



The forgotten Bengal

ভুলে যাওয়া বাংলা

A tribute to the people of West Bengal

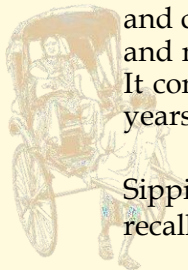


A few centuries ago (circa 1617 - 1624) when an entourage of curiosity footed seafarers anchored their ship at the shores of Bengal province, little did they realise that they were stepping into a land of no return. Such was the charisma of its people and the assurance of its wealth that their voyage turned into an enterprise of surveys for trade opportunities.

Decades later in 1698, the British East India Company bought three villages from a local landlord. These 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 capital of the Colonial Indian Empire, with their take over of Bengal many literary practices of this distinguished land began to find new urban patronage and social bearings. Constant exposure to the western people, their lifestyles, etiquette and finer education began to affect social changes.

Gradually over several decades (a period known as Bengal renaissance (circa 1775 – 1833 through 1861 – 1941), the region came to be known for its artistic pursuits, knowledge and learning, and its capital city Kolkata became the centre of the elite intellectual fraternity, literary wealth, writing, poetry, social and religious reforms, music, science, film making and cultural high. It was a period of metamorphosis directed by blossoming of influences and marked the impressive transition from the medieval to modern 19th century Bengal. It continued to conserve its distinct persona, appeal and scholarly aura thereafter, as the years went by.



Sipping a cup of hot masala chai (tea), 64 years old Deboshish Ghosh smiled and fondly recalled:

"Although the core character of Kolkata remained largely unchanged, the nostalgia of those great days still elates my spirits. It is really difficult for us not to compare those time with today"

"We lived on the Ganesh Chandra Avenue and often walked across to Chowringhee, I was then a young boy, tana-rickshaws (hand-pulled rickshaws) with wooden wheels rolled on the city streets, they used to run alongside the chubby looking yellow ambassador car taxis, these tana-rickshaws used to carry around all types of people, from white-collared office babus to pot-bellied lalas with their bulky spouses...."

"My mother used to go to new market area in a tana-rickshaw, I can still in my mind almost hear the hollowish ting-ttt-ting jingling sounds of their ghungroo shaped finger-bells, these rickshaws were introduced by the British in 1890s, it began as a ride only of the affluent people eventually it became popular with the middle class too"

"I remember very well my father used to get his shoes custom made from a Chinese fellow, one Mr. Lee on Park street. In those days only the twin-engined Dakota airplanes used to fly to Dum Dum aerodrome..."

"I also remember, we used to visit lebutala during Durga puja festival, I still have many many memories of those festive days, the floating smells and aromas, the noises, the food, the chants, our beautifully dressed Bengali women and many other things, the whole atmosphere of lebutala was filled with some kind of divine energy..."

"Did you know Roland Joff  had directed a very famous film which was based on a novel written by a french author Dominique Lapierr. It was a dramatic story which captured the life of a tana-rickshaw puller..."

"And by the way Satyajee Ray, who brought the world recognition to Indian cinema and who was the first Indian to receive an honorary Oscar was from Kolkata".

Putting down his blue porcelain tea cup, Mr Ghosh concluded:

"Anyways, Kolkata is a cosmopolitan city with an extremely rich history, but all the rest of West Bengal also has many rewarding experiences to offer, the city of Kolkata is only a very small part of it".

Born on 26th January of 1950, the state of West Bengal is the only state in 'Incredible India' which is endowed with every conceivable leisure product within its singular geography, such is the abundance of its tourism wealth.

Its magical land area sweeps across 88750+ sq kms of charming landscapes touching the enchanting mountains and valleys under the shadows of the Himalayas in the North and tropical shorelines of swaying palm trees and soothing waters of Bay of Bengal in the South. And a lot more in between.

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

The appeal of its beauty and experiences remain unending. No one can fully comprehend the delightful merits inherent to this topographical and cultural wonderland called West Bengal. (Pa cima Banga).

- Neel Thakur (Author)