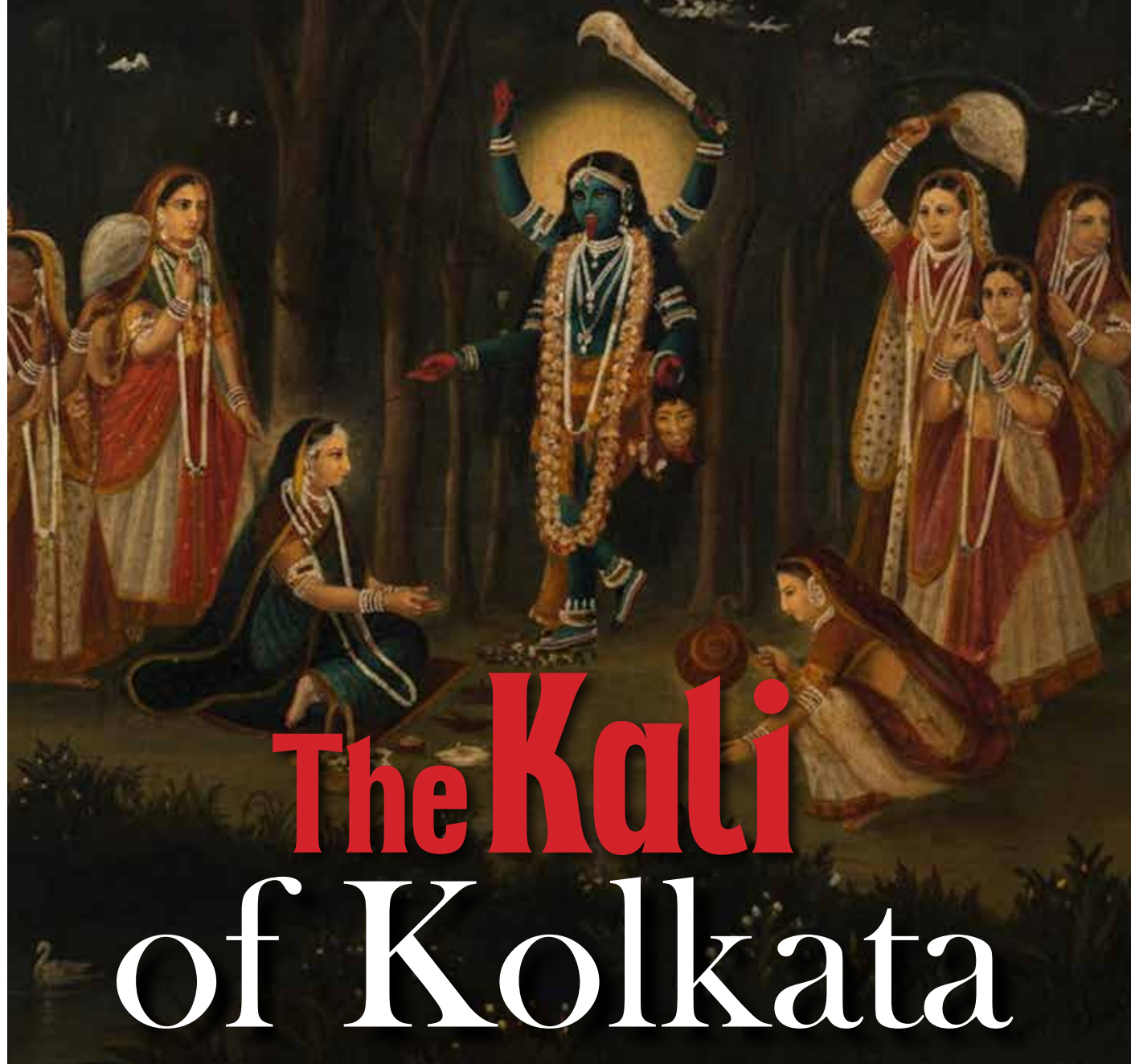


Calcutta CHRONICLE



The Kali of Kolkata

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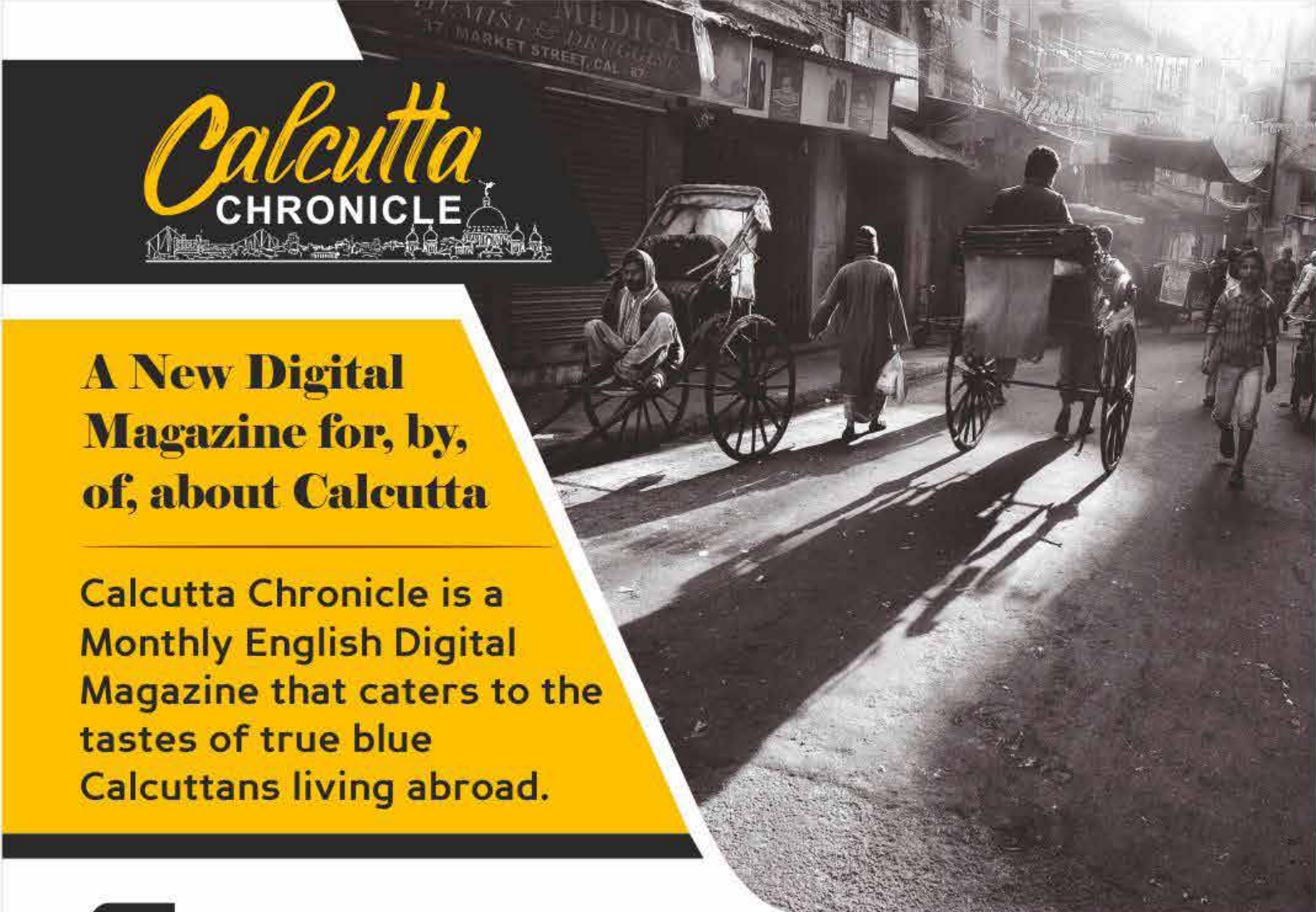
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Calcutta CHRONICLE



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EDITORIAL

Kali remains the presiding deity of Kolkata though of late the grandeur of the five-day long festivities of Durga Puja seems to have overwhelmed every other festival. Today, not many historians are willing to accept that the goddess gave her name to Kalikata but the endearing address, 'Kali Kolkatawali' (owner of the city) indicate the inextricable link between the city and the deity which watches over its fate. In this edition's 'When Kolkata Was Calcutta' column, we trace the link between Calcutta and its patron deity – Kali.

The fifties and the sixties were truly the golden era of music in Bengal. Television was still some years away and musical soirees and live concerts were the popular source of entertainment. Music lovers eagerly waited for the Puja album of their favourite singers and composers. Turn to this edition's, 'Music' column, to relive the era reigned by some of our legendary names in music which saw the creation of innumerable hit songs popular even today.

Durga Puja, Bengal's grandest festival, is far more than a religious observance. It is theatre, carnival, ritual, and memory woven together. For five glittering autumn days, the goddess Uma returns home, and the state transforms into a stage of lights, music, devotion, and artistry. UNESCO's recognition of the festival as intangible cultural heritage has only reinforced its global stature. Yet beneath the glow of pandal lights and the drumbeat of dhaks lies an older and more complex story; of politics disguised as religion, of superstition masked as devotion, of commerce eclipsing craft, and of myth caught between symbolism and science. More on that in this edition's 'Special Feature' column.

Joydip Sur
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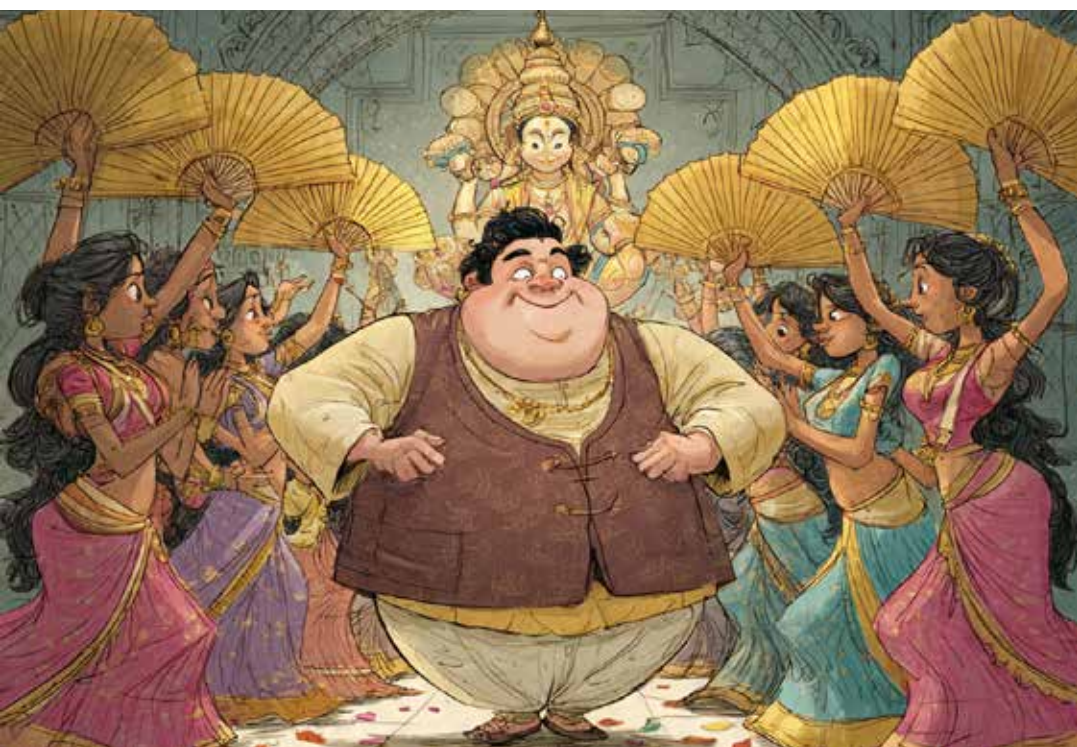
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Chowringhee Road

The Piccadilly of Calcutta



The famous author David William Martin once remarked, “Nostalgic Londoners like to regard Piccadilly as the centre of the universe”. We Calcuttans are undoubtedly much more reserved in our acclaim, although the zest and fervour that we display for our city is perhaps unmatched anywhere in the world. London might have its Piccadilly, Paris its Rue de Rivoli, Chicago its Michigan Avenue, New York its Fifth Avenue, Delhi its Connaught, but our good old Chowringhee Road is as illustrious and perhaps is a lot more epic than the rest.

Fame and fortune have been bestowed upon Chowringhee Road for nearly three centuries. It still remains one of Calcutta's grandest north-south thoroughfares. Throughout the length of its history, Chowringhee Road has carried an aura of prestige and heritage. Grandeur, colourfulness and importance have always been its handmaidens. To countless Calcuttans, and for most people all around the globe who are even remotely familiar with the city of joy, the singularly unique name Chowringhee is synonymous with Calcutta.





PAST PRESENT CITYSCAPE

Chowringhee Road not only shoulders the responsibility of skirting the Maidan and routing the hordes north or south from misty mornings to the setting of the sun, it also acts as the central longitudinal axis upon which almost all of the city's denizens has traversed more than once in their lifetime.

The etymology of Chowringhee Road has baffled many historians. Some say that the name owes its origin to a village called Cherangi, while others are inclined to believe that the name originated from the legend of a yogi, Chourangi Giri, who discovered an image of the goddess Kali's face and founded the original Kalighat temple. Since those days, Chowringhee Road was also referred to by some as the 'Road to Kalighat'.

During the 17th century, the area now occupied by the Maidan and Esplanade was a tiger-infested jungle. At the eastern end of it was an old road, which had once been built by the Sabarna Roy Choudhury's family from Barisha to Halisahar. Beyond

it there were pools, swamps and rice-fields, dotted here and there with the straggling huts of fishermen, falconers, wood cutters, weavers and cultivators. In that region were three small hamlets – Chowringhee, Birjee and Colimba.

In 1717, Chowringhee was a hamlet of isolated hovels, surrounded by waterlogged paddy-fields and bamboo groves separated from Gobindapur by the jungle. Legend has it that it was at this very place when Warren Hastings hunted tigers.

In the evening of July 6, 1857 Chowringhee was lit up with gas lights provided by the Oriental Gas Company. The strengthening of British supremacy, subsequent to their victory in the Battle of Plassey was followed by the construction of the new Fort William in 1758. It was then that the European inhabitants of Calcutta gradually started to settle around the Maidan. In the mid 18th century Englishmen began to build magnificent houses on the Chowringhee that earned Calcutta the title of 'City of Palaces'.



CITYSCAPE

Chowringhee was the first road in Calcutta where pavements were built in 1858 to facilitate the erection of gas lamps. The traders who had stores on Chowringhee Road objected as their customers were forced to park their carriages at some distance from the shops.

There aren't many old establishments along the road now, as most of them are either gone or renamed. There was a time when the Bristol Hotel, Auddy & Company, Great Eastern Stores, Whiteaway & Laidlaw, Army & Navy Stores were all located on Chowringhee Road. Now, they no longer exist.

