POSTSCRIPT I

SOME CALCUTTA NEIGHBOURHOODS—PAST AND PRESENT

Studies of the neighbourhoods of Calcutta are very few and those few are only preliminary surveys. Nevertheless, the available studies of Burrabazar, Bhowanipur and Ballygunge, however incomplete, are useful. Two related articles on Burrabazar–Pathuria-ghat–Jorabagan area contributed by Meera Guha in *Man in India* (1964) deal with the distribution and concentration of communities in the area under study, which she broadly calls Burrabazar. She thus describes the concentration of communities: “In the north are the old concentrations of Subarnabaniks [gold merchants], Gandhabaniks [spice merchants], [Bengali] Brahmins and Kayastha families. The central zone has a mixed population of Tantubaniks [Bengali cotton merchants], Gandhabaniks and traders from Rajasthan. Transition is in progress—outgoing Bengali-speaking elements being gradually replaced by Hindi-speaking population . . . [in the] southern area there is a distinct change in population. Bustee population in the zones marked above also show a similar Bengali-speaking majority in the north, a mixed group of Bengali and Hindi speakers in the centre and a Hindi-speaking majority in the south [that is, Hindi-speaking population increases as one approaches Burrabazar proper or the core of the business area].” Guha found in Baniatola (literally, locality for merchants) descendants of some original mercantile families of Calcutta claiming to have settled in the city as far back as the 17th century, after the decline first of Saptagram (the Portuguese port on the river Saraswati above Calcutta) and then of Hooghly. The small group of priestly Brahmins in the north were said to have settled in the area when their ancestor, a Gossain from Khardah, a village traditionally famous as a settlement of priestly Brahmins of high status, was invited to act as the spiritual preceptor of Bengali mercantile families, to whom the descendants of the original Brahmin family are still attached as “gurus”. Besides the old mercantile and Brahmin families, there are a number of old zamindar families in the north–central area, represented by Dattas, Ghoshes and the senior branch Tagores. All these families were originally merchants and banians but after one or
two generations became zamindars and rentiers, the transition occurring in the early 19th century. These families are now subjected to heavy pressure from mercantile forces from Burrabazar proper.

The major concentration of businessmen from Rajasthan in Burrabazar developed, according to Guha, after the construction of railways (1870s and 1880s), when the western provinces of India were brought within the trading focus of Calcutta. Most of the immigrants had lived in Calcutta for nearly three generations. Guha found a large number of them engaged in small trade or employed in commercial companies owned by people from their home region. There are four predominant groups: Agarwal, Maheswari, Oswal and Saraogi. The Hindi-speaking population is mainly from Bihar.

In the Bengali-speaking north zone the institutional development is in a static state. Schools, gymnasiums and libraries were established mainly in the 19th and early 20th century. The Oriental Seminary was founded in 1829, the Metropolitan Institution in 1887 and the Aryan Institute in 1887.

In the central mixed zone, the belt of transition is marked by a lack of compactness due to a situation where one set of economic and cultural standards is being succeeded by another. There is a lack of social integration and absence of educational institutions, recreational facilities, etc. There is, however, a new form of integration represented by the Timber Merchants' Association, founded in 1930, in which the Bengali and Rajasthani merchants have found a common platform, observes Meera Guha.

In the Hindi-speaking zone to the south there is a rich development of several stabilised institutions, such as schools, dispensaries and charitable institutions, established by Marwari businessmen. Guha mentions that there is some lack of integration between the Maheswari group and the Agarwal group.

The area of Puthuriaghat–Jorabagan in the north-central zone had, after the battle of Plassey in 1757, a population of Brahmins, Kayasthas, Subarnabaniks, Kangsabaniks (bell-metal merchants), Sunri (liquor merchants) and Tantubayas (cotton merchants and weavers). Gradually trade from the south, that is, Burrabazar, began to invade the area. Smaller families started moving out, so much so that only a shell of the old population remains. These few remaining families retain an oyster-like existence within the area.
New residents are the non-Bengali traders, refugees who have occupied deserted houses and a bustee population. The core of the old settlement precariously survives in the northern parts side by side with bustees. The floating population of "coollie" (porter) labour is employed in the "postas" (wholesale markets and storage spaces). The early feature of this locality was the residential character of its population, a number of families which at one time had flourished because of their relationship with the British (Ghoshes, Tagores, Mulliks of Pathuriaghat and Mitras of Jorabagan).

The study of Bhowanipur by Anjana Roy Choudhury (Man in India, 1965) contains some significant data. The original settlement, according to her, took place along the Adi Ganga or the old course of the Hooghly river—a traditional manufacturing and trading belt the remnants of which are still visible from the layout of streets and buildings and location of temples. These remnants survive also in names like Kansaripara (locality for bell-metal manufacturers and traders), Sankharipara (locality for conch-shell makers and traders), Potopara (locality for earthenware and image-makers), Telipara (locality for oil merchants), etc. The original settlers, artisans and traders belonging to artisan castes, are said to have migrated from Saptagram, the port above Calcutta which declined in the 16th century, to Gobindapur, a village from which the settlers were displaced when it was selected as the site for the new Fort William in 1758. After their removal from Gobindapur, Roy Choudhury tells us, bell-metal manufacturers went to Simla Kansaripara (a north-eastern locality of Calcutta), while bell-metal traders settled in Kansaripara in Bhowanipur. Similarly, a split occurred in the community concerned with trade and manufacture of conch-shell articles—most traders settling in Bhowanipur while most manufacturers moved to Baghbazar in north Calcutta.

