, the lost abode is kept alive for the subsequent generations as “postmemory” by carefully etching out a contrasting cartography of a homeland to confront the exclusionary narratives of the state with their embedded ideologies. As Manas Ray recalls in his testimonial account of “Growing Up Refugee”:

People coming from East Bengal carried their ‘homes’ on their back. They saw the landscape grow as a part of their settling down. The landscape we created and the dialects we spoke were the only traces of our history. We kids were brought up in the midst of that landscape: it had a sensual density that made us ignore the rest of the world... (138)

For the “landswept”^v people of India’s Partition, nostalgia serves as a literary-cultural response to the loss of a homeland imbricated in a complex network of spatial, temporal and social relations. These relations were collectively commemorated in fiction, oral poetry, songs and other popular artefacts of demotic tradition. For instance, in Gangopadhyay’s

novel, one can see how Arjun remembers his home in a hamlet of East Bengal with all its affective particulars:

Those afternoons spent catching fish in the submerged rice fields, the fragrance of lime leaves in the rice, the call of chameleons from the banyan tree, swimming across to school, shivering with fear of the supernatural, climbing the date palm trees to steal the tapped, accumulated juice, accepting sweets from Amaladi, encountering a chameleon underneath a tree—my native land consisted of all this and so many other images. And I left it behind (trans. Chitra Banerjee-Abdullah; 54).

Partition chronicles are replete with such tactile inventories of human and non-human relations to the place. The recurrent allusions to the openness and the experience of abundance amid the natural environment in the former home(land) as opposed to the stultifying, gated, built environment of the city is another way of coping with life in the cramped spaces of the refugee enclaves that severely curtailed physical freedom and altered everyday rituals which gave shape and meaning to home. Nostalgia thus becomes a cardinal affect around which the identity of “*Bangal*” or the East Bengali refugee has been conceived in popular culture.

It was believed that the East Bengali migrants repeatedly iterated the phrase “amago dyashe” (“in our country”, referring to pre-Partition East Bengal) to draw upon the repository of their past that would reinstate their former glory with a catalogue of good things which were available to them prior to the Partition, like the vast tracts of “land” they had at their disposal.

The relentless struggle to own land or a roof above their heads was central to the survival of refugees in their pent-up existence. While this constant reference to the land owned by the East Bengalis became a source of disparaging humour among the Calcuttans, the protagonist in *Arjun* again rationalizes this by claiming:

It was true that many people made up stories about their past. A lot of them came to India and gave inflated descriptions of their property in East Bengal. It was only human nature to magnify the past. But it was equally true that most of us had had a little bit of land there. That was why the epithet of ‘refugee’, and being known as landless, was so humiliating to us. There was not much by the way of industry, in the days before Pakistan. Life centred round agriculture. Land was everything, which was why there was still an attachment to land (trans. Chitra Banerje-Abdullah; 99).

The landless refugees’ attachment to their erstwhile properties amplified in their evocations, reveals nostalgia’s inexorable struggle to grapple with the paradoxes, i.e. “to hold fast to that which cannot be held, but which also once known cannot be lost...there is a suffering here, but also strength and healing” (Howland 203).

THE *GHOTI-BANGAL* RIVALRY IN POST-INDEPENDENCE

CALCUTTA

In Post-Partition West Bengal, particularly Calcutta, the clashes between the articulations of nationalist nostalgia and sentiments of the refugees

were largely centered around the game of football in the cultural domain. The football subculture that developed around the *Ghotis* (the natives of West Bengals) constituting the *Mohun Bagan Athletic Club* (1889) and the *Bangals* (the immigrants from *Purva Banga* or East Bengal) represented by the *East Bengal Football Club* (1920-), took this rivalry ahead. In the 50s, football (soccer) in Bengal was wrapped in an aura of cultural nostalgia. Both communities lifted their spirits by nostalgically ruminating on past glories in the field.

In 1899, Mohun Bagan Club was founded by Calcutta aristocrats “who had the best of English education and strict Victorian values” (M. Nandy 243). Among its patrons were Maharajas, Knights, ICS officers, *zamindars*, barristers, solicitors, industrialists, etc. In course of time, it came to represent the nationalist sentiment at the peak of anti-colonial movement. It was the first Asian club to defeat a British team, East Yorkshire by 2-1 in a game of football in 1911, the year of the annulment of *Bangabhanga* (the first instance of Bengal Partition that was initiated by the British on administrative grounds in 1905 and was repealed in 1911 after tremendous public outrage). The inroads of the Indians—typecast as indolent, feeble and effeminate in the colonial imaginary—in what was seen as a quintessentially masculine sport, and their victory over the British team at their own national game gave a much-needed thrust to the nationalist spirit when the *Swadeshi* Movement was at its height. Several songs and poems were penned on this historic occasion. Enumerating the significance of this momentous event, Partha Chatterjee writes in his

treatise “An Equal Right to the City: Contests over Cultural Space in Calcutta” that:

The symbolic power of this victory over a British military team by eleven barefoot young men from the city was incalculable. It probably served to underscore the belief that despite the patent unfairness of the rule of colonial difference, the rule of freedom could provide the opportunity to a colonized people to assert its claim to equality in the public spaces of urban modernity (180).

Mohun Bagan’s association with Indian nationalism was strengthened by fact the team won the IFA Shield for the second time in 1947, the year of India’s Independence. Further, its foundation day in 1889 was 15th August, which eventually coincided with India’s official date of Independence. Mohun Bagan was deemed India’s national athletic club after Independence. This was a matter of great pride for the Bengalis who otherwise felt marginalized in the cultural map of India after Calcutta lost its status as India’s administrative capital. Mohun Bagan’s heroic victory of the IFA shield against the East Yorkshire Regiment in 1911 was thus often nostalgically invoked in the post-colonial period as an enduring contribution made by Bengalis to the nationalist movement. In contrast, the East Bengal Club started rising to prominence in the 1940s. In Post-Partition sporting culture, they became the arch-rival of Mohun Bagan with huge emotional support from the East Bengali refugees who identified themselves with the club^{vi}:

As the immigrants sought to preserve their cultural identity and integrity in a new society, they searched for avenues to prove that point. Football, in this context, was taken by the East Bengali Hindus as a useful tool to establish their social identity and cultural excellence (Bandyopadhyay 173).

Football, around which the Bengali identity was now polarized, was quickly embraced in other cultural spheres. Much of the resentment that existed between the host and the refugees in their new habitat was channeled through the bellicosities in football matches that acted as safety-valves in preventing larger outbursts of animosity. The seething discontent with the socio-economic condition in Post-Partition Calcutta, was largely contained through football's regimented acts of aggression on the field.

Films such as, *Ora Thake Odhare* (*Those on the Other Side*, 1954), *Mohun Bagan er Meye* (*The Daughter of Mohun Bagan* 1976), depicted these *Ghoti-Bangal* clashes with much humour. For the people of Eastern Bengal, football became more than a game against the inconsideration and the neglect from the state that made their lives expendable in the camps and colonies. The victories in the field rekindled male pride by addressing the crisis of masculinity that became pressing due to the forced departure from home under threat, to save their lives and dignity, and was heightened by the humiliations in a new city. Having lost everything in the Partition, the refugees were determined to hold their ground in the Calcutta Greens. The successes of the East Bengal Club and its memories temporarily reversed the equation of the refugees with the locals— they enjoyed rare

moments of power in the victories, amidst a sense of all-encompassing defeat in their daily lives.

The communities representing *Ghotis* and *Bangals* nurtured their distinctive rituals, culinary styles and sartorial preferences in Post-Partition Bengal. The squabbles between the two regional subcultures in the city are amply reflected in doggerels and rhymes directed at each other.

An example of this would be:

Bāngal manushya noi

Ure ek jantu

Lampha diye gachh e uthe

Lyaj nai kintu

Bangals are non-humans

Beasts of rare kind

They hop and jump to mount the trees

And yet they've no tails dangling behind.

In a pithy rejoinder to this insult by the *Ghatīs*, the *Bangals* too packed a punch with their witticism:

Bangal manushya noi

Debota r tulya

Kolkata r oi ghoti gulo

Bujhbe ki tar mulya.

Bangals are non-humans

They equal the Gods

Ghotīs never understand

As their intellect falls short^{vii}.

While a definitive history of the slightly pejorative terms (though often used in good humour) *Ghoti* and *Bangal* is unknown, their popularity can be traced back of the colonial period. *Ghoti*, a slang used for the people of Calcutta and those hailing from southern districts of Bengal to the west of Hooghly river, has probably come from the fact that they used a small round metal pot without a cover, called *ghoti* to store water for their daily chores. There are however, other opinions about the coinage. Earlier, most Bengali homes had private wells in the courtyard for water supplies in the household. Often the metal pots (*Ghotis*) and buckets that were used to draw water from these reservoirs were dropped into the well. To bring them out there were men who offered their hands. Like hawkers ferrying their services, they came with a distinctive street call: “*Ghoti tolo Ghoti*” (pull out your *Ghotis*). It is from this everyday practice that the moniker “Ghoti” might have come to describe the Bengalis in Calcutta^{viii}.

As for the etymology of *Bangal*, there are several theories in circulation. In the 16th century Kabikankan Mukundaram used the term *Bangal* in *Chandimangal Kavya*^{ix}, the narrative verse eulogizing goddess Chandi or Abhaya. One such allusion in the text is “*Kande re Bangal bafoi bafoi*”^x. Again, Imanul Haq points out in letter to the Bengali daily *Ei Somoy* (*Times Now*) on 8 December 2015, that one may trace the root of *Bangal* by joining *Banga* (*Bongo*) which meant cotton (“*karpash tulo*”) and Sanskrit *al* meaning “rich” or “prosperous”. *Bangal* collectively refers to an ethnic group inhabiting a region rich in cotton cultivation. However,

it was possibly in colonial period that the term acquired a deprecatory meaning when Hindus from East Bengal arrived in substantial numbers to Calcutta for work and study. They were ridiculed by the locals as *Bangals* for their gaucherie. *Bangal* (despite being homogenized in West Bengal, constituted a diverse group from different regions of East Bengal) became a stock figure in comic scenes, portrayed as a hot-headed quarrelsome and yet a gullible character^{xi}. This is depicted in Dinabandhu Mitra's nineteenth century social satire *Sadhabar Ekadashi*^{xii} written partially in the style of a Manners Comedy to portray the world of *babus* or the upper-class elites in Calcutta. In *Sadhabar Ekadashi*, the figure of country yokel in the Comedy of Manners was replaced by a comic *Bangal*. At his very introduction, Ram Manikya is presented as an oddball. His friends tease him for his East Bengali dialect and even rhyme *Bangal* with *Kangal*, usually “a pauper” or a person who constantly hankers for things:

Bangal, punti maccher kangal

Bangal gonajoler kangal

Bangal Danga pother kangal,

Bangal bhalo kothar kangal

This poem may be roughly translated as:

Bangal craves for *Punti*³ in the platter

Bangal hankers for Ganges' water

Bangal yearns for terrestrial land, /

³ a small edible fish

Sweet words, *Bangals* madly demand.

(Mitra; my trans.; 104)

The rhyme reflects the clichéd perceptions about the natives of Eastern Bengal—their insatiable craving for small fish that are found in abundance in the ponds, estuaries and numerous aquatic bodies in riverine Bangladesh. They miss their fish diet when they travel afar, especially in Calcutta, where most of these varieties of fish are either scarcely consumed or totally unheard of. Similarly, the reference to *Bangal*'s yearning for land routes came from another perception about the geography of East Bengal, which being in the delta region is surrounded by water all over, necessitating the extensive use of waterways for travel. On the other hand, the exchanges between *Ram Manikya* and his Calcutta friends also reveal certain banal assumptions about the *Ghotis* in Calcutta. One such belief was that the women in this city who have adopted the Western lifestyle were morally compromised, unlike their counterparts in East Bengal who were still guarded from the talons of decadent modernity.

As I have discussed early in the second chapter, the ascendance of Calcutta as the British capital gave it an undisputable command over the socio-economic sphere. Calcutta firmly established its cultural hegemony whereby the dialect, literature, art and entertainment of the *Bhadraloks* in the city became the model for what was deemed to be Bengali culture. Those who spoke or behaved otherwise were often laughed at, like the natives of Eastern Bengal whose habits and customs were starkly different from the Calcuttans. In *Sadhabar Ekadashi*, Ram Manikya registers his anger at this discriminatory treatment by asking: “Why do you always call

me *Bangal*? Have I drifted from nowhere in the sea?" (104). And yet, despite the protests, he is forced to submit to the ways of the city, to be accepted among the Calcutta gentry. He follows their lifestyle, and yet fails to garner any respect. This leads to his self-castigation and dismay:

Why do you call me *Bangal* always. Even after having all those inedible foods why am I still not treated as a Calcuttan? What have I not done like them? Visited a brothel, dressed myself in fine clothes, eaten biscuits from [non-Hindu] Sahibs, drank *bundil* (brandy)—even after all these if I am not fit to become a Calcuttan, what do I do with this sinful body? Let me drown myself in the water where the sharks and crocodiles can eat me (my trans.105).

This prejudice that we see in the *Bhadraloks* of Calcutta for the East Bengali natives in nineteenth century literature escalated to a different level after the Partition. The large number of Hindus who were forced to leave their homes in East Pakistan sought shelter in Calcutta, which was inadequately equipped to cope with such a flow of population. Consequently, the differences between the *Ghotis* and the *Bangals* gave birth to a new climate of hostility between the two communities, warring over the finite resources of the city. The natives often looked upon refugees with suspicion. Their conflict became particularly violent over the practice of squatting (*jabardhaka*) or the forced occupation of the uninhabited properties of landed aristocrats by the refugees who saw themselves denied minimum legal aid and succour by the Indian state. Gangopadhyay's novel narrates how several refugee families like Arjun's lived in the Railway

Station, government transit camps and other provisional settlements in and around the city for months:

Several camps were set up near the station, but there was hardly a room to move there. The station platform was swarming with human beings. These uprooted people had taken shelter in neighbouring fields under the trees. Eating, sleeping, defecating—everything went on in the same place. And, of course, cholera came and carried them off rapidly, one after the other... The local people would come to the overbridge in the station and stand and stare at us, as if we were a new breed of animals. (trans. Chitra Banerje-Abdullah; 59).

In Sealdah, one of Calcutta's busiest railway stations, conditions were abysmal. It was often compared to a "hellhole", swelling with refugees who haplessly waited for their fate to unfold in the unwelcoming city. In *Arjun*, after spending days in such nightmarish conditions, when the families heard of rumours that they might be transported offshore to the distant Andaman Islands like the convicts in the colonial era, or perhaps to the fallow land of *Dandakaranya*^{xiii} in Central India, these people finally resisted. "Having been fellow travellers on the road to suffering" gave them a "tremendous feeling of solidarity" (Gangopadhyay 64). The refugee families together walked into the city looking for a permanent shelter. They eventually succeeded in occupying some empty properties in a locality on the outskirts of Calcutta under the leadership of a man called Biraj Thakur. These were country houses whose rich landlords occasionally visited with their friends or family as a retreat from the city:

...Then we came to a suburb in Dum Dum and, sure enough, there were quite a few of those country homes. Biraj Thakur divided us into groups and allotted each one a house [which was inhabited by several people together, generally one room for one entire family] and a garden. We did not meet with resistance. The property we entered did have two guards, but they disappeared in the rush of this tide of humanity.... That was how a group of destitute people found a new place to settle. Having left their own land behind, they named this place 'Deshpran Colony' or the colony of patriots (63).

In the chaotic Post-Partition years, such forced occupations were rampant. This practice often led to violent clashes between the squatters, police and the hooligans appointed by the property owners to evacuate their land. In *Arjun*, for instance, the central conflict is built around the ownership of "land" against the refugee crisis, bringing forth the questions of rights, citizenship and law in Post-Partition India. Seventeen years after the "thirty-two" refugee families had built their homesteads in the Deshopran colony, the landlord tried evicting the squatters from his "forcibly occupied" property by conspiring with the owner of a local plywood factory in the vicinity who had plans for expanding his business on that land. When the families resisted the move under the leadership of Arjun, declining to be "homeless for a second time" (154) attempts were made on Arjun's life to remove him from the scene. Then, the houses of the refugees who refused to move were mysteriously burnt down and the land was fenced off with brick walls for the factory.