Honestly, a lot has changed on Chowringhee Road since the 'Road to Kalighat' days. New stores have come up throughout the stretch of the road selling various knick-knacks ranging from food, clothes, and curios to magazines, old books and old coins. New street lamp posts have been erected on both the side-walks of Chowringhee Road illuminating and beautifying the entire stretch of the road.

There are plenty of modern, high-rise buildings along the Chowringhee Road alongside the iconic Chatterjee International Centre, which before the construction of THE 42 held the mantle of being the tallest building in Calcutta. Kanak Building, at the intersection



■ CITYSCAPE ■

of Chowringhee Road and Jeevan Deep, is an architectural beauty you just can't miss and to this day remains well maintained. At a key intersection of Chowringhee Road, Park Street and Kyd Street stand Chowringhee Mansions, a sight to behold with its grand Edwardian design.

Another must see on Chowringhee is the Indian Museum. The ninety metres long frontage of the building boldly displays a strong attitude appropriate for the treasure trove that lies within. Juxtaposed are the Government College of Art and Crafts and the Geological Survey of India.

Oberoi Grand Hotel located at 15 Chowringhee Road is one of the most prominent landmarks on this road. It started as Royal Hotel and was rechristened Oberoi Grand in January 1911, when a wild fire claimed the old Royal Hotel.

One of the finest buildings in Calcutta, not just in size and looks, but in the saga of its survival is the Metropolitan Building which stands at the Chowringhee Road and Surendra Nath Banerjee Road crossing. It was here, where British army officers stationed in Singapore on short furlough would shop for a 'decent lifestyle'. You could power-dress in tropical linen suits, sip lemon tea and dig into cucumber sandwiches for breakfast at the lifestyle retail rendezvous. This colonial edifice once housed Whiteway, Laidlaw & Co, then Asia's largest departmental store. Today it houses the Central Cottage Industries Emporium and a Big Bazaar outlet.



Tucked away beside the Metropolitan Building at 5 Chowringhee Road once stood the iconic Metro Cinema Hall. Before the advent of the multiplexes, this used to be a venerable house of entertainment that occupied a pride of place among the cinemagoers of Calcutta. Unfortunately, like many other standalone theatres, Metro too is a thing of the past, making way for a swanky shopping mall.

The 'Road to Kalighat' stands witness to a great deal of Calcutta's history since the days of Clive and Hastings. But somewhere in our hearts it seems that Chowringhee's best days are over. Whether we, as the present inhabitants of the city of joy share a collective responsibility to restore the reputation it once enjoyed, is a question we need to ask ourselves.

Trivia: 1

Indian independence saw a rush to

rename streets. Chowringhee Road was renamed after Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India.

Trivia: 2

The Bengali novelist Sankar wrote Chowringhee in 1962 (three years before Arthur Hailey's *Hotel*). It became an instant hit. Set in Calcutta of 1950s, it is the saga of the intimate lives of the staff and the guests at the Shahjahan, one of the largest city hotels located in Chowringhee. Some of its larger-than-life characters, like the enigmatic manager Marco Polo, the debonair receptionist Sata Bose and the tragic hostess Karabi Guha, attained cult status.

Trivia: 3

In 1981, Aparna Sen wrote and directed a film, 36 Chowringhee Lane, about an aged Anglo-Indian school teacher who lives a lonely life in a flat in the neighbourhood.



Melodies of the Past



Tarun Goswami

The fifties and the sixties were truly the golden era of music in Bengal. Television was still some years away and musical soirees and live concerts were the popular source of entertainment. Music lovers eagerly waited for the Puja album of their favourite singers and composers. In this edition of Calcutta Chronicle, we relive the era reigned by some of our legendary names in music which saw the creation of innumerable hit songs popular even today.

It was 1957. At a musical soiree or jalsa, organised by Bhanu Ghosh at CIT Road shortly after Durga Puja, the microphone developed a mechanical snag and the electrician had a trying time to repair

it. Meanwhile, an artist, in his late twenties got impatient and requested the stars of the evening, Hemanta Mukherjee and Dhananjay Bhattacharjee to allow him to go on stage and sing. Both laughed and said that they had no problem but he would have to sing without a microphone. Undaunted the young man went out and charmed the audience with the depth of his voice; he was none other than Nirmalendu Chowdhury.

In the same programme, V Balsara played for the first time an instrument, Univox designed by him which later turned out to be the origin of electronic key board or synthesizer. Balsaraji



MUSIC

played tunes of Bengali and Hindi songs and his own compositions on the Univox and Melodica, thrilling the audience with his invention. In fact, he had to play Univox and Melodica at almost every function that followed.

Jalsas were an important part of Durga Puja celebrations in the 1950s and 1960s, generally held after Lakshmi Puja. The most popular ones were held at Hrishikesh Park on Amherst Street, Laha Colony Math, Rajendra Deb Road and Bagbazar Sarbojonin in north Calcutta and Forward Club off Kalighat in south Calcutta. Enabling a live connect between musicians, singers and their fans the soirees usually began at 6 PM and continued well past midnight with the audience clamouring for "one more."

The evening usually kicked off with an orchestra by either V Balsara or Himangshu Biswas. The artists were of three categories - star attractions, and then came the middle rung and finally the budding artists. Artists like Hemanta Mukherjee, Dhananjay Bhattacharya and Sandhya Mukherjee were undoubtedly the stars; Shyamal Mitra, Manabendra Mukherjee, Satinath Mukherjee and Utpala Sen also drew crowds. Young artists like Tarun Banerjee, Mrinal Chakraborty and Ila Basu performed as well. But all

jalsas had two mandatory items - parody songs by Mintu Dasgupta and Dwipen Mukherjee and comic or koutuk naksha by famous comedians, Bhanu Banerjee and Jahar Roy.

The songs sung in the jalsas were mostly new numbers (pujor gaan) from the discs released before the Pujas. All India radio also played these new songs on in Anurodher Asar where the people could send their requests and their names were read out before the song. HMV also brought out a magazine Sarad Arghya with texts and musical scores of the song along with photographs of the artists which sold out within a week.

Some of the hit numbers released before Pujas which later went on to become all time greats include 'Kono ek gayer bodhu', 'Shono kono ekdin' and 'Amai proshno kore neel dhrubotara' written and composed by Salil Chowdhury and mellifluously rendered by Hemanta Mukherjee. These



MUSIC

became so popular that the artist had to sing these numbers in almost every programme. Similarly when Deya Neya, starring Uttam Kumar and Tanuja was released the composer and singer, Shyamal Mitra had to regale the audience with 'Ami cheye cheye dekhi saradin' or 'Jibonkhatar proti patae'.

Similarly, 'Mayur ponkhi rater nile', a song composed by Sudhin Dasgupta became hit because of its orchestration and singer Manabendra Mukherjee was flooded with requests to sing the song along with 'Meteria medicar kabyo'. Hits numbers of Sandhya Mukherjee included 'Ke tumi amare dako' (Agni Pariksha), 'Tumi nahoy rohite kache' (Potho holo deri) and 'Gane mor kon indradhonu'.

Mintu Dasgupta was one of the most sought after artist in the jalsas because of his parody songs, 'Sarir kotha age koto gechi koi' (from the original Hindi song 'Mae hu rangila pyar ka rahi') or 'Oi laldighir opar hote' (from the original Bengali song 'Oi mahasindhur opar theke'.

Late Banasree Sengupta, who had performed in many jalsas as a young artist, had once stated: "It was a real honour to perform and share the dais with senior and famous artists at the jalsas. Many of the audience had sharp musical sense and cheered the artists. The musicians who accompanied the artists were equally brilliant like Radhakanta Nandi (tabla), Topa or Amar Dutta (percussion), Himangshu Biswas (flute), YS Mulki and Pratap Roy (piano accordion), Milan Gupta (mouth organ)



and Khokon Mukherjee (guitar)."

Last but not least Mahisasurmardini by Banikumar aired on Mahalaya Day marked the beginning of the festival. Only a few families owned a radio and people got up early in the morning, thronged the houses to listen to Birendra Krishna Bhadra, invoking Goddess Chandi in his rich baritone voice. The programme started at 4 AM and continued till 5.30 AM, and so many people went to the Ganges for a holy dip and perform tarpan only after the programme got over.

The Naxal movement in the mid 1960s brought the curtains down as police refused to give permission for open air functions and the artists apprehending attacks refused to perform. In late 1970s the jalsas were replaced by daily cultural programme at the pandals. But old timers fondly remember the bygone days of jalsas when the legendary voices performed live and charmed the audiences without any technological intervention or aid.

Faith, Modern Spectacle and Money



Abhijit Dasgupta



Durga, our daughter, fierce and strong, Born to battle what is wrong. But today you hide in painted light, In glamour's shade, away from fight.

Glitter masks the wounds we know, While deeper still, the wrongs do grow. O Mother, when will your fire rise— With blazing arms and burning eyes?

To strike the dark, the filth, the dust, And cleanse the world of greed and lust.

An octogenarian's reflections often become food without spice, no salt— tasteless, yet too stubborn for the trash bin. Here is one.

Durga Puja, Bengal's grandest festival, is far more than a religious observance. It is theatre, carnival, ritual, and memory woven together. For five glittering autumn days, the goddess Uma returns home, and the state transforms into a stage of lights, music, devotion, and artistry. UNESCO's recognition of the festival as intangible cultural heritage has only reinforced its global stature.

Yet beneath the glow of pandal lights and the drumbeat of dhaks lies an older and more

■ SPECIAL FEATURE ■

complex story; of politics disguised as religion, of superstition masked as devotion, of commerce eclipsing craft, and of myth caught between symbolism and science. To understand Durga Puja is not only to marvel at its splendour but to reckon with the shadows it carries.

The roots of today's spectacle lie deep in Bengal's colonial past. In the 18th century, when the East India Company consolidated power, the festival became a political stage. Wealthy zamindars—flush with land revenues and eager to curry favour with the new rulers—turned Puja into a theatre of opulence.

The most famous example is Nabakrishna Deb's Sovabazar Puja, where Lord Clive himself appeared after the Battle of Plassey. The irony was cruel: only months earlier, Nawab Siraj ud-Daulah had burnt down Calcutta's only church. Yet now, the British masters sat as honoured guests at a Hindu festival, entertained by banquets and nautch girls, while the goddess became little more than a bargaining token to fulfil the aspirations of the sycophants.

This marked a turning point. What had once been a household worship of Durga, rooted in devotion, was converted into a public display of loyalty and influence. Religion merged with politics, faith bent under the weight of spectacle.

The pattern continues. Where zamindars once wielded banquets and offered 'Nautch' girls from



lower castes, modern politicians and corporations use billboards, slogans, campaign songs, and corporate sponsorships. The budgets of many urban pujas now run into crores, and pandals become platforms for electoral influence as much as artistic expression.

The goddess, instead of being a unifying mother, often serves as a prop in Bengal's theatre of power. Just as in the 18th century, devotion is frequently overshadowed by exaggerated display of pomp and grandeur.

In 1910, two young brothers of the Sardar family





This act carries profound symbolism: it erases social boundaries and declares that the Mother belongs to all — high or low, pure or stigmatized. The soil from society's margins merges into the goddess herself, turning Durga into the true "Mother for All."

This tension between opulence and faith had been observed much earlier. Colonial newspapers often commented, sometimes with mockery, on Bengal's "theatrical" Pujas:

In the *Calcutta Courier* (1857), one article sneered that "Madam Doorga, so long the favourite of native grandees, may vanish altogether

should the stream of English patronage be withdrawn." The suggestion was clear: without British approval, the goddess herself would lose prestige.

The *Friend of India* papers carried wry accounts of British officers dining at Shobhabazar Rajbari's puja, where Lord Clive once arrived on elephant-back, turning devotion into a political theatre.

Later, *Amrita Bazar Patrika* and *Bengalee* began critiquing the same extravagance, pointing out how wealth was squandered while famine and poverty stalked Bengal's villages. These editorials planted early seeds of the idea that true faith cannot thrive under vanity.

The Bhakti saints once sang against ritualistic pomp; the Satnamis rose against exclusion; Gandhi framed Ganesh Utsav as a people's festival rather than a display of aristocratic power. The Sardar brothers, in their modest 1942 puja, stood within this continuum of quiet revolts.

were humiliated at the opulent Durga Puja of the wealthy Sarkars. In that era, aristocratic households staged their Pujas as spectacles—lavish banquets for the British, orchestras, fireworks, even nautch performances. To common people, entry was restricted, and devotion became secondary to display. The humiliation stung the brothers not only personally but symbolically; the goddess herself seemed caged within the walls of privilege. They vowed that one day they would host a Durga Puja where the doors would remain open to all.

It took until 1942 for that promise to be fulfilled. Their puja was more than worship—it was a polite protest. In an age when elitism dominated religion, the Sardar brothers reclaimed Durga as the mother of everyone, not just the chosen few.

One of the most powerful traditions of Bengal's Durga Puja is the making of the clay idol. The sacred clay (*kumari mati*) is collected not only from riverbanks but also from the doorstep of a prostitute's house.

■ SPECIAL FEATURE ■

Today, the cycle repeats. With multimillion-rupee pandals that mimic palaces or pyramids, and carnival processions - a traveling amusement show, Durga Puja once again risks being consumed by spectacle. It generates money and certainly the poor gain from these. But alongside, there are smaller voices—eco-conscious pandals, rural community pujas, and even some “bonedi bari” traditions that hold on to rituals stripped of extravagance. They stand as reminders that worship is strongest when it is shared, not staged.

The question is, will Bengal once more hear the call of protest—this time not against zamindar vanity, but against dazzle only culture—so that Durga may again return as the universal mother, unbound by wealth or exclusivity?

Alongside politics, superstition has crept into the heart of the festival. Indoctrinated priests often insist on elaborate rituals—costing devotees fortunes—arguing that without them the goddess’s blessings will not descend. Fortune-tellers and self-styled spiritual guides thrive during the season, offering promises of prosperity in exchange for offerings.

The simplicity of faith gets lost in ritualistic excess. Religion becomes transaction. What should be a personal act of devotion turns into a marketplace of invented rites, where the currency is not sincerity but payment, in money, kind or allegiance.

Commerce, too, has transformed the festival. Artisans of Kumartuli, the traditional clay sculptors, spend the year creating idols that

sustain the Puja. Yet they remain among the least rewarded. Their craft, rooted in sacred tradition, is diluted by demands for cinema-inspired idols and pandals modeled on global monuments or Bollywood sets.

The traditional ekchala idol—Durga standing with her children in a single frame—faces near extinction, replaced by fragmented, theatrical interpretations. Smuggled Chinese lights illuminating the streets, squeezing out the art of local craftsmen. In Mumbai, fibre glass Ganesh has become popular. Thus, the homecoming of the goddess risks turning into exile for the very artisans who gave the form. Even the act of pandal-hopping, once about artistic reverence and quiet awe, increasingly resembles a carnival of fashion shows, celebrity endorsements, and product launches. Pujas compete like film releases—who has the tallest idol, the most elaborate pandal, the boldest theme.