The Kansari community, still occupying a distinct and extensive area in Bhowanipur, shifted to goldsmiths' and silversmiths' profession, which is still continued. The shift might have occurred in the early decades of this century. Some enterprising members of the community also started manufacturing hackney carriages. During the two World Wars a number of Kansari families manufactured brass buttons, badges and buckles. A section of the Kansari community, though highly conservative in social attitudes
and practices, proved flexible enough to respond to changing circumstances. A recent trend is the manufacture of parts of electric machinery and of surgical instruments for hospitals and colleges in Calcutta. In all these occupations the original skill and experience of the Kansaris in handling metal proved valuable.

In the case of the Sankharis, there has been, according to Roy Choudhury, a total shift from traditional occupation. The Potos or the community of potters, however, stick to their original occupation of image-making and manufacture of earthenware. They too occupy a distinct area along the eastern bank of the Adi Ganga, numbering about forty families.

The area along the Adi Ganga, that is, the old Bhowanipur, is a well-integrated old residential area with narrow, meandering lanes and by-lanes. Local solidarity can be observed not only in population composition, livelihood pattern, social functions and religious rites, but also in the physical layout. A very different social scene is observed along the two main traffic arteries in Bhowanipur, where the work of the Improvement Trust in the twenties and the thirties of this century disturbed the traditional localities and started a new urbanising process with a more complex economic and social pattern than in the eastern part of Bhowanipur along the Adi Ganga. A new community element was introduced in the early twenties with the advent of the Sikhs, many of whom, on retirement from military service, took to professions connected with transport. A French taxi company, the Indian Taxi, trained them to become drivers. This company was the nucleus around which the Sikh community grew, according to Roy Choudhury. From drivers they became owners mainly after the Second World War, also moving into transport business, that is, carriage of goods in trucks and lorries, and ownership of shops selling motor parts, paints, varnishes, etc. Hotel-keeping and tailoring developed as side businesses.

In the eastern part of Bhowanipur there has developed in recent years a distinct area of Gujarati-speaking people—a settlement which, with its rich economic base, has a forceful impact on land values and rent, putting the Bengali middle class at a disadvantage as in some other developing areas in Calcutta.

Historically, Bhowanipur was dominated by a professional middle class, which, from about the late 19th century to the early decades of this century, was the most dynamic element in Bengali
society. In Bhowanipur this class consisted primarily of people connected with the legal profession and secondarily, of doctors. Roy Choudhury produces as evidence of this dominance the fact that in the annual report of a local philanthropic society for 1891 all the members on the list were barristers, advocates, vakils, district judges and attorneys, with Sir Asutosh Mukherjee, the High Court Judge, as President, and Sir B. C. Mitter, Member of the Privy Council, as one of the members.

The growth of a distinct middle class residential area within a structure largely determined by social forces connected with the services, teaching and the professions is typically represented by Ballygunge, comprising the extreme south-eastern wards of Calcutta proper, in the first three decades of this century. Land records and revenue survey maps in the Alipur collectorate in Calcutta as well as stray references in reports make it clear that Ballygunge was an extensive stretch of swamp, interspersed with hutsments, agricultural plots and occasional gardens, from the late 18th to the first decade of this century. Only in the northern part of the area there was a highly developed European and Indo-European neighbourhood, which tended to expand to the east and the south along a narrow wedge up to the thirties of this century. The process gave rise to fashionable neighbourhoods of Ballygunge Circular Road, Old Ballygunge Road, Queen’s Park and Mandeville Gardens, with houses owned or rented by Europeans and Europeanised rich Indians. In the vast area outside this zone land was owned by non-resident Bengali zamindar families like the Tagores, while smaller plots were owned or held under various conditions by Bengali Muslims and people belonging to Hindu agricultural and fishing castes.

An idea of the pattern of growth of some of the wards in Ballygunge can be obtained from an unpublished report prepared by Samik Banerjee, who worked with Professor N. K. Bose, the anthropologist, on a social survey of Calcutta. The following narrative is in part taken from Samik Banerjee’s report.

The middle class settlement in Ballygunge had its beginnings along the road adjacent to the station on the railway line connecting Calcutta with the south 24-Parganas. This was happening from the first decade of this century. Some of the earliest settlers in the area were people from Kasba, on the other side of the railway track, which was a much older settlement divided into the tradi-
tional types of caste-based localities. The first of the new settlers in the Station Road area was Roy, who had a number of houses in Kasba. It was Roy who brought in Nyayaratna, a Sanskrit scholar, followed by Vidyabhusan, Shastri and Banerjee, all three of them well-known scholars. New people continued to come in. But the face of the locality was not much changed even in the early twenties. Cornfields and cultivated patches remained, the houses standing far apart from one another. In 1933, Maitra, a retired professor, and Sinha, a Corporation Councillor, set up the Ballygunge Bank, which started as a Land and Housing Corporation. A large area was developed by this bank. The rent purchase scheme, insurance scheme and instalment scheme enabled quite a number of people to have their own modest houses on small plots of land in the area.

Banerjee, who was the owner of considerable landed property in the ward next to Roy’s, was an eminent professor of Sanskrit College and Calcutta University. He came over to Ballygunge in 1906. In his locality he established a girls’ school. Banerjee is remembered in the locality for his social activity, which must have been very important in the early stage of the formation of a neighbourhood. One of his collaborators was Shastri, an early settler. Among others who co-operated with Banerjee were a number of younger people who had settled in the area. An association for helping the poor was established in 1926, two of the organisers being a young lecturer and a young engineer. Banerjee got Roy interested in the idea of a boys’ high school for the locality. The institution was founded in 1914; Roy provided the finance while the organisational part was tackled by Banerjee. A students’ association was organised by Jana, a school teacher. The association held regular games and debates, and also organised a co-operative store.