For a long time, the refugees in the city lived in fear of the police, landlords and their local goons, with the constant threat of being uprooted and “sent away” to another place. In situations of utter helplessness, they sometimes took the law in their hands, as did Arjun in Gangopadhyay’s novel, when he marched with a band of young men towards the fenced property that Kewal Singh had acquired by razing the refugee homes. While they managed to dismantle the “wall” that was built overnight after setting fire to the houses, Arjun was badly injured by Singh’s henchmen. Frequently, these encounters led to violence and death. Police often stood aside in such scuffles due to the refugees’ inability to produce legal papers. Thus, lawlessness prevailed on both sides. The refugees who fled persecution at home hoping to avert the violence inflicted on religious minorities were not only faced with the ordeal of epistemic dislocation, they had to equally grapple with ostracism and homelessness in their new country.

**POST-PARTITION TRAUMA AND THE INTEGRATIVE ROLE OF
NOSTALGIA IN LITERATURE**

Nostalgia, especially in Post-Partition literature coming from Bengal, has often been invoked for its integrative role. An underlying recognition of a shared existence, the attachment to the same landscape that nourished the Hindus and the Muslims alike, the love for the music of Lalan, Nazrul, and Tagore who has the rare honour of being the writer of the national anthem for two countries— India and Bangladesh—could not entirely sever the bond that the two communities shared for ages. In the North-West, the

relationship between India and West Pakistan succumbed to a steady escalation of political tension over the disputed territory of Kashmir where both countries staked their claim. This resulted in successive wars between India and Pakistan. It fed the forces of hyper-nationalism by bringing the implacable memories of uprooting and Partition violence to the surface. This practically sealed the hope of cross-border cultural dialogues between estranged friends for a long time. In contrast, despite the religious animosity between the Hindus and the Muslims, East Pakistan and West Bengal shared a relatively agreeable relationship and the cultural ties were never entirely cut off. Drawing precedence from the annulment of the Partition of 1905, in the initial years after 1947, some even dreamt that the two Bengals would unite once again when the differences were resolved.

A couple of decades after the Partition when East Pakistan decided to cede the control of its western wing, India strategically extended its support to the cause of Bangladesh Liberation (*Muktijuddho*) in quelling the West Pakistani army. It resulted in Indo-Pakistan War of 1971. In 1972, when the Allied Forces of Bangladesh and India defeated Pakistan in the war, Calcutta-Dhaka united in a joint celebration at the birth of a new Bengali nation^{xiv}. While this aggravated the animosity between Delhi and Islamabad, worsening the situation in the Western front, in the East the channels of cultural exchange were rejuvenated, which won huge support from the East Bengali migrants in regions like Calcutta.

During the *Bengali Language Movement* (popularly known as *Bhasa Andolon* or *Language Movement*) fighting for the autonomy of Bengali Muslims in the East against the Urdu supremacy supported by West

Pakistan, the banning of a few Tagore songs on national radio triggered a mass protest. The events gradually gravitated towards the Liberation Movement for Bangladesh. At this time, poems of Atul Prasad Sen, Jasimuddin, Jibanananda Das or Shamsur Rahman were circulated across the borders. Irrespective of the religious divides, the collective archive of Bengali literature was variously summoned, studied, appropriated and interpolated within the framework of Language Movement and subsequently, the Liberation War. It gave a political articulation to the nostalgia for a shared Bengali heritage.

This resurgence of spatio-cultural nostalgia that attempted to create a collective Bengali identity by subverting the tenets of religious separatism that was at the heart of Partition, brought the Bengalis closer, in its emphasis on *Bhasa* or the commonality of language as the essence of *Bengaliness*. This nostalgia, in its prioritization of common linguistic culture, could be perceived as antithetical to the trauma of Partition, particularly in its stress on of positive memories of the past to the exclusion of less than romantic aspects of experience. This, however, was not without problems in the context of Bangladesh's socio-economic ethos. The excessive and repeated emphasis on linguistic nostalgia by petit-bourgeoisie intellectuals from both Bengals against the foreignness of Urdu have subsided, and eventually suppressed the concern of economic exploitation of the working class by the Pakistani elites:

Such precedence of nationalist unity over socio-economic transformation served to conceal and repress a very crucial aspect of Pakistani colonialism in East Bengal: the exploitation and oppression

of East Bengali working and peasantry by the local elite, patronized and protected by Rawalpindi (P. Ghosh 12-13).

However, the problem primarily lies in the way the political articulation has been hijacked by the elites and the bourgeoisie by manipulating the linguistic nostalgia to serve their own class interest— a predicament common to perhaps most mass movements.

This linguistic nostalgia in the context of Bangladesh War is inseparable from the landscape of Bengal. Indeed, the image of Bangladesh, particularly its landscape that weaves itself in the syncretic social and cultural life of Bengal, repeatedly evoked in literature, oral poetry, songs and other artifacts of folk culture, helped the *Bengalees* across the border to maintain a link with their home under difficult circumstances. Such nostalgic evocations of landscape can be traced back to the surge of Romantic, anticolonial nationalism of the 1880s, as we have seen in Chapter Two, when writers such as Bankimchandra Chatterjee, later Tagore, Bibhuti Bihuti Bhusan Banerjee and a host of others conspicuously “drew upon new perceptions of the countryside to create, for and on behalf of the urban middle classes, a powerfully nostalgic and pastoral image of the generic Bengali village” (Chakrabarty, *Habitations* 127). Dipesh Chakrabarty in his essay, “Romantic Archives” notes that at the center of this romanticism, was a “perceived connection between identity and aesthetic activity in the realms of art, music, literature, and language” (658). So, the prolific outpouring of vernacular literature in the late 19th and 20th century, permeated with strong emotionalism and nostalgia for that quintessential *Bengaliness* which was perceived more

than an “*ethnic tag*” (Chakrabarty, “Romantic Archives” 658), became an important expression of cultural nationalism, at the heart of which stood the romantic idea of a pristine Bengali village.

Consistent with this tradition, some of the most vivid pictures of an idyllic village, rife with its own myth, history and traditions are found in Jibanananda Das, especially, his collection of sonnets, *Rupashi Bangla* (*Bengal the Beautiful*) composed around 1934. They were posthumously discovered in the Post-Partition decade of 1950s and garnered huge acclaim during the *Bhasha* Movement. In one of the better-known poems of the anthology, Das writes:

I have looked on the face of Bengal: nowhere else shall I go to see
 the loveliness of the Earth; waking in dark I discover
 dawn’s *doyel*-bird in a fig-tree; above it I see hover
 a large leaf like an umbrella—and mounds of tree-greenery,
jaam bat, kanthal, hijal ashwattha on all sides silently
 over cactus-thicket and shati-bush throw shadow-cover;
 but when did Chand from his bee-boat near Champa look out over
 that blueish shade? —*hijal bat tamal*—Bengal past loveliness...

(Trans. Joe Winter; 2)

Here the poet indulges in a quintessentially Bengali experience. With his deep affective attachment with the common and quotidian, Das restores nostalgia to everydayness of life. In his poems, nomenclature is often not generic but specific. The names of seasons and months like *Hemanta*^{xv}, *Kartik* or *Aghrayan* and the cornucopia of proper nouns such as *jaam bat*, *kanthal*, *hijal ashwattha*, or more specifically *shati-bush* (“a plant with a

tall slender stem and long tapering leaves”), or the small, white *bhant*-flowers which grow in bushes are fragrant with the smell of rural Bengal, and are untranslatable into another language. In fact, Jibanananda Das’s works are brimming with such phrases, metaphors, names and idioms that are entrenched in the spatio-cultural memory of his land. They are enriched by his allusion to the myth of Chand Saudagar^{xvi} and Behula^{xvii} from the medieval Bengali epics such as *Manasha Mangal Kavya* (The eulogy of snake Goddess Manasha) in this case. As Seely contends in *A Poet Apart*, the English biography of Jibanananda Das: “Chand from Champa and Behula establish a community of experience [with the poet], for back then they had seen Bengal’s beauty just as the poet sees it now” (93). Here the language, which is an important vehicle for sustaining this Bengali reality, is almost conceptualized as flowing out of the body of “mother Bengal” in its intimacy with the earth and earthly creatures. Language *becomes* the land through the body of the poem. While nostalgia for Bengal is perpetuated in language, there is also a distinct nostalgia for the language itself. This became most prominently manifest during the *Bhasha Movement*: “*moder garab moder asha/a mori Bangla bhasha....*” (“Our pride and hope is our Bangla Bhasha”, a song by Atulprasad Sen^{xviii} that became intrinsically associated with the Movement).

A recurring theme in Jibanananda Das’s poetry is a persistent desire to come back and remain in all his future lives to the “eternal Bengal” (Chakrabarty, *Romantic Archive* 675) which is both self-contained and complete. In perhaps the most well-known sonnet of *Rupashi Bangla*, he

imagines a certain future to express his nostalgia for eternal past-present-future of Bengal:

I will come back again to Bengal, to this Dhansiri riverside
 maybe not as a man—but a *shalik*, or a white chest kite;
 or a dawn crow maybe, new-rice-time, in misty-flight
 to this Jackfruit-tree-shade one Kartik day will glide (Trans. Joe Winter; 14)

Alison Hui in her essay, *Placing Nostalgia* explores the affective attachment to places by “thinking about place and affects as not static states or entities but rather mobile processes that are practised repeatedly. People can return home through imaginative mobilities to their places of memory, and these imaginative mobilities are unhindered by financial resources or temporal constraints” (81). And nostalgia is one such affect which facilitates this “imaginative mobility” that is vividly articulated in *Rupashi Bangla*. Apart from the aesthetic dimension, therein lies the appeal of Das’s sonnets in *Bengal the Beautiful* in the Post-Partition years. His articulation of this nostalgia, as Dipesh Chakrabarty points out, has less to do with the “nationalist, programmatic, and optimistic fervor”, rather they “carried an acutely historical sense of a twentieth-century ‘crisis’ in Bengali lives. It was as if by holding the historical and the nonhistorical together that Das could heal the wounds of the historical present” (Chakrabarty, *Romantic Archive* 679). These wounds and memories of loss inherent in modernity, acquired a special significance against the calamity of Partition, giving Das’s poetry a textual afterlife.

The nostalgia or affective memory of a place in Das's poetry, resuscitated the vital links between individual and collective identity, and the "self-in-present" with the "self-in-past", when Partition created a rupture between the continuity of the past and the present by initiating a break from anteriority.

CONCLUSION

By looking at the overall picture that emerges from the representation of trauma in Manto's "A Strange Tale" early in the chapter in the context of Punjab, and nostalgia in accounts from Bengal, one could discern the ways in which trauma and nostalgia may potentially historicize an event like the Partition through methods of exclusion and proliferation of historical details. The excess of possibilities that characterizes the nostalgic reminiscences is registered in the minute inventory of names, characters or objects that are invoked with graphic and tactile detail in narratives of nostalgia, such as in the poems of Jibanananda Das. In contrast, the representation of traumatic events in Manto's *A Strange Tale* inverts the logic of mimesis in a deliberately disordered narrative that resists comprehension. Further, the paucity of proper names leaves things unsaid and unresolved, ultimately rendering the traumatic event inaccessible. Thus, the exploration of the unreachability becomes the only way of reaching out to the traumatic experiences of the Partition.

While trauma and nostalgia are generally perceived as oppositions in the affective spectrum, they share an intimate relationship within the

purview of Partition literature. As we see in *Arjun*, the image of home comes with the memories of its sudden changeover into an “uncanny”, hostile territory which made the religious minority conscious of their alterity by posing a severe threat to their life and dignity. Thus, in the narratives of lost home, nostalgia simultaneously brings forth “positive recollections of childhood and youth and the traumatic events that precipitated their departure” (Harsch and Spitzer 84). To cope with this ambivalence, exiles sometimes adopt what may be called the “psychic mechanism of ‘splitting’” (Harsch and Spitzer 84):

Like the small child who endows parental images alternately with good and bad qualities, the survivor split(s) off nostalgic memory from negative and traumatic memory to sustain nostalgia’s positive aspects. Geographical and temporal distance, and the trauma of exile or expulsion, make it difficult to develop an integrated memory of a lost home. Conflicting memories co-exist unreconciled (Harsch and Spitzer 84).

On another plane, just as certain traumatic human conditions act as a trigger to nostalgic reminiscences, there is a trauma entrenched in the very understanding of nostalgia itself—the trauma of the fragmented subject—for being dissociated and un-homed from primordial unity and wholeness, through his initiation in the socio-linguistic order after birth.

In terms of impact, trauma and nostalgia produce different results. In their early medical associations, both trauma and nostalgia were considered fatal (in certain cases), but that perception of nostalgia has

changed over the centuries. However, it must be noted that while the structural aspects of trauma and nostalgia are not necessarily culturally specific, their expressions are mediated and interpreted within certain socio-cultural contexts. In Bengal, nostalgia for a common land and language played a significant role in fostering this harmony.

Finally, nostalgia enables the exile to cope with loss by creating a therapeutic space through a reconfiguration of the past, to make it bearable. As Darwish reminds us:

no one feels nostalgia for his injury; no one feels nostalgia for pain, for a nightmare. Rather, he feels nostalgia for what went before, a time without pain except of the first pleasures which dissolves time like a cube of sugar in a cup of tea; for a heavenly time (Darwish, *Absent Present* 84).

Thus “unlike melancholia, which confines itself to the planes of individual consciousness, nostalgia is about the relationship between individual biography and the biography of groups or nations” (Boym xvi). Nostalgia thus becomes a “bridge” between the subject and the object of loss in exile by constituting a memory for “un-archived histories” and forced forgetfulness caused by pain and denial.

 NOTES

ⁱ For a comparative study between Gangopadhyay's novel, a loose modern-day adaptation of the *Mahabharata* and the original epic, refer to Debali Mookherjee-Leonard's essay in "The Diminished Man: Partition and Transcendental Homelessness", anthologized in *Partitioned Lives*, edited by Anjali Gera Roy and Nandi Bhatia.

ⁱⁱ See Caruth's *Unclaimed Experience* and LaCapra's *Writing History, Writing Trauma* for further reference

ⁱⁱⁱ During the Partition, both India and Pakistan have a history of reciprocally sending trains to the other country, packed with mutilated bodies, and body parts such as breasts. It was a perverse expression of the communal vendetta that follow the Partition based on religious incommensurability between the Hindus and Muslims in the subcontinent. There were several killings in the trains and railway stations. Khushwant Singh's novel *Train to Pakistan* is a fictional testimony to such events in history.

^{iv} In East Bengal, most of the Muslim families were "low-class cultivators" who lagged behind the Hindus in education and stature. As Leonard Gordon notes in his treatise, "Divided Bengal: Problem of Nationalism and Identity in the 1947 Partition", the Muslims were largely "tenants in Hindu lands and borrowed money from Hindu money-lenders. The Hindus, though, highly stratified themselves, included the dominant Indian minority functioning in collaboration with the British rulers" (283).

^v The term, "landswept" was coined by John Berger in his Introduction to Mahmoud Darwish's book of poems, *Mural* (Verso, 2009), to refer to the Palestinian exiles.

^{vi} Under J.C. Guha, the East Bengal team performed unusually well in the years following the Partition. From 1949 to 1952, East Bengal won numerous trophies in Rovers, Durand Cup, DCM and brought home the prestigious League-Shield in two consecutive years 1949-1950. Mohun Bagan too was back to form in 1954 by winning the IFA shield and Calcutta Football League in 1954, and was almost unrivalled till 1959.

^{vii} These poems are recollected from memory. Their exact sources are not known as they are orally circulated in Bengal, with slight variations at places that characterize any oral text.

^{viii} Nineteenth century, playwright and stage-actor, Amratlal Basu's in his memoir, *Smriti O Atmasmriti (Memory and Autobiography)* tells us that "ghotitola" were familiar visitors in Bengali households. Writer, journalist, Moti Nandy in "Football and Nationalism" speaks of a letter in the Bengali daily, *Ananda Bazar Patrika* in the late 1980s:

In the nineteenth century, when water taps were unknown in every home in Calcutta, each household had its own well. The pots and buckets would often fall into the well. In the afternoon, some men would do the rounds of the neighbourhood with a rope and a hook, shouting Ghati tulben? Ghati tulben? "Want the pots taken out?" Finally they abbreviated their call to just shouting Ghati! Ghati! in front of the houses. The East Bengalis who lived in these areas at that time, heard this daily uproar and assumed that the locals of Calcutta were referred to as "Ghatis" (as qtd. in Nandy 249)

^{ix} *Chandimangal* is a subgenre of the medieval *Mangal-Kavya* ("Poems of Benediction"), a series of Bengali Hindu narrative verses composed chiefly between 13th-18th century, eulogizing indigenous deities in the folk tradition of Bengal, against the socio-cultural backdrop of the Middle Ages.