What was meant to be community bonding often becomes borrowed glamour. The festival bends beneath



cinema screens and corporate banners, risking a break from the very tradition it claims to uphold.

But Durga Puja is also about stories—stories that keep evolving in every generation. Among them, none is more profound than the tale of Ram’s Akal Bodhan.



Traditionally, Durga was worshipped in spring (Basanti Puja). Yet the Ramayana tells us that before his battle with Ravana, Ram invoked Durga in the autumn—akal or untimely—worship. He offered 108 blue lotuses to the goddess. When he found one missing, he prepared to pluck out his own eye—famed as lotus-like—to complete the offering. Moved by his devotion, Durga appeared and blessed him for victory. This story not only explains why Bengal celebrates Durga Puja in autumn but also underlines a larger truth: that rituals and calendars may shift, but devotion is what gives them meaning. Ram's invocation was not about spectacle but about surrender, not about politics but about faith.

In the Akal Bodhan lies a reminder of what Puja could be—an act of simple, profound worship where sincerity matters more than a carnival.

If Ram's invocation represents devotion at its purest, another story from the Ramayana illustrates the risk of confusing symbolism with science; the tale of the Pushpak Rath.

According to the epic, after defeating Ravana, Ram returned to Ayodhya in the Pushpak Vimana—a flying chariot originally owned by Kubera. For centuries, devotees treated it as poetic metaphor. In the 20th

century, however, the Vaimanika Shastra surfaced, claiming to describe ancient aerodynamics. Enthusiasts hailed it as evidence of India's forgotten aviation past.

But in 1974, the Indian Institute of Science examined the designs and declared them aeronautically impossible. The danger here is real: when poetry is mistaken for physics, myth for manual, imagination for engineering. Epics like the Ramayana and Mahabharata are cultural treasures, not blueprints for technology.

Hanuman's leap across the ocean, too, may be read as a timeless dream of breaking earthly limits—a metaphor for human aspiration, not an account of space travel.

Yet in today's society, such myths are often packaged as literal truths. Leaders and influencers invoke them not as symbols but as proofs of ancient technological supremacy. In a country where education often means rote learning, where Swami Vivekananda's vision of "man-making education" remains unrealized, superstition finds fertile ground.

Rituals become institutionalized. Breaking coconuts, lighting lamps, or offering costly prayers are sold as solutions to personal or collective crises. For a suffering population, these acts may offer temporary psychological relief. But when endorsed by



Durga Puja, therefore, stands at a crossroad. On one side is its cultural magnificence: community bonding, artistic innovation, spiritual devotion, and mythic storytelling. On the other side lie its distortions: superstition sold as truth, politics masquerading as faith, commerce overpowering craft.

The challenge is to preserve the former without succumbing to the latter. To cherish mythology without mistaking it for manual. To celebrate spectacle without letting it

consume sincerity. To protect artisans and traditions from being buried under imported lights and corporate banners.

political leaders or religious authorities, they risk becoming tools of manipulation.

Faith becomes dependency. People lose confidence in their own strength, surrendering instead to ritual prescriptions.

This confusion between myth and fact is not unique to India. Eric von Däniken's *Chariots of the Gods* argued that ancient monuments like the pyramids or the Nazca lines were built with alien help, since humans allegedly lacked the necessary technology. Archaeologists, however, proved otherwise: Egyptians used copper chisels, ramps, and human ingenuity; the Incas mastered stone-cutting techniques still admired today.

Von Däniken was accused of mistranslating and misrepresenting evidence. Yet his theories, much like claims of Pushpak Vimanas, captivated the public imagination. The risk lies in allowing pseudoscience to replace critical inquiry.

Above all, to remember Ram's Akal Bodhan—that true worship is not in the extravagance of offerings but in the devotion of the heart.

Durga's annual visit is meant to be the homecoming of a daughter, welcomed with joy, reverence, and love. If the festival is to remain the soul of Bengal, it must shed the baggage of unnecessary rituals, superstitious manipulations, and commercial greed.

Uma deserves more than being reduced to a stage prop for votes, fortunes, or fashion shows. She deserves what Ram once gave her—sincere devotion, born of faith and courage.

Durga Puja, in its truest sense, is not about power or politics. It is about reclaiming confidence, dignity, and the will to fight against darkness. The 'asura'—whether that darkness is Ravana in myth, colonialism in history, or ignorance and exploitation in the present.

Sandhi Bichchhed

A short play by Alipore Ahana



Chanchal Bhattacharya



On September 14, two short plays of contrasting moods were staged at Muktangan Mancha.

The first play, *Sandhi Bichchhed*, was presented by Alipore Ahana. This drama depicts the everyday diary of an ordinary middle-class family — a life suddenly gripped by the venomous claws of evil forces.

The story revolves around Nihar Babu, who lives happily with his wife Neeraja, son Shankha, and daughter Jhunu. Shankha, though an M.A. graduate, remains unemployed, while Jhunu is in a relationship with Soham, the son of Nihar Babu's friend Joydeep. Sardaprasanna, Nihar Babu's uncle, is a freedom fighter devoted to social work. He dreams of building a children's park on his small plot of land.

However, this land catches the attention of promoters who wish to build a large housing project there. Sardaprasanna refuses to sell, and a conflict begins. A politically powerful promoter ally, Parimal Babu, interferes,



■ STAGE CRAFT ■



Stage design was by Bablu Naskar, costumes by Gitali Chatterjee, makeup by Gour Koyal, and sound design by Dipankar Chatterjee — all of whom deserve appreciation.

Lopamudra Chakraborty's rendition of Rabindra Sangeet captivated the audience.

The overall concept and direction of the play were handled by Dipankar Chatterjee, whose creative vision gave Sandhi Bichchhed both emotional depth and dramatic intensity. His approach to the narrative was sensitive yet powerful — transforming a simple story of a middle-class family into a strong social statement about greed, corruption, and moral decay in contemporary society.

Alipore Ahana deserves heartfelt thanks for presenting such a socially relevant and bold play that mirrors our present times.

triggering a chain of criminal violence. Anti-social elements attack Nihar Babu's home; Sardaprasanna dies from a bomb blast and brick assault. On Dashami night during Durga Puja, the miscreants brutally rape and murder Jhunu.

The entire play unfolds through Jhunu's flashback. Written by Amitabh Ghosh, this powerful drama exposes how terrifying the grip of promoter-raj can be in today's society. The direction by Dipankar Chatterjee deserves high praise.

Dipankar Chatterjee's direction and Saikat Manna's lighting elevated the play to another level. Each actor performed their roles with authenticity. Notable performances came from Shaibal Banerjee as the Grandfather, Gitali Chatterjee as Neerja, Amit Ganguly as Parimal, and Dipankar Chatterjee himself as Nihar. Dhruva Das, Rupam Marik, and Moumita Banerjee also delivered commendable performances.



Barabazar



Anindita Mazumder

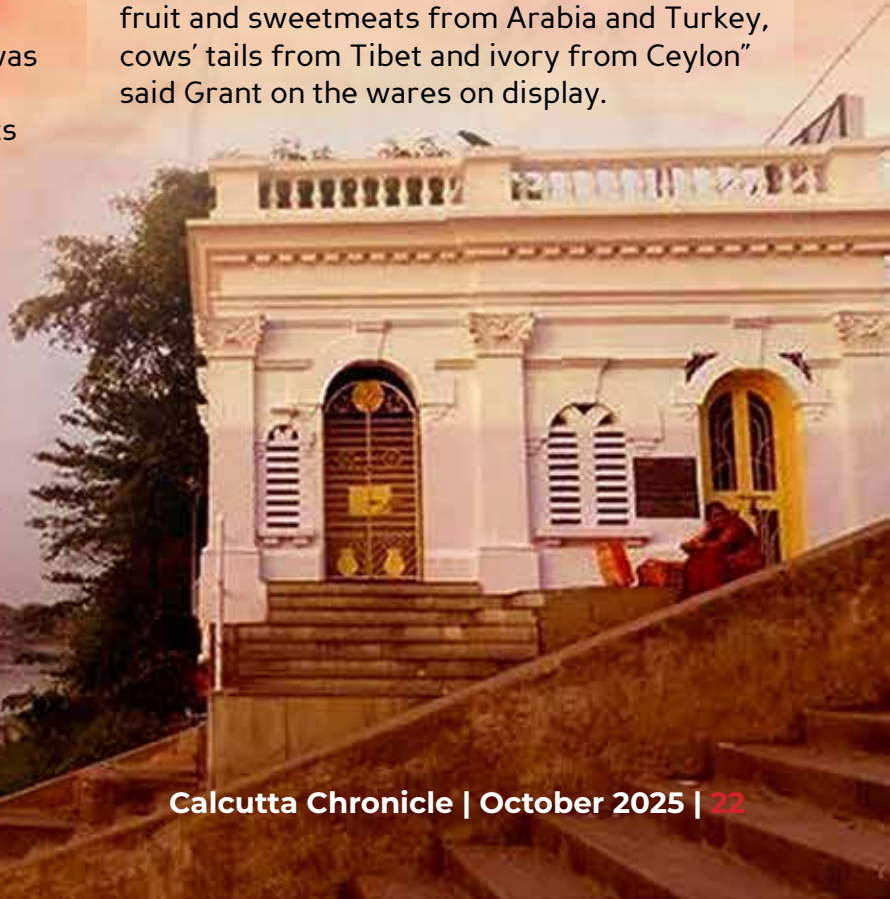
Barabazar, located on the northern part of Dihi Kalikata adjoining Dihi Sutanuti owed its original nucleus to the yarn market of Sutanuti with its trade controlled by the Seths and Bysacks which later expanded into the Great Bazar. The banians and diwans –intermediaries in English trade and administration began to set up their great households in the area surrounded by dwellings of servants and rent payers. Raja Shukamoy Ray of Posta, the Mullicks and the descendants of the famous Seths and Bysacks of Sutanuti occupied huge residences in Barabazar.

Located in between the White Town at Chowringhee and Black Town at Sutanuti, Barabazar was at the centre of the city and densely populated because it was the locale for business activities. A conglomeration of bazaars, Barabazar was the central point of the market network in the city and connected the city with its hinterland. In all probability, Barabazar was already an important market place in the mid-eighteenth century. It owed its name to Shiva, often affectionately referred to as “Buro” by his devotees. However, the upcountry merchants who usurped the position of the Seths changed it to Barabazar or Burrabazar–the great market. When Nawab’s troops attacked Calcutta in 1756, Barabazar was set on fire.

In 1774, P.D. Stanhope described the Calcutta Bazaar as “streets of miserable huts and every Indian man who occupies one of

this is called a merchant.” Nearly a hundred years later Colesworthy Grant’s Anglo-Indian Sketches (1850) provides a fine description of what Barabazar became in the mid-nineteenth century: “For oriental traffic, oriental tongues and oriental heads, commend me to Burrabazar, a mart tailed on to the north end of the China bazaar and occupied and visited by merchants from all parts of east.”

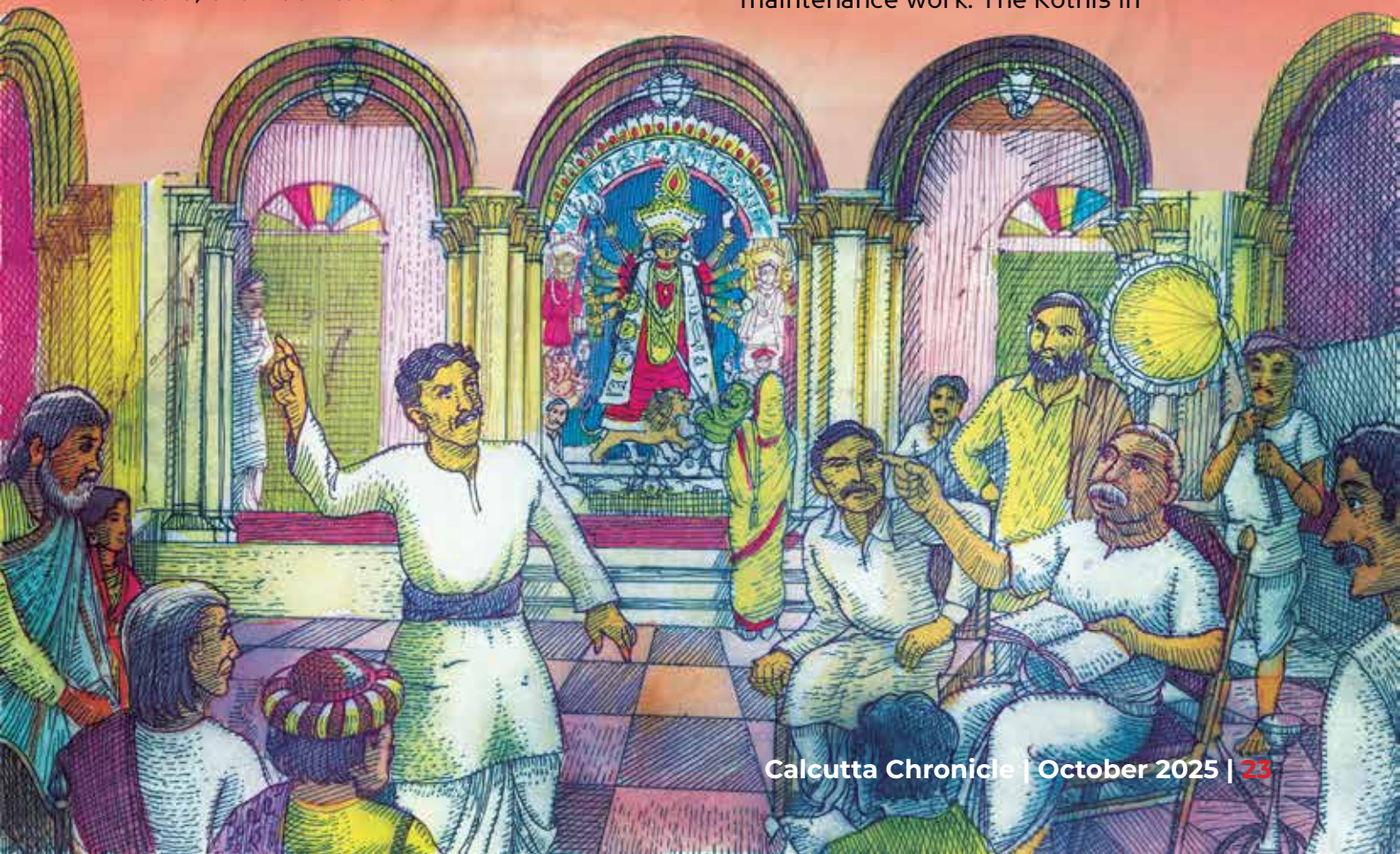
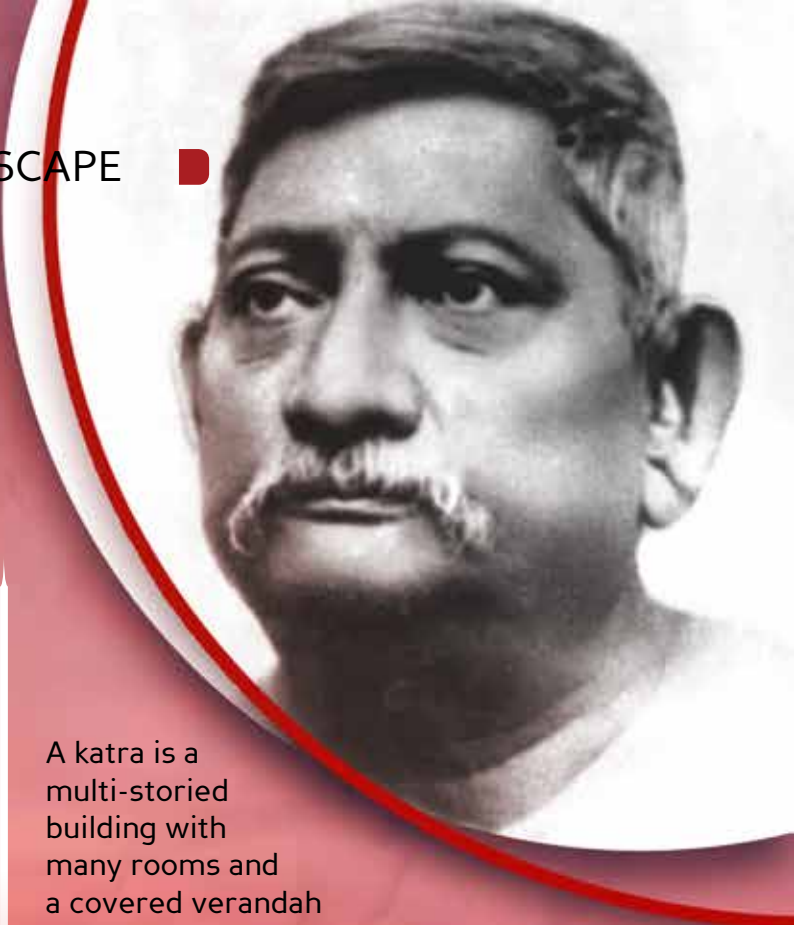
“Here may be seen the jewels of Golkanda and Bundelkhand, the shawls of Cashmere, the broad clothes of England, silks of Murshidabad and Benaras, muslins of Dacca, Calicoes, gingham, Chintzes and beads of Coromandel, firs and fruits of Caubul, silk fabrics and brocades of Persia, spices and myrrh from Ceylon, Spice Islands and Arabia, shells from the eastern coast and straits, drugs, dried fruit and sweetmeats from Arabia and Turkey, cows’ tails from Tibet and ivory from Ceylon” said Grant on the wares on display.