Two other schools in the area, one for boys and another for girls, were founded in the late thirties. A library was organised in 1932 and about that time a club for boys.

Among those who settled in the area in the twenties were two barristers, one lawyer, a contractor, a doctor, two professors, and some owners of urban landed and house property. In the thirties there was a spurt of building activity when people of generally modest but steady income settled in the area. On the road on which the present writer has been living for about forty years
there were seven houses from 1938 to 1950, all these seven houses having been built between 1935 and 1940. The ownership pattern is significant—a subordinate government officer, a subordinate judge, a deputy magistrate, a university lecturer, a lawyer, a cashier, and a contractor (non-resident). The area served by this road was developed by a private developing agency.

The foregoing is a broad account of the growth of Ward 61. The contiguous Ward 63 was originally inhabited by a number of Muslim families who had left a mosque in the area. The new batch of settlers began to arrive from the early twenties after a developing agency had bought some plots of land in the area. In the first group of new settlers was a superintendent of the Bengal Secretariat. In the mid-thirties the Calcutta Improvement Trust had completed the development of part of the area through a programme lasting about a decade. The men who first settled here were retired government officers, a retired presidency magistrate, three retired deputy magistrates, and the principal of a leading college of Calcutta.

It is, however, possible to exaggerate the middle class character of the settlement in Ballygunge. A part of Ward 62 had slums and industrial concerns from the twenties and still retains this character. The huts are now mostly owned by people on the fringe of the lower middle class, making payment to the landowners, mostly upper middle class people depending partly on income from real estate. Nearly all the hutowners live in the slums. The tenants who pay rent to the hutowners are mostly domestic servants and maidservants (the largest proportion, according to Samik Banerjee’s report), carpenters, porters, mechanics and bricklayers. So far as the present writer’s memory serves him, a very large slum in his own ward (no. 61) had a similar composition in the late thirties and early forties with the exception that milkmen from Bihar and U.P. were quite prominent. The Ballygunge slum population has a larger proportion of people dependent on middle class households (part-time domestic servants and maidservants) and middle class consumption (milkmen, for example) than the slum population in the older localities having close association with business centres, traditionally rich families, and hereditary caste occupations.

A section of population in the slum-dominated part of Ward 62 consists of Sikhs, who are likely to have been an offshoot of the
Bhowanipur community. The nucleus of the Sikh settlement formed in the thirties. The most prominent non-Bengali immigrant group in Ballygunge has for a long time been south Indians concentrated in a portion of Ward 62. They have always been white-collar employees in central government offices or commercial firms. The south Indians had settled by the turn of this century in Ramkrishnapur in Howrah. Later on, a settlement had grown up around the group of outstanding south Indian scholars (Sir C. V. Raman, Dr. Radhakrishnan and others) who had come over to Calcutta. It was the Bowbazar settlement which later moved southwards. The bulk of the south Indian community which settled here came from Tamilnadu and Kerala with a sprinkling of people speaking Telegu and Canarese. The National High School, the prominent south Indian school in Ballygunge, took its present shape in the thirties. The community, however, does not seem to be permanently settled like the Sikhs and the Marwaris in Calcutta.
POSTSCRIPT II

LINGUISTIC AND REGIONAL GROUPS IN CALCUTTA—THE PHENOMENON OF REGIONALISM IN URBAN SETTING

Studies of linguistic or regional groups in the metropolitan cities of India are very few. N. K. Bose has done pioneering work in this field by mapping out certain residential clusters, indicating the distribution of linguistic and regional groups in Calcutta. Such maps are extremely useful and visually satisfying but are not accompanied by details which can be vitally significant for the historian or the anthropologist. William Row’s study of a regional group in Bombay is limited to immigrants from one village in U.P. He has followed an interesting method of dealing with an immigrant group by placing it alongside the village society it has come from. Other studies of these groups are statistical surveys of migration, which might be technically of a high order but are not quite meaningful from the point of view of social and cultural interaction of groups. In this section I will try to explore the historical process of formation of regional groups in Calcutta in a setting of interaction with the locally dominant society and culture of the Bengalis.

The earliest positive reference to any linguistic or regional group in historical source material concerns the Oriyas. A writer in the Asiatic Annual Register (1799), describing his journey through Balasore in Orissa, writes: “From this part of Orissa come all those people called by the English Balasore bearers. . . Seven thousand of the stalwart young fellows go into Bengal and are employed as chairmen [‘chair’ means ‘palanquin’], leaving their families behind.” He also refers to the caste organization of the Oriya palanquin-bearers in Calcutta: “The bearers in Calcutta form a Commonwealth. They have a president and hold frequent councils . . . [when] any resolution is formed, neither stripes nor bonds must cause any member to secede. They have gained their present ascendancy by taking advantage of the heat of the climate and the indolence of the English; for if a person incurs the displeasure of this Worshipful Society, he may walk till he dies of a fever.” The writer indirectly remarks that in their own region, that is, Balasore in Orissa, they lacked such an organisation.
This impression about the prominence of the Oriya palanquin-bearers in Calcutta is confirmed by other sources. Thus, Solvyns, a Flemish artist, who completed four large tomes of pictorial material with notes in French and English between 1790 and 1808, presents pictures of Oriya palanquin-bearers with this observation: "They are under Sardars or chiefs who meet together and establish rules which a private carrier does not dare to disobey. They refuse to render service when they disagree with the employers over some lines of conduct. . . . While they have no objection, for example, to brushing clothes, or even cleaning shoes, they will never extinguish a light otherwise than by agitating the air with their hands or with their clothes, and would lose their caste by blowing out with their breath." [I asked a priest of the Jagannath temple in Orissa whether this was credible. He said that he himself had the same scruple along with many others, particularly in the villages.]