^x Another reference is found in 16th century text, *Chaitanya Bhagavat* (composed between 1538-1550) by Vrindavana Das: "*Bangal er kodorthane hanshiya hanshiya.*".

^{xi} In the late 1950s, the stand-up comedian Bhanu Banerjee gained much popularity in Bengali films by delivering his dialogues in East Bengali argot to evoke peals of laughter. The comic situation in Bhanu comedies generally arose from his character's inability to communicate and comprehend the life in a big city like Calcutta. This introduced the figure of a headstrong, naïve and yet lovable *Bangal* in popular culture.

^{xii} While the mood and the ambiance reflects the 17th Century Comedy of Manners in England, nevertheless it is neither an unapologetic portrayal of the Europeanized Babu culture nor free from moral censures. It particularly castigates social vices such as drinking and alcoholism among urban elites.

^{xiii} DNK or the Dandakaranya Project, was designed by the Indian government in September 1958 for the rehabilitation of the displaced minorities from East Paskistan in central India near the tribal region of Bastar.

^{xiv} In his essay, "Divided Bengal", Leonard Gordon pointed out that:

The division of Pakistan has suggested anew that national and ethnic identities are not fixed essence. Men may make one choice in a period of crisis and other choices at another time...Some Bengalis—meaning for the moment those living in the Bengal Presidency as it existed between 1912—1947, who spoke Bengali and participated in the economy of Bengal—who were pushed in a time of crisis to identify with one political community having a particular national design, demanded new choices in later circumstances (279-280)

Similarly, notions of collective nostalgia can also change over shifting socio-political contexts in popular culture. During 1947, when land became a bone of contention between two religious communities, the Hindus and the Muslims denied any pleasant memory of co-habitation as neighbours for centuries, to drive out the “other” from the land. In the envisioning of the past, present and future in the “Two Nation Theory” focusing on the “divisive elements”, nostalgia was entirely exclusionary where the “religious other” had little place in the political imagination.

However, against the context of the 1971, Bangladesh Liberation War against “West Pakistan,” nostalgia for the shared language, and common memories of the land and its customs, brought the Bengalis in “East Pakistan” and West Bengal together across the border as opposed to their religious divides, showing how the affective politics of nostalgia alters with the changing times.

^{xv} Jibanananda Das and Sakti Chattopadhyay are two prominent Bengali poets who conspicuously celebrate the sights, sounds and the ‘mellow fruitfulness’ of *Hemanta* with their pen-strokes. However, *Hemanta* does not feature in the European seasonal-cycle. The English autumn is an improper equivalent, since it roughly encompasses two Indian seasons— *Satat* and *Hemanta*.

^{xvi} “A Merchant character in *Manasamangal*, a long verse narrative of 15th century Bengal, celebrating Manasa, the patron goddess of snakes” (Winter 74).

^{xvii} The daughter-in-law of Chand in *Manasamangal*. She made a brave journey on a raft with her dead husband bitten by a snake, and appeased the gods who brought him back to life. (Winter 73).

^{xviii} Atulprasad Sen (1871 –1934) was born in Dacca in British-ruled India. He became renowned as a musician, lyricist and a composer. He had composed a substantial number of songs on themes such as love, devotion or patriotism.

CHAPTER VI

**“AFTER THE EMPIRE”: HAUNTING AND NOSTALGIA IN THE
POSTCOLONIAL SPECTROPOLIS**

The spirit world around this world of sense
Floats like an atmosphere, and everywhere
Wafts through these earthly mists and vapours dense
A vital breath of more ethereal air.

(W. H. Longfellow: “*Haunted Houses*” 188)

This chapter delves into the question of whether the grotesque and the fantastic as figments of people’s imagination can work concurrently with history to interpret a postcolonial city through affects such as nostalgia and trauma. Partially predicated on the stories of legendary haunted houses of the British Calcutta, and partly on the ghosts of historical personages who have a reputation for haunting the city, it explores the capacity of such anecdotes to narrate and transform experiences that exceed the historical imagination. The phenomenon of haunting that is common to the structures of trauma and nostalgia, takes myriad “spectral” forms in a postcolonial metropolis. Like the empire, the ghost “never dies, it remains always to come and to come-back” (Derrida, *Spectre* 123), through a complex reconfiguration of the irreconcilable desires and conflicts arising from the unresolved memories of the past. Thus, a meditation on the problematics of postcolonial trauma/nostalgia in relation to the colonial uncanny opens a rich area of inquiry, posing questions about how Calcutta negotiates with the traces of the empire written into the city. As I have stressed earlier

in the thesis, it is important to read the codifications of nostalgia for Calcutta's past, alongside historical trauma and the complex of other affective and historical memories. Envisioning the past entirely through the lens of nostalgia can be both naïve and dangerous. For nostalgia, which dabbles with the desire for the ideal, may end in palming off fantasy in lieu of historical truth. This may not only undermine the multiple sites of struggle with the British misrule in India, but can also become a strategic weapon for the colonial apologists to validate their imperial propaganda, supporting Britain's paternalism towards its ex-colonies. Again, reading trauma alone into Calcutta's colonial past would be equally lopsided as it ignores a gnawing sense of cultural loss, a feeling of diminished importance that is constitutive of Bengali nostalgia at the wake of decolonization in Post-Independence India. For an affective mapping of the city one must recognize the *mélange* of its numerous non-linear histories, myths and urban legends in a mishmash of contradictions that find their way into each other. The stories of spectral hauntings circulated in public repertoire are classic examples of this ambivalent attitude towards the past.

Some of the incidents of haunting in ex-colonial societies are results of a deep historical trauma of the colonizers after their retreat, with England witnessing an accelerated economic decline following the loss of its prosperous colonies and the devastating drainage of exchequer in the World Wars. Contrariwise, in the subcontinent, independence came with its own burden of sorrows. It brought the Partition (that neat narrative of nationalism brushed under its carpet through a forced amnesia) in its wake,

leading to a longing for better times. These unspeakable secrets muzzled into silence, returned as ghosts in postcolonial narratives with England's spectre haunting the city's present. Simultaneously, these accounts also reveal how what is touted as the colonizer's past is contingent. It can be duly subverted, modified and owned by the recalcitrant colonized people to claim their stake in history. The final section of this chapter will show through the character of Begum Johnson in Nabarun Bhattacharya's novel, *Kangal Maalshaat (The War Cry of the Vagabonds, 2003)*, that the ghosts of the colonial past too, can be appropriated and radicalized to weed out the nefarious inheritance of the imperial regime.

Before moving into the accounts of haunting in Calcutta, it may be useful to attend to the term "spectre", particularly the way Derrida's use of the concept becomes relevant to my understanding of haunting in the postcolonial spectropolis. In contemporary cultural theories, the spectre has a wider implication than the traditional ghost, as Blanco and Peeren testify in their introduction to *The Spectralities Reader* by tracing it back to its etymological allusion to "visibility and vision". In its Latin root, *spectrum* variously invokes notions of "vision", "appearance" and "apparition" from *specere* "to observe", "view" or to "look at". The duality inherent in the term that alludes to both being "*looked at* (as fascinating spectacle) and *looking* (in the sense of examining)" (Blanco and Peeren 2), encompasses the protean forms in which a spectre reveals itself and is "seen" in cultural paradigms, attesting to their "suitability for exploring and illuminating phenomena other than the putative return of the dead":

In their new spectral guise, certain features of ghosts and haunting—such as their liminal position between visibility and invisibility, life and death, materiality and immateriality, and their association with powerful affects like fear and obsession—quickly came to be employed across the humanities and social sciences to theorize a variety of social, ethical, and political questions. These questions include, among others, the temporal and spatial sedimentation of history and tradition, and its impact on possibilities for social change; the intricacies of memory and trauma, personal and collective (Blanco and Peeren 2).

Building upon this operative liminality, Derrida's spectre is absent present. It is neither living nor dead, diffusing the binary between the past and the present, the corporeal body and the spirit, or the visible and the invisible. None of these categories can be read independently of the other, since they are haunted by the *traces* of those that they seek to contradict. Through repeated visitations, the spectre defies a neat line of separation between the past and the present by muddling the teleological and linear apprehensions of temporality that rest on a decisive beginning and an end.

Colonialism does not have a definite moment of closure. Like the spectre, "one does not know if it is living or if it is dead" (Derrida, *Spectre* 6) and its re-iterations that "ghost" the present often collapse the postcolonial into the neo-colonial loop. Thus, coursing through the chapter, I demonstrate that the colonial past from its beginning was haunted by the anticipatory presence of its fall. The postcolonial city, likewise, is also substantively constituted by the residual traces of its older order. In interpreting the hauntings of the empire in relation to the city's

identity and history, the spectre upholds the “undecidability” as a figure from yesteryears that does not entirely belong to the past.

As the definition had earlier indicated, the spectre encompasses a range of meanings, which alter with every recurrence in time and its changing context. Every repetition is also an “inauguration” or a beginning (a *dual movement*ⁱ that is central to Derridean “hauntology”). In its multiple differential returns in the present, the spectre marks a difference from the person whose “proper name” it bears. So, as a figure of liminality that is always haunted by “another time”, the ghost conspicuously challenges the limits of chorological time while working within it: “haunting is historical, to be sure, but it is not dated, it is never docilely given a date in the chain of presents, day after day, according to the instituted order of a calendar” (Derrida, *Spectre* 4). The interaction between the colonial uncanny and the postcolonial society in this chapter rests on how the different temporalities infiltrate each other through the ghost, often obfuscating the demarcation between and past and present of the city by the arbitrariness of a specific historical date of the country’s independence.

HAUNTINGS AND HAUNTED HOUSES IN CALCUTTA

Much of my thesis has revolved around the quest for a home in the city by exploring notions of “home longing”, “home-making” and “homing” desires. In the first half of the chapter, I examine some of the actual homes of the British residents: their private mansions and administrative offices.

This brings out traces of memory preserved in the architecture, as revealed in the stories of spectral haunting from the Raj.

The old colonial mansions in the city in their decrepitude generally evoke strong sentiments of pity as *memento mori* of their past grandeur, but are nevertheless invested with a powerful interruptive potential when they earn the dubious reputation of being haunted. As Vidler points out in *The Architectural Uncanny*, the “house provided an especially favored site for uncanny disturbances: its apparent domesticity, its residue of family history and nostalgia, its role as the last and most intimate shelter of private comfort sharpened by contrast the terror of invasion by alien spirits” (17). The spectral disposition of the houses evinces the embedded strangeness, or the subversive residues within the planned spaces in the city that remain unmappable.

These sites open “certain depth within the present, but they no longer have the contents that tame the strangeness of the past with meaning. Their histories cease to be pedagogical; they are no longer “pacified,” nor colonized by semantics—as if returned to their existence, wild, delinquent” (de Certeau, *Practice Vol.II* 136). The past in the form of ghostly disruptions in these buildings represents the *uncanny other* of the “common” and quotidian. In his 1919 essay, “The ‘Uncanny’” Freud defined the term as a “species of the frightening that goes back to what was once well known and had long been familiar” (124). The colonial houses discussed here in relation to supernatural hauntings are not really dilapidated or derelict homesteads, but libraries and busy public offices. The stories of spectral visitation bespeak an uncanny reversal of the

familiar atmosphere of these everyday workplaces by evoking the defamiliarizing moments that open the manifold categorises of “strange”, “alien” and “unknown” which the built environment of city breeds by radically undercutting the schemes of totalized urban planning.

The tales of hauntings narrated here are gleaned from various sources. The primary knowledge comes from oral accounts of the city, since written material is sparse. There are references to famous haunted sites in personal memoirs of Anglo-Indians in Calcutta. Articles such as “Anglo-Indian Ghost-Stories” (1909) and “Ghost Stories of Old Calcutta” (1990?) were published in *Bengal: Past and Present*, the journal of the Calcutta Historical Society, based on these private accounts. The stories of the houses mentioned in this chapter, also appear in a ficto-critical account *Purono Kolkatar Bhuter Bari (The Haunted Houses of Old Calcutta)* by Subhash Sammadar, which combines fertile fabulations with documented facts. Quite predictably, most of the stories related in the following section lack concrete evidence or even historical plausibility. These anecdotes become a performance of a certain past as they are played out in public imagination, casting a light on their fears, anger, happiness, or anxieties. These are thus seen as forms of affective interpretation of historical narratives that stress on the “physical and psychological experience” (Agnew 301). They throw a light on the public understanding of a past event, and simultaneously, reveal the ways in which that understanding subtly alters through its transmission across generations according to the priorities of the present.

With the triumph of the Enlightenment in Europe, sharp distinctions were made between reason and the non-rational practices in public culture. Several of these tenets of the European Enlightenment were also foundational to the awakening of colonial modernity in the Empire. They sought to reject occult practices, possession, ghosts and sorcery. The renowned writer of Bengali ghost stories in the nineteenth century, Troilokyanath Mukhopadhyay complained through his narrator in “Lullu” that:

The people of this wretched country have now become so Anglicized that when one is possessed by a ghost or a witch, they call it hysteria! When such idle talk angers those in possession of a corporeal body, the ghosts cannot be, but disgruntled. In utter contempt, they said— “Get lost, we’re not possessing anybody.” The witches too unanimously declared—“Get lost, we’re not going to eat anybody.” The ghosts and the witches of India are now silent and depressed...All the glories that India once had are now lost one by one (my trans.; 158).

In the era of “high empiricism”, while the longstanding tradition of indigenous ghosts and their European counterparts fell into disrepute, and were cast out from the modern urban societies, they survived in the margins of the culture as lore, gossips and rumors. Despite being relegated to the realm of urban myths that entailed either “the repetition of something imagined or imagined repetition” (Scott 287), their popularity in the public culture is significant. Now with the enhanced attention to the “spectral” and its political-cultural ramifications, some of these stories, as we shall

see, can be effectively deployed for interpreting the affective history of the haunted sites, vis-à-vis the city. Sometimes, these stories themselves perform an interventionist act in relation to colonialist history by pointing to the “other” hi(s)stories left unacknowledged, forgotten or repressed, by evoking fear, regret, or nostalgia. The spectral visitations reanimate the “abstract time” frozen in the architecture and “deprived of all thickness” (Bachelard 9), with memories being enacted and embodied by the ghosts through a “conjectural interpretation of the past” (Agnew 300).

OF LOVE, CRIME AND RETRIBUTION: THE RETURN OF THE DEAD SHAHIBS

As the editors of *The Spectralities Reader* posit, haunting is always attached to a location— from the “expansive landscape” to the “sites of our intimate lives” (Bachelard 8) — such as homes and properties where a specific event took place. In anchoring the past to a definite site, haunted houses powerfully espouse what advocates of memory’s spatial turn like Gaston Bachelard claim about memories being “motionless, and more securely they are fixed in space, the sounder they are” (9). Haunted houses are important case studies for spatial narratives, showing how “places of the past remain in us for all time” (Bachelard 6).

The property of the National Library in Calcutta was among the many establishments that the Muslim ruler of Bengal, Mir Jafar owned in Alipore in the 1760s. He probably gifted it to the first Governor General

of India, Warren Hastings. Later it became the official residence of the Lieutenant Governors until the British capital shifted to Delhi. Shortly after India's Independence in 1947, the National Library of India was rechristened from The Imperial Library (which was housed in Esplanade) and relocated in this mansion on the Belvedere Estate.



Figures 14 and 15: The National Library of India on the Belvedere Estate



Among the colonial edifices in Calcutta that have a reputation of being ghost-ridden, the Belvedere is the most famous. It is believed that this mansion is haunted by several spirits, including that of Lord Hastings, who spent many winters in this house. It has been reported by the night guards on duty that sounds of concerts, merriment, gay footsteps of men and women dancing in the ball occasionally wafted in the breeze during the quiet hours of the night from the rooms inside the library building. However, when the guards approached with lights, the sounds stopped. Allegedly, the watchmen in the colonial era as well as in more recent times also claimed that a European lady, elegantly clad in white, was sometimes seen sitting on the branches of the massive banyan tree on moonlit nights. She is generally identified as Madame Grand (1762-1834) whose fateful

affair with Philip Francis made her a household name in European society of Bengal.

