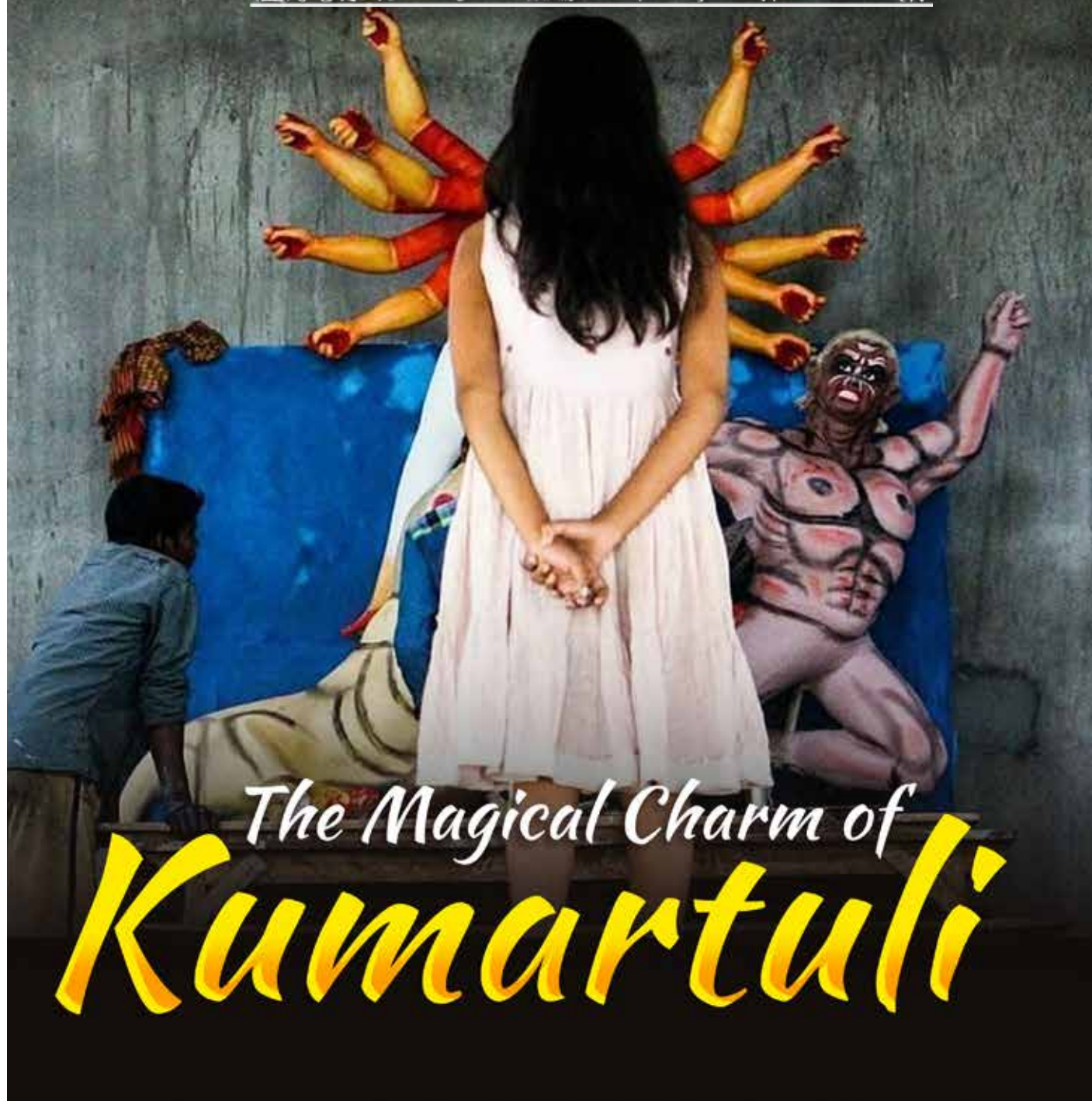


Calcutta CHRONICLE



The Magical Charm of **Kumartuli**

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Makaranda

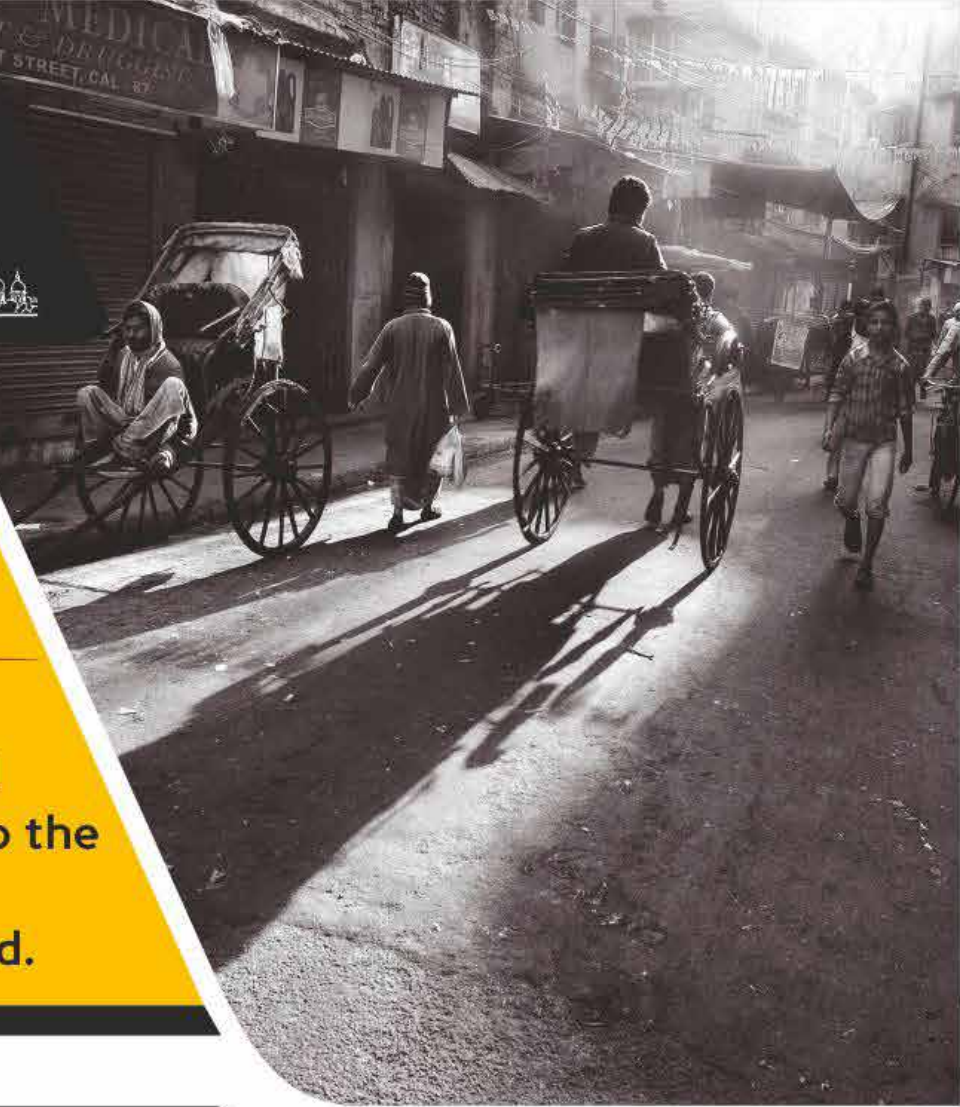
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Calcutta CHRONICLE



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EDITORIAL

From a modest beginning as the city's potter-quarters, Kumartuli has come a long way to emerge as a hub of art. Though it is difficult to pinpoint the precise date from which the potters made Kumartuli their home, the locality is certainly as old as Fort William which was rebuilt after being razed to the ground by the Nawab's forces. Since the past several decades, Kumartuli has become synonymous with Calcutta and its autumn festival. In this edition's 'Spotlight' column, we trace its history while exploring its narrow, dingy lanes which has produced such fine artistry over centuries and generations.

In the days of Charnock when Calcutta was yet to be second city of the Empire, the British encouraged the natives to settle in the area, clearing away the swamps and forests. However, by 1751 this came in the way of town planning as natives constructed structures and dug ponds wherever they pleased, creating an unhygienic atmosphere. In 1752, the white zemindar, Holwell decreed, following the orders of the company that the natives would not be allowed to construct houses just anywhere but must reside according to their caste-vocation. As a result, the bell metal artisans, Kansaris or Kanshabaniks came to live in the city, setting up their own paras where the workers lived, manufactured and sold their wares. Read the fascinating tale of Kansaripara Road in this edition's 'Neighbourhood' column.

Joydip Sur
Editor



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Stage Craft

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Old Fort William

Calcutta's First Fort



Anindita Mazumder

The old Fort William, one of the first structures built by the British in Calcutta had a humble beginning and probably was an apt symbol of the Empire in its early days – built almost as an afterthought, left defenceless and tottering, vanquished and then abandoned altogether in humiliation and for a new order of things.

The East India Company's factory was on the river side, at the Tank Square, later called Dalhousie Square and neither the Governor's House (not the present Raj Bhavan) nor the warehouses were fortified. In 1696, Sobha Singh, a petty zemindar rebelled against his superior and attacked Burdwan; anarchy followed, trade suffered. The foreign traders were then allowed by the Nawab to fortify their assets. Gladly, the Dutch did so and the English followed and fortified it on August 20, 1700. The fort was named after the reigning monarch William III.

It was not much of a fort as it was shaped like an irregular tetragon. According to HE Busteed, the building which was "of brickwork and strongly cemented" lay near the riverbank about halfway between the northern and southern extremes of the company's territory. Its east-west walls were longer than north-south, the two latter sides being of unequal length. It had four bastions, built gradually over the years; the outer walls were barely 4 feet thick and 18 feet high. The terraces were merely roofs of the storerooms and chambers below. There were large windows on the outer walls for the ventilation of the rooms contiguous to it. A little less than half of the fort was opposite the Great Tank or Lal Dighi and the park. The main entrance stood projected from the eastern wall and had guns and the "avenue leading towards Eastward", called the Great Bungalow Road that led towards Dalhousie Square north and farther to Lal Bazaar. There was a line of canons mounted on the masonry facing the riverside. Houses of other Englishmen jostled and could impede the defence of the fort and a church stood