The Oriya bearers, the Bengali journal *Samachar Darpan* reported on 27 February 1819, sent Rs. 3 lakhs annually to their homes in Balasore. An official publication of 1840 reported that there were ten thousand registered palanquin-bearers under an Oriya official supervisor, Hurripatti (very likely to be an Oriya name). It appears from contemporary engravings, including those by Solvyns, that at least a section of these Oriya bearers had the bearing of "labour aristocracy". The hey-day of the Oriya bearers was probably the late 18th and the early 19th century. Some research may be possible on the changing modes of transport in Calcutta, tracing the gradual decline of the palanquin and its replacement by horse-drawn carriages, which, by Indian tradition, is associated with Bihari and U.P. Muhammadans.

The Oriyas do not figure prominently in historical material after 1840. This may, however, be due to a gap in historical investigation. That a significant proportion of Calcutta municipal labour had been from Orissa from the late 19th century seems quite likely and the sphere might well have been plumbing in which the Oriyas still have a marked specialization. The other sectors in which the Oriyas figured in the early twentieth century (and do so even now) were domestic service (Census of Calcutta, 1921), work in the docks (Census 1921), gardening (Census 1911) and casual labour (Census 1921). From the report on the Census of Calcutta (1911) it appears that a large number of immigrants,
from Orissa were Khandayats by caste. This caste was closely associated with the Hindu Rajas of Orissa. A fact which is specially commented upon in the Calcutta Census Report of 1921 is that the “Oriya cook or coolie practically never brings any of his family with him”. He is described as most “readily prepared to separate himself from his family”.

The prominence of the Oriyas as cooks in the hotels and “messes” of Calcutta and as “haluikars” or expert cooks hired on contract for ceremonial occasions like marriages or *srahdhs* has been so familiar a sight that it is rarely commented upon. As far as memories of most people go, the custom seems always to have been the same. A fact which has again not been seriously noticed is the guild-like organisation of Oriya domestic servants, particularly in hotels and “messes”, and the “old” households now decaying and disappearing. I observed the working of a Bhowanipur “mess” (meaning, in Bengali, a non-profiteering and collectively run boarding house of Bengali white collar employees) which functions with clock-like regularity in the matter of serving meals from early morning to mid-day and then again from evening to nearly mid-night. Between the group of servants and cooks, on the one hand, and the Bengali boarders, on the other, there is a striking mutual understanding and trust. The dignity of the chief cook, assisted by servants from his own district, is reminiscent of the hey-day of Oriya workers in the age of the palanquin.

The fact that the Oriyas have been traditionally associated with Bengali households in Calcutta in domestic service can be attributed to the striking linguistic affinity and similarity of food habits between the Bengalis and the Oriyas.

The Bengalis had figured as an exploiting class in Orissa on a limited scale. Some Bengali families purchased zamindaris when, in former times, sales of Orissa landed estates were held in Calcutta. Many Bengalis settled in Cuttack where they started coming either with the British as office employees or as doctors, lawyers and teachers. A section of these old Bengali residents in Cuttack got nearly assimilated in the Oriya society in Cuttack and was described as *kera* Bengalis, after a curious jargon of their own, owing to their frequent use of the word *kara*, a corruption of the Oriya *kari*. So far as my experience goes, the *kera* Bengalis are now practically indistinguishable from the Oriyas.
Communication between middle class Bengalis and middle class Oriyas, particularly in the twenties and thirties of this century, was facilitated by the University of Calcutta, which had been known for its linguistic hospitality and was once the focal point of higher education throughout the eastern region. In recent years universities all over India, including those in Calcutta, have virtually ceased to discharge their valuable integrative functions owing partly to the growing use of local languages but mainly to the operation of local influence.

Every year, however, since the time of Chaitanya and with increasing intensity since the late 18th century, Bengalis have been resorting to Puri in Orissa in large numbers, some of them building houses there. Rows of houses, some of them ruined or semi-ruined now, bear evidence to a continuous injection of often hard-earned Bengali middle class money into that place of pilgrimage. It is well known how the priests of Jagannath temple can recite the genealogies of and the district and place names associated with the ancestors of many modern Bengalis who personally have only vague notions about them. The Bengali seems to have had a vague dissatisfaction with the absence in Bengal of concrete objects of association with his inherited mythology, such as impressive temples, sites hallowed by gods when they appeared on earth. Puri, along with Brindaban, Hardwar, Benares hold for the Calcuttans a charm and an appeal which shows no signs of diminishing in spite of progressive secularisation of outlook. This is clearly the continuation of a tradition, though its expression might have been changing from generation to generation.

Misunderstanding seems particularly likely to grow among kindred peoples who are neighbours to each other as between the Oriyas and the Bengalis or the Biharis and Bengalis. The emergence of the Bengali middle class as the most advanced community in India in the 19th century from the point of view of economic well-being as well as cultural and literary modernisation created a gap between the Bengali middle class and the retarded middle classes of Bihar, Orissa and Assam. Distrust of Bengali modernity as well as admiration for it have been curiously intermixed. With the growing crisis of the Bengali middle class, many old feelings have no validity in fact but nevertheless continue to influence attitudes as a matter of historical logic. If the Bengali is occasionally contemptuous and the Oriya occasionally resentful, that is to
a large extent influenced by the residuum of history.