With a fine eye on details Grant wrote: "A great portion of these and various other articles too numerous to mention are either sold or bought by the natives from the countries where they are obtained who together with visitors, travellers and beggars form a diversified group of Persians, Arabs, Jews, Marwarees, Sikhs, Turks, Parsees, Chinese, Burmese and Bengalees." Fanny Parkes also spoke of the "dexterity with which seed pearls are bored by the natives" at shops in Barabazar and since this was a difficult task, seed pearls were sent from England to be pierced.

Barabazar was actually a hierarchised conglomeration of highly specialised bazaars, each concentrated in a particular area within the great market according to the commodity it traded in along with narrow lanes and bylanes. Thus a buyer would go to Dhotipatti, Fancy-patti or Pagia-patti for apparel, to Sutapatti for imported thread or cloth to Tullapatti for hessian or cotton, to Chinipatti for sugar and so forth. There was further specialisation within each branch of trade, creating subdivisions like katra, chowk or kothi.

A katra is a multi-storied building with many rooms and a covered verandah with a square courtyard in the centre. The rooms open into the central courtyard. Some of the important katra are Sadasukh Katra, Punjabi Katra, Raja Katra, Manohar Das Katra and so on. The management of katra is done through an elected executive body that raises annual subscription and undertakes maintenance work. The Kothis in



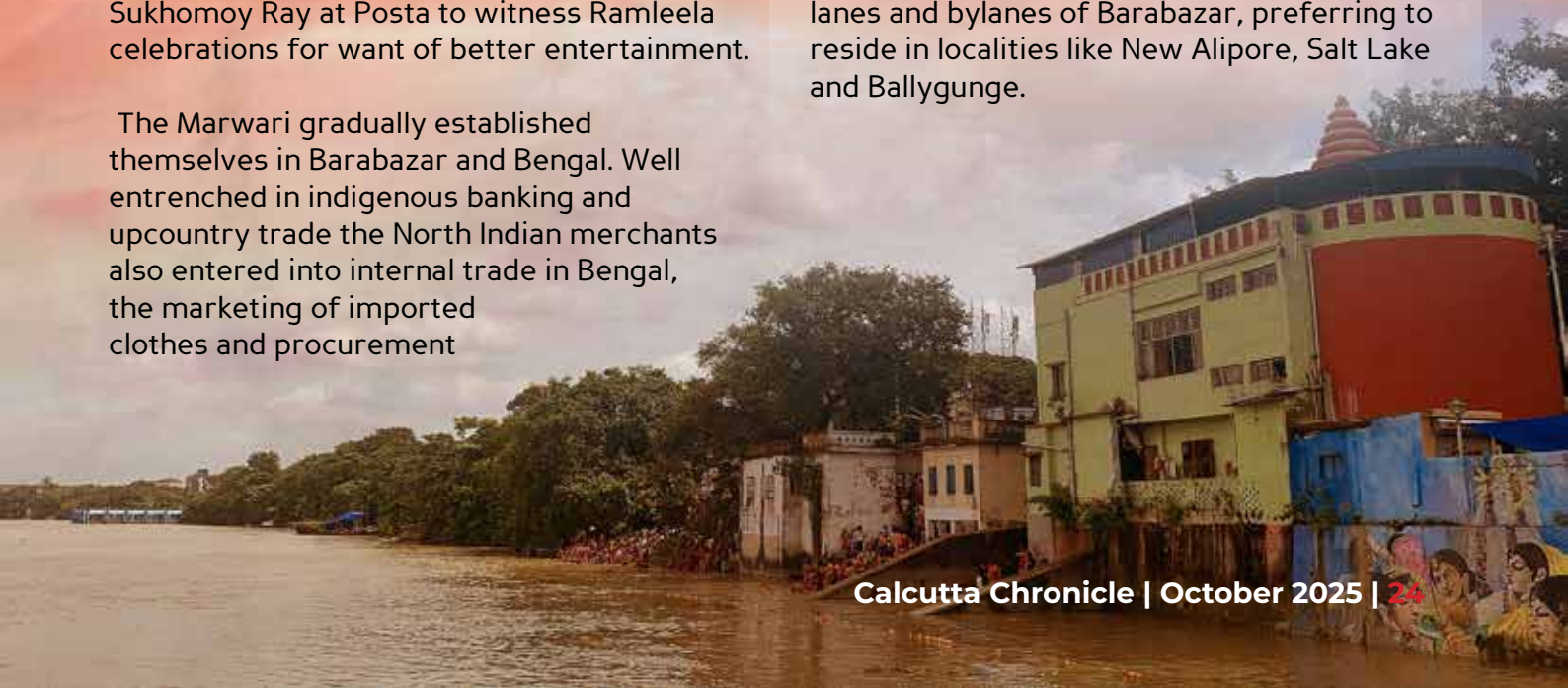
Burrabazar are organised differently than Katras. They are managed and controlled by the shareholders. Patties in Burrabazar are shopping ribbons dealing with special kinds of goods for wholesale. Overwhelmingly, a large portion of space in Burrabazar is occupied by business cum residential areas and due to want of space the rooms often have multiple uses. But apart from such spatial concentration of particular commodities there was ethnic specialisation in business with strong ties of personal cum business relations within that ethnic group. Barabazar with its cosmopolitan culture has been home to Marwaris, Gujaratis, Punjabis and migrants from UP and Bihar spreading over Cotton Street, Kalakar Street, Muktaram Babu Street, Hariram Goenka Street, Maharishi Devendra Road, Mahatma Gandhi Road, Armenian and Ezra Street.

The Marwaris started arriving in Burrabazar in large numbers in the 19th Century eventually replacing the Bengalis and even the North Indian Khatris. As early as in 1872, Reverend James Long had noted Barabazar to be populated by Marwaris and a Census of Calcutta in 1826 found that only 11 per cent of the population of Barabazar was native to Calcutta. Even Kaliprasanna Singha in his Sketches of the Screech Owl mentioned Barabazar as being inhabited by Marwaris and Babus along with their companions flocking to the garden houses of the descendants of Raja Sukhomoy Ray at Posta to witness Ramleela celebrations for want of better entertainment.

The Marwari gradually established themselves in Barabazar and Bengal. Well entrenched in indigenous banking and upcountry trade the North Indian merchants also entered into internal trade in Bengal, the marketing of imported clothes and procurement

of agricultural commodities such as jute on behalf of English business houses. Their merchant houses which maintained kothis and operated through munims in Barabazar started making Calcutta their headquarters and place of residence in later part of nineteenth century. Initially, they lived without women folk in mess-buildings or sleep at their gaddis at night. In contrast Bengali indigenous capital turned to rented investments while holding on to some traditional businesses with little prospects of growth. Around 1892, when Harrison Road (renamed Mahatma Gandhi Road) was constructed, the land on the flanks was sold in small plots. Marwaris purchased most of it. The Bengalis were further pushed back to Beadon Street with the construction of Central Avenue in Calcutta by 1912 since the compensation amount was not enough to buy the roadside plots after prices rocketed following the construction of the thoroughfare.

After settling down with families the Marwaris felt the need to set up educational institutions for imparting education in mother tongue. Besides a number of humanitarian institutions and dharamshalas were set up by the various ethnic groups. With the passage of time the Marwaris also progressed towards being industrialists from merely a trading community. However, in the past few decades the young and educated among the Marwari community have chose to leave the congested lanes and bylanes of Barabazar, preferring to reside in localities like New Alipore, Salt Lake and Ballygunge.



The Kali of Kolkata

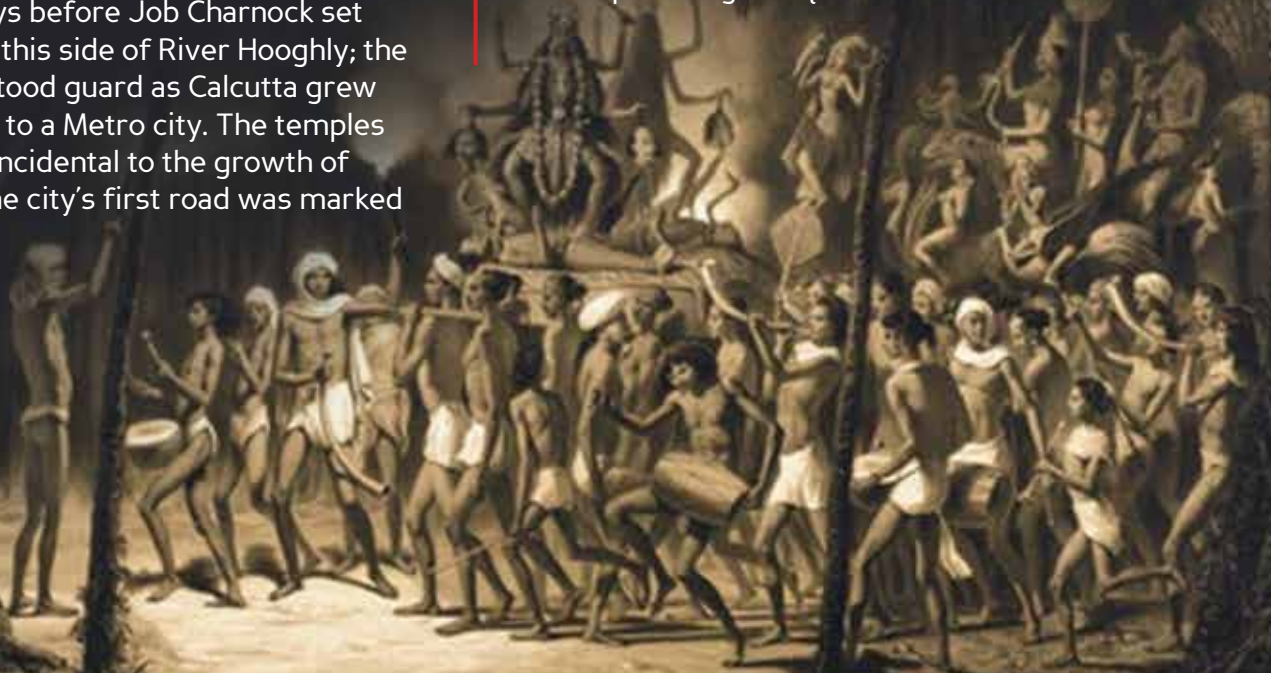


Anindita Mazumder

Kali remains the presiding deity of Kolkata though of late the grandeur of the five-day long festivities of Durga Puja seems to have overwhelmed every other festival. Today, not many historians are willing to accept that the goddess gave her name to Kalikata but the endearing address, 'Kali Kolkatawali' (owner of the city) indicate the inextricable link between the city and the deity which watches over its fate. The dark-complexioned goddess with the red lolling tongue strikes terror in the heart of enemies but is a provider to her devotees. The city's Kali temples date back to even days before Job Charnock set his foot on this side of River Hooghly; the goddess, stood guard as Calcutta grew from a dihi to a Metro city. The temples were also incidental to the growth of Calcutta; the city's first road was marked

by the travellers who traversed on foot through the forests from Murshidabad to Kalighat or the emergence of its oldest neighbourhood, Chitpore owed its name to the Chitteshwari Kali temple in its vicinity. In this edition of Calcutta Chronicle, we trace the link between Calcutta and its patron deity – Kali.