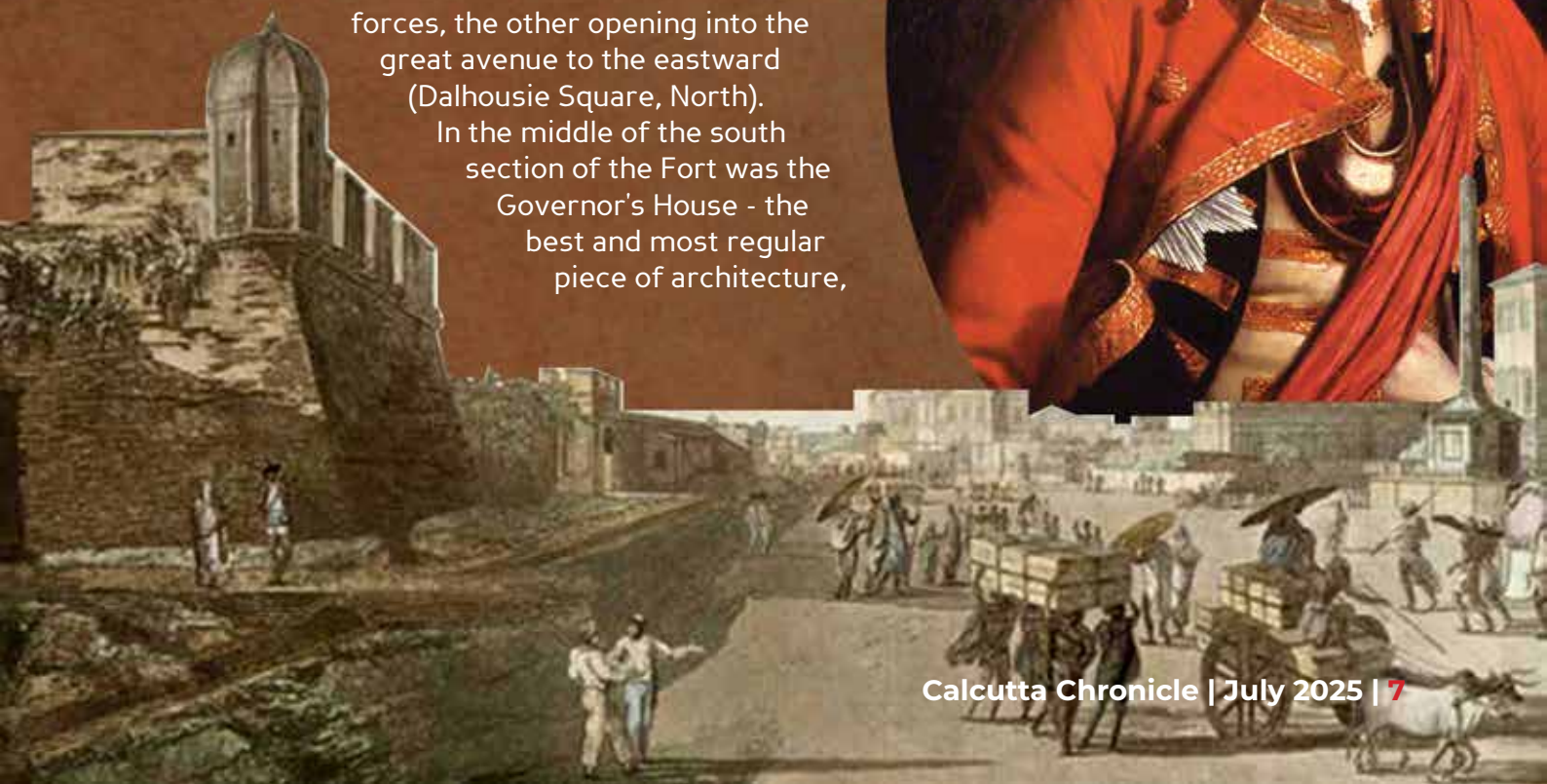
■ CALCUTTA'S EDIFICE ■

nearby. In fact, while building the new fort at Gobindopore, the English kept in mind the havoc caused by the Nawab's forces due to the houses that stood near the fort, endangering its defence. They ensured the new fort was placed at the centre of a large open ground - the Maidan which turned out to be the lungs of the concrete city.

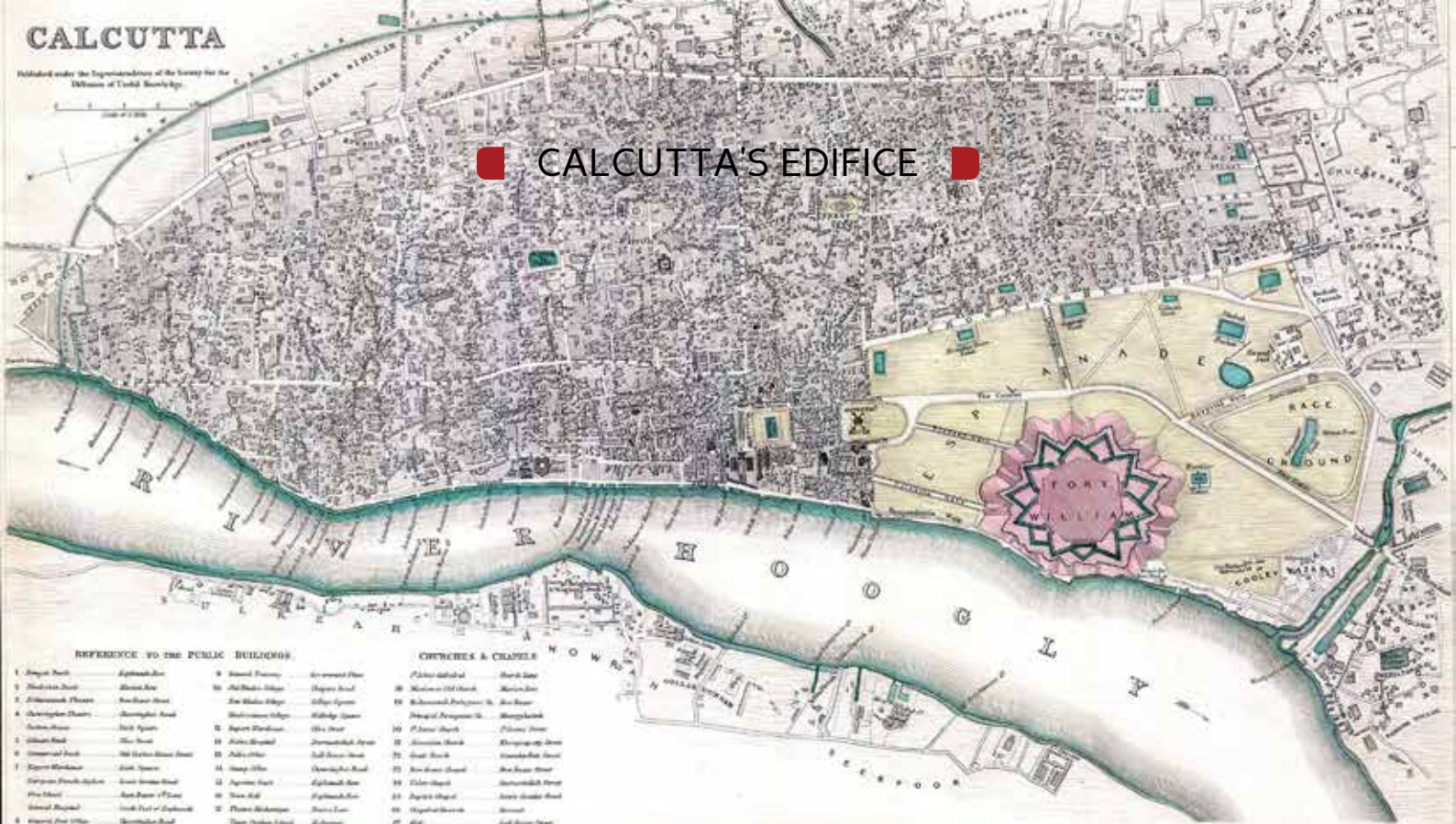
The Marhatta ditch was dug in 1742 to protect the English settlement from the raiders but was never completed. Meanwhile, after receiving the zemindary which once belonged to Sabarna Roy Choudhurys because of the firman of the Mughal Emperor, the Company found the means to defray the expenses of the small garrison required to be stationed at the fort. The first Writers' Buildings in the first half of 18th century were housed in the Long Row within the fort, used as quarters by the young gentlemen in the company's service. The northern part of the fort contained the magazine, armoury, the dispensary and various shops and stores. The northern river gate was used by the young Nawab to enter the fort after it fell. The south section had two gates, one leading to the river and steps and landing stage, used by the Governor Roger Drake to escape in a boat before the fort fell to the Nawab's forces, the other opening into the great avenue to the eastward (Dalhousie Square, North). In the middle of the south section of the Fort was the Governor's House - the best and most regular piece of architecture,

according to the much travelled Alexander Hamilton.

It was found that the defences of Calcutta, natural as well artificial were inadequate to prevent it being stormed. The natural defences were Hooghly and the Salt Lakes. A visitor noticed that the "Governor's house and the Company's stores and warehouses" were surrounded by a high wall without moat, with bastions planted with a few canons and a battery of 30 guns facing the river and a feeble garrison. He concluded, it may survive a country force but would stand no chance against a European force.



■ CALCUTTA'S EDIFICE ■



Moreover, in spite of remonstrance by the Court of directors and local military officers the fort's defences were allowed to fall into a state of disrepair. Adding to the misery, new godowns came up in between preventing the canons from being effective in case of an attack. Hence, it did not even withstand the storming of Nawab's forces.

The siege of Calcutta and the Black Hole tragedy are oft-repeated tales and to cut a long story short, the new Nawab, Siraj-ud-Daula attacked Calcutta after the British ignored his orders against repairing the fort, anticipating a clash with the French ensconced in Chandannagore. As the Nawab's forces advanced, the British first tried to placate him by accepting all his demands, then urged the Dutch and French to help but they turned down the pleas. Reinforcement was sought from Madras.

At the end Governor Drake abandoned the fort while among those who remained behind in the garrison there were hardly a handful of Englishmen who had any experience in warfare. The rest were mostly Eurasians who held the musket for the first time. The siege was over even before it began and the fort fell to Siraj's forces on June 20, 1756. Siraj ordered the prisoners to be held for the night and the guards pushed them in a small room with only single window leading to the Black Hole tragedy. There are various accounts of the tragedy but Holwell who chronicled it, had built a monument in the memory of those who perished, at the corner of the Writers' Buildings and the site occupied by the GPO. The bodies had been thrown at that very spot, in the ditch, the next morning. However, it fell into disrepair after being struck by lightning and its removal was

■ CALCUTTA'S EDIFICE ■

ordered by the Marquis of Hastings after a few years.

The fort had been built on the highest piece of land and the plot is now occupied by General Post Office, Calcutta Collectorate, the Custom House (now RBI Building) and office of Eastern Railway. From 1766 what remained of the first fort was used as Customs House with an adjoining landing stage to receive arriving goods and passengers. The present General Post Office was erected in 1856 on the partial ruins of old Fort William. Later, under the directions of Lord Curzon the outline of the old fort was marked with brass lines in the stone and a tablet was put up to indicate "the position and extent of south curtain of Old Fort William" on the walls of GPO. The brass lines are hardly visible today and most people who cross that busy stretch are unaware of the past history. At the location of the tiny guard room which served as the "Black Hole" Curzon had put up a marble plaque which said: "The marble pavement below this spot was placed here by Lord Curzon, viceroy and governor general of India in 1901 to mark the site of the prison in old fort William known as the black hole in which 146 British inhabitants of Calcutta were confined on the night of the 20th June; 1756 and from which only

23 came out alive." The Holwell's monument has since disappeared, abandoned at the back of the St. John's courtyard after an agitation by Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose. Little remains of the efforts of Curzon to preserve the past and the railings and tablets are mostly gone except the brass lines on the staircase and a tablet on the walls of GPO.



■ CALCUTTA'S EDIFICE ■



While in possession of the Nawab, some of the inner buildings of the fort were demolished and a mosque was erected. But after the English recovered their lost ground, it returned to original use. In 1758, Company's goods were removed and given up to the army for its barracks. In 1760, the space between the East Gate and black hole was used as a temporary chapel before St. John's Church was built. By 1767 all traces of military were removed to convert the fort into a Custom House. The masonry was strong enough to ward off pickaxes and crowbars and the workers had to resort to the use of gun powder.

The foundation stone of the Old Custom House was laid by Lord Hastings on February 12, 1819. It was a substantially wide two storied building erected on the site of the old fort between Calcutta Collectorate and Eastern India Railway House. The iron gate of the Custom House faced Clive Street and East India Railway Company was situated to

its northern side before a new one was built at Strand Road and the office of Reserve Bank of India came up at the same spot. "Finally, in 1868 the opening of the GPO banished out of sight and mind for nearly thirty years all memories of the Old Fort and of the tragedy of suffering and humiliation which it was its fate to witness," wrote HEA Cotton. The new, strongly built Fort William with the Union Jack fluttering atop became the new symbol of British ascendancy over India and further helped the English to obliterate the shameful saga of the fall of the fort and the humiliation of defeat.