Almost as closely related to the Bengalis in linguistic-literary culture and habits of food and attitudes have been the Maithilis of Bihar. These immigrants hail from such Bihar districts as Darbhanga, Muzaffarpur and parts of Champaran. The Bengali households have long been familiar with the "pure Brahmins" of Darbhanga as the most acceptable cooks by orthodox Hindu standards. But the most fruitful association has for centuries been at the cultural level. Vidyapati Thakur, who lived in the fifteenth century, wrote devout songs dealing with the love of Radha and Krishna in the pure Maithili of Darbhanga district. His songs had a tremendous influence on the lyrical tradition of eastern India. "They were adopted and enthusiastically recited by the celebrated Chaitanya (16th century), and through him became the house poetry of the Lower Provinces" (Grierson, Linguistic Survey, vol. 5, pt. 2). Communication at another level concerned the keenest intellects of the two regions involved in the development of the Indian Logic (Nyaya and Navyanyaya).

In the rush for English education and development of new themes for Bengali literature, intercourse with Mithila was neglected by the Bengalis for the greater part of the 19th and early 20th century. The orthodoxy of the Maithili Brahmins might have also acted as a hindrance to communication in spite of strong similarities in food habits and affinities in ethnic characteristics. The Maithilis, in their turn, leaned heavily in the direction of north-western India, that is, towards the hard core of the Hindusthani-speaking region—the United Provinces. "Like Bengali and Oriya, Maithili is a direct descendant of the old Magadha Apabhramsa. It occupies the original seat of that language, and still retains all its characteristic features. In one particular of phonetics alone does it depart from its parent, namely in the pronunciation of the sibilants. This is accounted for by the political influence of the North-West. The pronunciation of these letters is a literal shibboleth between Bengal and Central Hindusthan. A man who pronounces his s's as sh would at once be known as a Bengali and treated as such. The Biharis... have striven after the pronunciation of the s's of the west and have now acquired it, but that this is a comparatively modern innovation is clearly shown by the fact that, although they pronounce s, in the Kaithi national character they write sh, and use the very character which the Hindu gram-
marians employed to illustrate the *sh* sound which in their time was so characteristic of the tongue of Magadha" (Grierson).

Grierson identified the second group of Bihari immigrants in Calcutta as speakers of Magahi. The dialect is spoken in the districts of Patna, Gaya, Hazaribagh and some parts of Palamu, Monghyr and Bhagalpur. "Only in Patna it is infected with idioms belonging to the North-western Provinces (U.P.) by the strong Musalman element which inhabits that town, and which itself speaks more or less correct Urdu" (Grierson). According to the Linguistic Survey (Grierson, 1920–27) people from Magahi-speaking areas comprise the largest Bihari-speaking group in Calcutta. Traditionally these people are employed as shoe-makers or cobblers, carters and unskilled labour in jute mills.

The Magahi dialect was, according to Grierson, traditionally regarded as "boorish and rude by speakers of other Indian languages". "To a native of India one of its most objectionable features is its habit of winding up every question, even when addressed to a person held in respect, with the word *re.*" How far this influenced Bengali attitude towards the Biharis of the region is difficult to determine. But some uncomplimentary words, once very much in vogue in Bengal about the Biharis, are now progressively regarded as indicating bad taste among educated Bengalis, especially after the wave of nationalist sentiment in Bengal in the early 20th century and the growth of Leftism from about that time with its intellectual attitude towards the workers and the poor. A sentiment for the hallowed historical sites of Gaya and Magadha has long been a part of Bengali mental make-up.

Another group of Bihari immigrants in Calcutta, the Bhojpuris, who, according to the Linguistic Survey, numbered 71,600 in Calcutta in the twenties of this century and were found in substantial numbers even in the interior districts of Bengal—40,900 in Murshidabad, for example—were in many respects fundamentally different from the other two Bihari immigrant groups. Standard Bhojpuri is spoken mainly in the districts of Shahabad, Ballia and Ghazipur, while western Bhojpuri is spoken in the western districts of Fyzabad, Azamgarh, Jaunpur, Benares, the western half of Ghazipur and south Gangetic Mirzapur. Of the three Bihari dialects, Bhojpuri is the most western as well as most westward-looking. "Politically", as Grierson remarks, "it belongs rather to the United Provinces than to Bihar. It was from its neighbour-
hood that the famous Bundelkhand heroes, Alha and Udan, traced their origin, and all its traditions and associations point to the west and not to the east."

The Bhojpuri Brahmins and Rajputs loved to imagine themselves as heroes, carrying sturdy sticks. This self-image has been particularly fruitful. They once formed a rich source of recruitment to the Indian army. Thousands of them migrated to British colonies, some returning as rich men. Bengali landlords used to keep a number of these men as "darwans", mainly to hold the tenants in order. They had few scruples and invested a portion of their earnings in quick high-interest-bearing loans but at the same time earned a reputation for honesty. As a Subarnabanik student of mine, whose family (a large joint one) holds substantial landed property in Calcutta, remarked to me, these Bhojpuris could be trusted with large sums of money which they collected (rents from tenants in Calcutta houses, for example, or cash from banks), and that they had been serving many old and opulent Calcutta families for generations. The British also seem to have been particularly fond of them, and in most commercial houses, mostly situated on Clive Street or Dalhousie Square, they still form a very substantial element of the large community of watchmen.

Between the Bhojpuri and the Bengali the relation has been somewhat intriguing. At one time the Bhojpuris formed the highest element in the hierarchy of domestic employees in opulent Bengali households, mainly zamindari households. The code to which they systematically adhered made them strictly loyal to these families. With the steady decline in the fortunes of rich Bengali families, particularly zamindars, the Bhojpuris found other patrons like the Marwaris. Yet a substratum of understanding perhaps still remains, largely balancing the Bengali stereotype of the Bhojpuri as an over-corpulent being and the Bhojpuri stereotype of the Bengali as an unheroic bookwala, a stereotype not infrequently encountered by the Bengalis in north-western India. I have, however, come across quite a number of families of Bhojpuri origin nearly integrated within Bengali society, despite difficulties in the development of marriage ties. I have a feeling that the somewhat higher (but not too high) economic status of Bhojpuris has been a factor in the process of integration, though in Calcutta proper this had not gone very far. The barriers, on the side of the Biharis, have probably been a far more rigid caste
system than that prevalent in Bengal, a relative absence of middle
class attitudes and the depressed economic status of the non-
Bhojpuri Biharis. On the part of the Bengalis, there has been a
basic social conservatism, pride in their recent cultural and intel-
lectual achievements and a widely shared feeling that non-Bengalis
are mere sojourners whose only object is money-making.