Another report about spectral visitation in *Belvedere* that might be associated with Madame Grand is that of a bloodied Englishman who was sometimes seen at night lying inside the phantom palanquin. The story goes back to eighteenth century Calcutta, when two high-ranking officials of the East India Company were engaged in a duel in the garden to the west of *Belvedere*. These men were none other than Warren Hastings, the first Governor of the Presidency of Fort William, and his arch rival, Sir Philip Francis, an esteemed member of the Supreme Council of Bengal, the highest executive body of British India at that time. They apparently could not see eye to eye right from Francis's arrival in India. They differed irreconcilably in their war policies, norms of governance and management of the exchequerⁱⁱ. Some were also of the opinion that among many issues which could have potentially fueled the misgivings between the two warring titans was envy over the attention of the beautiful Mrs. Catharine Grand.

Catharine, Busteed observes in *Echoes from Old Calcutta*, "emerged from obscurity to occupy a very conspicuous position in the highest Parisian society as the Princess of Benevento several years afterwards" (224). She was born to a French colonial official Jean Pierre Verlée in the Danish settlement of Tranquebar in South India. This occasion is marked in J. J. Cotton's verse, attributing her charms to her birth in this European colony:

Was it the half-Danish air
Of your birthplace made you fair?
Surely some auspicious star
Shone that night at Tranquebar (41).

Later, her family moved to the French colony in Chandonnogore, in Bengal where she met her would-be husband George Francois Grand. This legendary “blue-eyed” damsel, who became better known in the Calcutta social circuit as Madame Grand after her marriage to a member of the Indian Civil Service, eclipsed many in her beauty:

All authorities agree in testifying to the extreme beauty of Mrs. Grand: in face, form, figure, and gracefulness of carriage she seems to have presented a combination quite unrivalled. But beyond this she was dowered with woman's crowning glory, a luxuriant head of hair; an attraction which has ever been found to exercise witchery over men, especially when associated, as in her case, with blonde colours (Busteed 231).

The Grands lived in a mansion near Belvedere which brought them in regular contact with Hastings, who had previously known and favoured Mr. Grand.

Philip Francis, who was already married by then, met Catharine in a ball and fell in love with her. Her marriage fell apart at the age of sixteen due to her brief and scandalous affair with Francis, and contemporary evidence such as Augustus Hicky's Bengal Gazette (December 2, 1780)

notes that she was removed to London in a Dutch ship in December 1780 and later settled in Paris. Her magisterial portrait in 1783, currently held in Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York by Elisabeth-Louise Vigée-Le Brun reveals to us her exquisite features. One of the reviewers of this painting commented on its “bewitching sensuality”ⁱⁱⁱ

The story goes that on the night of December 8, 1778 while Mr. Grand was away to dine in the company of his friends, his servant found a bamboo ladder swinging from his wife’s window. Following the discovery, Philip Francis was found coming out of the lady’s chamber^{iv}. This notorious incident, for which Francis was taken to the court and had to pay Mr. Grand a damage of 30,000 sikka rupees, was a sensation in the Calcutta high society. The English lawyer, William Hickey (1749-1830) recalls in his four-volume memoir for which he is best remembered, that “this business created much wit in Calcutta” (160). As an example, he alludes to a *jeu d’esprit* by a Colonel Ironside, who made a playful use of puns and innuendo to refer to the Francis fiasco. There is more than an element of wit in the way he relates Madame Grand’s French lineage and her proclivity towards “whatever from FRANCE-IS” with her admiration for Francis (FRANCE-IS):

Psha! what a Fuss, ‘twist SHEE, and ‘twist her!’

What abuse of a dear little creature,

A GRAND and mighty affair to be sure,

Just to give a light PHILIP (fillip) to nature.

How can you, ye prudes, blame a luscious young wench,

Who so fond is of Love and romances,
 Whose customs and manners are tout a fait French,
 From admiring whatever from FRANCE-IS!

(qtd. in Hickey 161)

Such an inappropriate action on Francis' part could have enraged Hastings. Hastings' own supposed affection towards Mrs. Grand is obliquely suggested by a Calcutta reviewer: "Hastings and Francis exchanged shots in the days when European women were few; jealousy often gave rise to these affairs of honour" (qtd. in Busted 107). Hastings may also have been angry because of his closeness to the Grands, whom he hosted in his own house in Alipore several times. Thus, political and personal motives must have prompted Hastings to deliver a long minute to the Board Supreme Council of Bengal in August 1780 that stated:

My authority for the opinions I have declared concerning Mr. Francis depends on facts which have passed within my own knowledge. I judge of his public conduct by my experience of his private, which I have found to be void of truth and honour (qtd. in Busted 111).

This was naturally a great affront to Francis's honour. He wrote back to Hastings, demanding "personal satisfaction" for the injury of his character. The matter eventually culminated in the infamous duel on the grounds of Belvedere on 17 August 1780, when the two gentlemen decided to exchange shots. In this exchange, Francis was wounded by Hastings in a gunshot (though he survived the injury). Mrs. Ellerton, a neighbor, saw to

the blood-soaked body of Francis being carried in a palanquin. Years later, there were rumors about seeing the body of Philip Francis drenched in blood, and even a spectral performance of the scenes from the duel in quiet hours of the day.

The stories of spectral visitations inhabit the interstices between history, fiction, and memory, and are infused with diverse emotions and passions—political, social or personal. Their retellings, which are now deemed to be a part of our urban nostalgia, speak of an excess of reality that open spaces: “through which something other returns” (Wolfreys 3) leading to new revelations. The ghosts are representatives of a lost world, who by their sheer presence pry open the historiography to a potential rupture or “disclosure”. For instance, while the Hastings-Francis duel is a well-documented affair in Calcutta’s colonial history, it points to something that is generally written out or effaced from public memory: the internal disputes within the colonial system. To uphold its authority over the vast network of the empire, the colonial government constructed a blanket narrative of its discipline, strength and integrity which made the “British” (in the projection of the consolidated “Britishness” which subsumed the internal differences between the English, Welsh, Scots and so on) an invincible power in the colonies. This was sometimes done by casting the internal conflicts on the colonized, who in their disunity and communal differences represented the obverse of what the “British” stood for. At other times, they deliberately followed the political strategy of “divide and rule”, either by separating ethnic or religious groups, or by pitching one community against the other. The ghostly reenactments of

Francis-Hastings duel within a microcosmic community of Europeans in the eighteenth century return as repeated reminders of the violence, jealousies, rivalries and internal dissensions integral to the colonial life and the administration in the empire. These divisions slowly weakened the fabric of its government right from the days of its foundation. The colonial present from its beginning was always already haunted by the anticipation of its fall.

These stories not only become one of the registers in which the past survives in public memory; they also represent the melding of different non-synchronous worlds. The image of Madame Grand dangling her legs from a banyan treetop evoked in these narrations fits well into the Indian or more specifically, Bengali ghosts—*Petni*,^v *Shakchunni*^{vi}, *Ekanore*, who have a proclivity towards hiding in tall trees from where they can frighten passersby. Bengali neighbourhoods, especially in the villages, are infested with such ghosts who coexist with humans. This makes them more familial than frightening figures. Their participation in the everyday leads to a degree of demystification of the ghostly alterity. The depiction of Madame Grand becomes a potent instance of how a European woman finds “home” in the Bengali cultural imaginary through the fusion of different ethos in the story that transcends the sharp divide between the colonizer and the colonized.

While it is coincidental, it is telling that India’s national library and archives is also one of the most famous sites of spectral haunting. Spectre prowling the library or a house for books evokes the conceptual metaphor of “textual haunting” by literalizing the figure of the ghost. The notion of

textual haunting is premised on the argument that texts are “systematically ‘haunted’ by voices from the past” (Rabaté xv), often through “archival intertextual strategies” (Murnane 225) where every text is inextricably tied to its past and the future. The textual identity is simultaneously constituted by continuity and slippage, the “dual moment of rupture with and debt to tradition” (Murnane 225). It is situated within a complex temporal nexus where the past and the present reanimate and rewrite each other through a reciprocal haunting by means of translation, transgression and transformation of tradition, which itself is ghosted by its futurity. The identity of the text thus extends beyond the boundedness of a book (represented by the “publication date”, “imprints” and so on)

The text, haunted by instances of its own “undecidability” that sometimes come as inadvertent revelations or disruptions from the margins of the textual universe, destabilize the narrative. This “unsettledness”, as deconstructive readings have shown, open the text to potential interpretation through a persistent proliferation of new meanings that preclude the possibility of a closure. “There is thus already at work here a certain troubling, a trembling, in the idea of text itself, something which can appear to be both real and phantasmic, and yet simultaneously neither” (Wulfreys xi).

Again, the ghosts in the State’s archive bring to fore the “anarchiving” chaotic elements which resist the violence intrinsic to the process of archive formation that aims “to coordinate a single corpus, in a system or a synchrony” (Derrida, *Archive Fever* 3) through the elimination of those anarchic traces that are inconsistent with its organizing principle.

The act of archiving in history thus entails a concomitant process of exclusion or “un-archiving”:

...every archive, [...] is at once *institutive* and *constitutive*. Revolutionary and traditional. An *eco-nomic* archive in this double sense: it keeps, it put in reserve, it saves, but in an unnatural fashion, that is to say in making the law (*nomos*) or in making people respect the law (Derrida, *Archive Fever* 7).

The spectre in the library challenges the epistemic power of the archive that the state aims to preserve for the future. The ghostly residues of the unassimilated past in the physical site of the library exteriorizes how the archive itself becomes haunted by that which is repressed and excluded, or the multiple “unarchived” elements in the margins. They not only underwrite its disintegration by positing the existence of numerous other, and often contradictory possibilities, but in the archive’s radical instability, they reveal the prospect of its “democratization” through the cohabitation of two incongruous worlds.

Julian Wulfreys in the preface to his book *Victorian Hauntings* indicates another form of textual haunting. This form of haunting depends on smudging the boundaries between the real and the imaginary, especially in relation to the spectral figures that populate a text, oscillating between the living and the dead, and at the same time being neither:

Textuality brings back to us a supplement that has no origin, in the form of haunting figures – textual figures – which we misrecognize as

images of 'real' people, their actions, and the contexts in which the events and lives to which we are witness take place. We 'believe' in the characters, assume their reality, without taking into account the extent to which those figures or characters are, themselves, textual projections, apparitions if you will, images or phantasms belonging to the phantasmatic dimension of fabulation. And it is because they are phantasmic, because they appear to signal a reality that has never existed, that they can be read as all the more spectral, all the more haunting (xiii).

In a different sense, the ghosts of Hastings, Grands or Francis who populate the stories of Belvedere are like the textual figures in the excerpt, straddled between the real and fictional and at the same time being "neither". These "revenants" in oral narratives that circulate in popular culture are drawn from history, and yet they are "projections" of public imagination and perception, often with a tenuous attachment to historical reality. In the differential reenactments, these spectral characters write and rewrite themselves with the past's changing relation to the present and consequent shifts in representation.

Not far away from the National Library is another mansion in Judges Court Road, better known as the Hastings House. This house is situated on the same Belvedere estate. Warren Hastings shifted with his wife to Hastings House around 1777.



Figure 16: Hastings House, Alipur (Alipore)

This house, like Hastings' other properties, shares a reputation of being troubled. Colin Cleghorn's *Calcutta: A Book for Visitors (1945)*, attests to the rumour, although Cleghorn adds that these stories are probably ferments of intoxicated minds. Cleghorn writes: "it is said that every night, as the hour of midnight strikes, Hasting's ghost with that of his wife, "beloved Marian", drive up to their old residence in a ghostly silent coach and six. If you want to make sure of seeing these spirits I suggest you sit up near the porch and take your own spirits with you in a bottle" (44). The story however, bespeaks Hasting's attachment to this place which he was forced to leave due to his impeachment in London on charges of corruption and money laundering. In fact, Hastings so loved

this house that when he returned to England, the gardens of his mansion at Daylesford were laid out like his garden at Alipore.

Just before his wife's departure to England—Hastings followed afterwards—he commissioned the celebrated neoclassical portrait painter Johann Zoffany for a portrait series. Zoffany, who was touring India at that time, painted portraits of most of the eminent members of the European community. Among the ones painted for Hastings, the best known was an intimate conversation portrait of him and his wife beneath the sprawling banyan tree with their bedecked Indian maid holding her mistress's hat^{vii}.

The house in Alipore, where the couple had spent some of the best times of their life, formed the backdrop faraway. In the painting, Hastings is seen pointing with his hat towards that beloved "country home". Near the magisterial mansion stands his favourite elephant, and a troop of Company soldiers saddled on horseback:

The distant objects [in the painting] suggest the world of India that the governor general has built, secured, loved—and will soon leave behind. In a sign of intimacy that goes beyond the usual mere nod of husband and wife towards one another in English 'conversation' portraits, Mr. and Mrs. Hastings are shown holding hands—as a sophisticated Adam and Eve in an Indian Eden (Gilpin 135).

Despite their closeness, the couple looks calm yet slightly pensive, and the Indian empire that they are to leave behind already appears distant. An aura of impending nostalgia hangs over the whole scene, tinged with sadness.

Whether it was Hasting's nostalgia for the land that he had once ruled and where he had enjoyed prestige and privilege, or the native's nostalgia for the *sahib*, Hasting's apparition is occasionally seen at midnight on New Year's Eve at the portico of Hastings House driving a *brougham car* drawn by white horses. He is said to be searching in vain for a black chest of drawers that was misplaced just before his return to England. This bureau contained official documents that could have hastened the court proceedings and exonerated him from the charges of his supposed crime. That the contents of this bureau were highly prized by Hastings is evident from an advertisement on September 6th, 1787 that appears in *The Calcutta Gazette*:

Whereas an old Black Wood Bureau, the property of Warren Hastings Esq., containing, amongst other things, two small miniature pictures and some private papers, was about the time of his departure from Bengal either stolen from his house on the Esplanade, or by mistake sold at the auction of his effects: This is to give notice that Mr. Larkins and Mr. Thompson will pay the sum of two thousand sicca rupees to any person who shall give them such information as shall - enable them to recover the contents of the bureau" (Scott Seton-Karr, *Sections from Calcutta Gazette* 221).

A "corroboration" of this story occurs in a letter from Hastings to his close friend and late Private Secretary, Nesbitt Thompson in Calcutta, which is dated the 21st July 1785, and is mentioned in the volume of Gleig's biography. "It pains me," he writes "to recur to the subject of my bureau.

I have not as yet received any intelligence from you or Larkins about it. You cannot conceive my anxiety about it” (Gleig 297).

In his lifetime, Hastings never found those important papers. No conclusions were reached about the lost property^{viii}. Although all charges against Hastings were lifted eventually, the frustration resulting from the inordinately long legal battle and a sense of injury to his honour left an indelible mark that remained with him till his demise, and if these stories are to be believed, even after his death. Thus, he comes to visit his beloved residence in the darkness of night. Witnesses during the British period and after complained of mysterious sounds of horse’s hooves, the sight of a shadowy brougham coach or even occasionally a figure with a torch searching frantically for something that he could not find. These spectral sightings in the Hastings House are sometimes erroneously attributed to the National Library, the other residence of the Governor General. The confusion primarily resulted from the fact that both buildings are located on the same property of Belvedere, and both these houses, associated with Hastings have the ill-reputation of being haunted.

Structurally this story, like most supernatural tales, dwells on the metaphor of “departure” and “return”, and most certainly the cardinal trope of “repetition”. It helps to unpack several significant questions about the encounter between spectrality and inassimilable memories of the colonial past, that are like the Derridian formulation of the ghost, who “never dies, it remains always to come and to come-back” (*Spectre* 123). The visitations of the dead Sahib become an embodied memory of the dismantled Empire which haunts the postcolonial present. Abraham and

Torok famously contended in their psychoanalytic work, *The Shell and the Kernel*, that “What haunts are not the dead, but the gaps left within us by the secrets of others” (171).