"Baro mashe tero parbon." Calcutta was once truly a land of festivals, celebrated round the twelve months of a year. Rass, Rath, Janmashami, Charak – every festival was celebrated with much fervour in those days. Since a large number of rich men were Vaishnab, the temples constructed by them were of Radha-Gobindo in their myriad forms. But among the masses, Shiva and Kali had quite a following and hence several temples of Shiva and Kali were established in the past few centuries, mostly by mendicants and ascetics. These were later patronised by the wealthy. Kali worship gained much popularity due to resurgence of the tantric way of worship in Bengal. Liquor and meat flowed



■ WHEN KOLKATA WAS CALCUTTA ■

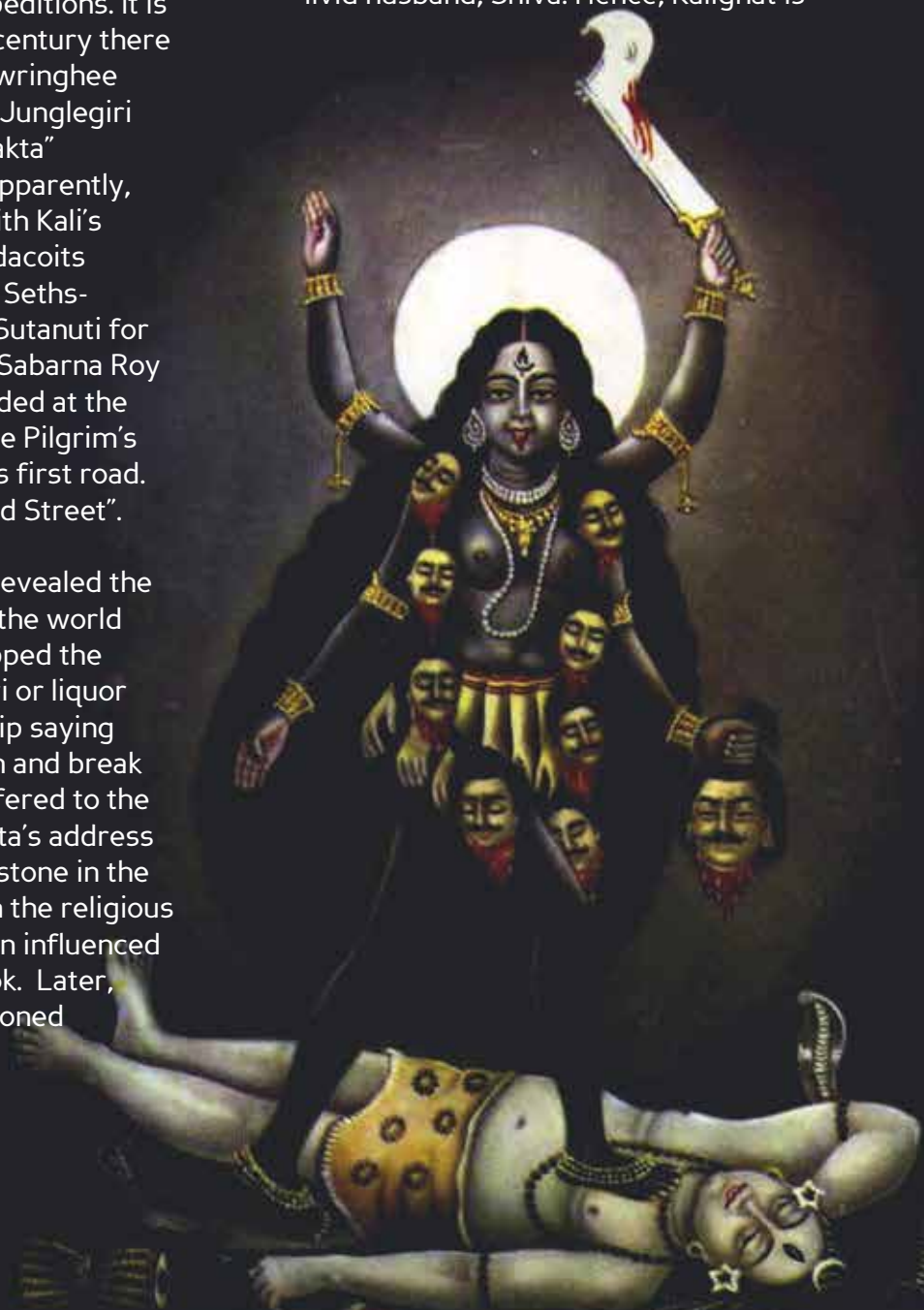
during the religious rites, a practice which continued unabated even when Kali gained acceptance in the “thakurbari” of the gentlemen creating a deep revulsion among many and leading to the reforms movement in Bengal. Most of the temples were built near the Ganges or its tributaries including Kalighat near Adi Ganga.

Interestingly, the goddess was also the patron deity of thugs and dacoits who worshipped her at the dead of night before going out on their expeditions. It is said that in the seventeenth century there was a thick forest at the Chowringhee area, named after an ascetic Junglegiri Chowringhee who was a “Shakta” (worshippers of Shakti). He apparently, found the stone imprinted with Kali’s face. The forest infested by dacoits was cleared in phases by the Seths-Basaks who were resided in Sutanuti for trading purposes and by the Sabarna Roy Choudhury family which resided at the Kalighat end near Barisha. The Pilgrim’s Path to Kalighat was the city’s first road. The British named it as “Broad Street”.

It was Sri Ramakrishna who revealed the benevolent mother in Kali to the world at large. It is said that he stopped the practice of offering karanbari or liquor to the goddess during worship saying “Beti (daughter) will fall down and break her leg.” Instead, milk was offered to the goddess. Later, Sister Nivedita’s address on Kali was a significant milestone in the acceptance of the goddess in the religious consciousness of the Western influenced pro Brahmo Bengali bhadralok. Later, the image of a dark complexioned woman on a white man appealed to the imagination of the revolutionary groups who took their vows before the deity to expel the British from their motherland.

Kali Temple at Kalighat

Coming back to the emergence of the city, historians are however, divided about the origin of the name Kalikata which was later anglicised into Calcutta. But undoubtedly this part (from Bohula to Dakshineswar) was known as Kalikhetra among the Hindus. According to Puranas the little toe of Sati’s right foot had fallen within this Kalikhetra when Vishnu had dismembered her body in pieces with his Sudarshan Chakra in order to pacify her livid husband, Shiva. Hence, Kalighat is

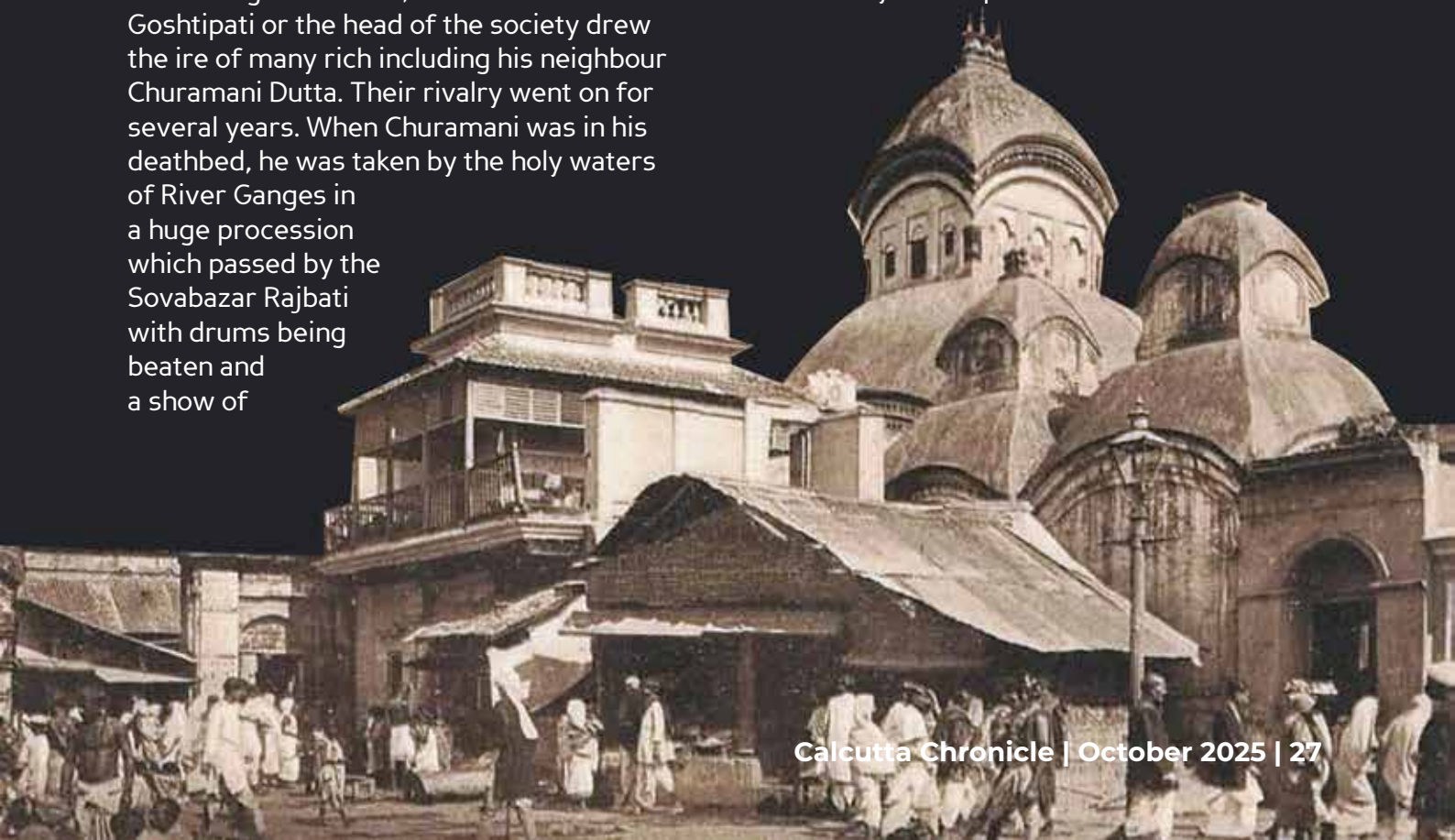


■ WHEN KOLKATA WAS CALCUTTA ■

considered to be one of the sacred Shakti peeths mentioned in the ancient scripture - Peethamala. The manifestation of Shakti at Kalighat – among the oldest and revered temples of Kali - is known as Dakshina Kali and Shiva, her husband is worshipped in the form of Nakuleshwar Bhairab. Vishnu is worshipped here as Syamaraja. There are several legends about the discovery of the Kali idol at Kalighat which was set in the thick of forest, infested with dacoits and sacrifices (even humans) were made; and the legends are mostly related to the forefather of Sabarna Ray Choudhury family, Laxmikanta Mazumder. It is said that his mother Padmabati had found the stone imprinted with Sati's toe while she was bathing in the adjoining Kalikunda praying for an heir. The family had the rights to the small temple and the adjacent land yet they could not develop this spot which drew large number of pilgrims. However, the present temple was constructed in the old bed of Ganges about a mile or more to the south west of the older temple which was in Bhawanipore.

The anecdote about the present temple is interesting. When Raja Nabakrishna suddenly amassed great wealth, his sudden rise as a Goshtipati or the head of the society drew the ire of many rich including his neighbour Churamani Dutta. Their rivalry went on for several years. When Churamani was in his deathbed, he was taken by the holy waters of River Ganges in a huge procession which passed by the Sovabazar Rajbati with drums being beaten and a show of

great pomp. In a few days time Churamani died by the river but trouble was awaiting his son Kaliprasad. He was told that the Kayasthas and Brahmins will boycott the funeral feast because of his irreligious way of life. He was accused of spending nights with a Mughal bai dancer. Feeding of Brahmins is an integral part of the Hindu funeral rites. Kaliprasad then sought help of Ramdulal Sarkar since most of the Brahmins residing in Calcutta were on the pay roll of the Rajbati. Ramdulal convinced Santosh Ray of Barisha, considered to be quite prominent among the Brahmins to partake in the final feast. Santosh Ray came with his followers but bade them not to accept any money. A grateful Kaliprasad then donated Rs 25,000 for the construction of the temple which ended in 1809 after the death of Santosh Ray. The 90 feet high temple had cost Rs 30,000 in those days and the hands, tongue and the other ornaments made of gold were donations from various wealthy men including Gopimohon Tagore. The door is made of solid silver with the images of ten mahavidyas engraved on it. The face of Kali is of fine black stone. The Haldars who have been sebayats for generations take care of her daily worship.



■ WHEN KOLKATA WAS CALCUTTA ■

Chitteshwari at Chitpore

Another famous Kali temple is that of Chitteshwari Kali temple at Chitpore. Makaranda (some say Manohar) Ghosh, the forefather of Srihari Ghosh (still remembered for his munificence in the proverb, Hari Ghosh er gohal or cowshed) had established this temple in the year 1610. He was in the service of Raja Todar Mal who reformed the revenue system during Mughal rule. He had amassed great wealth during this period and set up two temples of Sarbomangala and Chitteshwari in Chitpore at a time when the Mughal general, Raja Man Singh was fighting the Afghans. It is said Man Singh introduced the worship of Shakti in myriad forms in Bengal. The temples were set up on the Pilgrim Road which led to Kalighat. However, Makaranda's descendents left the area for Chandanpukur near Barrackpore since the temple was frequented by dacoits who worshipped the goddess. Another myth says that the temple was set up a dacoit named Chitu. None among the two temples has survived.

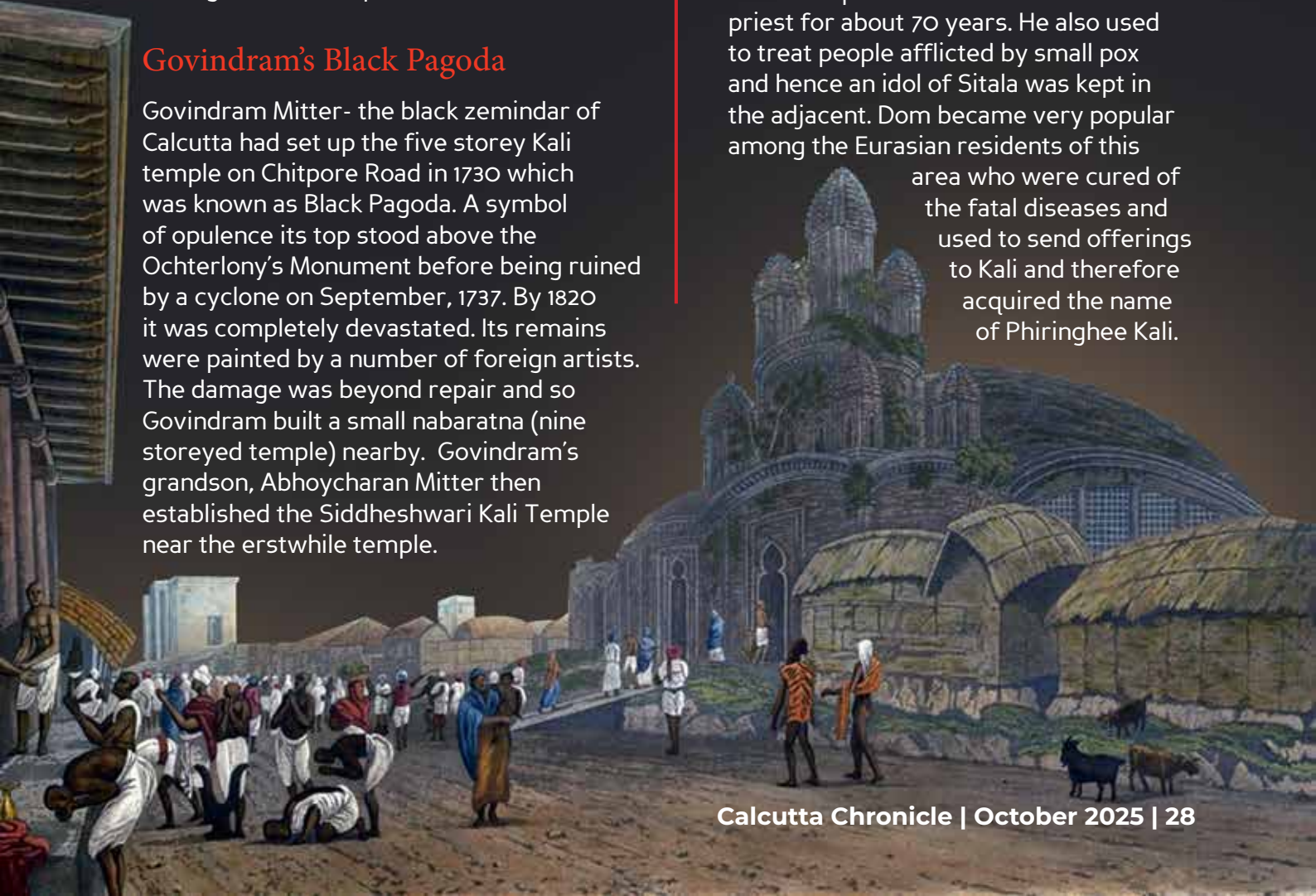
Govindram's Black Pagoda

Govindram Mitter - the black zemindar of Calcutta had set up the five storey Kali temple on Chitpore Road in 1730 which was known as Black Pagoda. A symbol of opulence its top stood above the Ochterlony's Monument before being ruined by a cyclone on September, 1737. By 1820 it was completely devastated. Its remains were painted by a number of foreign artists. The damage was beyond repair and so Govindram built a small nabaratna (nine storeyed temple) nearby. Govindram's grandson, Abhoycharan Mitter then established the Siddheshwari Kali Temple near the erstwhile temple.