The distinguishing characteristics of non-Bengali immigrant
groups in Calcutta have traditionally been extreme poverty and
extreme prosperity. So far as the immigrants from Bihar and
Orissa are concerned, hard manual labour has been combined
with poverty, matched and to some extent exceeded only by the
post-partition non-middle-class Bengali refugees. The poverty of
the Bihari and the Oriya might almost have been taken as part of
the natural order of things by previous generations of Bengalis.
It was from about the thirties or so that groups of young Bengalis
refused to accept this fact, but their exertions for the trade union
movement touched only a fringe of organised labour, the vast
majority of these immigrants from eastern India constituting the
great mass of porters, carters and human carriers of different
kinds in the unorganised sector.

Placed in a diametrically opposite position on the economic
scale are the traditional merchant communities, especially Mar-
waris from Rajasthan, and some other groups from Gujarat and
parts of U.P. The presence of Khatri as possessors of fabulous
wealth in Dacca was noticed by Manrique as early as 1640. It is
interesting to refer to this fact alongside the description of Khattris
in J. N. Bhattacharjee's Hindu Castes and Sects (1896). In the
section on "The Banyas of North India", Bhattacharjee observes,
"In the Punjab, United Provinces, Behar and Calcutta the Khatri
have almost the monopoly for the sale of all kinds of textile fab-
ricks, from Cashmere shawls and Benares brocades to the cheap
Manchester dhotis which are now hawked in the streets of the
town by the shrill and familiar cry of 'three rupees to the rupee,
four rupees to the rupee'. The majority of several classes of
brokers are also of the Khatri caste."

The Khatri do not as a rule seem to have reached the western
cost. They moved to the east, though they were to be found in
Afghanistan and Central Asia, where they were the only Hindu
traders. In The Punjab Castes (1916) Ibbetson remarks that the
"Khatri traders are most numerous in Delhi and found in Agra;"
Lucknow and Patna and are well known in the Burra Bazar of Calcutta...” The Khatri, who were prominent in the business world of Calcutta before the sharp rise of the Marwaris, seem to have migrated mainly from U.P. Like the Bengalis of the earlier period they readily associated themselves with European firms as banians, brokers and agents but also carried on large-scale banking business. From an interview with Lala Babu, an octogenarian belonging to a very old Khatri family in Calcutta, and a person well known for his association with different forms of cultural expression in Calcutta, this writer got the impression that the Khatri of Calcutta enthusiastically absorbed some aspects of Bengali culture, especially those represented by the zamindar families. But it is difficult to ascertain how far this assimilation could proceed in the absence of realistic social ties like marriage relations.

The Marwaris were present in Calcutta, especially in the crucial sector of banking, long before the First World War, which was generally accepted as the starting-point of Marwari economic dominance and large-scale arrival of Marwaris in Calcutta. Data on the presence of the Marwaris and on Marwari business operations in early nineteenth century Calcutta have been presented in some recent publications (N. K. Sinha, Economic History of Bengal, vol. III; Thomas A. Timberg, “A Note on the Arrival of Marwaris”, Bengal—Past and Present, January-June, 1971).

In the first half of the nineteenth century, Marwaris were already the strongest group among the traders and merchants in India. Tod (Annals of Rajasthan, vol. III, 1832) remarked that “more than half of the wealth of mercantile India passes though the hands of the Jain laity...”. Tod refers to the Oswals who were prominent in Bengal as bankers as early as the 18th century. The leading family was the well-known Jagat Seths of Murshidabad.

The Rajputana Gazetteer (vol. III-A, 1909) describes the Oswals as “by far the most numerous of the Mahajans or Banias (in Jodhpur State). More than 98% of them are Jains.” They “are said to be descendants of a number of Rajputs of different clans converted to Jainism in the second century and they take their name from the town of Osi or Osian, the ruins of which are to be found about thirty miles north of Jodhpur city.”

The Rajputana Gazetteer contains a passage which can be used as an explanation of the prominent concentration and continued
business tradition of the bania communities in the Jodhpur-Marwar region. "The trade of Marwar", it is observed in the Gazetteer, "in olden days was considerable, the state forming the connecting link between the sea coast and northern India. The chief mart was Pali, where the productions of India, Kashmir and China were exchanged for those of Europe, Africa, Persia and Arabia. Caravans from the ports of Cutch and Gujarat brought ivory, copper, dates, gum, borax, cocoanuts, broadcloths, silks, sandalwood, camphor, dyes, drugs, spices, coffee, etc. and took away chintzes, dried fruits, cumin seed, sugar, opium, silks, muslins, shawls, dyed blankets, potash and salt. The guardians of the merchandise were almost invariably charans, and the most desperate outlaw seldom dared to commit any outrage on caravans under the safeguard of these men, the bards of the Rajputs. If not strong enough to defend their convoy with sword and shield, they would threaten to kill themselves and would proceed by degrees from a mere gash in the flesh to a deep wound, or if one victim was insufficient, a number of women and children were sacrificed and the marauders declared responsible for their blood." Tod wrote thus about 1830 (quoted in the Gazetteer): "Commerce has been almost extinguished within the last twenty years, and, paradoxical as it may appear, there was ten-fold more activity and enterprise in the midst of that predatory warfare, which rendered India one wide area of conflict, than in these days of universal pacification. The torpedo touch of monopoly has had more effect on the caravans than the spear . . . of the outlawed Rajput; against its benumbing qualities the Charan's dagger would fall innocuous, it sheds no blood, but it dries up the channels."