THE BRASS LINES
IN THE ADJACENT STEPS AND PAVEMENT
MARK THE POSITION AND EXTENT
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OF OLD FORT WILLIAM.
THE EXTREME SOUTHEAST POINT BEING
95 FEET
FROM THIS WALL.

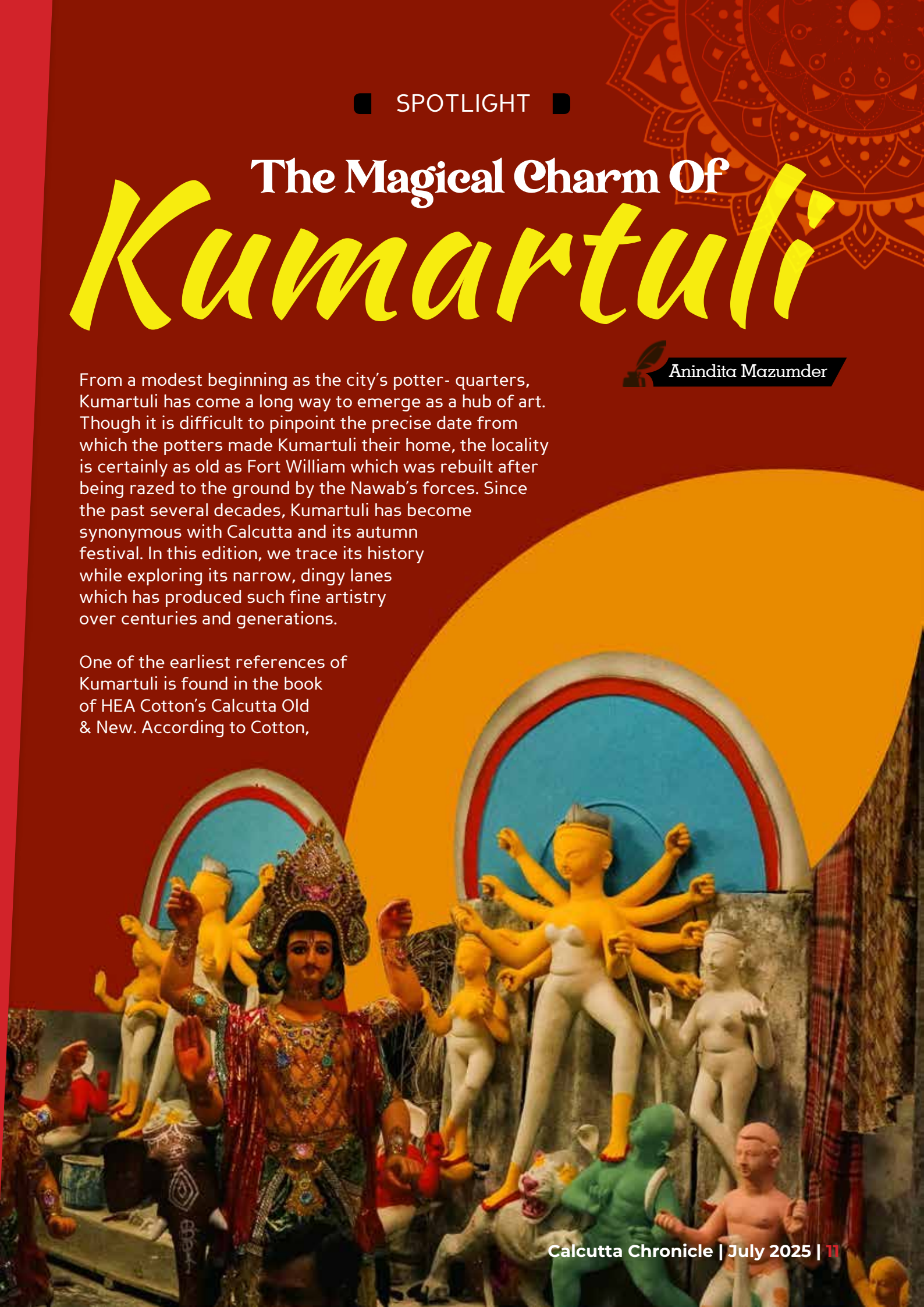
SPOTLIGHT

The Magical Charm Of Kumartuli

Anindita Mazumder

From a modest beginning as the city's potter- quarters, Kumartuli has come a long way to emerge as a hub of art. Though it is difficult to pinpoint the precise date from which the potters made Kumartuli their home, the locality is certainly as old as Fort William which was rebuilt after being razed to the ground by the Nawab's forces. Since the past several decades, Kumartuli has become synonymous with Calcutta and its autumn festival. In this edition, we trace its history while exploring its narrow, dingy lanes which has produced such fine artistry over centuries and generations.

One of the earliest references of Kumartuli is found in the book of HEA Cotton's Calcutta Old & New. According to Cotton,



the newly rebuilt Fort William was situated beside the river and at the centre of the “populous flourishing village” of Govindpore and a portion of the “restitution money” was spent in compensating the inhabitants to settle in other parts of the town notably, Toltollah, Kumartooly and Sobhabazar.

It is also mentioned that Holwell, the company’s agent, under the direction of the directors allotted separate districts to the company’s workmen including Suriparah (place of wine-sellers), Maidaputty (flour market), Colootollah (oil-sellers), Chuttarparah (for carpenters), Chunam Gully (lime lane), Molunga (place of salt works), Aheeritollah (cowherd’s quarters) and Coomartolly (potter’s quarters).

As I gingerly made my way past the scores of headless figures of Viswakarma and the moulded heads of Maa Durga kept in the open to be dried, my thoughts turn to the past and the kumors who, abandoning all else took up idol-making as a full time occupation with the passage of time.

Turning the pages of the city’s history one finds that Durga Puja was first celebrated in the city by Laxmikanta Ray Mazumder, the forefather of Sabarna Roy Chowdhurys’ of Barisha, but the pomp and gaiety that Durga Puja later came to be associated with begun with Nabakissen Deb of Sovabazar. His palace or Rajbari is quite adjacent to Kumartuli. Nabakissen Munshi began celebrating Durga Puja after the fall of Plassey in 1757 and invited Lord Clive to participate in the festivity. By the turn of the century a number of zamindars or the nouveau rich in their eagerness to display their wealth begun celebrating Durga Puja in the city on a lavish scale.

The first kumors or potters certainly hailed from Krishnanagar, Nadia. Initially, they visited the home of their patron’s and made the idols at the thakurdalans, a few months before the Durga Puja. The wealthy and the neo rich who had congregated at Calcutta -- the trade centre of the British East India, became the first patrons of the kumors who made clay images of Durga and various other idols; but round the year they also made other things of clay.

It is said that as the demands for their work grew, the kumors and their apprentices wanted



SPOTLIGHT

a piece of land to settle and were granted one; while some say they settled on the land of Govind Ram Mitra, the black deputy who had amassed great wealth, others attribute it to Gokul Mitra. But it certainly belonged to a zamindar, for the said plot now enjoys the status of thikha tenant land, another feature unique to Calcutta. (In thikha tenancy, the land which once belonged to zamindar prior to independence now rests with the state government following the abolition of zamindari system. The original tenants of the zamindars made structures, pucca or temporary which they again rented out to the bharatiyas; at present, the bharatiyas were in an agitating mood, demanding more compensation from the state government.)

The idol for the first Durga Puja held in Belur Math in 1901 by Swami Vivekananda also came from Kumartuli. Only a few days before the Pujas, Swamiji decided

to celebrate Durga Puja at the Math and a Brahmachari was sent to Kumartuli to procure a suitable idol. All the idols had been sold save one; someone had ordered it but did not turn up at the last minute and the idol was brought to Belur Math and worshipped. Maa Sarada was also present on the occasion.

By the turn of century, Kumartuli prospered under a new form of patronage. The sarbojonin or community puja began to gain popularity and over the years they became the new patrons of Kumartuli. As Maa Durga shifted out of the cramped thakurdalans to the wide pandals on the roads her family too became disjointed.





From traditional ekchalas where Maa Durga was in the same frame with her children, each god and goddess was now placed on separate pedestals.

By 1960s a lot many of the Calcuttans had flown the nest, settling abroad and started celebrating pujas on foreign soil. Kumartuli responded to the needs of time sending idols made of paper pulp or fibre glasses to far off places in US and Europe.

Although the very first inhabitants of Kumartuli may have been potters and hence most of them bear the surname "Pal" but over generations their social standing changed and now the inhabitants of Kumartuli are no longer potters but artists or shilpis on their own right. A case in point is Sunil Paul, a renowned sculptor. He does not make clay idols but moulds models of famous personages out of clay or stone. A number of his clay models are on display at our Town Hall and at the Parliament. He has his own studio at Kumartuli and will readily regale you with tales of the potter's town.

"I do not make clay idols. I cannot bear to see my creations destroyed during immersion," Sunil Paul said while adding that his family has been at Kumartuli for nearly six generations.

In the late nineties, Kumartuli faced competition from the pass-outs of the art colleges as "theme pujas" gained popularity among the organisers; the artists were required not only to innovate on pandals but the idols were also custom made to match the "theme". However, as the hype died down Kumartuli managed to hold on to its tradition and survive.

Kumartuli, at present, is a maze of cramped and decrepit structures, mostly, made of



■ SPOTLIGHT ■

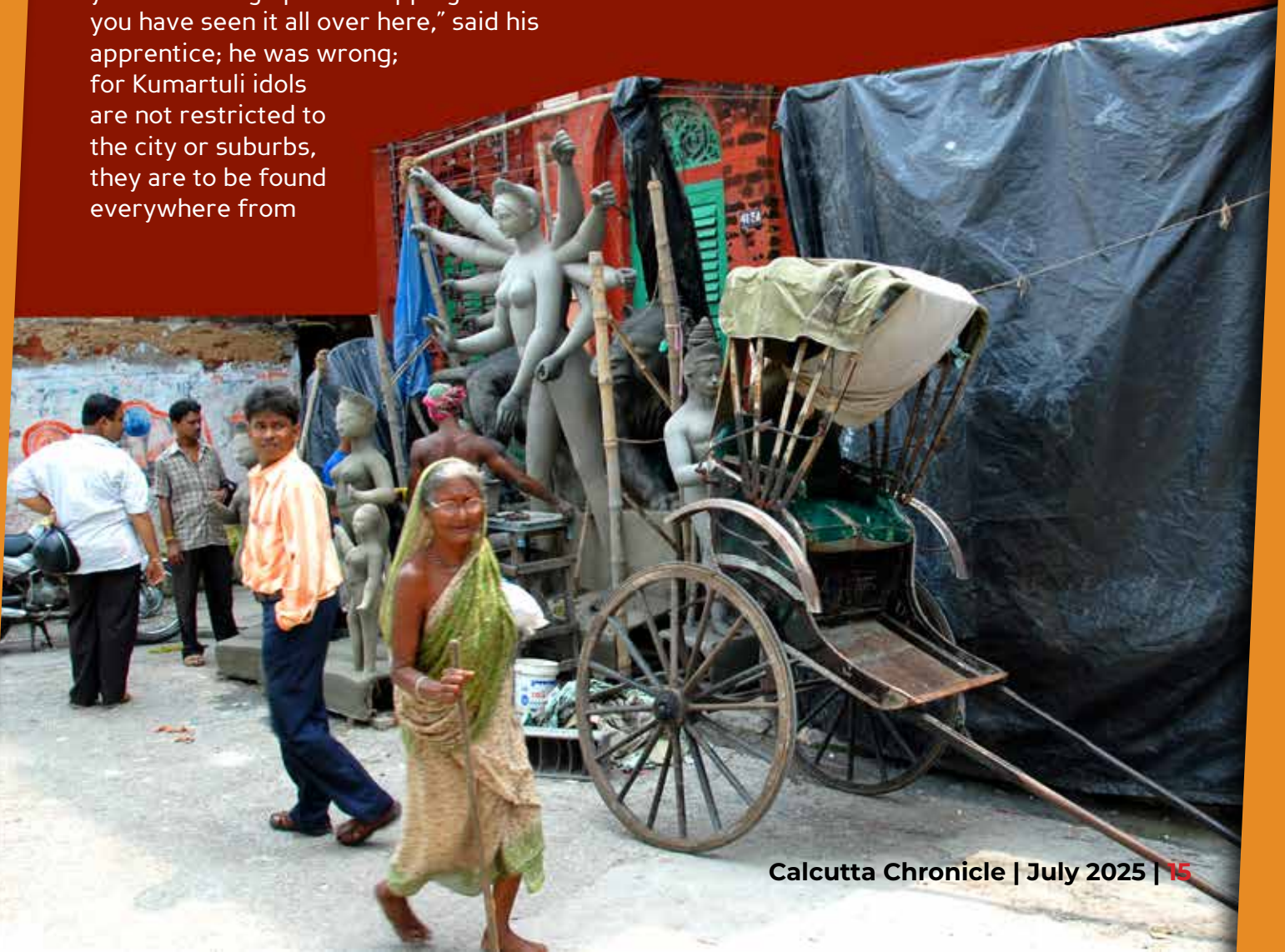
bamboo, wooden planks and polythene sheets. There is a flurry of activity ahead of the Pujas; I stood and watched an artisan moulding the clay with his fingers, finely shaping a canine for the ferocious looking but still toothless lion, oblivious to any appreciative gaze. Even as the camera wielding went hysterical for a good angle, the artisans apparently used to such prying, seldom looked up in curiosity. With less than two more months to go, none of the images are complete, even the most advanced ones have only a coat of yellow paint.