Phiringhee Kali

A temple at Bowbazar Street is popularly known as Phiringhee Kali and many people attribute the name to Anthony Phiringhee, who was a kabiya or minstrel or to his grandfather, Antony – the Portuguese agent of the proprietor of Calcutta in Charnock's time. But according to HEA Cotton, this deity was established by a low-caste, Srimanta Dom who performed the duties of a priest for about 70 years. He also used to treat people afflicted by small pox and hence an idol of Sitala was kept in the adjacent. Dom became very popular among the Eurasian residents of this area who were cured of the fatal diseases and used to send offerings to Kali and therefore acquired the name of Phiringhee Kali.



■ WHEN KOLKATA WAS CALCUTTA ■

At present Brahmins serve as priests.

Kali Temple at Thanthania

The Kali image was originally established by a Brahamachari Udaynarayana but it was Babu Sankar Chandra Ghosh of Thanthania who erected this temple in 1210 according to Bengali calendar. It is associated with Sri Ramakrishna who frequented this temple and said to have vowed an offering of green coconut and sugar to the goddess while praying for speedy recovery of Keshab Chandra Sen, a Brahmo leader.

Anandomoyi Temple at Nimtolla & Punte Kali at Posta

Near the old crematorium at Nimtolla Ghat stands the temple of Anandomoyi. It has an image in form of Sasane Kali. Established nearly two centuries back by a Mahanta, zemindar Madhav Chandra

Banerjee of Nimtolla Street inherited this temple with the two feet high black stone image of the goddess and restored it. The Punte Kali temple in Posta has the image of Dakshina Kali and owes its name to a legend. According to it, once while performing the yajna the priest suddenly saw a small fish (punti) burning in the fire. He was initially devastated in thinking he had performed some mistake but then prayed to the goddess that if he had performed her puja with enough dedication the fish should survive and she granted his wish.

The worship of Kali Puja has also gained prominence in present day Kolkata. While Chetla records the most number of community pujas others including by legendary Phata Keshto still draw large crowds.





Sunderban Samudra Mela

A Celebration of a Cultural Circle



Shankha Bhattacharyya

Samudra Biswas, the soul of the Chapa Katha family, is an eminent storyteller. Around him has grown a unique cultural circle. Those whom Samudra love, and those who love him, often come together to celebrate in a joyful, creative environment filled with the spirit of art and culture.



■ STAGE CRAFT ■

Within this circle are many gifted individuals — writers, singers, social workers — all united by their dedication to creativity and humanity. Together, they have built a vibrant cultural community. “Sunderban Samudra Mela” is a reflection and celebration of that very spirit.

Distinguished personalities from various fields were invited and felicitated at this event. On August 31, the Boi-Chitra Sabhaghar on the third floor of Kolkata’s iconic Coffee House turned into a true “fair of the moonlight” — a gathering of radiant minds and generous hearts.

People from different faiths and walks of life came together in harmony, creating an atmosphere pulsating with literature, culture, and compassion.

Many eminent individuals were honoured that evening for their contributions in their respective fields. Among the awardees were playwrights, poets, a young astronomy enthusiast, courageous warriors who risked their lives during the pandemic to save others, a devout mother figure, and several social workers.

One of the highlights of the event was the conferment of the Lifetime Achievement Award 2025 on poet and playwright Chanchal Bhattacharya. Eminent Oncologist



That day’s Sunderban Samudra Mela was exactly that — a heartfelt gathering, a treasure chest filled with the sweetness of shared memories.



Dr Sankar Nath was present in the felicitation event.

The entire event was gracefully anchored by renowned writer poet and elocutionist Aloke Dutta.

Another notable aspect was the inclusion of concise yet well-curated introductions of each awardee — a thoughtful touch that added grace and depth to the occasion.

Photographs may capture only moments, but memories linger on — preserved like precious keepsakes in an album.

A Dive Into Heritage **Architecture of Kolkata**



Sandip Banerjee

Kolkata or Calcutta as it is originally known is certainly not a very old city, particularly when compared to many other cities of India. But with the advent of the British, it shot into prominence in a sudden spree. This city which was a swampy land with hardly any decent inhabitation gradually became the 'Second City of the British Empire'. As the British became the political master of India, Calcutta became the Capital City. By the turn of the nineteenth century, the city not only became cosmopolitan, it became a melting pot for culture, taste and fashion. With the flourish of Bengali aristocracy and European affluence, Calcutta displayed fine array of buildings of style and architecture; it came to be known as the 'City of Palaces'.

By the 1850s, Calcutta had developed into two areas that essentially segregated the inhabitants by colour. The British 'White Town' included many of the colonial buildings and municipal offices still in use today, while the 'Black Town' comprised of large parts of North Calcutta, including old Rajbaris and the houses of influential locals. There are two broad ways to label the colonial structures in the city- the landmark, iconic, postcard monuments and the historic, sometimes crumbling but still functional public offices. In some cases, both these labels intersect. The colonial era has gone but the hangover still persists. Even today when we survey Kolkata, we locate buildings which have withstood time, bearing testimony of the historical legacy of this city.



When we talk about Calcutta or Kolkata one of the first names that strike our minds is that of Rabindranath Tagore and 'Jorasanko Thakurbari'. Built by Dwarkanath Tagore, this building is the ancestral house of the Tagores and is considered as the site of Bengal Renaissance as here lived Maharshi Deventranath Tagore, Poet Laureate Rabindranath Tagore and many other luminaries of the Tagore Family. The house was constructed by British architects in the Indo-European style which is evident from the façade itself. The edifice features hanging verandas, cathedral -style window and expansive aisles- all transporting us to a different era. Personal belongings of Rabindranath Tagore are all exhibited here. The house also has a painting gallery and some rooms have the walls inscribed with the great poet's writings. Everywhere there is a display of architecture and sculpture depicting neo- classical construction.

Another shining example of neo-classical architecture that stands tall even today is the 'Marble Palace'. Located at 46, Mukhtaram Babu Street, just off Central Avenue, it is one of the best preserved and most elegant houses of nineteenth century Calcutta. It is believed that as many as 125 different types of marble has been used to build the walls, floors and sculptures of this magnificent marvel; and that is from where it derives its name.

Built in 1835 by Raja Rajendra Mullick this house also has a Jagganath temple within the premises. Though neo-classical in style, the open courtyards are traditionally Bengali. The house is a unique specimen of architecture with its Corinthian pillars, ornamented verandas and sloping roofs built almost in the style of Chinese pavilion. The entire mansion still emanates the flavour of 'Baboo Culture' of nineteenth century Bengal.

In commotion with the exquisite lifestyle of the Babus of British Calcutta we bear the story of Putul Bari or Doll House, mansion which has earned the reputation of a haunted place. Situated at the Shovabazar area of Calcutta, Putul Bari was originally a warehouse, which was eventually turned into a lavish building. This house features magnificent structures of faces of people on the top. On a moonlit night these structures appear like human beings, if viewed, suddenly. Hence the name 'Putul Bari' is derived. Red and pink sandstone was used for constructing this monument and the unique five-storey exterior looks like a





■ POTPOURRI ■

Dinesh exchanged bullets as they attacked the very seat of British imperialism. It is like a mini township. The exterior walls are all engraved with statues of Victorian tradition. The architectural beauty lies in the spread out and in the symmetry with which the several blocks of the building are linked. It was Calcutta's first three-storey building and was constructed to accommodate the junior clerks of the city. This is the place that stood as an epitome of British Colonial domination in Bengal or even in India.

honeycomb. Surely the building is a narration of architectural aristocracy.

One of the noted heritage buildings of Calcutta, 'Ramdual Thakurbati', popularly known as Latubabu- Chatubabur bari takes us back to those days when Bengal sparkled in gorgeous splendor. Situated at Beadon Street, this house harks back the neo-classical era with its engraved walls and sprawling courtyard. The site of the Puja - offering along with the image of the deity adds to the attraction of the place. This 250-year-old construction has some rare marble in the floors that still glow in appearance.

The very locale of Administration of Bengal for more than hundred and fifty years Writers' Buildings is truly historical as it describes a running narrative of history. Designed by Thomas Lyon, the 150 metres long structure covers the entire stretch of northern fringes of the famous 'Lal Dighi'. In the corridor of this very building the brave heart trio of Binoy, Badal, and

The Old Fort William in Calcutta was built by the British East India Company in 1696. It was the main fortified settlement of the company in Bengal and served as an important military base during the eighteenth century. The fort was named after King William III of England and was one of the largest British fortifications in India. The fort was surrounded by a high brick wall and had a total of three gates. The main gate was located on the northern side. The other two gates were located on the eastern and western sides of the fort. The fort was hexagonal in shape having an area of 10 acres. The fort was also used as a prison and was the site of the infamous 'Black Hole' tragedy. The permission for constructing this fort was granted by the Mughal Emperor





■ POTPOURRI ■

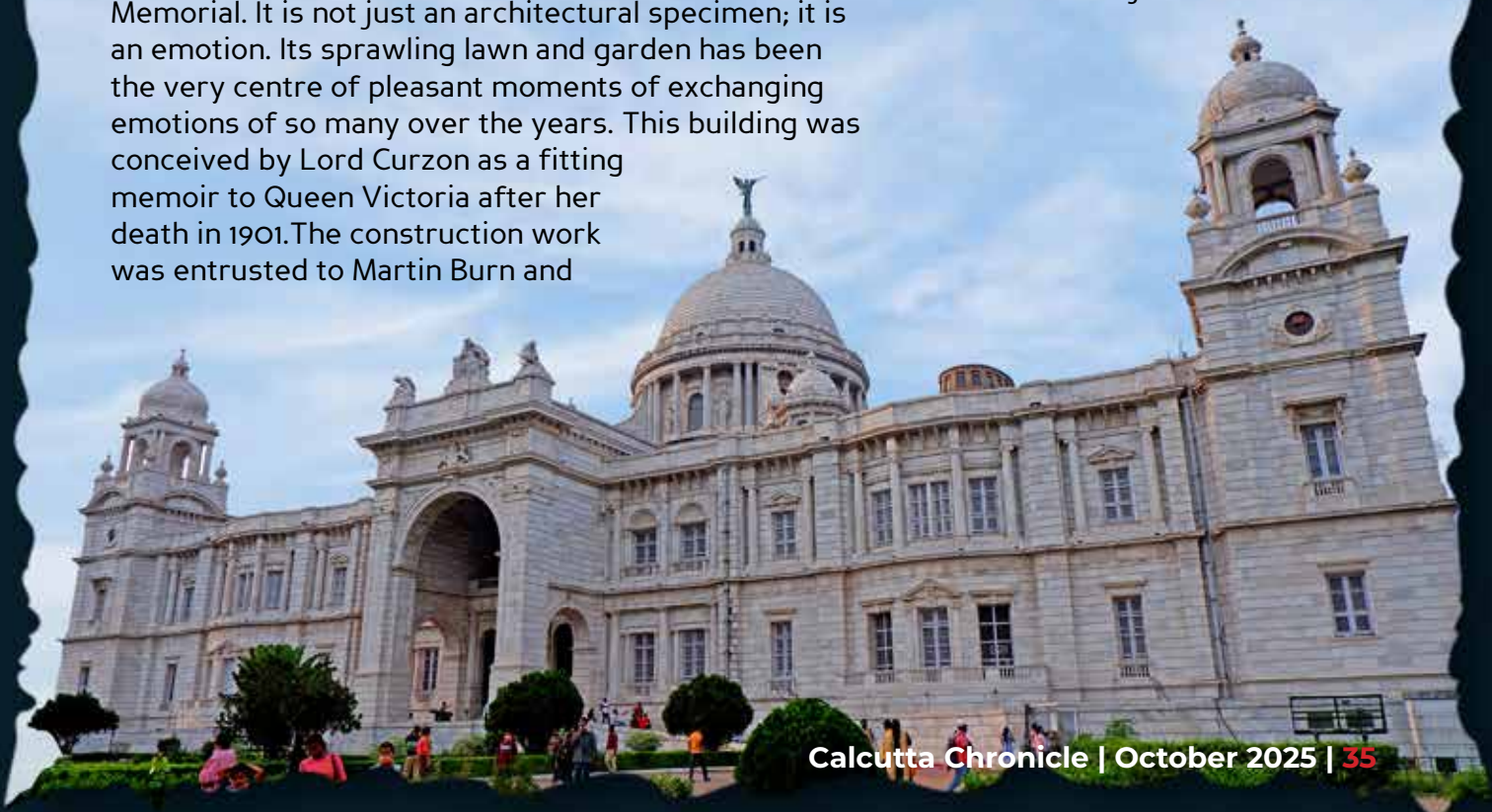


Aurangzeb. Sir Charles Eyre started the construction near the bank of the Hooghly River. In 1756, the Nawab of Bengal, Siraj-ud-Daula attacked the fort and temporarily conquered the city of Calcutta. This led the British to build a new fort in the Maidan.