It may be that, while the primary impulse in the earlier era might have been towards exploitation of greater opportunities, the expansion in the later phase was likely to have been impelled by the process of economic decline, that is, the loss of commercial opportunities in the home region. This hypothesis fits in with the fact of the growing volume of Marwari migration in the nineteenth and the early twentieth century.

The earlier migration to Bengal, and presumably to Burrabazar in Calcutta was mainly from the Jodhpur-Marwar region. From about the third decade of the nineteenth century there was a steadily increasing volume of migration from Shekhavati (north of Jaipur) and Bikaner, areas which had close links with the ori-
iginal nucleus of Rajasthan commerce in Jodhpur-Marwar. Ultimately they occupied the topmost position in Burrabazar. The Marwaris of Burrabazar got divided into two groups, viz. Kaniya (i.e. inhabitants of Jodhpur-Marwar) and Churuwale (i.e. inhabitants of Churu, Shekhavati and Bikaner).

The steady increase in the number of traders from Bikaner and their growing importance is clear from the trends of family histories available about the Marwari traders in Burrabazar (Bharatiya Baparionka Parichaya, Calcutta Division, Part II, 1929, as summarised in Calcutta and Its Hinterland (1976) by P. Banerjee). Recent studies in the history of Marwari firms in Calcutta also confirm this point.

Finally, however, the group that emerged into greatest prominence were members of Maheshwari and Aggarwal (the latter in a large majority) trading castes from the Shekhavati region, north of Jaipur. Almost all the large contemporary industrial establishments belong to this group.

Some of the first migrants are said to have maintained free hostels for new immigrants. "By a process of uncles calling nephews, and fathers-in-law sons-in-law to help them the Shekhavati merchant community in Calcutta grew... the Shekhavati migrants also could draw on the banking services and serve as brokers of the larger sized Shekhavati firms." (Timberg)

By the end of the nineteenth century quite a number of Marwari firms, operating from Calcutta, and having interconnections in the sprawling Bengal hinterland, particularly in the jute-producing and jute-marketing areas, through agents, branches and representatives, had survived for decades (Bharatiya Baparionka Parichaya, quoted in Calcutta and Its Hinterland). The vital new opening in jute was virtually monopolised by them in the Calcutta market. Almost equally important was the establishment of their predominance in the wholesale market of imported cloth. Another important sector was trade in kirana (spices, seeds, etc.). Besides these, the Marwaris undertook commission agency, brokerage for British firms and pursued the highly effective, though traditional, calling of indigenous bankers (shroffs), which belonged to them long before they had come to dominate Bengal's internal trade, the cloth market and the jute market. At various stages the Marwaris had replaced, first, the Bengalis and then the Khatris from north India in the Great Bazar (Burrabazar) of Calcutta.
From the point of view of later, i.e. comparatively recent, developments, involving Marwari dominance in industry (which was extremely slow to nature and characterised by an almost proverbial caution about long-term investment), the growing importance of the Marwaris in the share market of Calcutta in the late 19th century seems to have been highly significant. "Brokerage was one of their traditional occupations; but their importance as shareholders can be traced to their proverbial love for speculation. This would account for the prevalence of forward contracts in the Calcutta share market and the forced sales during periods of monetary stringency. In the art of options they were masters. With their ears to the ground they always received the news affecting the share market first and were unsurpassed in spreading rumours and confusing the market. In the early nineties, when the Calcutta market was wild with the speculation over gold mining companies, the Europeans became surprised at their skill in getting the best out of the market" (Rungta, Rise of Business Corporations in India, quoting parts of a report from The Englishman of September 1, 1890). Thacker's Bengal Directory for 1875 contains a list of "Native Sharebrokers" in which almost all the names are of Bengalis. It appears that the replacement of the Bengalis by the Marwaris as a dominant force in the share market occurred somewhere between 1875 and 1890.

The picture of the Marwari first dominating the field of banking, then expanding into the cloth and the jute market and then from the share market into industry seems to be broadly correct, though the actual process was more complicated than the picture would suggest. How the first generation migrants established themselves, what kind of competition they faced from the Bengalis or Khatris or whether they just stepped into a gap, seems hard to document. The family histories and prevailing traditions seem to point to a generally common background of austere life as petty brokers, "munims" or confidential clerks, small dealers, etc. The Bengali stereotype of the Marwari as arriving from Rajasthan with only a "brasspot and a blanket" is naturally oversimplified like all stereotypes but does not seem totally invalid in view of the contemporary accounts of Marwari immigrants in western India in the late 19th century. There is one fundamental difference between Marwari migration in western India and the same phenomenon in eastern India. The Marwaris in Bengal were not rural
moneylenders. They settled in the marketing centres starting from Burrabazar at the apex of a pyramid, as it were, to relatively small distributing and collecting centres of rur-urban character, particularly in northern and western Bengal. Yet there is likely to be a considerable degree of similarity in the habits, attitudes, and even methods of two groups of ethnically and regionally identical people migrating to two different regions in the subcontinent.