One such ghastly secret about the crimes of colonial masters that lurked beneath the surface of imperial metanarratives of good governance and strength, resurfaces from the depths through Hasting’s search for the missing bureau. Hastings’ reputation in India was not entirely unblemished. It was repeatedly sullied by charges of corruption, bribery, extortion and mis-governance. He became particularly notorious in Bengal for what is known as the trial of *Maharaja* Nandakumar (also called Nuncomar by British Historians), who was appointed by the East India Company as a collector of taxes in extensive areas in Bengal in 1764, after Hastings was removed from that position. When Warren Hastings returned as the governor-general of Bengal almost a decade later, Nandakumar brought charges of embezzlement against him, for which Hastings’ rival Sir Philip Francis and his other opponents in the Supreme Council extended their support. However, Hastings managed to override the Council’s indictments and accused the *Maharaja* of forgery and fraudulence. He was tried under India’s first Chief Justice, Sir Elijah Impey, a friend of Warren Hastings who found him guilty. Nandakumar was hanged in Kolkata on 5 August 1775. It is believed that this conspiracy and subsequently the order of hanging Nandakumar till death came from Belvedere, the residence of the governor general.

The trial of Nandakumar created a strong stir in India and England. Songs, doggerel poems, fiction and plays were written in subsequent eras

recalling the incident. For instance, more than hundred and fifty years after his demise a play was staged in Calcutta theatre by the name *Maharaja Nandakumar* (1943) narrating the injustice meted out to him by Hastings. Earlier in 1907, Khirod Prasad Bidyabinod had penned another historical play *Nandakumar* for Star Theatre based on facts and legends on the native prince. It was popularly held, particularly among the natives, that Nandakumar was framed by Hastings, who grossly misused his power to avenge the injury to his reputation by an audacious native landlord. The matter did not end there. Later, during his impeachment, both Impey and Hastings were accused of unfair trial and custodial death. While Hastings was eventually acquitted of the charges, the protracted trial weighed severely on his health and reputation. Thus, the story of Hastings having lost his important documents which would have sped up the court proceedings, fitted perfectly into the scheme of retribution and psychological suffering for the crimes he had committed in the empire.

The story of Hasting's ritual visit to his Calcutta residence on the New Year's Eve can also be read as an account of "homecoming". While hauntings of colonial past are normally associated with the "unhomely" or the *unheimlich* of history, these stories are about how the ghosts of old Calcutta found their "home" in our imagination and in the city. One of the founders of British India, Warren Hastings, who in William Hodges' description had built the nucleus of the "great and opulent city" (16) now became an inseparable part of the city's nostalgic repertoire. The anecdotes of his visitations—far from evoking fear—are narrated with a certain degree of relish. Specifically intriguing for me, has been descriptions of

Hastings's phantom carriage in versions where witnesses claimed to have seen snatches of the horse-drawn car. Even in oral recollections (some of which I heard as stories in my childhood) there has always been an emphasis on the "shining" brougham with robust, agile horses and sometimes, even an equally well dressed cab-driver. The stories resonate with a wistfulness about Calcutta as a "shining", prosperous capital, unlike the present lacklustre city in rags. Thus, the postcolonial nostalgia for British Calcutta in traumatic times of deep social and economic instability hinged upon the myth of a "lost city" cleansed of its blemishes—the heart of the great British empire and second only to London.

Among other colonial establishments, Writers' Building^{ix}, the administrative headquarter of the British capital, is also listed among the haunted buildings in the city. Barring the sounds of heavy footsteps, the noise of sudden laughter or clatter of typewriters in empty rooms, the night-watchmen have reported that they still see pale figures of Sahibs sauntering in the corridors at night.



Figure 17: Writers' Building, BBD Bag (Dalhousie Square)

Many others hold that the place is haunted by the British Colonel, N.S. Simpson: The Inspector General of Prisons. His colleague and compatriot W. G. Hamilton portrayed him in an obituary to the British weekly, *The Spectator* on January 3, 1931 as follows:

Simpson was an ideal prison officer, he had a judicial mind and possessed a remarkable gift of tact which was invaluable in dealing with difficult prisoners. He was a humane man and held enlightened and very progressive views on the treatment of prisoners (22).^x

In contrast, the popular reception of his character as a public official was vastly different. He had a notorious reputation for inflicting ruthless torture on the political prisoners in jail during the anticolonial movement. He was assassinated in his chamber in 1930, by three Bengali youth—Binoy,

Badol and Dinesh—who identified themselves as members of an underground revolutionary group. After firing at Simpson from a close range, they engaged in a gun battle with the forces of the Calcutta police in the corridors of Writers' Building. This exchange was colloquially termed *corridor warfare* by an English daily. The young men were soon cornered and overwhelmed by the British troops, but they refused to surrender. Badol died on the spot by consuming pills of potassium cyanide, while Binoy and Dinesh attempted suicide by shooting themselves with their own weapon. Five days after the event Binoy expired in the hospital and Dinesh, the only survivor, was hanged on 7 July 1931. Today, a statue of the trio has been installed in front of the Writers', and Dalhousie Square where the building stands has been renamed B.B.D. Bag (*Binoy-Badol-Dinesh Bag*) after the valiant martyrs of the liberation struggle. According to the rumours, spectres of those who participated in the battle are still seen in the corridors of this public building, at the dead of night.

The spectral reiterations of scenes of murder by Binoy-Badol-Dinesh marks the desire for the reclamation of the colonial space by the once subjugated population through its resignification as a space of liberty or freedom. Each time stories of spectral encounter in the corridors of the British Secretariat are recalled with specific local colours, the valiant martyrdom of Binoy-Badol-Dinesh is invoked with nostalgia. The representational content alters as the characters are often projections of the speakers' imagination. Since such anecdotes can never be entirely subsumed within a rational structure, their repetitions are not constrained by fidelity to truth. Ghost stories require a willing suspension of disbelief.

One might think as to why the ghost of Francis or better still, Madame Grand would haunt the Belvedere Estate when they died miles away from Calcutta after spending long periods in Europe. But seeking a rational explanation could only lead to dead ends. Popular demand could be reason behind the proliferation of such anecdotes. The drama of star-crossed love staged out in Belvedere not only made it ideal for stories of haunting but also gave it an afterlife. It added to the enigma of the building and its precincts where many such events crucial to the life and career of Hastings and his contemporaries were played out. Thus, such stories are largely about how the city retrieves its past in popular imagination. They supplement the historical narrative with fertile speculations, which cannot be explained either by inductive reasoning or by marshalling evidence. However, that does not diminish their relevance, particularly the interruptive potential that inheres in these tales that refuse to be incorporated within the mainstream historiography.

By reinterpreting a situated encounter, the oppressed seizes the past to find a “home” in the colonizer’s narrative through a moment of rupture— when the “corridors” of a repressive state power are temporarily taken over by three native youths who repaid the violence perpetrated by the colonial state apparatus with a counter-action of terror. In the nationalist imagination that mythicized the “revolutionary terrorists” of British India into “revolutionary freedom fighters”, the incident is read as a rude shock to the mighty British administration in the empire with their sudden awareness of the limits of their power. It was one of those many times when the colonizing population in the city was jolted into the

realization that the “home” they created for themselves in India by thrusting the natives to the periphery of privileged life is only a brittle and contingent construct. Even the fortresses of their paramount power such as the Writers’ Building can be invaded, occupied and turned into an *unheimlich* space by a sudden turn of events.

THE POSTCOLONIAL DILEMMA

The previous segments explored some instances of spectral visitations in the city and their possible ramifications in literary and cultural narratives. In this section I attempt to account for why the postcolonial landscape of Calcutta became a fertile ground for such hauntings in relation to nostalgia and memory.

The ghosts in these stories—real and metaphorical, fantastic and grotesque, have become a quintessential part of the vast urban repertoire of Calcutta. The dilemma of the postcolonial lies in grappling with these specters of colonial modernity that are integral to Calcutta’s past and present. Even though the city and its “culture [had] passed from the colonial confines to acquire an independent life that the colonial ethos would empirically disown” (Chaudhuri, *Living City* Intro) the old ghosts still lingered in the backdrop (as we would see in the following segment with Begum Johnson who literalizes this resilient spectre of Calcutta’s colonial modernity).

In the years following independence, when the city was caught up in the Post-Partition turmoil, these ghosts might have represented as it were, a form of regret, not without a sense of guilt, a suppressed yearning for a

more stable world—a nostalgia so typical of an age of transition caught between a receding past and an indefinite future. The Partition changed the demographics of the city rapidly. The trauma of coerced migration not only affected the refugees as they were forced to confront different forms of strangeness, isolation and discrimination in their everyday existence in the new country; it also baffled the host population. The presence of “strangers” at the “threshold”^{xi} unsettled their familiar environment. In their essay “The Postcolonial Ghost Story,” Gelder and Jacob assert that:

‘Ghosts’ cannot function in a climate of sameness, in a country which fantasizes about itself as ‘one nation’ or which imagines a utopian future of ‘reconciliation’ in which [...] all the bad memories have been put to rest. But neither can they function in a climate of difference, where one can never resemble the other (198).

Thus, the existence of ghosts is premised on a “more ‘promiscuous’ structure in which the [...] sameness and difference embrace and refuse each other simultaneously” (198). The ideological framework of India’s Partition hinged on this very idea of “difference” and “sameness”. When the Indian subcontinent was divided along religious lines, it was deemed that the Hindu minorities in the areas that were now under Pakistan would migrate to India where the dominant religion was Hinduism (though India firmly upholds its secularism in the Constitution) and likewise, the Muslims would join the new state of Pakistan in the east and west. The refugees who emigrated to the new countries across the borders shared a common religion with their hosts; however, their everyday practice,

customs and habits were different. The two populations treated each other as “strangers”, who were similar, like “replicas of the self” in many respects, and yet unfamiliar. The play is “one of doubling” (Vidler 3).

The notion of a stranger is always fraught with such an ambiguity. It represents a figure of liminality which provokes a sense of fear and unease as its presence blurs the defined boundaries between what is clearly known and unknown, constantly challenging “the limit of knowledge—knowledge of others, knowledge of ourselves” (Kearney and Semonovitch 4). Like the revenant, the familiar returns as the unfamiliar in the “stranger” who “is like us and not like us at all, hovering between the knowable and unknowable, that it strikes us as uncanny” (Kearney and Semonovitch 4). In Post-Partition Calcutta, this sense of *unheimlich* is intimately linked to the rapid transformation of the cityscape with the huge surge of refugees in the metropolis who also carried with them the shame of Partition and its violent history, which Post-Independence nations were trying to conceal. The Calcuttans who elegiacally invoked a past prior to the Partition did so from a sense of disjunctive temporality that divides the city’s history into two contrasting epochs—the glorious yesteryears and a miserable today. To many old *ghatis* (natives of West Bengal) it was the refugee and squatters from the East Bengal, who reduced the city to mordant poverty that nakedly reflected itself:

in the disintegrating brickwork of stained walls, in the exposed life of street and slum dwellers, in the stench of rotting garbage on the sidewalks (S. Chattopadhyay 1).

So, the refugees as “strangers at the threshold” or specters of the Partition in the postcolonial city aroused a sense of the unhomely on different planes. While on the one hand their presence and quotidian practices altered the urban landscape substantially, on the other, they embodied the repressed history of Partition, which the new nation was trying to erase. To combat the refugee crisis that impacted the city profoundly, a different past of Calcutta was often invoked in nostalgia, whether in the story of Hasting’s shining carriages, or in the valiance of Binoy-Badol-Dinesh who challenged the British power in their own stronghold.

This nostalgia for the old Calcutta is not synonymous with a longing for the colonizing race. It is about a vanished era of Bengal’s centrality in the politico-cultural scene; its prominent contribution to the nationalist struggle; the pride of having the first Asian Nobel laureate in literature; tales of flamboyant leaders; anecdotes of sacrifice, heroism and martyrdom of freedom fighters immortalized in the lore; the clinching victory of the barefooted players of a native club in the football match against the all-powerful English team in 1911—to list a few. This has been the predicament of the Calcuttans as postcolonial subjects, caught up in a dilemma between clashing identities—while their rational mind jettisoned the colonial institutions, they could not get over their remnants altogether. So, it haunted them as memories with a gamut of affective dispositions—nostalgia, pain, guilt, pleasure or trauma.

The following section will offer a reading of such a spectral Calcutta in Nabarun Bhattacharya’s (1948-2014) trilogy: *Kangal Maalshaat (The War Cry of the Vagabonds*, 2003) *Mausoleum* (2006) and *Mobloge Nobel*

(2016) which was published posthumously. I will focus in particular on the first novel.

Nabarun Bhattacharya was the son of the renowned writer and activist Mahasweta Devi. His father, Bijon Bhattacharya, who has been an abiding influence in Bhattacharya's life was associated with the Leftist Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA) and was hugely acclaimed for his play *Nabanna (Harvest)* on the 1943 famine of Bengal. Nabarun Bhattacharya's own writings, marked his faith in radical left politics (though never without a critique). They depicted his deep-seated commitment to subaltern resistance, particularly the urban poor, social outcasts, and underground revolutionaries and even non-human characters such as the dogs in *Lubdhak (2006)*. He often used comic deflections, dark humour and trenchant satire to critique various forms of state repression and its collusion with multinational capitalism. In his literary career spanning over four decades he penned several novels, including *Kangal Maalshaat (2003)*, the dystopic *Khelna Nagar (The Toy-City, 2004)*, or *Juddha Parsisthiti (The Warring Situation, 2006)*. Bhattacharya also wrote numerous short stories and poems. His first collection of poetry, *Ei Mrityu Upatyaka Amar Desh Noi (This Valley of Death is not my Country)*, published in 1973 brought him critical acclaim. Bhattacharya received the prestigious Sahitya Academy Award for his novel *Herbert* in 1993, which was later made into a film. The creation of mischievous, *fyatarus* (flying proletarians) who are recurrent characters in his novels and stories became a cult by themselves.

The spectral landscape of Calcutta that is nostalgically invoked in Bhattacharya's novel-trilogy covers two distinct aspects of the haunted city. The subterranean city that explodes in the novel like a surreal dreamscape remains alongside its modern counterpart, without the knowledge of the human subjects. This "ungraspable visibility of the invisible" (Derrida, *Spectre* 27) in the shadowy "spectropolis" exists like a watermark in a chiaroscuro of light and darkness, where one still finds the musical-soirees and ball-room parties in the houses of the rich, where men of rank fight duels over their ladies-fair, and rich ladies ride in their phaetons to breathe air ("*Hawa-Khana*") in the evening (Bhattacharya, *Maalshaat* 251). Similarly, several other ghosts come out in the night-sky, wanting fresh air (see Bhattacharya, *Mausoleum* 490). The other end of this spectral metropolis belongs to the subaltern classes—the spectral subjects of the postcolonial city, as Sanghita Sen notes in "*The Language of Nabarun's Novels*"—who occupy a large "space" in urban conurbations. However, there is no significant representation of this space in mainstream literature. This invisible city lies in the gap between the hovel and the palace, in the liminal zone between the conspicuously visible flats and the footpaths in literature^{xii}. The spectral topography of the run-of-the-mill places in the light and darkness "near the crematoriums of Garia, Mohamayatala, Chetla, Kewratola" (Sen 218) become epicenters of Bhattacharya's literary activities, where his proletarian characters find their homes.

The next section will show how the denizens of these spectral Calcutta(s), as a force within the present, join hands under the auspices of

Begum Johnson, a ghost from the colonial times, and her friend *Dandabyosh*— “the oldest raven” in Calcutta, against the political bankruptcy and the capitalist aggression in the city.

BEGUM JOHNSON AND THE CARNIVAL OF *FYATARUS*

Certain spectral figures from the colonial past such as Charnock, Hastings, Francis and Madame Grand are so enmeshed in Calcutta’s urban repertoire that that their stories haunt the popular and literary imagination across generations. A character like Begum Johnson, thus, reappears in her full glory two centuries after her demise in Nabarun Bhattacharya’s trilogy. In these novels, Begum’s Calcutta is not only nostalgically raised against its present decay, but through his carnivalesque representation, Bhattacharya initiates a series of reversals where the old specters of the city orchestrate the plans to upturn the current government. And against the haunted grounds of the erstwhile empire, nostalgia for Calcutta’s past and its characters are invoked to eradicate the harmful bequests of the British colonial system. Finally, this section considers the function of language in Bhattacharya’s novels, which like his nostalgia, is integral to his radical politics. By resurrecting the “Calcutta cockney” in vernacular literature, he inverts the supremacy of institutionalized Bengali that dominated the literary scene for more than a century.

