



The forgotten Bengal



A few centuries ago 'circa 1617 - 1624', when an entourage of curiosity footed seafarers anchored their ship at the shores of the Bengal province, little did they all realise that they were stepping into a land of no return, such was the charisma of 'this land' and the assurance of its wealth. Their voyage turned into an enterprise of survey for trade opportunities. A few decades later in 1698, the 'British East India Company' bought 3 villages from a local landlord.

These three villages were called Sutanuti, Gobindapur and Kolkata, thus began the glory of **Kolkata** and the new-age saga of Bengal (a word acquired from the ancient kingdom of Banga, pronounced 'Bongo').

By 1772, Kolkata became the 'capital of the Colonial Indian Empire' and their Colonial influence started to spread. It began to affect social changes and with it several literary practices of this distinguished land began to find their new urban patronages. Regular exposure to the western people, their etiquettes and lifestyles, their education and sense of correctness, became socially appealing and acceptable.



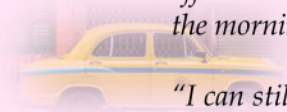
Gradually over several decades (a period known as Bengal renaissance circa 1775-1833 through 1861-1941), this region came to be known for its artistic pursuits, knowledge and learning. Its capital 'Kolkata', became the centre of literary wealth, writing, poetry, music, science, film making and socio-religious reforms. It became the city of cultural high and a place of the elite intellectual fraternity

It was a period prompted by the blossoming of influences. It marked its transition from the medieval to its 19th century modern day character which continued to conserve its persona and scholarly appeal as decades went by.

Sipping a cup of masala tea, the 67 years old retired school teacher, Deboshish Ghosh, fondly recalls the city's older days.

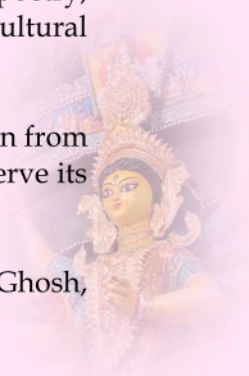
"Although the character of this city remains largely unchanged, however the nostalgia of those old days still elates my spirits"

"We lived on the Ganesh Chandra Avenue and often walked to Chowringhee which was not far. I was a young boy. The Tana-rickshaws (local hand-pulled rickshaw) with large wooden wheels used to roll around on the city streets, sometimes they used to run alongside the chubby looking Yellow ambassador taxis. These rickshaws used to carry all kinds of people, from white-collared office babus to pot-bellied lalas and their bulky spouses. My mother used to visit New Marke in the morning everyday in one of them"



"I can still almost hear in my ears, that hollow tingg-ttt-tingg jingling sound of their ghungroo shaped finger-bells. These rickshaws were introduced in 1890s by the British. It began as a ride only for the affluent people, but eventually it became popular with the middle class too"

"I also clearly remember my father used to get his shoes custom made from one Mr. Lee on Park Street. In those days, twin-engined Dakota airplanes used to fly into the Dumdum aerodrome"



During Durga puja festival time, we used to visit Lebutala area with my parents. Festive fever and harmony was visible everywhere. It was a very special atmosphere, which I can only feel in my heart. It is difficult to describe that feeling”

“I recall, one English man Mr Roland Joffé had tried to capture a dramatic story with the life of a Tana-rickshaw puller, through a film”

“And I hope you know, Satyajee Ray was born in Kolkata and lived his life here, the brilliant man who brought world recognition to our Indian cinema. He was the first Indian to receive an honorary Oscar Award”



Putting down his tea cup, Mr Ghosh concluded:

“Anyway, Kolkata is a cosmopolitan city with very rich history but the rest of Bengal has also many greatly rewarding experiences to offer the visitors. Kolkata is one of them, but it is only a small part of Bengal. There is so much more to discover in Bengal”

Born on 26th January 1950, the state of West Bengal is the only state in ‘India’ which is endowed with every conceivable experience within its singular geography, such is the abundance of its cultural and tourism wealth.

It sweeps across 88750+ square kms of charming landscapes, touching the enchanting mountains and valleys in the shadows of the Himalayas in the North and long tropical shorelines of swaying palm trees and the waters of Bay of Bengal in the South.

West Bengal is also the passage way of the river Ganga, which flows through this land on its endless journey to the infinity of Oceans, carrying in its holy waters the prayerful hopes of nirvana for countless Hindu souls.

The appeal of Bengal’s essence and beauty remain ever unending. None could fully comprehend the delightful merits inherent to this versatile topographical land called West Bengal.

Neel Thakur (Author)