The building that captivates everyone's imagination as one proceeds from North to South of Calcutta through the Maidan area, is the Victoria Memorial. It is not just an architectural specimen; it is an emotion. Its sprawling lawn and garden has been the very centre of pleasant moments of exchanging emotions of so many over the years. This building was conceived by Lord Curzon as a fitting memoir to Queen Victoria after her death in 1901. The construction work was entrusted to Martin Burn and

Company of Calcutta. The marble was quarried at Makrana in the then princely state of Jodhpur, while the statuary on the porches and the central dome was executed in Italy. The Queen's grandson, the Prince of Wales, later to be King George V laid the foundation stone on January 4, 1906 but only on December 28, 1921 was the memorial opened to the public. An institution of national importance since the Act of 1935, the Memorial houses remarkable collection of manuscripts, paintings, sculptures, maps, coins and artifacts which are memorabilia of the Raj. In designing of the building, Sir William Emerson adopted an Italian Renaissance style with an oriental touch. The entire structure shines in splendor of statues and paintings, particularly which showcases Queen Victoria in different phases of her reign.

There are so many other magnificent edifices in Calcutta which are not just famous



for their architecture but also for their association with the social, cultural and political events of this great city. One such example is certainly the Belvedere House which once was the residence of the Governor of Bengal and now houses the National Library. It is in the grounds of this Estate that the famous duel between Warren Hastings and Philip Francis was fought. It is believed that this house was gifted to Warren Hastings by Mir Zafar.

The Town Hall is another edifice which has witnessed many important meetings and events that took place in Calcutta. It is here that one of our greatest philosophers and monks Swami Vivekananda was offered a public felicitation on his return from America. Built in Doric style of architecture in 1814

this two storey structure was used as a venue for balls, concerts, receptions and public meetings. The present 'Raj Bhavan' where the Governor of West Bengal resides is a Baroque-Neoclassical type architecture inspired by the Kedleston Hall in Derbyshire. The uniqueness of this mansion lies in creating a sense of awe even without expensive stonework. There are many other buildings of this city which epitomise the great tradition of colonial architecture of this city. Many have lost their glorified existence; many stand as relics of their rich heritage. They all together unfold an era when this great city really possessed cultural and creative wealth. As long as these edifices exist, the past mingles with the present to catch us in the suspension of time.





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Modern Mime Centre's Mime Festival 2025



Shankha Bhattacharyya

Over the past four years, with the active cooperation of the Paschim Banga Natya Akademi, the Modern Mime Centre has been continuously promoting the art of mime across various districts of West Bengal including Kolkata. Under the guidance and direction of the eminent mime artist and guru Kamal Naskar, numerous young boys and girls from the state have become proficient in the art form.

On September 20, the students showcased their mime talents on the stage of Rabindra Sadan in Kolkata. The festival was inaugurated by Gautam De, former Director of ICCR, and Ritish Ranjan Chakraborty, the guiding force of Suranandan Bharati. Gautam De delivered an insightful speech on the Art of Mime and Kamal Naskar, while Ritish Ranjan Chakraborty recited a self-composed

poem dedicated to the guru. The event was gracefully conducted by renowned mime artist Dr. Shubhra Sanyal.

With the participation of nearly a hundred students selected from various districts of West Bengal, the Mime Festival 2025 was a grand success. From the vast repertoire of 250 mime sketches created by Guru Kamal Naskar over his illustrious 45-year journey in mime, seven selected pieces were performed at this year's festival.

From North 24 Parganas, the Jaygram Social Welfare Society presented "Mondo Khadya" (Bad Food)—a performance by speech and hearing-impaired students that conveyed a strong message on social awareness through humour and satire. Their brilliant performance by Sumaiya, Tamanna, Ashraful, Rakesh, Tuhina,



■ STAGE CRAFT ■

Rupsana, Iman, and Merina, guided by Guru Kamal Naskar, left an indelible impression on the audience. Watching them perform, one could feel the spirit of their message — *"We may be mute and deaf, yet we shall set new milestones. With the touch of love extended towards us, we shall never lose."*

Indeed, Guru Kamal Naskar's compassion and dedication made the impossible possible.

From Howrah district, students of Baksara High School presented "Lobhe Paap, Paape Mrityu" (Greed Leads to Sin, Sin to Death) — a mime adaptation inspired by the Arabian Nights tale of Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves. Debashis Poddar, as Kasim, and Pallabi De, as the Leader of the Thieves, delivered memorable performances, supported by Gagan, Abhirup, Anish, Manik, Prasenjit, Sandeep,



Sujan, Mainak, Sujit, Ayush, Jeet, Manish, Shambhu, Inos, and Neelakash.

Kolkata Modern Mime Centre, staged two presentations. The first, "Bandhu" (Friend), explored the fragile bond of friendship — how personal interest can sometimes rupture even the deepest ties. The principal roles were enacted by Dr. Shubhra Sanyal and Pallabi De, accompanied by Khushi, Anwesha, Debashis, and Mohana.

The final presentation from the Kolkata team was "Khudiram" — a tribute to the great revolutionary Shahid Khudiram Bose, one of India's youngest martyrs.



■ STAGE CRAFT ■



On April 30, 1908, Khudiram hurled a bomb at a carriage near the European Club in an attempt to assassinate the notorious Chief Presidency Magistrate. Unfortunately, the bomb mistakenly struck the car of barrister Pringle Kennedy, resulting in his arrest and eventual execution. Debashis Poddar's powerful portrayal of Khudiram, alongside his depiction of the British police officer, the judge, and the executioner, stood out as one of the most remarkable performances of the day. The lighting, designed by Kartik

Dev Barman and Mintu Das, enhanced the dramatic effect with perfection.

With the continued support of the Paschim Banga Natya Akademi, the noble initiative of the Modern Mime Centre will undoubtedly enrich the art of mime in West Bengal.

Guru Kamal Naskar's relentless efforts across the districts will surely elevate the art form to a place of great honour in the years to come.



BDHC Celebrates World Tourism Day in Kolkata

Shines Spotlight on Sustainable Tourism and
UK-India Travel Opportunities



The British Deputy High Commission (BDHC) in collaboration with Chandni Travel Group hosted an event to mark the World Tourism Day this year at the British Club on Thursday, September 25, 2025. BDHC hosted a vibrant and insightful event, bringing together leaders and stakeholders from the tourism and hospitality sectors to discuss the future of sustainable tourism and strengthen deeper UK-India travel collaboration.

The event featured a compelling keynote address by Dr. Andrew Fleming, British Deputy High Commissioner to East and Northeast India who spoke about the UK's rich offerings in nature and eco-tourism, emphasising the growing global interest in sustainable travel experiences. Joining virtually, Ms. Ritu Varma, Country Manager, India, VisitBritain, highlighted the immense

potential to attract tourists from Eastern India to the UK, citing cultural connections and evolving travel preferences.

A thought-provoking panel discussion on Sustainable Tourism was moderated by Amit Sengupta. The panel included distinguished experts from the tourism and hospitality sector who shared insights on responsible travel, community engagement, and the role of innovation in shaping sustainable tourism models.

Adding to the significance of the occasion, the event also marked the launch of the Global Office of Chandni Travel Group, a major milestone for the Kolkata based travel company as it expands its international footprint in the UK. The launch underscores Kolkata's growing role as a hub for global tourism initiatives.



TRAVEL

Dr. Andrew Fleming, British Deputy High Commissioner to East and Northeast India said: "Tourism has long been a driver of economic growth, cultural exchange, and community development. Like all industries the tourism industry constantly evolves over time; current challenges include climate change, biodiversity loss, the impact of social media and shifting consumer values. The future of tourism lies not only in sustainability but in regeneration. It's about leaving places better than we found them. I am equally delighted to see a Kolkata travel company, Chandni Travel Group, expand their business operations to London; this has the potential to enhance travel (visibility, volume and quality of experience) in both directions and strikes me as a superb platform through which to promote the Durga Puja."

Ritu Varma, Country Manager, India, VisitBritain said: "India is one of Britain's most important tourism markets, with visitors staying longer, spending more, and exploring further than average. Kolkata, as a cultural hub, is an increasingly vital source of high-value travellers. As Britain's national tourism board, VisitBritain plays a central role in India working closely with trade partners, media, and influencers to strengthen the UK's

appeal. Our focus is on promoting regional dispersal and showcasing that Britain is far more than London. From food, culture, and history to landscapes, theme parks, and self-drive routes, the UK offers something for every age group and traveller."

The event was attended by tourism and hospitality industry professionals, travel influencers, all united by a shared commitment to promoting sustainable and inclusive travel.



Spreading Sweetness

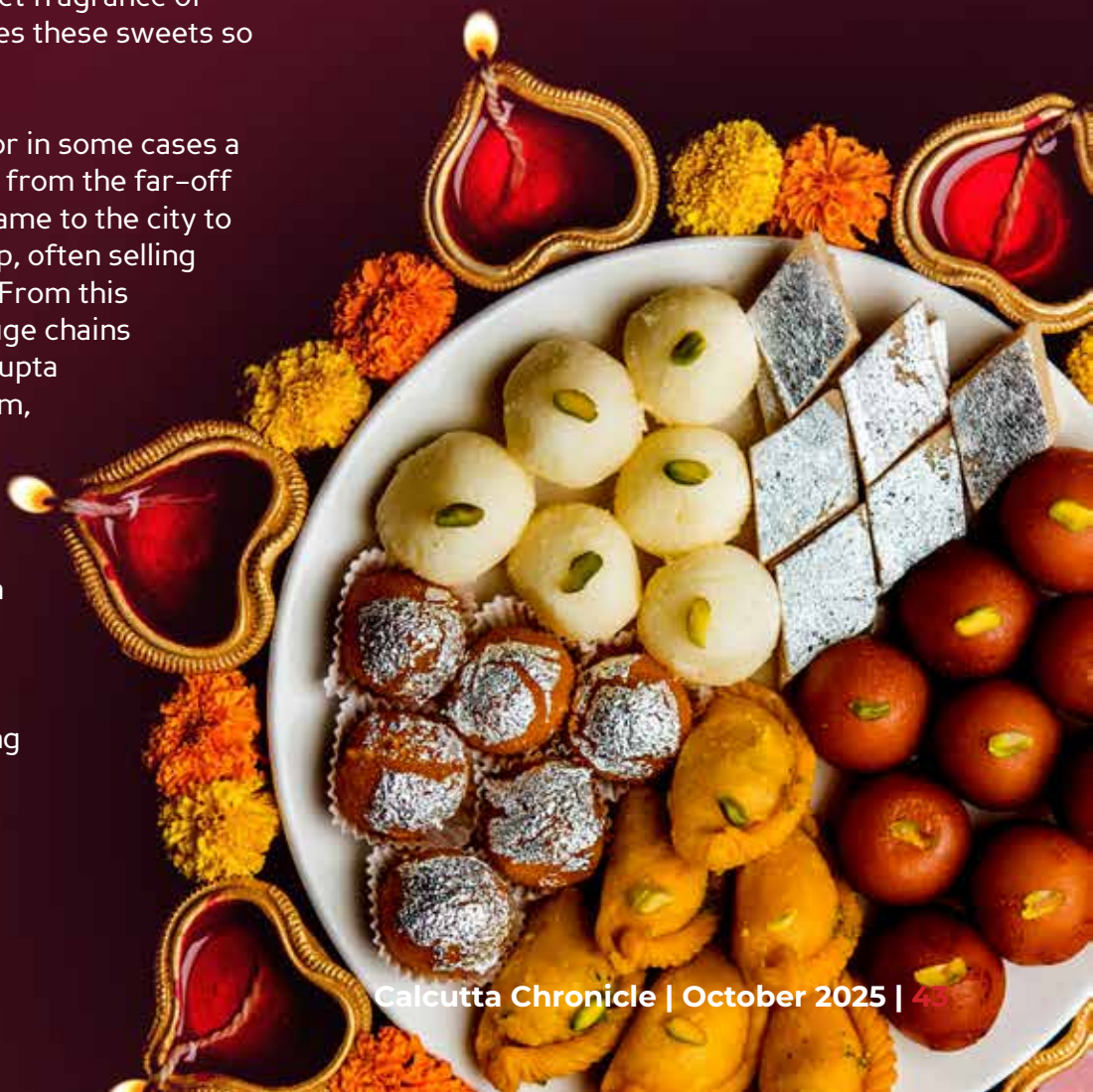


Joydip Sur

Over the years a lot has changed about Diwali in Calcutta. The millions of diyas which dispelled the darkness and ignorance spreading the light of love and radiance have given way to Chinese made decorative lamps of varied hues. The rangolis too come ready-made. The sweets, earlier prepared at home, also come packed in boxes. But one thing is yet to change is the sweet fragrance of pure desi ghee which makes these sweets so tempting.

Quite a few decades ago, or in some cases a century ago, a man usually from the far-off villages in Uttar Pradesh came to the city to establish a desi mithai shop, often selling samosas or even hot milk. From this humble beginning grew huge chains of sweetmeat shops like Gupta Brothers, Haldiram, Bikaram, Tewari or Sharma Sweets who have been enticing our taste buds with gulab jamuns, jalebis, laddoos, kaju barfis, pedas, kesariya sandesh and thick rabris. And Diwali in Calcutta has become synonymous with decorative boxes containing varieties of laddoos and barfis as with trays of dry fruits, diyas and crackers.

The use of besan, mawa, nuts make the mithais so delectably delicious even to the Bengali taste buds which are more acquainted to the taste of chhana and the thick sugary syrup. The use of kesar (saffron) and rose water also brought in a fragrance hitherto unknown to the Bengali olfactory senses. Even as food inflation has broken all records and



the prices of all the ingredients from milk to sugar have shot through the roof, there has not been any compromise in the proportion of desi ghee or the mawa in the sweets of these popular confectioners. "I love eating these laddoos and gulab jamuns just because of the smell of pure desi ghee that hits your senses. The desi ghee laddoos from Tewari Brothers are a personal favourite," said Shounak Ghosh of Ballygunge who vouch that there has been no compromise in the taste since his childhood.

The bustling shop of Tewari Brothers at Minto Park is a pointer to their popularity and the owners claim that their medium for all products be it sweet or snacks, is still pure desi ghee. Their laddoos and kaju barfi among the traditional North Indian sweets, have a huge fan following.

But Gupta Brothers have also been innovative. Apart from the array of traditional North Indian sweets that are available the confectioner came up with a new recipe of mixing chhana to give the North Indian tongue a taste of the Bengali sweets. The recipe is still

a secret but it is a mix of rasagolla, sandesh and malai. It was named "Abar Khabo" after the customers asked for it again and again. "It is our signature item and has contributed immensely towards our popularity. It is perhaps the most popular sweet item in Calcutta after rasagolla, mishti doi and sandesh", said Pappu Gupta of Gupta Brothers.

But when it comes to innovation, Gupta Brothers are not the only ones who are experimenting with different tastes. The trend extends to other popular confectioners of Calcutta as well. In fact this festive season, Haldiram has launched several new varieties of sweets with a mix of chhana and North Indian dry fruits to romance with the Bengali taste buds.

Then there are lip smacking gajar ka halwa seasoned with the choicest nuts or kaju katli and kaju anar, though essentially Gujrati in origin but have been well accepted by the cosmopolitan Calcuttan. So for once bid goodbye to your calorie concerns and let's gorge on delicious laddoos, barfis and hot gulab jamuns and jalebis.