In history, Begum Johnson (nee Frances Crook) is known as the oldest British resident in Bengal (1725-1812)^{xiii}. The Calcutta of her times was also the city of Clive and Hastings, encompassing the years of Calcutta's gradual rise to prominence under the British. Her mausoleum plaque in St. Johns Church cemetery in BBD Bagh gives us an account of her four marriages:

Beneath are deposited the remains of Mrs. Frances Johnson, second daughter of Edward Crook then governor of Fort St. David on the coast of Coromandel, and was born 10th of April, 1725. In 1738 she intermarried with Parry Purple Templer, Esq., Nephew of Mr. Braddyll, then Governor of Calcutta, by whom she had two children, who died Infants. Her second husband was James Altham of Calcutta, Esq. who died of the small pox a few days after the marriage. She next intermarried with William Watts, Esq. then Senior Member of the Supreme Council of Bengal, by whom she had issue [sic.] four children... After the death of Mr. Watts, she in 1744, intermarried with the Reverend William Johnson, then principal chaplain of the Presidency of Fort William, by whom she had no issue. She died on 3rd of February 1812. Aged 87, the oldest British resident in Bengal, universally beloved, respected and revered.

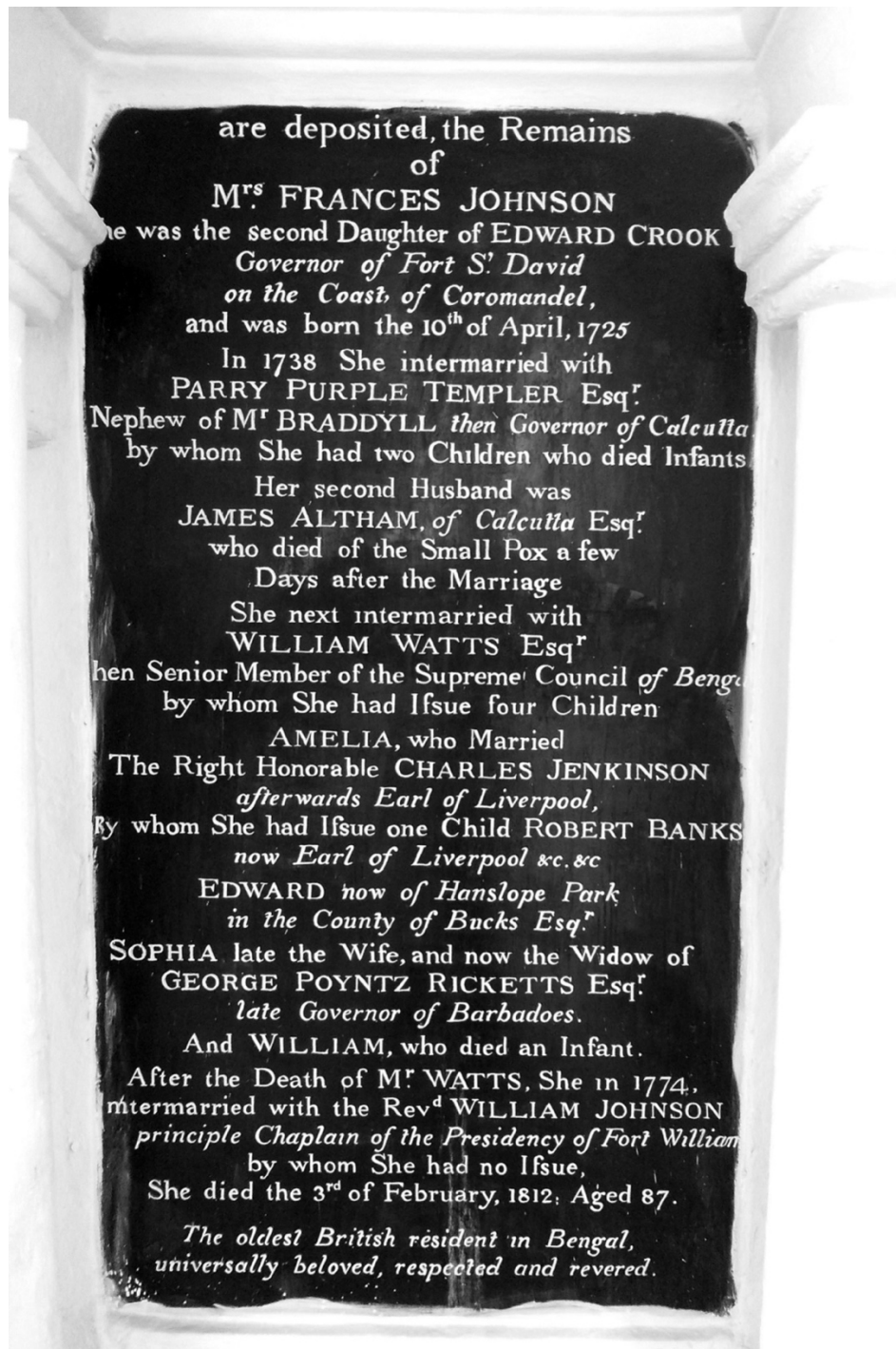


Figure 18: Begum Johnson's mausoleum plaque at St. John's Church, Kolkata

Frances' third husband, Mr. William Watts became well known as a British ambassador in the court of Nawab Siraj ud-Daulah—the reigning monarch of Bengal before the Battle of Plassey (1757)—which shifted

power to the hands of the British merchants. When Siraj decided to seize Calcutta in 1756 from the East India Company, Frances was arrested along with her husband and three infant children, Emilia, Edward and Sophia. Watts and his family were held hostage in Nawab's court in Murshidabad as the Company's representatives. Frances remained captive for thirty-seven days while Siraj ud-Daulah was on a rampage in Calcutta, capturing the trading outpost at Cossimbazar and seizing Fort William from the British. According to popular belief, in the days of her imprisonment, the mother of the Nawab (in some version, his grandmother) who was also given the local sobriquet "Company's mother" due to her reputation of being particularly charitable towards the British, took pity on the young wife of Watts and her children. She asked the Nawab to remove Frances to *Jenana* or the ladies' quarter which housed the other women of the royal family. Her request was granted and Mrs. Watts developed a camaraderie with Siraj's mother who eventually helped her family to escape to the French colony of Chandonagore in the darkness of the night. It was Frances' stay at Nawab's household which earned her the moniker "Begum", a title given to married Muslim women in aristocratic and royal households in south-Central Asia. It corresponds to the masculine equivalent *bey* or *baig* which in Turkish means "higher official". After the Murshidabad episode, Frances became forever remembered as Begum Johnson of Calcutta. In 1760 William Watts sailed back to England with his family and soon died thereafter. After the demise of her husband, Frances returned to Calcutta without her children to manage her estates in the city. On her arrival, she took her final nuptial vows with Rev. Johnson

with whom she had lived for eighteen years till he decided to go back to England like Mr. Watts. However, Begum Johnson chose not to accompany her husband this time, and instead stayed in her beloved city where she died in 1812. With the huge property, she had inherited from her four marriages, Begum lived in a palatial mansion near *Lal Dighi* (later renamed as Fairly Place). From the pages of Bengal obituary, we get a glimpse of her personality, particularly her generosity of spirit:

Her (Lady Johnson's) manners were cheerful, polished and highly pleasing. She abounded in anecdote; and possessing ease and affability of communication, her conversation was always interesting, without any tendency to fatigue the hearer. She had a strong understanding, to which she superadded much and accurate observation. Her views of life were correct, and the benevolence of her heart and the warmth of her affections continued unimpaired to the latest period of her life (5-6).

In her Clive Street residence, she regularly hosted extravagant parties that were attended by all the dignitaries of White Calcutta in her august company. In *The Calcutta of Begum Johnson*, Ivor Edwards-Stuart writes with a wealth of detail about her daily routine:

Although she has left no memories we learn from contemporaries that Frances Johnson prided herself that she kept up with all the old customs to the last except that as she got older she forwent her early morning drive. As of old she would dine at three or four o'clock, take her siesta after dinner and then take her airing in her carriage. On her return home

her house in Clive street would be lit up and thrown open for the reception of visitors. All who were on visiting terms were expected to come without invitation, and a few who had been previously invited to stay to supper and cards” (124).

When the octogenarian Begum passed away in 1812, her last rites were attended by Lord Minto, the chief justice of the Supreme Court, and numerous other luminaries of the European society. In her favourite city, Calcutta which she saw thriving into a prosperous metropolis, was where she was laid according to her desire. Her mortal remains were buried in the grounds of St. John’s Church, facing the mausoleum of Calcutta’s British founder—Job Charnock.



Figure 19: The mausoleum of Begum Johnson facing the tomb of Job Charnock at St. John’s Church

In *Kangal Maalshaat (The War Cry of the Vagabonds)*, the first novel of Bhattacharya’s trilogy, Begum Johnson appears on the cusp of the

new millennium as the chief among the masterminds of the proletarian resistance against the state machinery. The revolutionary resistance in Bhattacharya's novels is carried out by an army of fantastical *fyatarus* or the "flying humans" who squat in the wasted margins of bourgeois society. In Bhattacharya's fictional corpus they are recurrent figures who camouflage themselves as humans by hiding their wings. The three central characters who appear as *fyatarus* are Madan, D.S. and Purundhar Bhatt, the poet. In his short story by the same name which introduces these *fyatarus* to readers, we form an idea about their species from the conversation between an old and a new *fyataru*, initiated into the gang:

--- What are these fyatarus then?

--- I don't know exactly what species they are of. But they are very special. Understand?

You'll see in History, many great men have devised various plans to build the humans anew. I think all those plans and efforts have ultimately given us the fyatarus.

[...]

.... Fyatarus have a programme every night.

(*Fyataru*, trans. Sourit Bhattacharya;139)

Even as *Fyatarus*, they can live the life of a human, carrying out the everyday chores and mundane duties. Thus, in normal circumstances, one can seldom differentiate between the two species:

Brother Madan, we are fyatarus now, but can we go back to our normal lives again? Say like casting votes, shopping for the day, [...] - Why

not, you can do everything. But you have to always remember that you are a *fyataru*. Who wants to know anyway whether you are one? (*Fyataru*144).

Through their aerial maneuvers the militia of *fyatarus* launches attacks against the upper-classes, though without having them wounded or killed. “Just frightening. Making the place dirty. Rampaging stuff. The fun’s there” (*Fyataru* 142). They wreck the amusements of the rich by pouring from the sky an assortment of shit and piss, “broken stoves, sweepers’ brooms, rotten potato curry with the weird goat-head soup, discarded toothbrush, exam scripts, the leftover hair collected from the salon, bed pan, etc” (*Fyataru* 146). The *fyatarus* sometimes behead their targets with flying saucers without having them murdered (the severed heads can be duly fitted back on the torso after the decapitation), and cause panic among the police with their flying. In *Kangal Maalshaat* they are led by black magicians or *choktars*. We are told as doctors are to humans, *choktars* are to *fyatarus*. These magicians galvanize the “flying humans” for the ultimate battle with the government. In *Kangal Maalshaat*, *choktar* Bhodi, the self-appointed marshal of this army of *fyatarus* receives instructions from his father, the old and venerable— “Black Raven” who speaks in human tongue and heads the vagabond revolution with the inimitable Begum Johnson of Calcutta. Begum is omniscient and omnipresent in these novels. Though humans cannot sense her existence, she can see them, which gives her special powers. She is generally present with the Great Raven at the site of the *fyatarus*’ carnivalesque attacks without the knowledge of the others.

In the spectral city that lurks behind the present-day metropolis, Begum Johnson throws parties every night as before, inviting the English *Sahibs* and their bevy of beautiful ladies. As before, in the evenings, she rides her grand phaeton for a breath of fresh air— “*Haowa-khana*” (literally, to “eat the air”) along with her vast entourage, a common practice in old Calcutta as Ivor Edwards-Stuart tells us:

...at sunset the whole of Calcutta became alive as with one accord both European and native went to ‘hawa khana’ or eat the air. From the great houses rolled out the carriages. The belles of the town such as Misses Sanderson, Emma Wrangham, etc. would be seen driving their smart phaetons usually accompanied by their young beaux mounted beside them on their prancing horses (126-27).

It is on these tours with charming ladies such as Mrs. Sanderson and Emma Wrangham of the *Raj* that Begum observes the city from close quarters. However, in the novel, the spirits of yesteryears not only watch over the new but are given the agency to agitate and empower the present. The strategies of the *fyataru* resistance are laid out at Begum Johnson’s dwelling where she pulls the strings from behind.

Bhattacharya often identified himself as a chronicler of the urban ethos. He proclaims in the “Poem to know myself III”:

The sky is one of wings

The sea another.

But my beaks

Are firmly sedimented in the city” (*Uncollected Poems*; my trans.; 69)

Imaginary and actual maps of the past-present and future urban conurbations saturate his creative world. The city expands, evolves, invents and re-signifies itself through the expanse of his literary corpus. The map which this chapter seeks to trace through the ghostly trail is that of a hidden city in *Kangal Maalshaat* and *Mausoleum* where “Ghosts are no longer just perceived as mysterious, otherworldly manifestations that need be put to rest elsewhere to restore order, but are seen to reveal something of the enigma of everyday life, the way it can no longer be taken as straightforward but ‘presents us with a recalcitrant object that does not give up its secrets too readily’” (Blanco and Peeren, *Popular Ghosts* xiii). Against the barren and impoverished urban landscape of contemporary Kolkata in Bhattacharya’s novel, these spectral residues of the burgeoning colonial capital erupt almost everywhere to ruffle the margins of the modern metropolis. The protagonists of this phantom Kolkata—the “Great Raven” (*Dandabayosh*) and Begum—can easily traverse the distances between past and present, and their existence in the secret folds or ghost spaces of the city hint towards an alternative reality that interacts, and can potentially interrupt our visible, routine life of limited imagination.

For the narrator, this choice of Begum Johnson as the peerless queen of the vast spectral empire of Britain in Calcutta is obvious:

because Begum Johnson is that indomitable woman who between her four marriages had seen Sirajudullah with her own eyes, had merrily chatted away with talents like Clive or Watson, and with a great sense

of contentment had witnessed how the [Hindu royalties] Holkars, Scindhias, and even the terrifying Maratha forces were cowered and stood before the John Company^{xiv} in total submission, muttering “*Jo Hukum, jo Hukum.*” It is for this we must always bow down before Begun Johnson. There is no other way around (Bhattacharya, *Maalshaat* 293).

Even though Calcutta was deemed Charnock’s city by the English historians for a long time, he only lived there for a short span after laying the foundation of a British factory in Bengal in 1690. Compared to the vast and colorful life of Begum who had seen the exponential rise of the city from a humble establishment, his experiences were limited. When Job Charnock passed away in 1693, Calcutta was barely a city.

In Bhattacharya’s trilogy, Begum’s closest confidant is fittingly the “oldest raven” (Bhattacharya, *Maalshaat* 293) of the city—the spirit of *Choktar* Bhodi’s father who marshals the *fyatarus*. The spectral figures of Begum and the Raven embody the spirit of the city that has seen numerous epochal and political shifts across three centuries, and having survived them all, remained untethered from time’s decay. Begum and the “Great Raven” thus become such an archive of Calcutta’s history that surpasses the dispositive of state’s knowledge. Their spectral repository troubles the margins of official texts with stories of occluded pasts.

The raven with a human voice who glides across the city closely observing the unfolding of urban life revives the literary memory of *Hootum Pyancha* or the vigilant barn owl in a new epoch. The satiric sketches (*Naksha*) of the *Babu* culture in colonial Calcutta once created

turmoil in genteel society of nineteenth-century Bengal. After its publication, several pen-sketches, some written in response to Hootum's dig at the eminent personages of city who commissioned writers for a riposte, appeared under pseudonyms of birds and beasts. A contemporary, Bhuban Chandra Mukhopadhyay, humourously alleged that "After the publication of *Hootum Pyancha* in the market, different animal voices were heard in the zoo" (qtd. in Arun Nag's Introduction to Annotated *Hootum*, 11). Taking up an avian identity became prevalent, presumably due to the bird's ability of flying to corners inaccessible to humans. *Kaak-Bhusundi* (The Black Crow), *Hootum* (Barn Owl) or *Roopchand, the Bird* (RC Bird) who sang on the streets of Calcutta on current issues, are examples of such literary characters. Bhattacharya, whose works reflect a strong nostalgia for the lost world of nineteenth century literature are replete with allusions to early Bengali writings, covering a vast range from the forgotten and the obscure to the popular and the acclaimed.