“This is a unique place. You should come in the evening when the boys are at work. They work till the 11pm or even midnight. The whole place looks magical. A lot of people who come from outside spend days among us, researching about Kumartuli or capture the magic on camera”, said Sunil Pal.

“If you visit Kumartuli just before the Pujas you need not go pandal hopping because you have seen it all over here,” said his apprentice; he was wrong; for Kumartuli idols are not restricted to the city or suburbs, they are to be found everywhere from

Shillong to San Fransisco. The Durga idol before which I stood would make a long journey to Ghatshila, undaunted by any Maoist threat.

The magical charm of the ramshackle, dimly lit studios from where Maa Durga emerges every Panchami to be transported to the brightly illuminated pandal, still lingers on.

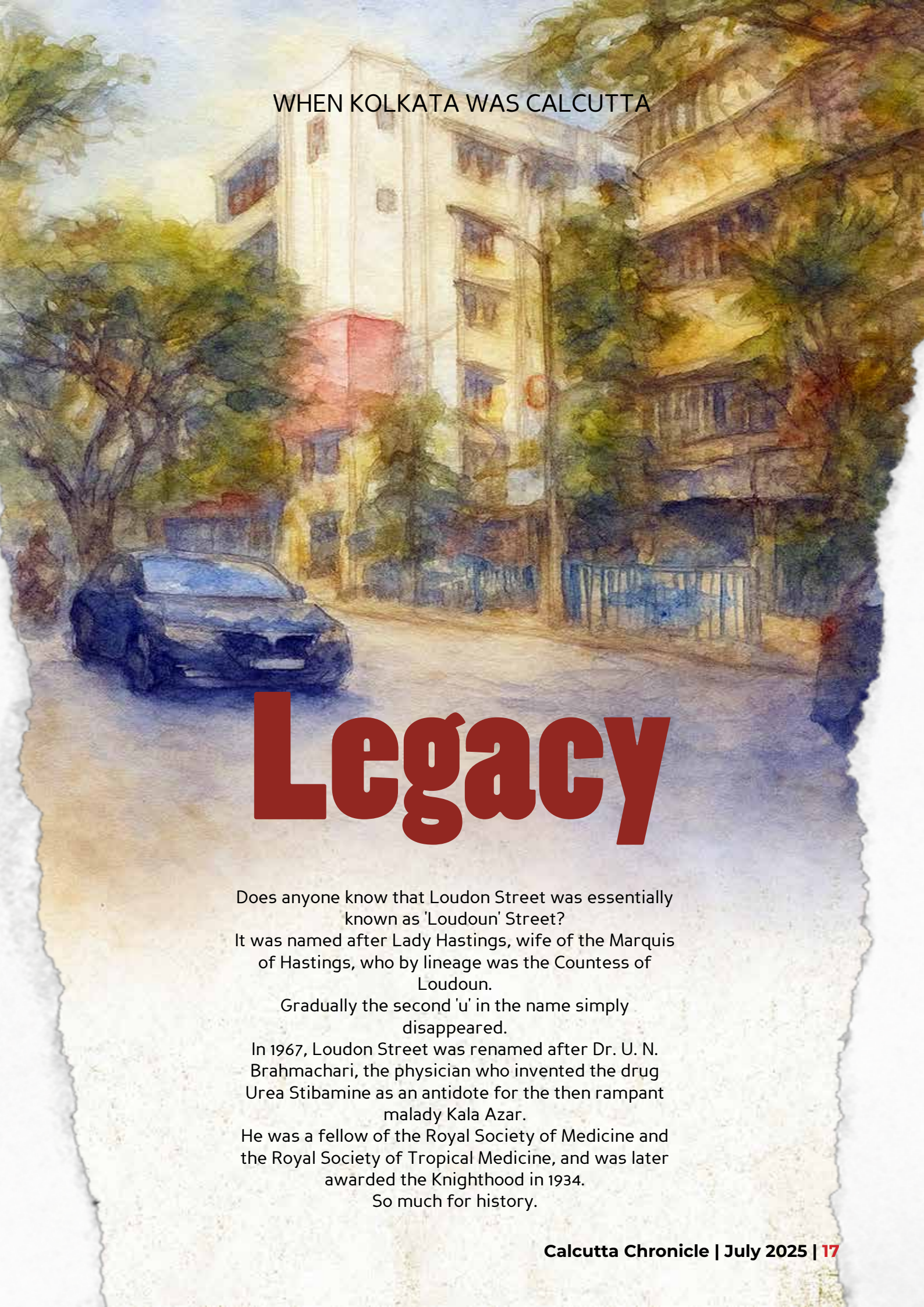


WHEN KOLKATA WAS CALCUTTA

Loudon *at Random*



Arjun Mukherjee



WHEN KOLKATA WAS CALCUTTA

Legacy

Does anyone know that Loudon Street was essentially known as 'Loudoun' Street?

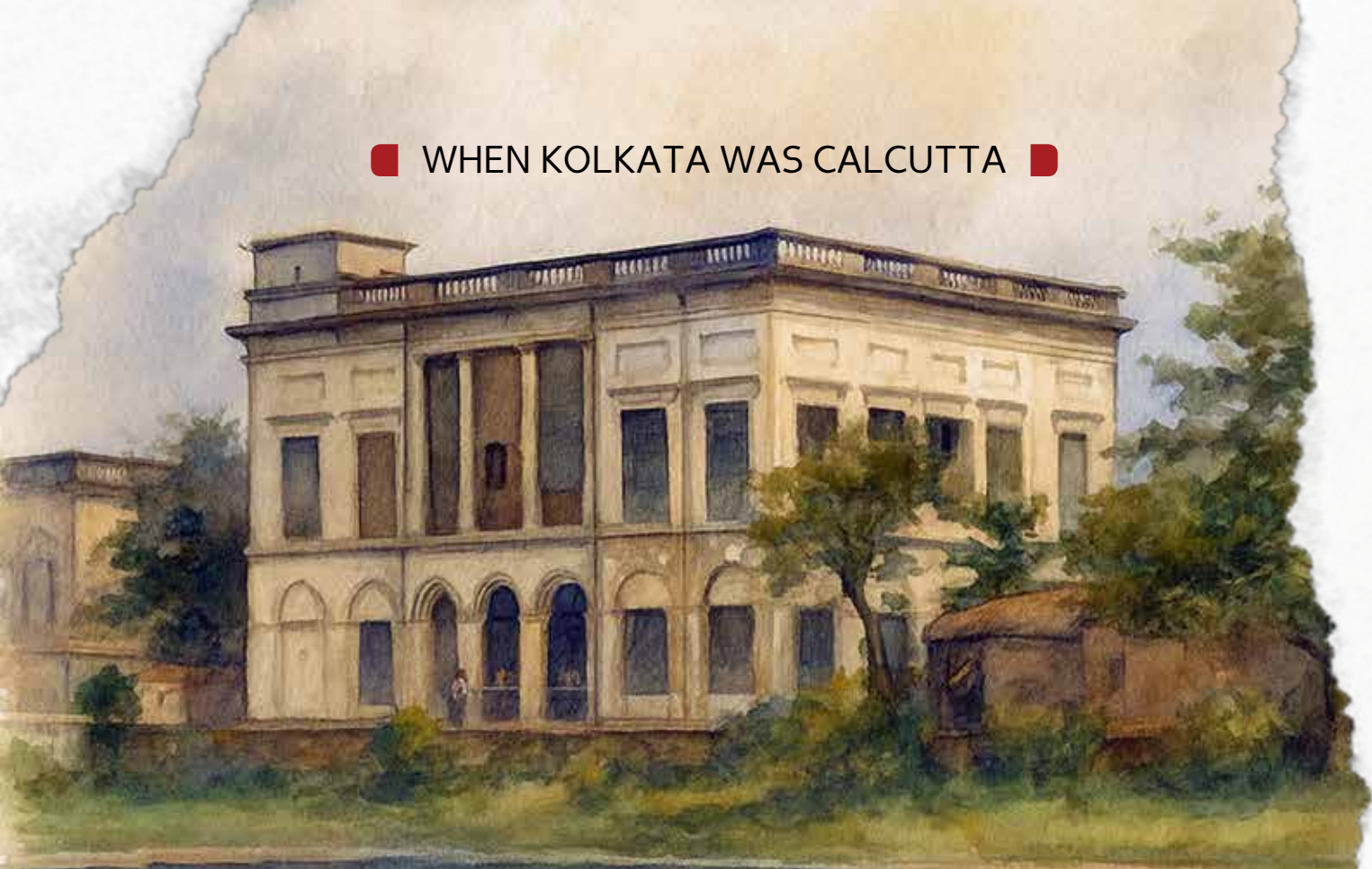
It was named after Lady Hastings, wife of the Marquis of Hastings, who by lineage was the Countess of Loudoun.

Gradually the second 'u' in the name simply disappeared.

In 1967, Loudon Street was renamed after Dr. U. N. Brahmachari, the physician who invented the drug Urea Stibamine as an antidote for the then rampant malady Kala Azar.

He was a fellow of the Royal Society of Medicine and the Royal Society of Tropical Medicine, and was later awarded the Knighthood in 1934.

So much for history.



Unforgettable

Memories of Loudon Street slip easily into focus.
St. Xavier's had a goalkeeper called Ali with legs like springs.
He identified a Loudon Street garage for his much
touted 'Jean junction'.
His jeans did sell fast, but his shop disappeared faster.
Loudon Street had another joint called 'Deli'. The place supplied
delectable Frankfurters to me and to the
KLM flight from Calcutta.
KLM stopped their flights. My ration of Frankfurters
vanished abruptly.
Hotel Rutt Deen on Loudon belonged to the Ruttonjee family,
owners of Olympia, Calcutta's iconic watering hole.
Ruttonjee was a nice man with an extra-large middle.
He always wore something that resembled a white uniform.
Reason why I once confused him with a waiter of similar width.

Tailpiece

To others Loudon will remain just
another street.