Some of the popular varieties are as follows:

- **Moti Choor Ladoo:** Round in shape, made of besan (gram four) and consisting of cardamom, pistachio and a touch of saffron.
- **Jalebi:** A popular sweet made of besan and dipped in sugary syrup.
- **Kaju Katli:** A soft diamond shaped sweet made from freshly grounded cashews.
- **Kaju-Pista Rolls:** A twist of cashew and pistachio.
- **Peda:** A special mithai recipe preparation from khoa flour. The pedas from Agra are the most famous in India.
- **Barfi:** Quadrangular shaped sweets made of whole milk and sugar, garnished with cardamom and pistachios. Extremely popular across the country.
- **Gulab Jamun:** A tasty circular mithai that comes dipped in sugary syrup. It tops everyone's wish list.
- **Badam Barfi:** Square shaped barfis made from almonds and topped with cardamom seeds and pistachio nuts.



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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Rasmancha of Hadal Narayanpur, Bankura

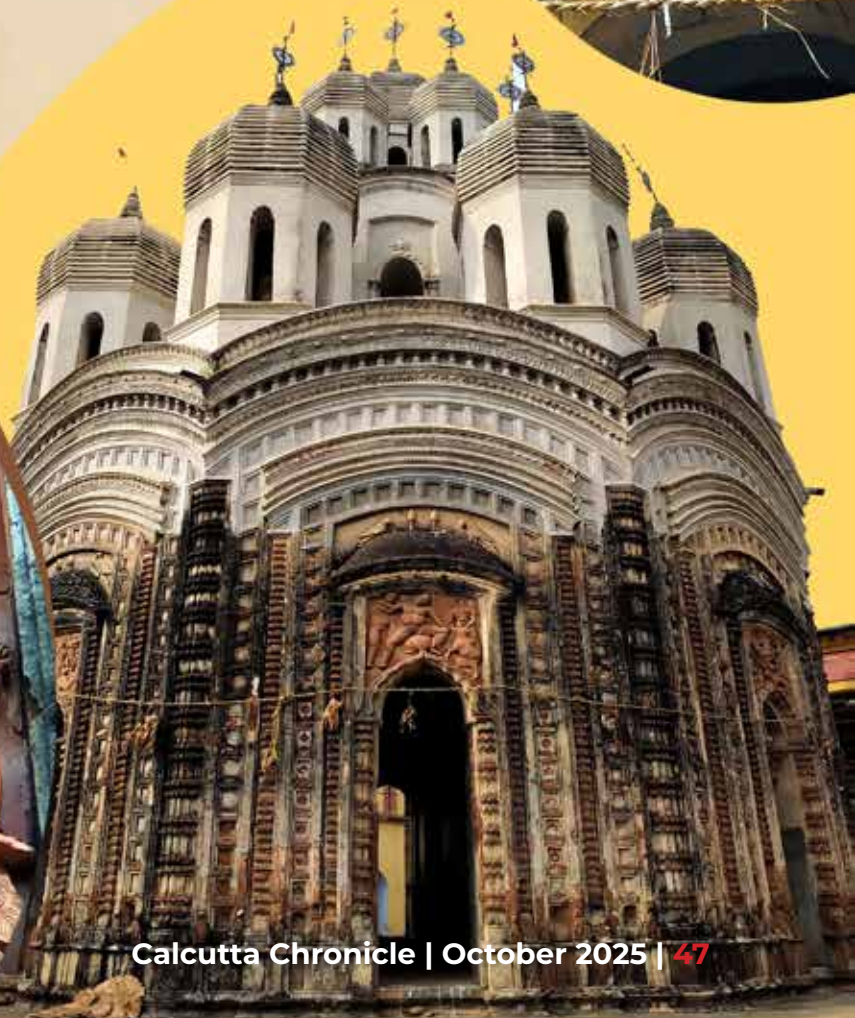


Kinjal Bose

The twin villages of Hadal Narayanpur located in Patrasayer block of Bishnupur subdivision of Bankura district of West Bengal has a number of terracotta temples and a beautiful saptadasratna (seventeen pinnacled) octagonal rasmancha.

A rasmancha is temple-like structure used during the Rashyatra on a full moon day held in the Bengali month of Kartick when the idols of Radha-Krishna are taken out from the main temple

and placed here so that devotees at large can witness the deities. Compared to dolmancha, where the idols of Radha-Krishna are kept for a single day, in the rasmancha, the deities are placed for three days mainly after the evening. The manchas are situated within the temple compound. The walls of these temple-like structures may either have intricate terracotta decorations or stucco works or simply floral motifs.



The rasmancha of Baro-taraf of Mondal family of Hadal Narayanpur is simply unique in many respects. First of all it is one of the largest of its kind – double storied with a height of about 40 feet. Secondly, all the sides are decorated with rich terracotta works. Thirdly, it may seem from a distance that this tall structure looks like a temple. Fourthly, each corner of the rasmancha has sculptures depicting Gaja Lakshmi; Ram Sita; Krishna Radhika; Anantasayan Bishnu; Gostho-Lila; Mahisasuramardini Durga; Marriage of Shiva; Shiva Nandi-Bhringi.

Placed on a higher pedestal, this saptadasa rasmancha with “rekha

turrets” was built in the year 1854. David McCutcheon in his book “Brick Temples of Bengal” mentioned that Sibnarayan Mandal commissioned a person by the name of Narayan Sutradhar of Balsi to build a number of buildings including this spectacular rasmancha which, during those days, cost fourteen thousand rupees.

More or less the sculptures on the walls of the rasmancha are intact but care should be taken to protect it. It is a unique heritage structure. There was an old custom that during the days of Rashyatra all the shalagramshilas of the village were kept here for three days.



“Meghe Dhaka Natok”

Ritwik Kumar Ghatak Centenary



Chanchal Bhattacharya

Ritwik Kumar Ghatak was born on November 4, 1925 in Dhaka, Bangladesh. His ancestral home was in Naya Varena, Pabna. His father's name was Suresh Chandra Ghatak.

In 1950, although he completed his M.A. coursework in English at the University of Calcutta, he did not appear for the final examination. Growing up in a culturally rich environment, his elder brothers and sisters used to sing, dance, and act, and Ritwik too participated along with them. In their adaptation of the play Chandragupta, he played the role of Chanakya.

At the young age of 18, in the year 1943, he staged several of Rabindranath Tagore's plays—Dakghar, Bisarjan, and Achalayatan—with his friends at the Rajshahi Public Library. Along with his college friend Kumar Roy, he also performed Phalguni and Raja. Kumar Roy, born on March 2, 1926 in Dinajpur, Bangladesh, was Ghatak's classmate at Rajshahi College.

Kumar Roy was arrested during the historic 1942 movement and appeared for his matriculation exam from jail. After these experiences, he permanently moved to Calcutta and, in February 1949, joined Bohurupee theatre through Ritwik Ghatak's introduction. Outside the college circle, Ghoramara Natya Samaj staged Paritran, where Ritwik played Dhananjay Bairagi and Kumar Roy portrayed the king.

Following the Partition of India, Ritwik moved from Rajshahi to Berhampore. His first play Jwala was performed secretly in an open space on Lake View Road, where he played the role of a madman wrapped in a torn quilt. Another of his plays was Kalo Sayar.

■ STAGE CRAFT ■

Although widely known as a distinguished filmmaker, in the early part of his artistic life he was an actor, playwright, and director. Panu Pal brought him into the Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA).

Panu Pal, a pioneer of street theatre, was born on January 2, 1919 in Gaibandha, Rangpur. His famous street play *Voter Bhet* (1952), featuring Utpal Dutt, Umanath Bhattacharya, Mumtaz Ahmed, and Panu Pal himself, became part of theatre history. Mumtaz Ahmed also acted in *Dalil*, written and directed by Ritwik Ghatak in 1950–51. The play was sent to the IPTA conference in Bombay, where it mesmerized audiences with its depiction of the struggles of refugees.

Ritwik played Raghupati in *Bisarjan*, though there remains some debate over whether he or Utpal Dutt directed the play. Ghatak also directed Panu Pal's play *Bhanga Bandar*, staged in 1951.



Among Ritwik Ghatak's own plays are *Jwala*, *Galileo Charit* (adapted from Brecht's *Life of Galileo*), *Sanko*, *Jwalanto*, and *Dalil*. He also acted in Utpal Dutt's direction of *Officer* (the Bengali version of *The Government Inspector*). Ghatak was the first to translate Brecht's *Life of Galileo* into Bengali, and the play was staged by the Teachers' Association of Burdwan University in 1964. He was also the editor of the theatre journal *Abhinay Darpan* (later renamed *Abhinay*).

The Government of India honoured Ritwik Ghatak with the Padma Shri in 1969, and in 1973, Bangladesh recognized him as a State Guest.

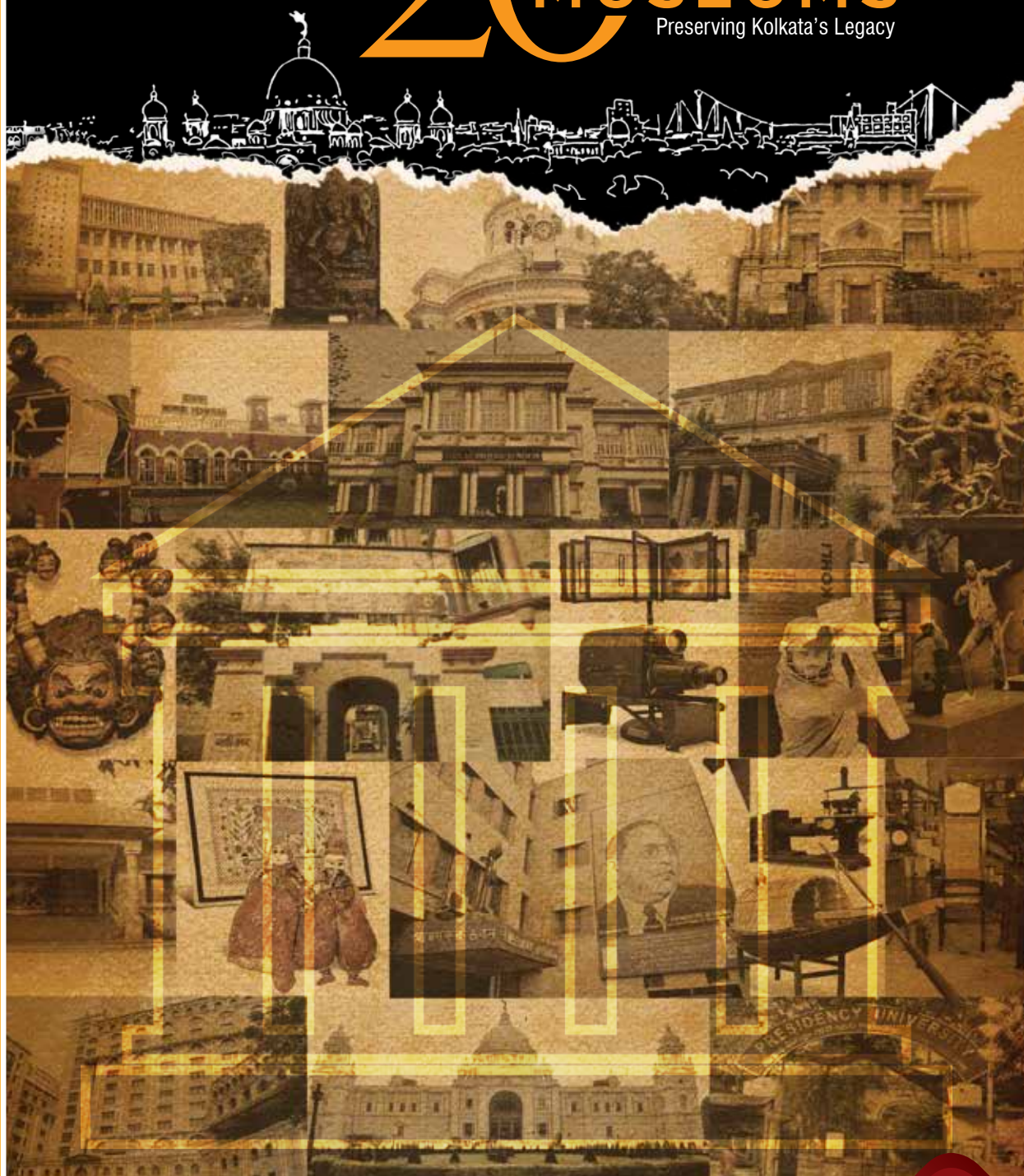
As a tribute to his centenary, Chetana presented *Meghe Dhaka Ghatak*, written by Jeet Satragni and revised and directed by Sujan Mukhopadhyay. The play was staged on Saturday, August 2, at Academy of Fine Arts, with two shows, matinee and evening.



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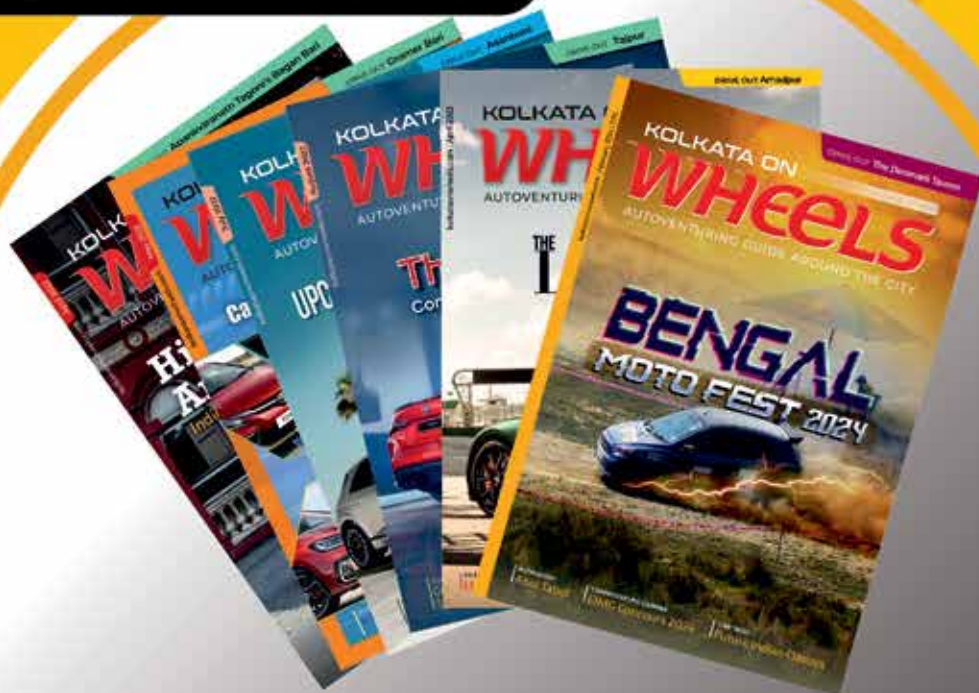
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