The Bombay Gazetteer ("Sholapur", vol. XX, 1884) thus describes the Marwari immigrants:

"When they come from their native country they bring nothing except a brass drinking pot, tattered clothes, and a big stick. By degrees they come to own good houses with a store of brass and copper vessels and gold, silver and pearl ornaments.... When they first come they begin by serving as shop boys in Marwari shops or go hawking parched grain, crying out...that parched grain will be exchanged for broken glass and bangles.... They begin with a capital of 2 to 4 as., buying parched grain and receiving in exchange, not copper or silver coins but pieces of glass or glass bangles, old iron and other articles, which a needy daughter-in-law or daughter gives away stealthily. This the hawker gathers and sells to bangle-makers and blacksmiths.... They also keep eating houses...serve as shroffs or money changers, moneylenders and bankers.... Social disputes are settled at caste meetings."

The Gazetteer continues: "With the savings of a year or two he [the Marwari] opens a small shop, often in partnership with a countryman. In other cases the newly arrived Marwari binds himself in some capacity as servant to a settled Marwari, and works with him till he is fit to open a petty shop on his own account. This he will often do on capital borrowed from his own master, or from other members who give him credit at low interest. If his shop succeeds he gains a share in some cloth-making concern, and at the same time, starts as a moneylender or pawnbroker and rapidly increases his wealth. At this stage in his career he sends for his family and some of his distant relations. A Marwari who has begun to make a fortune rarely returns to settle in his native place. If his family is not with him, marriage and other religious ceremonies sometimes require his presence at home and he may have to go home to seek a bride.... During any temporary absence his business is managed by his confidential clerk.
or munim in default of a partner, or by one of his relations. Their thrifty habits they never lose. . . . Though thrifty and averse from pomp and show, they are expected to spend large sums on marriage and other religious ceremonies, and it is usual for them on such occasions to entertain the whole caste. . . . They have their temples and they are understood to contribute for the support of their own poor.”

In Calcutta the last decade of the 19th century was a period of consolidation for the Marwari community. Before this period the only organised body among the Marwaris was the panchayet. The organisational gap was sought to be filled by the formation of the Marwari Association in 1898. Earlier, in 1892, the Baled Jute Association of Calcutta had been established. The names of members of this Association show the predominance of the Marwaris. The Marwari Chamber of Commerce was founded in 1900. “The members of this Chamber handled 80% of the import trade in piecegoods in Calcutta. In the very first year of its existence, as many as 1,198 arbitration cases were referred to this Chamber and 1,081 such disputes were settled to the satisfaction of the parties concerned” (Golden Jubilee Souvenir, Bharat Chamber of Commerce, quoted in Calcutta and Its Hinterland). After the construction of Harrison Road in 1892 land in Burrabazar on both sides of the road was sold in small plots which were purchased by Marwari merchants who constructed multi-storied residential houses with shops on the ground floor and the first floor, setting a general trend for the Burrabazar area (O. C. Ganguly, Bharater Silpa O Anar Katha, quoted in N. K. Sinha, The Economic History of Bengal, vol. III). About this time three periodicals called Marwari Bapari, Burrabazar Gazette and Marwari, mainly dealing with the economic life of the Marwaris in Calcutta, were founded.

It is not possible to trace quantitatively the process of numerical expansion of the Marwari community in Calcutta. It is alleged that even today the Marwaris are considerably undercounted in the census because so many of them sleep in offices and out of the way hostels. The census of 1901 makes the first clear reference to the number of immigrants from Rajputana, adding up to the figure of 15,000 (5,700 from Jaipur, mostly from Shekhavati, 6,500 from Bikaner (including the Churu area) and 1,100 from Jodhpur). The census of 1911 mentions 8,000 immigrants from Jaipur and 7,000 from Bikaner. For the census year of 1921 it is
observed in the report: "The immigration from Rajputana has shown a phenomenal increase in recent years. This increase marks the invasion of the Marwari community into the business circles of Calcutta." In the years following the First World War the Marwaris were moving into the sectors of industry and mining (lac, mica, etc.).

The phenomenal success of the Marwaris in the business world of Calcutta, and their growing prominence in the city, make the question of the Bengali attitude towards the community significant from the point of view of relationship between different language and regional groups, and especially between local and non-local communities. The success of the Marwaris attracted little attention from Bengali social and economic observers before 1930s. The first serious comment on the phenomenon came from the reputed Bengali scientist, P. C. Roy, who was deeply concerned with the economic rejuvenation of Bengal and was himself the founder of the first significant venture in the field of Indian chemical industry. He expressed admiration for what he considered to be the typical Marwari qualities of industry, thrift and tenacity, conspicuously lacking, according to him, in Bengali character. He was, however, deeply touched by the spectacle of vast unemployment among the educated youth of Bengal and the displacement of the Bengalis from the fields of major economic activities by people not quite identified with Bengal's regional interests. Commenting on a highly successful Marwari industrial family for whom he had some admiration, P. C. Roy writes in a tone of friendly reproof that the family's welfare expenditure is entirely for the native village while it extracts its wealth from Calcutta.

A very different point of view is expressed by Professor Benoy Kumar Sarkar, a prominent sociologist of the thirties. In an article entitled "The Economic Expansion of the Bengali People," published in *The Insurance and Finance Review* of February 1934, Sarkar refers to the development of new qualifications, aptitudes and professions, represented by Company promoters and directors, bank managers, insurance agents, manufacturers, exporters and importers, newsagents, engineers and chemists, printers and publishers. He makes specific mention of young men, trained in new engineering institutions of Bengal, and in Germany, U.S.A. and Japan, taking up the manufacture of fans,
electric bulbs, soaps, ink, fountain pens, pharmaceuticals, chemicals, scientific apparatus, etc. Sarkar points to the contribution of non-Bengali manual labour to the growth of the economy of Bengal and emphasises the need for co-operation with Marwari finance.

[The subject of this Postscript was suggested by Dr Biplab Dasgupta of Sussex University.]