To me it's where birds used to
come home.

Flowers used to open up.

Where a much advertised 'Nature
Park' simply used to be a pond full
of fishes.

Where I just used to be.

Kansaripara Road



Anindita Mazumder

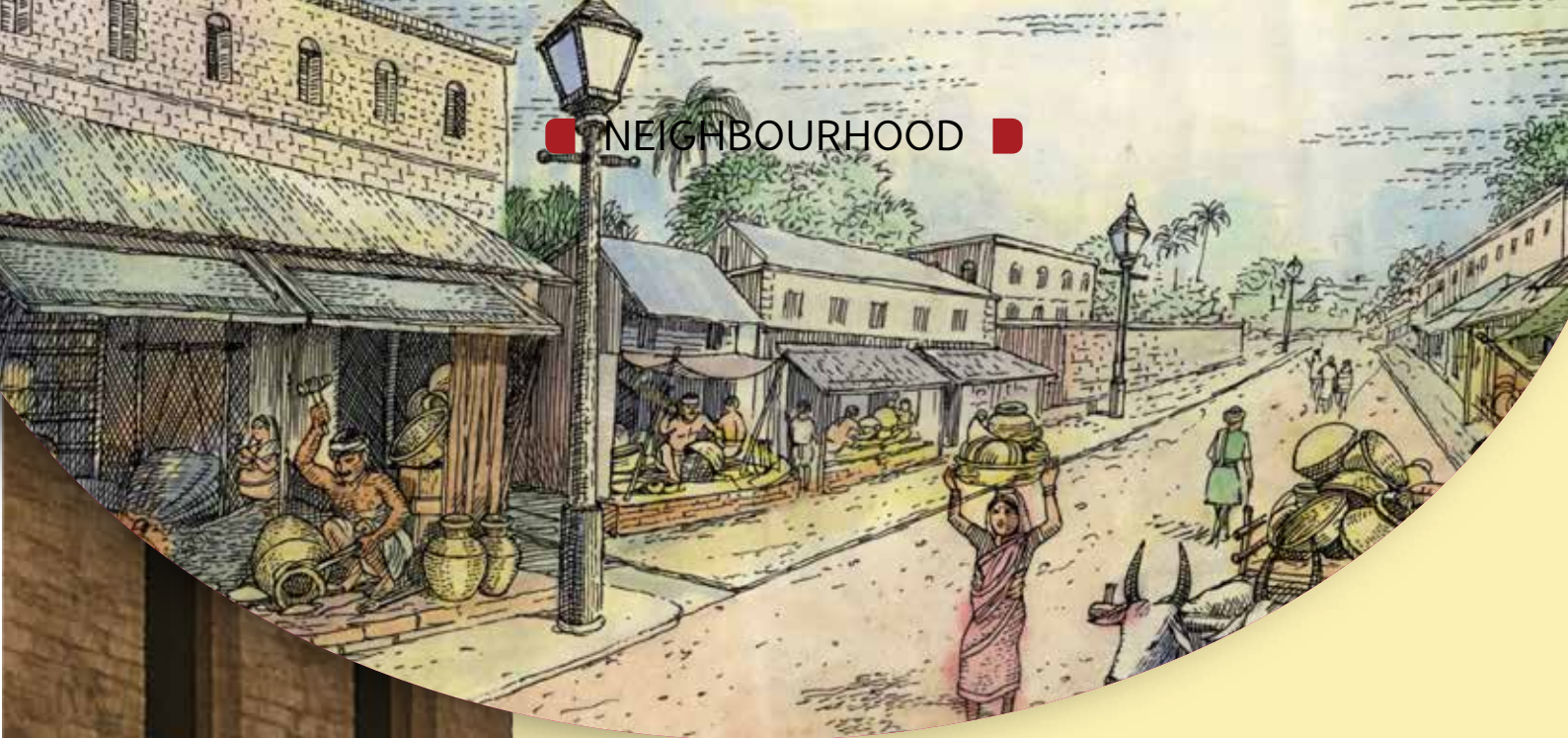
In the days of Charnock when Calcutta was yet to be second city of the Empire, the British encouraged the natives to settle in the area, clearing away the swamps and forests. However, by 1751 this came in the way of town planning as natives constructed structures and dug ponds wherever they pleased, creating an unhygienic atmosphere.

In 1752, the white zemindar, Holwell decreed, following the orders of the company that the natives would not be allowed to construct houses

just anywhere but must reside according to their caste-vocation. As a result we had kolus (oil-pressers), kumhars (potters), jele (fishermen) settling according to their hereditary profession, somewhat like the guild system prevalent in England but strictly on caste-basis.

Hence the bell metal artisans, Kansaris or Kanshabaniks came to live in the city, setting up their own paras where the workers lived, manufactured and sold their wares. Many Hindu families ate only on bell metal utensils and hence the Kansaris who held monopoly on both manufacturing and trade came to settle in both northern and southern parts of the city near the large native settlements. Even today, utensils used during Pujas are usually made of brass or bell metal. Bell metal utensils were mostly sold by weight.





Noted researcher, Dr Debashis Basu writing on the localities of Calcutta, found a Kansaripatti on Chitpore Road and all the shops in that area sold only kansa or bell-metal wares. But the biggest settlement of the Kangshabaniks in the north was in and around present Sithnath Road (Ward No. 25) which was earlier known as Kansaripara Lane. Beside Jelepara swang (a pantomime highlighting social aberrations) Kansaripara was also famous for its swang.

In the south, Kansaris occupied extensive areas in Bhawanipore by which the Adi Ganga flowed and at that time the area was considered to be the city's suburb. In fact, the chronicler of old Calcutta, HEA Cotton, mentioned Bhawanipore as "a populous native place, inhabited chiefly by Hindu artisans in metals who work for the houses in town."

Kansaris who originally hailed from Hooghly lost their livelihood after their raw material became scarce following the Second World War. With Partition their market in East Bengal and Burma and beyond was cut off while the introduction of enamel and aluminium utensils in poor families and use of glass and porcelain crockery among



■ NEIGHBOURHOOD ■

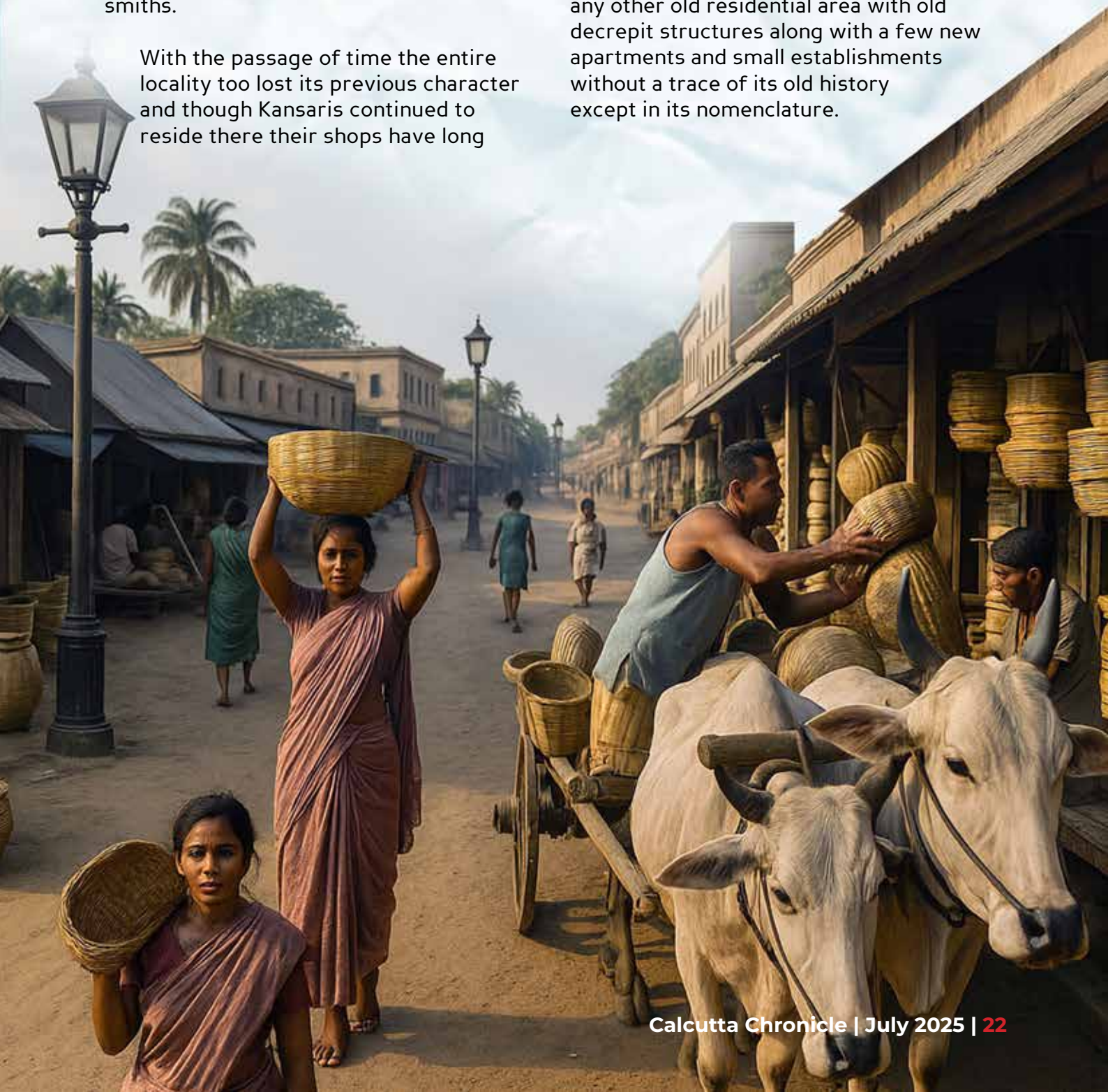
well-to-do families robbed them of their local market. Initially, they started making badges, buckles and brass buttons, rust proof fittings for ships and even electrical machinery and surgical instruments.

Interestingly, following the loss of their hereditary means of livelihood, the Kansaris instead of looking for jobs turned to entrepreneurship - jewellery making and setting stones. In Bhawanipore, the Kansaris turned into gold and silver-smiths.

With the passage of time the entire locality too lost its previous character and though Kansaris continued to reside there their shops have long

disappeared. Today, Kansaripara Road stretching from Elgin Road to Jagubazar is the sole remnant of extensive settlement of Kansaris in this area. According to noted historian PT Nair who lived here for decades, the names of adjoining roads such Beninandan or Rupnandan Lane are also evidences of the large settlement of Kanshabaniks since Nandan is a prevalent surname among them.

Today, Kansaripara Road is just like any other old residential area with old decrepit structures along with a few new apartments and small establishments without a trace of its old history except in its nomenclature.





■ STAGE CRAFT ■

JAAAL

A Brilliant Adaptation of Albert Camus' *Le Malentendu*



Chanchal Bhattacharya

French author, philosopher, and playwright Albert Camus was born on November 4, 1913, in colonial Algeria. A leading proponent of Existentialism and Absurdism, Camus left behind a legacy that shaped modern philosophy and literature.

His works such as the play *Caligula* (1945), and novels like *The Rebel* (1951), *The Plague*, *The Stranger*, *The Fall*, and *A Happy Death* continue to be celebrated worldwide. In 1957, Camus was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature. He passed away on January 4, 1960.

■ STAGE CRAFT ■



The recent production by the Banshroni Kathamrita theatre group titled “Jaal” is based on Camus’ play *Le Malentendu* (The Misunderstanding), translated and adapted by renowned playwright Jahar Dasgupta and directed by Shakti De. The play was successfully staged on June 5, 2025 at Madhusudan Mancha, and explored the themes of social rebellion and existential conflict.