Given his abiding interest in multifarious traditions of vernacular writing in the nineteenth-century, he probably had the *Nakshas* in mind when conceiving *Dandabayosh* or the "Great Raven" who becomes the millennial successor of *Hootum* in urban Bengali literature. A fundamental difference between *Hootum* and the "Raven" is that while both had Kolkata at their fingertips, the latter is not the omniscient narrator of Bhattacharya's trilogy. In *Hootum's* account, which is related in the first person, or in other pieces belonging to this genre, the principal purpose was holding a mirror to society's customs from an elevated distance and satirically chronicling the fads, mores and patterns of city-life. The

narrators seldom partook in the events directly. And even when they did, they were careful to keep the two personae distinct.^{xv} The role of “Raven” extends beyond this descriptive or corrective gesture in writing, for he trains the multitude of *fyatarus* and *Choktars* in the war against the State after laying down plans with the Begum.

Another connection between Bhattacharya’s trilogy and the *Naksha* literature is the choice of lexicon for these novels. They invoke racy humour, street argot and insolent slang which were frequently used in Bengali vernacular before it underwent a major transformation with writers like Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay who aimed at refining the written language in the late nineteenth century. The language was sanitized (*suddha* Bangla) by fusing Sanskrit’s sophistication with the “secularity of English” (S. Banerjee 161). The paradigmatic written language became elite by subduing the patois of streets.

Arun Nag, in the annotated *Hootum* posits a few essential attributes of the Pre-Bankim nineteenth-century *Naksha* literature of which “cerebral humour,” sharp “invectives against social or personal foibles through ridicule” and the “light-hearted language” of oral vocabulary are significant (Nag 10). This lexicon, “Hutoomi” as it was called, was the oral, everyday parlance of the common masses in the city. It was subsequently rejected by *Bhadraloks* for being inimical to literary creations because of its “poverty”. It lacked vigour and “cohesion” and when it was not outright obscene, it was devoid of purity^{xvi}.

Linguist Pabitra Sarkar points out in “Kolkatar Bhasha” (“The Language of Kolkata”) that even during the gradual shift from the

Sanskritized “High Bengali”, to a more colloquial form of written language in the mid-twentieth century, the language refused to include the “Calcutta cockney” of early nineteenth-century urban literature such as *Hootum*. What came to be known as the “standard Bengali dialect” in the twentieth century, the language of newspapers and written texts, emanated from Calcutta, but it carefully eliminated vulgar and “malformed” words that were used in the everyday speech, during the process of standardization. Acclaimed writer and lexicographer, Rajsekhar Basu made a clear distinction between oral and colloquial Bengali—while the former is the language of the spoken tongue which includes slang, corrupt and curse words, the latter belongs to the literary establishment and was accepted as the language for literary exchange^{xvii}.

By using “vulgar” spoken tongue, *Dandabayosh* and other characters of Bhattacharya novels, pay tribute to *Hootum* by partly revitalizing the oral patois of Calcutta after more than a century in urban literature (during which the colloquial lingo itself underwent significant transformation) with an avowedly political agenda. Bhattacharya claimed in his “Poem on Vietnam”, collected in the *Valley of Death* that words are not “passports or cosmetics” to “please the illiterate editor of a monopoly Daily” (17), they are “grenades” targeted at imperialism.

In “*Nabaruner Upanyasher Bhasha*” (“The Language of Nabarun’s Novels”), Sanghita Sen describes the deployment of this linguistic register in his writings as “*bhasakaman*” or “language-canon” (215) by deriving it from Bhattacharya’s “*nunukaman*” or “penis-canon” (a small Portuguese mortar) which the *fyatarus* used in their battle with the government.

Bhattacharya, for instance staunchly endorses the use of curse words in his writing. Against the stilted mastication of polite language, the ejaculation of the low-brow vocabulary infuses a vigour and spontaneity. In an interview given to Kaushik Mukherjee for his documentary, *Nabarun* in 2015, Bhattacharya explains:

Any human in a sound state of health should normally use expletives in a speech, and they do so—here the expletives are not specifically used to mean anything, it's a mode of expression. It bespeaks a language's vitality and strength (qtd. in Sen; my trans.; 216-217)

The “coarse colloquialism” in the copious use of slang and acerbic humour in these novels not only reject the refined language of the *Bhadraloks* which throttled every spontaneous expression that belonged to the margin and the streets. Bhattacharya unapologetically brings back into mainstream, the language, entertainment and the humour of the disenfranchised to foreground the “resistance” of the subalterns who were denied access to cultural power and validation. The frequent parodies and limericks by the underground poet of the fyatarus, Phurandhar Bhat, lampoons the upper classes and their cultivated veneer of civility with a generous dose of black humour:

The wasps flying, the hornets flying, the bees are in the sky
The moment the bums are uncovered, they sting hard and fly
From the space the turd-eating vulture throws down his shit
Bengalis are not only bastards, they're helpless to the last bit.

(*Maalshaat*; my trans.; 303)

These are deliberately enfolded in a language that is meant to offend. It flummoxes the middle-class respectability, like it did before when the “derivative discourse” of Victorian propriety that came with Western education in the nineteenth century made them ashamed of their vernacular traditions. Most demotic forms of entertainment, with their libidinal, “playful musical laughter, the uninhabited prancing” (S. Banerjee 157) were consequently rejected as low-brow, indecent or obscene. They gradually disappeared from the horizon of our visibility in the city with the shame of polluting the culture.

So, the literary nostalgia for this vernacular comic genre and particularly Bhattacharya’s radical experiment with street language is itself like a spectre that haunts the literature of *Bhadraloks* with the uninhibited, carnivalesque humour that attempts to capture the moods, sentiments and lived experiences of the city’s invisible underclass. While the return of subaltern language creates a sense of “unheimlich” shocking the “polite” readership, the socially suppressed idioms of orality, unhomed and banished from the literary pantheon, is reinstated in the literature as the language of the urban poor^{xviii} who exists as spectral citizens on the edge of “civilized” society. While trying to live with the pain and ignominy of their dehumanization, these disenfranchised citizens have metamorphosed into the “flying humans” in Bhattacharya.

Like the use of coarse language, the choice of litters and excrements to threaten the urban bourgeoisie is another significant subversive strategy

by these subaltern subjects who are viewed as refuse by the elites and bundled off in dark, inhospitable quarters to live amidst dust and dirt. Their existence in the modern metropolis is inimical to certain notions of order and aesthetics in the urban landscape—the glaring poverty and “uncouth” habits—is an embarrassment to the polite society, which attempts to conceal them from visibility. They are almost treated as an excremental-population, to be hidden at a safe distance from public gaze to avoid contamination. Thus, as a fitting reply to this treatment, the *fyatarus* avenge their injustice by attacking the “beautiful” homes and gated entertainment hubs of the upper classes with trash and waste, which the elites seek to hide.

In the short story *Fyataru*, an experienced member of this army makes a catalogue of the swarm, who fly from different directions of the city to attack Flotel—a plush entertainment hub of the rich on River Hooghly with trash, urine and faeces. On their way, they sing low-brow, popular songs from Hindi films, carousing, and creating complete pandemonium. They come from red-light areas of Sonagachi, and other shady underbellies of the metropolis:

From that dark side of Howrah, a sound of “ole! ole!” could be heard.

- There they are.

- Who?

- All the *fyatarus* of Howrah. They live in dirty alleys and slums like land snails in a colony. You give them free space and they are like the king – oh that sound, that roar.

Like a wind-cutter at night, a few more war-cries were heard, “Laila o Laila.”

Khidirpore, Ekbalpore, Kantapukur – everyone is coming. Just hear them, and you’ll know that they are the most fiery, chaotic lot.

In a whisker, the sky became thick with the fnyat fnyat snai snai sound.

- Can you see that gang of people there, wearing rings on their fingers, with shirt and dhoti, they are the lot of cheatingbaj, the tricksters. All from North Calcutta. Though there are a few shop-owners too.

A swarm of flying women wearing nylon-sarees and holding stuff like sweepers’ brooms, broken cooking stoves, rotten potato curry in an earthen pot, soup made of the discarded parts of a goat, etc. suddenly flew past DS, making their shrill war-cries. There were a few fat old women too. A flying woman tickled the armpit of the flying DS and giggled wide.

(trans. Sourit Bhattacharya;145-146)

Representatives of the downtrodden in the postcolonial third world—the *fyatarus* are “hopeless cases, half-dead, abused, humiliated” (Bhattacharya, “Fyataru”142) but they possess a unique knack for causing “damage” to the properties of the rich. They seek to create constant trouble till the moment arrives in the future when “a single spark of the gunpowder” will throw the “whole city in a tumult”, exploding in a “war with a tremendous anger” (Bhattacharya, “For a Single Spark” 16).

NOSTALGIA AND THE SPECTRAL CITY

One always locates an ambivalent yearning for the colonial city in Bhattacharya. We may consider his poem “Tram” as an instance. Calcutta is the only city in India to have trams. The Calcutta Tramway Co. Ltd formed and registered in London on 22 December in 1880, was first to run electric tramcars in Asia in 1902.



Figure 20: Calcutta's Tram

Even as an inalienable part of Calcutta's heritage, the trams are threatened with an imminent death because of their sluggishness, which makes them unprofitable as modern transport. The tram on its way towards

disappearing, thus becomes the most cherished object in Bhattacharya's spectropolis. This is demonstrated in "Ill-Fated City":

City, the Kolkata city

You have been trampled under my feet countless times

Seen strange things/ When you were blind during those power-cuts

Like a lighted- aquarium /the tram moved on" (Bhattacharya, *Uncollected Poems* 28)

Yet they are deemed hostile to the rhetoric of "progress", unsustainable in a city that is caught in a never-ending circuit of urban development. In another elegy to the dying transport, Nabarun compares the tram's glorious past to its existential crisis in the present cityscape:

I too am dying out from Calcutta, tram.

Written off because I'm too slow, obstinate, unprofitable:

Dark when untouched by electricity,

I too become night-blind, stupid:

Like a beached dolphin, nose down, motionless.

No one will put up with these old crocks any more;

[...]

Many years from now, indeed,

Your lights slipping away at night on the Maidan

While here and there, strung around temple or church,

Bells ring out a message;

Each ticket like a page of poetry,

The conductor-librarian,

The ancient driver –
 all this will become antique Egypt,
 The vanquished will be lost in the depths.
 (“Tram”; trans.; Supriya Chaudhuri)

However, Bhattacharya’s nostalgic invocations of Calcutta’s bygone era are not to be read as apologies for colonial rule. In his trilogy, the depiction of the colonial city in the crevices of the modern metropolis serves a larger purpose in its spectral manifestations. The characters of *Dandabayosh* or Begum Johnson dwell in the interstices of a temporal dislocation. They are figures of “anachrony”: “the disjuncture in the very presence of the present”, or the “non-contemporaneity of present time with itself” (Derrida, *Spectre* 29). The ghosts reveal, as Derrida posits in *The Specters of Marx*, that the time is always already “out of joint” by the “appearance of something in a time in which they clearly do not belong. But ghosts do not just represent reminders of the past - in their fictional representation they very often demand something of the future” (Buse and Stott 14). Here, the ghosts of old Calcutta negotiate with the *fyatarus* to execute the plan of overturning the corrupt social order by attacking administration in the city.

Initially it is not very clear what interest Begum Johnson, the ghost of an ex-colonizer might have in niggling the present government. She sometimes claims that she indulges in wreaking havoc for “fun and mirth”, but importantly as she puts it later, for the sake of what she calls an “even-handed justice” (Bhattacharya, *Maalshaat* 373). The edifice of *Lalbazar*, the headquarters of the Calcutta Police, was a creation of the British. Since

then, it has been held responsible for perpetrating several chilling atrocities and brutal acts of coercion in pre-and post-Independence India. In fact, the entire police administration of the city is an inheritance from the colonial government. As a fervent lover of Kolkata, Begum Johnson feels it is her duty to participate in the downfall of Lalbazar which her people had once created. So, before the *fyatarus*--led by Marshal Bhodi--with their weapons of warlike the corroded sword from the Medieval Mughal era, a Portuguese-built seventeenth century canon that they have named “penis-canon”, and the flying saucers (*chakti*) in addition to their stocked-up excrement and waste, launch their final assault on the city-police from the sky in *Kangal Maalshaat*. Begum explains the reason behind her own involvement in the conspiracy:

Bhodi has finally declared war. Now the victory will be decided in the fair playing field. I have seen Tipu (fighting the British). Open war. And to speak the truth, after all it is we who created Lalbazar. You might call this an even-handed justice of History (Bhattacharya 373).

Begum Johnson’s love for the city was so strong, that it was believed when her last husband decided to sail for England, she left him because she could not bear the thought of leaving her beloved Calcutta behind. Like the narrator, she must have been appalled to see the progressive decline of Calcutta, broken, maimed, burnt, melted, and battered into a toxic synthetic city whose skylines are perpetually covered with a poisonous mist. (see *Maalshaat* 253).

Bhattacharya strategically deploys his nostalgia with a reflexive critique. He judiciously selects, interprets and orders the past as an alternative to an utterly dystopic present. Nostalgia for a certain past is not always a desire to fold back into that time, but “a way to express valid desires and concerns about the present” (K. Smith 523). Bhattacharya’s nostalgia stems from his recurrent disappointment in the current state of the world. The words in the Introduction to his *Collected Short Stories* reveal his pent-up anger:

The century that began with the promise of decolonization, ended in despondency, despair, fraught with pain. What I see every day, near and afar, that in ever layer, in every stratum of society an imposition of fresh burdens of oppression, new faces of colonialism, and seen and unseen constraints forced by the dehumanizing facets of cultural-imperialism that like a cloth around our eyes blinds us. *This is even more dangerous, hideous and insulting than the bureaucratism and capitalism seen in my childhood.* My life is surrounded by those trampled human beings and the kaleidoscope of events in their lives. I see that everywhere. However, I do not consider this reality to be everlasting. This reality must change. It must (my trans., and italics; n.pag).

At the point when the mourning turns almost nihilistic, we see a turn around with a stubborn and impassioned iteration of hope in the “change” to come. Nevertheless, this “change” can only be instantiated by plucking out the evils of the past. On the one hand the parallel existence of the spectral metropolis in the depths of contemporary Kolkata indexes the

failures and inadequacies of the present, and on the other, it is an indicator of the city's unwholesome colonial inheritance. Even after independence, neither have the edifices of colonial administration been entirely dismantled, nor its evils completely rooted out—they remained beneath the façade of the new like the spectres of old colonizers still calling the shots.

The author of *Kangal Maalshaat* invokes British characters like Begum Johnson from history to facilitate the uprooting of the evil in administration planted by her own kinsmen, using the same war strategies that the British had once used against competing powers. Begum unites with the warring *fyatarus* to embarrass the government and its capitalist cohorts. The police force, which works to protect the interest of these groups, are duly attacked and their Chief, Commissioner, Jowerdar, is beheaded by a flying saucer (that was not meant to kill him, though. He could place the head back on his torso and carry on his daily business). However, this gesture of beheading is a literal translation of “*matha kata*” (“cutting the head”) which is an operative metaphor for shaming in Bengali language. And that's what the *fyatarus* do through their attack on the ministry and the police, who are forced into a truce with them after being totally duped and defeated by these puckish miscreants.

In Bhattacharya's trilogy, the past radically interacts with the present to open possibilities for “change” in the future. Thus, nostalgia here is potentially subversive. It challenges the official discourse of colonial history predicated upon myths of Calcutta as Charnock's city, and the way it is carried into the present. It is this irony which is brought forth in

Bhattacharya's *Kangal Maalshaat* in a repartee between the curator of Victoria Memorial and Great Raven in *Kangal Maalshaat*:

Curator: "Charnock was a great man. What would happen to Kolkata had he not come? Would there be any horse-driven trams in Calcutta's tri-centennial celebration? Would there be so many special issues on Calcutta in newspapers and magazines? Where would be those numerous seminars? Would it have been possible for me to be there with my august presence at different places.... with important ministers?"

The Raven: Charnock was a great fucker! That moron came here and defecated on the banks of Ganges, and thus was founded Kolkata. Only rascals like you can call that mugging randy, the founding father of the city. In the land of stupid asses whatever the jackass says is considered a gospel. And your government is such an idiot. Fooling around with Calcutta's birth day. You and your ministers are no different (my trans.; 295).

As the first chapter of this thesis explores, against the hegemonic historiography of the imperial power which projected Charnock as the founder of a great city in wilderness, there exists a postcolonial intervention which denies him any such privilege. Bhattacharya, instead of choosing Charnock as the person who changed the fortune of the city, proposes Begum Johnson, a relatively minor figure in history as the empress of spectral Calcutta. The combination of Begum and Johnson in

her name indicates a more complex intermeshing of cultures that goes beyond the coloniser- colonised binary into a hybridised reality.