“Jaal” immerses the audience in a crisis of existence — where the self becomes indistinguishable from the surrounding shadow. No matter who we are, a persistent crisis seems to follow us like a shadow. Often, we cannot foresee its arrival. We struggle continuously against it, but remain powerless to control it. When the inevitable happens, we are left devastated — desperately searching for a sense of



■ STAGE CRAFT ■



existence in its aftermath.

The plot revolves around a mother and daughter — two socially and morally isolated women — who face a devastating choice they never imagined. A choice that tears away the deceptive shimmer of reality to expose a cruel truth. But can they truly withstand such a truth?

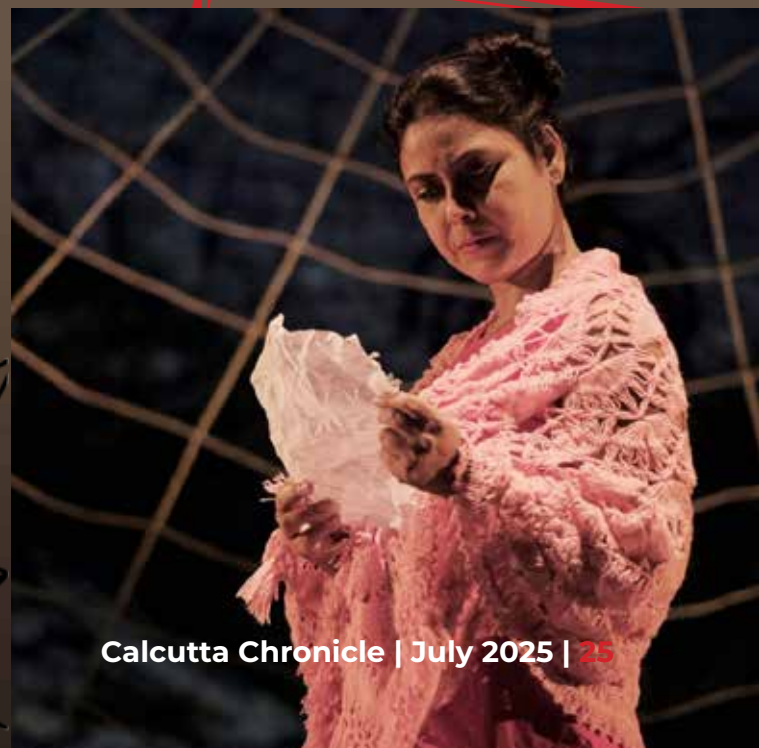
The Misunderstanding — or perhaps Mistaken Identity — turns everything into a grotesque parody of life. The spider's web that traps the characters gradually begins to ensnare the audience as well.

That's why the character Bhola screams, "As long as you control greed, you walk the right path. But when greed controls you..." Thus unfolds this play of existence and non-existence — "Jaal."

When the curtain rises, the audience is transported through the threads of a spider's web to a mysterious mountainous region — a brilliant concept by director Shakti De. The stage design by Partha Majumdar adds depth and texture to the vision.

Suranjana Dasgupta stands out in the role of the mother. A well-known name in Bengali theatre, she delivers an intense performance full of anguish, loneliness, and despair — firmly reestablishing her dominance on stage. Opposite her, Bindia Ghosh plays the daughter, Maya, with equal brilliance. Their onstage chemistry becomes a riveting psychological game — an endless serpentine dance between mother and daughter.

Then comes the royal entrance of Shakti De as Jayanta on a stormy night. He arrives, he sees, and he conquers — bringing fullness and conflict to the narrative. The mother and daughter fail to recognise him, and a catastrophic twist unfolds.





■ STAGE CRAFT ■

Abhisikta De as Barnali, Jayanta's wife, delivers a line that echoes across the mountain slopes:
"Where do I go now? Whom do I turn to?" Her helplessness reverberates like an emotional tremor.

Shambhu Mitra, portraying Bhola, proves that even with minimal dialogue, an actor can dominate the stage — his physical movements and body language are his greatest assets. As Stanislavski said, "Nothing is small" — and Shambhu embodies this truth.

Biswajit Pal (as Haladhar) and Krishna

Kar (as Paritosh) both offer natural and fitting performances in their respective roles. Lighting by Manoj Prasad creates vivid, layered moments that elevate the play. The sound design by Kalyan Sarkar adds depth and atmosphere.

In short, with Camus' *Le Malentendu* as its foundation, translated by Jahar Dasgupta and masterfully directed and performed by Shakti De, "Jaal" by Banshroni Kathamrita is sure to be remembered as an exemplary and enviable production in the world of Bengali theatre.



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The Parsis of Calcutta

A waning community



Sandip Banerjee

With the emergence of the City of Calcutta as the 'Second City of the Empire', this place started becoming more and more cosmopolitan. Calcutta, as a city is definitely much younger than many other cities in India. But it rose to unprecedented heights of prominence during the days of British Raj. As the root of British rule in India kept on becoming firm, Calcutta kept on improving as a city. The political and economic significance of the city went on multiplying,

attracting people of various communities. They flocked in search of fortune. Eventually many of them settled in the city for a long time, leaving behind an indelible mark of legacy.

All these communities like the Parsis, the Armenians, the Jews have a story to tell in the built-up of the city of Calcutta. It might be that these people have become thin in number over the years; many of them migrated to other places and yet they cannot be withered away from the face of consideration. It is for them that Calcutta has remained such a colourful city. With passage of time Calcutta might have become Kolkata, even then the long drawn presence of some communities reflect an impression of the past glory of this great city.

Calcutta once flourished as the capital of an empire, the bustling hub of commerce. The Parsis were the people who dwelt near the centre of commercial activities. They had



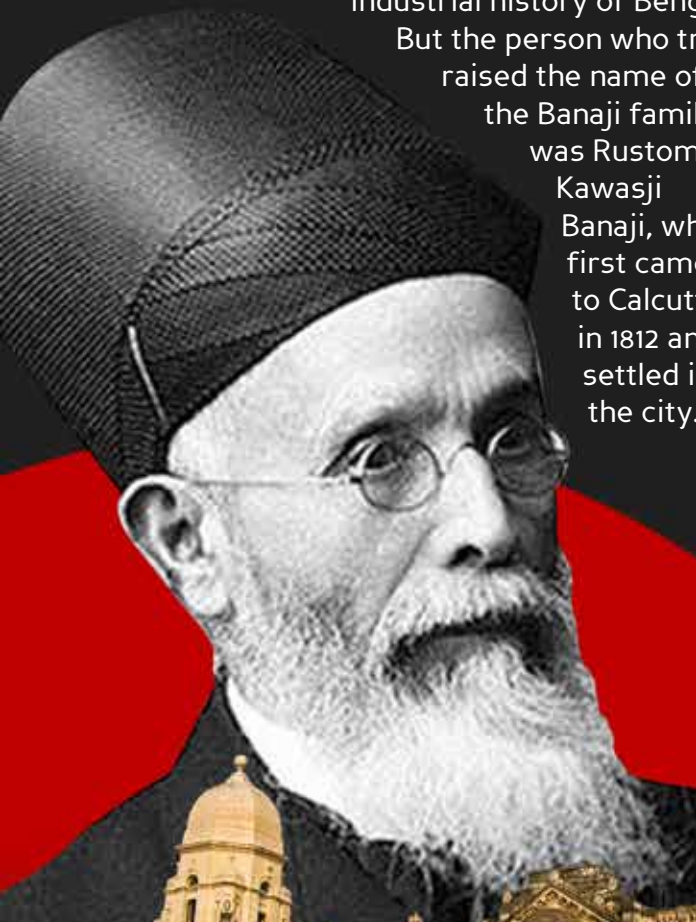
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undergone a somewhat strange alchemy; perhaps the arrival of the British acted as a catalyst, transforming an agrarian community to an entrepreneurial one. The earliest historical evidence of Parsi migration to Calcutta can be traced in 1767 in the form of a gentleman known as Dadabhoy Behramji Banaji who came from Surat. He was a flourishing trader, soon to receive the patronage of John Carter, then Governor of Bengal and who had known Banaji since his days in Surat. Behramji was the doyen of the famous Banaji family, later to make deep influence on the industrial history of Bengal.

But the person who truly raised the name of the Banaji family was Rustomji Kawasji Banaji, who first came to Calcutta in 1812 and settled in the city.

Rustomji Babu, as he was fondly called in the community founded the Sun Insurance Office and was also a known ship merchant. He was a personal friend to Dwarkanath Tagore. He not only owned a fleet of twenty seven ships; he actually bought the Kidderpore Docks in 1837. Rustomji, along with his prowess in merchandising, also was a notable philanthropist. He founded the first fire temple at Ezra Street in 1839. The British honoured him among the twelve Justices of Peace created in 1835. He also played a key role in modernising the city of Calcutta. Regrettably he is forgotten today, just like most of the icons of his community who once haloed the city of Calcutta.

The journey of the Parsis to Calcutta is the account of some intrepid men who had left settled homes in the West to come to Calcutta to start a new life. According to the book 'Pioneering Parsis of Calcutta' written by Prochy N Mehta, the Parsis used to trade with Armenian traders in Surat. Later on



some Armenians came to Murshidabad first and then to Calcutta. No wonder some Parsis took the Armenians to their heels and arrived at Calcutta. Unfortunately, though the Parsi community is almost 245 years old in Calcutta, yet there is very little historical documentation on them. The result is modern generation is almost ignorant about the achievements and contributions of the Parsi Community in Calcutta.

Among the first Parsi settlers in Calcutta (1780 onwards) was Jamshedjee Jeejeeboy who made his fortune in opium trade with China. There have been many illustrious families of the Parsis who flourished during the nineteenth and twentieth century rose from adversity to wealth and prominence by dint of their perseverance, hard labour and commitment. Seth Jamsedhji Framji Madan's rise is one such glaring example of the Parsi spirit of sincerity and tenacity. Starting his career at the age of 12 as a screen shifter in a theatrical company at wages of Rs 4 per month, he eventually became 'Madan Seth' and started a prosperous company of his own. His deserves a special mention for his role in popularising and spreading Indian cinema industry. It was he who conceived the idea of public viewing of films. At the time of his death, he owned a considerable number of cinemas dotted all over the country. In recognition of his services and notable acts of charity, he was endowed with the honour of 'Order of British Empire in 1918'. It was he who created India's first purpose-built cinema hall, the Elphinstone Picture Palace in Calcutta. Madan Theatres Ltd was the first exhibitor of the talkies in India. Some of the opera houses owned by Madan Theatres are The Electric Theatre (Regal Cinema), The Grand Opera House (Globe Cinema) and Crown Cinema (Uttara Cinema). It is only our misfortune that history has not done justice to the legacy of this great enterprising man, for

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how many of us know that the Madan Street located in the Dharmtolla area of Calcutta is named after Jamshedji Framji Madan.

Calcutta based Parsis have lived as a community whose representatives have engineered development and creativity. We can talk about M.N. Dastur and Co, a well-known firm for technical consultants; we can discuss names like C.R. Irani and his caveat with 'The Statesman'. Bengalis and Calcuttans have been great appreciators of music. Some of the everlasting loving, lilting melodies of Calcutta, sung by the most popular singers have been orchestrated by a Parsi gentleman by the name of V. Balsara who had a rare talent of having command over virtually any instrument with his fusion of Western and Indian Classical Music.

The status of the Parsis in Calcutta started declining in pomp and splendour with the eclipse of the British Raj in India. The industrial accomplishments of the Parsis started waning after 1947. Huge commercial establishments started fading away and the gestures of generosity became confined to their community. The main problem has been

in the steady decrease in the Parsis population in Calcutta. There was time, some hundred years back when the Parsi population was growing but since the 1960s and 1970s the wheel has started revolving in reverse. The young population of the Parsi community started moving out of the city for greener pastures like Canada, Australia and New Zealand and as well as to other Indian cities. The job scenario coupled with the poor industrial infrastructure in West Bengal over the last few decades primarily drove the city's young Parsis out to other places.

Today there are about 500 Parsis remaining in the city but sadly not even 50 percent among them are young. While the Parsis community of Calcutta might not as prominent as the Parsi Community of Bombay, however, even then it would be not wise to consider the Parsi Community in present day Kolkata as to having completely degenerated as a community. Parsi food like 'Sali Marghi' or 'Patra ni Macchi' can still be found in Calcutta in places like 9, Bow Street, in Bowbazar area in 'Manackjee Rustomjee Parsi Dharamshala for Parsi Travellers'. This 115-year-old Dharamshala is still operational. At present Parsis or those married to Parsis are allowed to stay here, although the dining is open to all.

There was a time some sixty years back when the Parsi community in Calcutta had around 2,500 members. Today, with only 500 members remaining, this community is slowly losing its significance in Calcutta. The Parsi Bagan Lane

near Raja Bazaar Science College still stands with reminiscences of freedom struggle and Indian Psycho Analytical Society founded by Dr. Girindrasekhar Bose. Perhaps there is no Parsi living there at present. A historical survey about 250-year-old recorded Parsi existence in Calcutta and would certainly throw light on the various ways in which the Parsi community contributed to the development of the city, particularly in avenues of commerce and entrepreneurial initiatives as well as in acts of social welfare. It is pertinent that the meager number of Parsis living in and around Ezra Street should not desert this city for with them a race would obliterate from the face of Calcutta.



SWARALIPI

► a Rabindra Sangeet Academy of music in Wayland, Massachusetts ◀



Swaralipi Academy is a singing school that was founded in 2005 by Swapna Ray. Swapna is the disciple of Sm. Suchitra Mitra (doyen of Rabindra Sangeet) and Sm. Sumitra Chatterjee. Swapna is carrying on the tradition of Rabindra Sangeet as an academic and cultural practice in the United States and has graduated numerous students who have attained mastery of the style. The school also helps to connect American-born and immigrant Bengalis to their mother culture.

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MUSEUM

Nehru Children's Museum

Team Chronicle

The word 'museum' immediately brings to our mind an old, archaic display of articles far beyond the interest of small children. Located on Jawaharlal Nehru Road, near Rabindra Sadan metro station, Nehru Children's Museum was opened to the public in 1972. The museum was conceptualised by the visionary statesman Sri Jugal Srimal. It was set up with a motive to impart education to children through informal learning. The museum houses a huge collection of dolls and toys. The exhibits are thoughtfully designed to be unique and to arouse the curiosity and imagination of the young visitors.

The premises are spread across three floors with two wings on each floor. The left wing galleries on

all three floors are lined with showcases displaying dolls from 92 countries across the globe. While most of these dolls are acquired, some of them were donated. One can see dolls from Argentina, China, Japan, Bangladesh, Canada, France, Philippines, Portugal, Poland, Russia, Rumania, Puerto Rico, Rhodesia, Syria, Sweden, Singapore, Spain, Seychelles, the USA, Thailand, Kenya, Macedonia, Peru, Tibet, Sri Lanka, Nepal, New Zealand, Pakistan, Mexico, Italy, Ireland, Iran, Costa Rica, Denmark, Finland, the Fiji Island, Czechoslovakia, Bermuda, Belgium, Vietnam and our own India. The dolls are in different shapes, sizes, looks and attires. Most of these dolls represent the appearance and feel of their respective countries, clad in their traditional costumes.

Dolls

The American dolls are comparatively larger in size with very cosmopolitan looks. They have a wide range of shades of eye and hair colour and skin tones and are seen to be wearing a variety of dresses. On the other hand, you can see children carrying red and blue gauze lanterns, women playing traditional Korean musical instruments and so on amidst the Korean dolls.

The Norwegian Barbie Doll is any girl's dream doll. The royal dolls of Japan and Thailand are bound to leave you awestruck with the emphasis on detailing. There's a showcase dedicated to the 'Hina Ningyo', the dolls for the 'Japanese girl's festival'. The children simply marvel at the sight of these dolls. The dolls serve

MUSEUM



as a wonderful media for the children through whom they get a fair idea about the different countries of the world, their people, their looks, their attire and also their culture.

A couple of showcases are dedicated to the dolls of India as well. Designed and crafted in the traditional dress of all the different states and union territories of the sub-continent, from Arunachal Pradesh to Daman and Diu and from Jammu and Kashmir to Lakshwadeep, these dolls are the priceless contributions by Madhabi Mistry.



Toys

The landing on each floor is lined with showcases displaying toys, mostly cars and other vehicles such as tractors, dumpers, motor graders, tankers, trucks, and aeroplanes and so on. These toys are basically from the USA, Germany, and Spain or from the Oriental countries. Some of these vehicles are also from Purulia and Malda, districts of our own state. These showcases are of particular interest to boys.

The left wings on the second and third floors are dedicated to the clay models depicting the story of the great epics, the Mahabharata and the Ramayana respectively.



Ramayana Gallery

The story of the Ramayana is beautifully depicted in clay models through 61 scenes, right from the birth of Lord Rama to Sita's renunciation of the world. Each and every scene is self-explanatory, owing to the excellent direction by Sri Jugal Srimal and his assistant Sri Sukumar Sahu as well as the unparalleled craftsmanship of their brilliant team. Add to this, each window has a write-up to support the scene and to provide a summarised version of the story that has been showcased. The aura and the grandeur of the royal families of yore, as also nature at its wildest, are very well portrayed through these clay models.





Mahabharata Gallery

Just like the Ramayana, the great epic of the Mahabharata has also been brilliantly depicted in 3D using clay models through 61 scenes. Right from the dictation of the Mahabharata by Veda Vyasa to Ganesha till Yudhishtira's journey to heaven, as one goes around, the story is mesmerising and completely absorbing. Parents are heard narrating the stories to their little ones, while young children jump with joy at the sight of kings and queens and especially on seeing Lord Krishna.

Ganesha Gallery

One whole gallery is dedicated to Lord Ganesha and is known as the Ganesha Gallery. This is on the third floor of the right wing, adjacent to the Ramayana gallery. This is probably done with the idea that Ganesha is the most popular deity in the whole of India. Several idols of Ganesha, big and small, in various poses and sizes can be seen in this gallery. This is particularly liked by children of all ages.

Nehru Children's Museum is much beyond a museum. Apart from attracting children with their exquisite collection of dolls, they also believe in engaging the minds of the children creatively, thereby improving their imaginative power and making their learning more enjoyable and meaningful. For this, the Museum regularly conducts workshops and training sessions for kids by inviting distinguished artists from the spheres of arts, dance, magic, drama and personality development. The children attending these workshops beam with confidence as they are able to creatively engineer their ideas.

Child or no child, this museum beckons you to experience the innocent land of dolls.



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Ganesha Gallery

Makaranda

A Contemporary Bengali Adaptation Of William Shakespeare's Macbeth



Shankha Bhattacharyya



The play is a contemporary Bengali adaptation of William Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, set in the decaying world of a dying theatre troupe in a small town.

In the faded yet determined world of Skandapur Natadha Chakra, a once-celebrated Bengali theatre troupe teetering on the brink of obscurity, a long-absent actor —Makaranda (portraying the character of Macbeth) — returns. Passionate, gifted, and restless, his re-entry into the troupe sends ripples through the fragile dynamics that hold the ensemble together.

Makaranda's return rekindles old relationships and reignites buried tensions. He confronts Lahari, his former lover; Maloy (portraying the character of Macduff), his childhood friend; the eccentric comic actor Bandhan; and Bandhan's mute, neurodivergent half-brother Phali. At the centre of this decaying universe looms Dhananjay, Maloy's father and the aging patriarch of the group, whose artistic authority is soon threatened by Makaranda's charismatic resurgence.

It is then that the play takes a surreal turn. The Three Amits—enigmatic, otherworldly

STAGE CRAFT



figures—arrive with a cryptic prophecy: Makaranda will one day rise to lead. This vision ignites within him a hunger for power that quickly mutates into obsession. The stage becomes the battleground between performance and reality, and the line separating them begins to dissolve.

In a grotesquely theatrical moment, Makaranda murders Dhananjay. He claims power, dons his symbolic yellow spectacles, and silences opposition—first Bandhan, and eventually Debashmi, Maloy's sister and Makaranda's last emotional tether. In a shocking act of desecration, Makaranda violates Debashmi's corpse—marking his complete descent into moral and psychological collapse.

Haunted by guilt and plagued by hallucinations, Makaranda spirals into madness and attempts suicide. In the

final act, Maloy, once friend and now avenger, kills Makaranda. As a grim coda, Maloy also murders Makaranda's mother—using the same silver knife that had first spilled blood.

The production featured a diverse and talented ensemble of performers and an efficient creative team, Makaranda Chatterjee (Akash Biswas), Dhananjay Goswami (Samarjit Das), Maloy Goswami (Bedadyuti Das), Lahori Sanyal (Pratyusha Roy), Debashmi Goswami (Mehli Das), Bandhan Patra (Pranoy Patra), and Phali (Granthan Das). The three incarnations of Amit were performed by Amit Sultania, Abhay Dutta and Pritam Mallik.

The other characters like Valmiki Das (Prosenjit Sur), Mother (Soma Das),



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Arjo (Jayatu Dutta), Nurse (Ankita Pal), Hospital Staff (Udayan Chakraborty), and Dancer (Triparna Pal) left their marks on the stage. The roles of the Hyenas were played by Anwesha Talukdar, Ananya De and Triparna Pal.

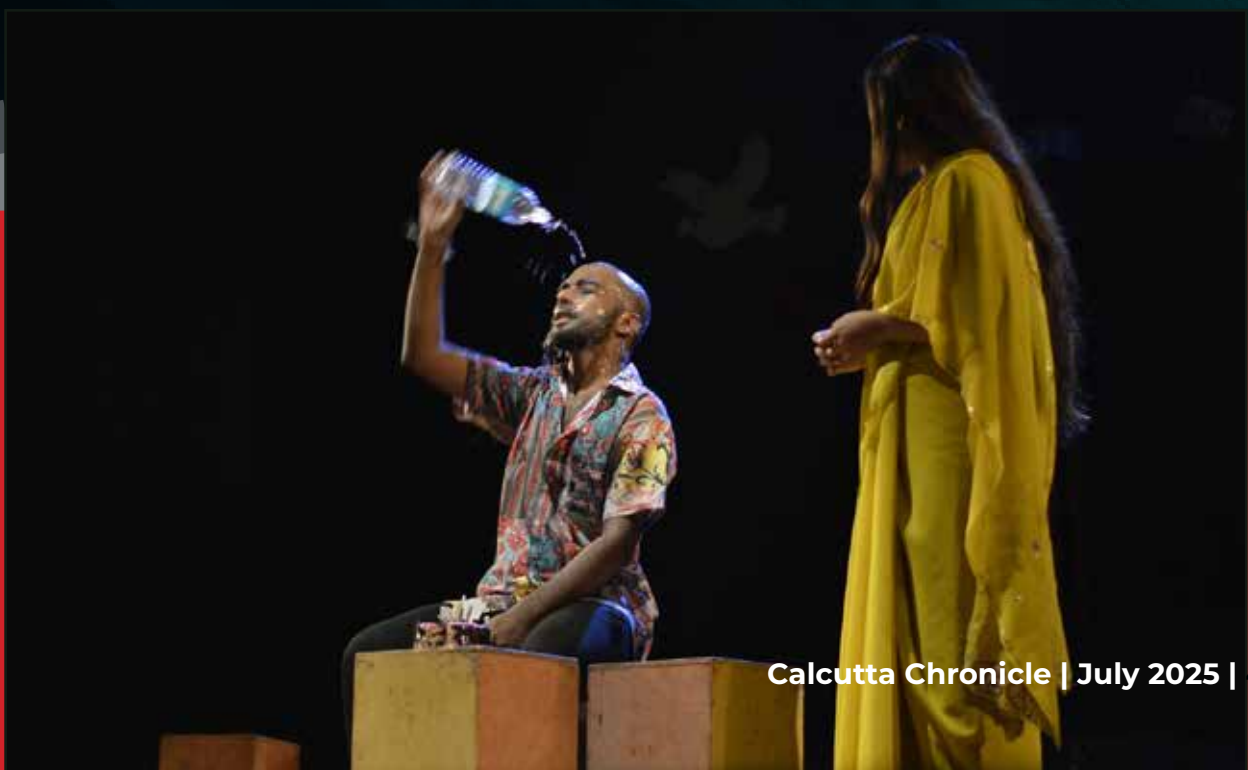
This production stands as a testament to the collective brilliance of a passionately driven young creative team.