As opposed to the dismal contemporary landscape consumed by decay, there is a timeless quality about the spectral metropolis where Begum is the undisputed sovereign. She glides between spaces and temporalities to mediate in the duel between the arch rivals Charnock and Watson outside their cemeteries, and draws up blueprints for the proletarian resistance steered by the *fyatarus*. Bhattacharya urges his readers to unleash their imagination to realize that “the dewdrops still fall on the green grass with the sounds of the piano, as they did before. The little flowers on the grass still blossom the way they did earlier...[to] see the English girls gleefully laughing in the fields and skipping in slow motion” (*Maalshaat* 335). This Calcutta is impervious to the spiral of decline caused by time and becomes a fitting alternative to the other “dead” city where “multistoried crematoriums rise into the sky” (Bhattacharya, “What Kind of City is This” 121).

Bhattacharya’s nostalgic evocation of Begum’s Calcutta against the present city is both affective and strategic. He turns to history to exorcise its evils from within. His immersion in the yesteryears of Calcutta eventually becomes an opening for an opposing strategy, where nostalgia supports the subversive power of resistance.

CONCLUSION

By exploring “haunting” through the evolving lens of nostalgia, the chapter advances a reading of Calcutta’s “beloved ghosts” who in their postcolonial reclamations are reciprocally tied to the city which they had once colonized. These stories narrated from the vantage-point of the postcolonial subjects, often destabilize the power of figures such as Hastings, Charnock, sometimes by punishing them for their crimes committed in the past, or envisaging relatively minor characters like Begum at the centre of a narrative by displacing a more traditionally recognized figure of authority. In the stories that are now nostalgically associated with Calcutta’s urban repertoire, haunting thus becomes a powerful metaphor. On the one hand, it connects the city’s colonial past with the neo-liberal regime at the turn of the millennium; on the other, it brings together forms of resistance to these oppressive regimens of power. What is equally interesting is how in the process, nostalgia becomes a critical tool which simultaneously aligns the present with the past, and animates the latter to redress some of its violent legacies that were carried into the future.

NOTES

ⁱ See Buse and Andrew Stott's Introduction to *Ghosts: Deconstruction, Psychoanalysis, History*. Macmillan, 1999.

ⁱⁱ Francis sent dispatches to Lord North and Baron Clive in England, slandering Hasting's reputation as a statesman: "Mr. Hastings has some little talents of the third or fourth order..." (Moorhouse 39). At another time, he claimed that "Mr. Hastings has wholly and solely sold and ruined Bengal" (Moorhouse 39) with his destructive administrative moves, purely driven by self-interest and corruption.

ⁱⁱⁱ The portrait of Madame Grand by Élisabeth-Louise Vigée-Le Brun (1783), is currently available in the public domain. It can be seen in the Wikipedia entry on "Catherine Grand", while the original portrait is in the Metropolitan Museum of Art. See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Catherine_Grand#/media/File:Madame_Grand_\(No%C3%ABl_Catherine_Vorl%C3%A9e,_1761%E2%80%931835\)_MET_DP3_20094.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Catherine_Grand#/media/File:Madame_Grand_(No%C3%ABl_Catherine_Vorl%C3%A9e,_1761%E2%80%931835)_MET_DP3_20094.jpg)

^{iv} Francis was questioned by the servants about what business could he possibly have in Grands household at such an odd hour when the master was absent. Francis, instead of addressing their queries, tried getting back the ladder through bribery, while Mrs. Grand, stepped out from her room to order the servants to let him go. However, the servants, in the fear of being punished by their master held back the trespasser and sent out a messenger to Mr. Grand. During all the raucous, Francis whistled a few times to his friends waiting nearby as a signal that he was in danger. Upon receiving the message, some of Francis's allies barged into the household. In the darkness, a scuffle ensued in which Francis, who was clad entirely in black managed to escape into the night. When Mr. Grand returned, he found George Shee, a friend of Francis who was present in the scuffle tied to a chair by the servants, while the real culprit fled the scene.

^v *Petni*, from Sanskrit *Pretini*, the feminine form of *Pret* or ghost.

^{vi} *Shakchunni* from Sanksrit *Shankhachurni* referring to a female ghost who wears *shankha* or conch-shell bangle like married women in Bengal. In popular imaginary *Petni* and *Shakchunni* are generally clad in "white" and have their faces covered in a veil. See Sukumar Sen's *Golper Bhut (Ghosts in Stories)* p.3

^{vii} Zoffany's painting of "Warren Hastings and his wife against the backdrop of his Alipore mansion" is available in the public domain. See, <http://www.the-athenaeum.org/art/detail.php?ID=204172>
A version of this painting can be seen in the Wikipedia entry on "Warren Hastings".

^{viii} A.F.M. Abdul Ali in his "Ghost Stories of Old Calcutta", published in *Bengal Past and Present* (1945) raised the question that "Sometime in the early part of 1876 [about fifty-eight years after his death] certain papers of his were

discovered, however, in the archives of the India Office. Can these have been a portion of the mysterious contents of the missing bureau?" (66).

^{ix}It was built in 1777, originally as an office for writers of the British East India Company

^x See W.G. Hamilton's "Lieut-Colonel N.S. Simpson." archive.spectator.co.uk/article/3rd-january-1931/22/lieut-colonel-n-s-simpson

^{xi} See *Phenomenologies of the Stranger: Between Hostility and Hospitality*, edited by Richard Kearney and Kascha Semonovitch

^{xii} See Sanghita Sen's "*The Language of Nabarun's Novels*", 218

^{xiii} For the portrait of Begum Johnson by Thomas Hickey (1741-1824), see *Art UK* website, listed under "Frances Johnson, née Croke (1725-1812)". <https://artuk.org/discover/artworks/frances-johnson-nee-croke-17251812-the-begum-johnson-28416>

^{xiv}The English East India Company was also informally called John Company. C.f. Carey, W.H. (1882). *1882 - The Good Old Days of Honourable John Company*. Simla: Argus Press. Retrieved 30 July 2015.

^{xv}When *Hootum* spoke about a person based on his real-life persona, he kept the author as "character" separate from the author as a "narrator". So, we find author as a narrator commenting on the author as the "character" in his satire.

^{xvi} See, *Bangla Bhasha Bibidha Prabandha (Miscellaneous Essays on Bengali Language)* Bangiya Sahitya Parisad. P. 351

^{xvii}See Pabitra Sarkar's "The Language of Kolkata", 190-191

^{xviii} This restitution is not entirely unproblematic though, for the voice of the subalterns is still mediated through a middle-class/ upper-caste author, which refuses a closure to the "home-coming" of proletarian language. It instead, opens the possibility of several such hauntings in the future, where the language of bourgeois would be invaded and genuinely taken over by the proletariats in literature.

CONCLUSION

By reading literary and cultural periods in Calcutta's history under the long shadow of Bengal's colonial modernity, my research examined the multiple windows through which nostalgia and its reception among the various populations in the city can be studied. Nostalgia's manifold figurations in narrativising the experience of modernity in Calcutta is critically explored, primarily through evocation of literary affects across a diverse body of literature: fiction, poems and literary essays in newspapers and journals. These writings emphasized the intimate, and yet disquieting coupling of urban nostalgia with modernity. This explains why writers and intellectuals who, while speaking of Calcutta, have been defensive about their evocation of nostalgic affects. They often ended up justifying their works as not an exercise in the soggy sentimentalism of nostalgia, even when nostalgia clearly had a significant role within the narrative, sometimes in its presence and proliferation, and on other occasions, in a symptomatic and telling absence. As the second chapter shows, in nineteenth-century vernacular satires, at times the failure to locate a dominant strain of nostalgia can itself become a productive site of enquiry, throwing light on the psyche of a population at a certain historical juncture.

Instead of undermining nostalgia's role in literary and cultural spaces, as is commonly done, my thesis addressed the nostalgia question with a "what if?" question. Can a work be treated seriously, once we accept that it is an exercise in nostalgia? I responded to this dilemma by interrogating the powerful impact of nostalgia's affective politics and its various, and often

uneven manifestations in urban life where such memories are also compounded with a range of other emotions.

The opening chapter looks at the Anglophone literature of the British Raj in India to study the ways in which nostalgia is mobilized to support the politics of imperialism in British subjects' yearning for a "Little London" on the Ganges. Chapter Two, when read in dialogue with the previous chapter, introduces—through the early Bengali literature of the nineteenth century—the "native" perspective of the mechanical city where life was tuned to the new industrial clock time. By alluding to nineteenth century set-pieces imagining the evils of urban life, the chapter explores how archetypal nostalgia for ruralism was radicalized in the nationalist movement to galvanize the masses in the anticolonial struggle. Chapters Three and Four delineate how this tension between native ways of living and urban life is finally resolved in the creative and intellectual practices of the Modernists, who accepted their bearings in the city, despite their fraught relationship with the colonial metropolis. The third chapter examines nostalgia's vexed negotiation with Bengali modernism in the city. It studies nostalgia in relation to its multiple entanglements with different, and often contrastive affective realities of the urban-space. In the fourth chapter, urban nostalgia as refracted through modernist writers, is radicalized through the subversive spatial practices of the Krittibas poets. From the literary space of the postcolonial third world, their work becomes a rejoinder to colonial representations of the urban nightscape in Calcutta as a site for potential crime and criminality. With Chapter 5, a new strain of nostalgia is introduced in relation to Partition trauma and its impact on people in Post-Independence Calcutta.

The final chapter explores different moments of spectral uncanny in the postcolonial city, where the familiar yields to the unhomely and the spectre brings into the pale of visibility the secret and the invisible. From metaphorical hauntings to real houses and places, the chapter not only responds to the question of how memories are variously rooted in physical or material spaces, but also how they are literalized in the colonizers' preoccupation with "homes"—homecoming, home longing and home building in the city.

For a city like Calcutta, as we attempt to construct the narrative of its transition from a colonial centre to a postcolony through the lens of nostalgia, the spectral traces of the past are palpable beyond the literary domain. These traces may become manifest in quotidian habits, or even in the built environment that significantly shapes urban subjectivities. The specters of colonial modernity in their protean forms and relations, inhabiting everyday spaces, represent an alterity that initiates the encounter of different worlds within different time-scapes. In postcolonial narratives, the city simultaneously speaks of two different types of haunting— one of nostalgia and the other of trauma, typical of culture with a history of a violent past. As both trauma and nostalgia confront each other at different planes, the checkered past of Kolkata gets written and unwritten through the mediation of complex memories. The legacy of the colonial past is represented both in this "heritage" and its poverty in a city chronically deprived of its wealth by years of exploitation. Calcutta's metropolitan landscape cannot be envisaged without the coexistence of palatial houses of the Raj and the impoverished

families that lined the footpaths outside these colonial-era buildings without a roof over their heads.

Postcolonial urban nostalgia for its past must therefore simultaneously take into cognizance the deep fault lines of colonial rule in the accounts of trauma and violence, and the sustained damage done to the city, to avoid the easy trap of a colonial apology. Nonetheless, read in a certain context, this old-world fixation becomes a defiance of the new process of “modernization” in the postcolonial nation from which the city felt excluded after the political power shifted to a North Indian centre. The post-1947 nostalgia for the old city, thus initially supplemented the “lack” generated by the unequal transitioning from colonial to postcolonial modernity in South Asia, and subsequently became ideologically resistant to the sweep of globalization under the neo-liberal world order. The recalcitrant Calcuttans had been slow to join globalization and the electronic revolution embraced by other regions of the country, as Amit Chaudhuri asserts in his *Guardian* essay:

In 1977, the Left Front was elected to form the government in the state of West Bengal; it then won eight successive elections until finally being voted out of power in 2011....Perhaps one of its legacies was to create a microcosm that was entirely out of tune with the free-market zeitgeist [at least in the initial years of reign] whose vanguard assumed power in other parts of the world soon after the Left came to power in Bengal: one thinks of Margaret Thatcher’s election victory in 1979, and Ronald Reagan’s in 1981. India itself embraced free-market deregulation in 1991 (2015).

Hence, the unshaken affiliation to the past in the form of love for old Calcutta against the new landscape of crass consumerism mostly came from the Left-

leaning intellectuals and writers like Nabarun Bhattacharya who refused to adhere to new economic paradigms, even after the ruling Communist Party in Bengal eventually gave in to the avalanche of globalization. Their gesture cannot be merely shrugged off as petty bourgeois nostalgia, undermining the decolonization agenda. On the contrary, nostalgia here is a strategic tool to address the question of the preservation of Kolkata's past that gives the city its definite shape and character. In a civil society headed by conservationists, public-intellectuals, scholars and writers, there exists a strong argument in favour of conserving the material remnants of the past, because decolonization cannot be simply achieved by razing chapters of history that are inimical to current trends in politics. Such denials can potentially lapse into a violent nationalist re-envisioning of history, where the emancipatory principles of postcolonialism co-opt totalitarian "revivalist" nationalism, which is just as dangerous as the conservative politics of colonial nostalgia.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS IN RESEARCH

Cities, as bustling spaces of social, political and cultural interaction, are in the interminable process of collusion, making, "un-making" or dismantling. They generate in the modern metropolis what Amit Chaudhuri describes as a sense of "unfinished-ness"ⁱ in a recent lecture, that is inherently ambiguous. For, it may be indicative of Modernist subjects' penchant towards decay, fragmentation and dereliction in the city, and at the same time it may suggest there are "half-made", underdeveloped, or "liminal" spaces in the interstices of the metropolitan map that make the cityscape uneven, evoking a feeling of incompleteness. However, the fact that "cities are not finished products"ⁱⁱ as

Chaudhuri asserts, also hints at their radical and inexhaustible capacity to regenerate themselves continually. This great urban churning consequently engenders new memories and affects against specific socio-political backdrops, which keep the nostalgia project open-ended. My existing work on Calcutta is primarily confined to the incursions of colonial modernity and the aftermath of Partition. It ends before the violent eruption of Naxalism, the radical Left Movement in the 70s that took Calcutta by storm.

“Naxalgia”, a spin-off of nostalgia for the Naxalite period from the vantage-point of the present, has gained significant currency in contemporary popular discourse in India, especially with the disintegration of communism. The vast body of literature that grew around the Naxalite Movement and the role of urban youth and the intelligentsia that participated in overwhelming numbers, deserves another project and is beyond the scope of the thesis. Equally, nostalgia for the old institutions of “modernism”, transitioning with the city’s transformation from “postcolonial” to “global”ⁱⁱⁱ in the late capitalist period, remains largely unexplored, even though it is briefly touched upon in Nabarun Bhattacharyya’s novel in relation to the spectral traces of past that lie beneath the new frontage of the millennial city. These are some of the directions in which future research could be effectively channeled, to build upon the affective politics of urban nostalgia in its canonical and subversive embodiments against the contemporary global order.

NOTES

ⁱ See YouTube Lecture (5.25). “The Here and Elsewhere-with Amit Chaudhuri” at the *Hellingdon Literary Festival*.

ⁱⁱ Chaudhuri “The Here and Elsewhere”

ⁱⁱⁱ In their “Introduction” to the special number in *Interventions*, Graham Huggan and Claire Chambers differentiate between global and postcolonial cities. In their views, a global city is “a relatively recent phenomenon, coextensive with economic developments in late-capitalist modernity and allied to spiraling increases in world population, both of which help account for accelerated rates of urbanization – the unevenly developed transition from rural to urban ways of living” (786). On the other hand, a postcolonial city is “connected to a more distant past: it is both informed and transformed by the ‘long’ colonial histories that shape it, as well as by more recent patterns of migration, and the social dynamics tied in with these, which are in turn often linked directly or indirectly to the colonial past” (786).

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¹ NOTE ON THE BIBLIOGRAPHY

The "work cited" list is prepared by following the guidelines of the eighth edition of MLA, according to which the place (city) of publication is no longer recorded in the bibliography, barring books that were published before the 1900s. So instead of "London: Routledge, 2017", the new publication detail contains: "Routledge, 2017"

In this list, the city's name features only where the book/document used in the thesis is either a pre-twentieth century edition, or when the book's last publication was before 1900.

MLA also provides an option for putting the place name for books published from lesser known presses in non-Anglophone regions. However, this has been avoided in the "work-cited" for the sake of standardization. Almost all the books in vernacular (Bengali) are published from Kolkata.

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