At the helm of direction, Bedadyuti Das and Akash Biswas offer a vision both precise and emotionally expansive, navigating the play's psychological terrain with insight and control. As playwright, Akash Biswas crafts a script that fuses classical tragedy with contemporary resonance, grounding ambition and decay in the world of struggling art.

Mehli Das's choreography imbues the performance with a kinetic poetry—her movement design elevates silence into speech and gesture into meaning. Meanwhile, Bablu Sarkar's lighting design and execution masterfully shape the emotional landscape, pulling the audience through dream, memory, and nightmare.



The subtle makeup artistry of Amit Chakraborty ensures that characters visually evolve with their inner disintegration. Set design and construction by Ankita Pal and Anwesha Talukdar anchors the surreal world in tangible space—expressive yet minimal, decayed yet defiant.



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Sound is another powerful presence in the production. Akash Biswas and Mehli Das, as sound designers, layer sonic textures that echo the play's descent into psychological chaos. Their intricate score is executed by Pritika Das and Aishi Upadhyay, whose seamless sound operation ensures that every emotional beat lands with impact.

Together, this team has not simply staged a play—they have created an immersive world. A world where ambition devours art, where madness finds its stage, and where performance mirrors the grotesque theatre of human desire.



Jor Bangla Temple

Kinjal Bose

Itanda, Birbhum

Birbhum has a number of temples of varying shapes and sizes of which the brick-built temple of Jor Bangla type at Itanda located about fifteen kilometres from Bolpur deserves special mention. It is possibly the only jor bangla temple of the district.

This type is said to be an altered and improved style of do chala or also called ek bangla. A jor bangla type is formed by placing the roofs of two ek bangla temples side-by-side. This type of temples are also found in other areas



of West Bengal like Jor Bangla Temple at Bishnupur in Bankura; Chaitanyadev Temple at the temple complex in Guptipara in Hooghly and Jor Bangla Temple at Birnagar in Nadia just to name a few.

There are a number of temples in Itanda of which Jor Bangla Kali Temple is a state protected monument. The temple has been renovated. This south-facing temple was built in the middle of the eighteenth century. It is on a slightly raised platform with intricate terracotta decoration. Legends say that the temple was once housed by a group of dacoits named as Harkata group and they used to worship Kali.

The temple facade had terracotta figures of extraordinary craftsmanship though

some figures got damaged. One will witness some exquisite terracotta panels of war scene between two war ships, rows of soldiers marching with guns, noblemen and soldiers, Goddess Bishnu, Kal Bhairav, dwarpal, Surya in chariot, Sita, Ravana, mrityulata or death-vine, two ladies standing side by side, soldiers on horseback, Shumbha and Nishumbha and Chandi and several other figures. There are plenty of terracotta panels in this temple.



Modern Mime Centre

IN SEARCH OF MIME TALENT IN NADIA DISTRICT

Since 2019, the Modern Mime Centre has been actively searching for talented mime artists in remote villages across various districts of West Bengal. This endeavour has now reached Nadia district.

Drawn by an interest in the art of mime, school students from remote villages of Nadia rushed to attend the mime workshop held at the Sukanta Cultural



Shankha Bhattacharyya

Eikatan stage in Gacha Bazaar, Muragacha region. Interestingly, these students had never seen mime before and had no prior knowledge of this performing art. It was solely due to the encouragement of their parents that the students came to learn about mime.



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On the first day of the workshop, a seminar was held where mime artist Kamal Naskar gave an insightful introduction to the world of mime. His explanation sparked enthusiasm among the students to learn more about mime. Soon, a need-based mime workshop began.

The workshop covered the grammar of mime, character development, various expressions of the body and

face, storytelling techniques, and more. In the final phase, training was given on a mime production titled “A Tree’s Autobiography”, written and directed by Kamal Naskar. Within a very short time, the students skilfully grasped the portrayal of characters like the tree, gardener, timber thief, and children.

On the evening of the past Sunday, young performers Adrika Maulik, Sneha Dutta, Tanvi Biswas, Soumik



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Mondal, Kaustav Biswas, Soumyajit Guha, Bikram Mondal, Sayantika Saha, Sumitra Sarkar, Sreeja Roy, Bidipta Sarkar, Anushka Pal, Shrabonti Sarkar, and Arshi Pal received immense appreciation from the audience for their performances.

To further educate the participants, mime artist Kamal Naskar performed two solo mime acts, mesmerising everyone present.

With the support of the Paschimbanga Natya Academy, these budding mime artists from Nadia will get the opportunity to perform at the upcoming Mime Festival '25.



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The entire workshop was organised by the cultural organisation Katha Shilpa, under the guidance of its director Pritam Bhattacharya.

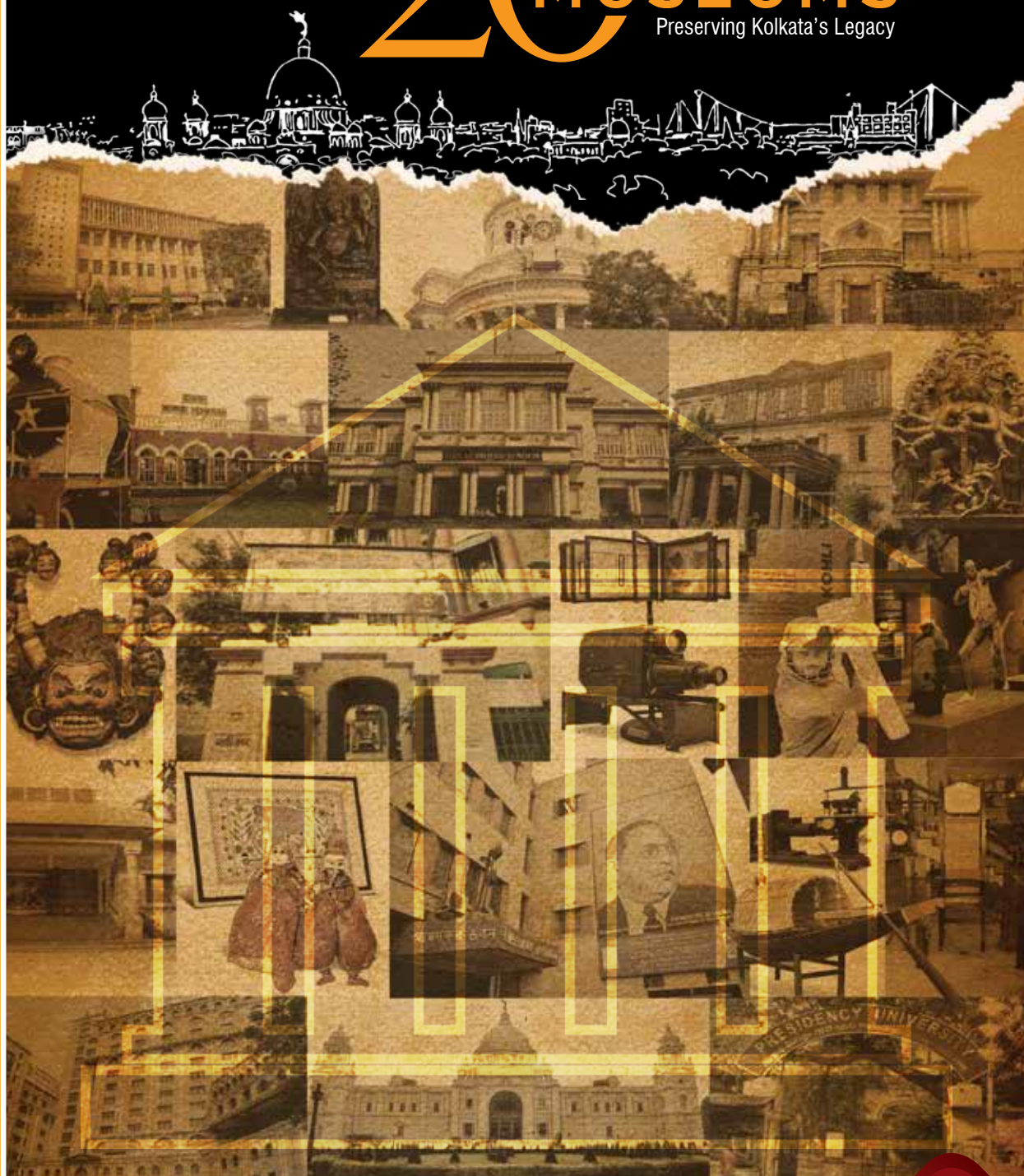
The program concluded with Dilip Pal honouring Kamal Naskar for his contribution.



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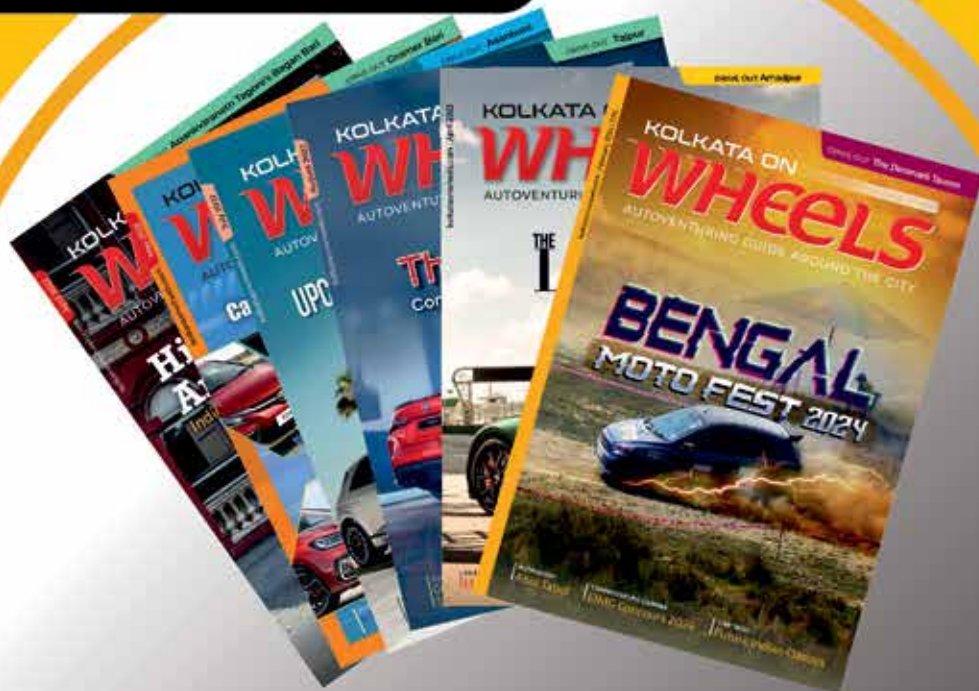
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