CALCUTTA IN 1806: AN ESSAY ON URBAN HISTORY AND THE COMPUTER

The purpose of my research project of which this paper is an introduction, has been to study the process of urbanization in Calcutta in the nineteenth century. Urbanization can be defined as a process of multiplication of points of concentration of population and an increase in size of individual centres of population. But the increased density of population is only a symptom of some deep rooted social and economic change. It is related to the push from the stagnant rural sector and the pull from its dynamic urban sector and to the disruption of old social ties and the birth of new class relationships. Durkheim once suggested that increased population density in a fixed land area ‘can be described as a social morphological index’.

The aim of our research is to describe the social morphology of Calcutta in the nineteenth century.

It is however, too naive to expect a simple linear development from status to contract, from familial ties to impersonal relationships and from community to individual in the process of urbanization, particularly in a colonial setting. Many sociologists and urban historians have tried to connect the process of urbanization with technological revolutions. They find in the inventions of the steam engine, and in the belt and the pulley in the nineteenth century a centripetal force which created dense population around factory plants. In the twentieth century the discovery of the automobile, telephone and electricity have set in motion centrifugal forces which simultaneously diffused population and industry widely over the landscape and permitted larger agglomeration of both.

Some scholars, in their studies of urbanization in the Third World, find no such devastating impact of technological revolu-

2 Hauser, op. cit. p. 4.
tions on the growth of urban centres. Hence we are urged 'To divest (ourselves) of the western image of urbanization' when we study the process of urbanization in the Third World. It is suggested that the Third World urbanization be called 'subsistence urbanization' which is 'an urbanization of very high density of individuals living under conditions that may be even worse than the rural areas from which they have come, of not having available the kinds of work or means of support which will permit them to do more than merely survive'.¹ Many sober sociologists like the late Professor Nirmal Kumar Bose thought that the process of urbanization in India was arrested at some point and he called Calcutta 'a premature metropolis',² where familial and communal ties continued to exist in a modern commercial and administrative centre. It is our contention that there is no universal law which governs the process of urbanization in every country. The process of urbanization varies from region to region and in a given region urban development depends on many factors, geographical, social, economic and historical. In modern India the process of urbanization is bound up with the expansion of colonial administration and market society, which created a new dynamism in one sector and stagnation in another. This helped to create a class of collaborators in the cities and strengthened the power of the traditional elites in the rural areas. This duality in economy and society is best shown in the process of urbanization in the nineteenth century. If, by the process of becoming urban, we mean increase in the size of population in a fixed land area and changing patterns of social and economic behaviour, then there was a significant urban development in Calcutta in the nineteenth century. I hope to find out how social groups, such as castes and communities which moved out of the rural environment into Calcutta, evolved an urban culture and became involved in modern politics. It was not a one-way process, for if Calcutta overshadowed Bengal, life


in the city was conditioned by the social mores of rural Bengal. There was no dichotomy between modernity and tradition in Calcutta, but each influenced the other.

Urban history is a neglected subject in India for a number of reasons; partly because the vast majority of the people of India live in villages and historians have recently directed their interest to rural India, to the agrarian system, to the peasants' revolts and other related topics and partly because the present-day official ideology is committed to the villages. It is not true that the cities like Calcutta, Bombay, Madras and Allahabad are not mentioned in the history books (in fact the British rulers and the Indian nationalist politicians from the cities dominate their pages), but the cities generally appear as mere seats of government where many politicians lived and where many dramatic political events took place. The socio-political structure of the cities, the economic life, the urban culture, however, have no place in the standard histories of India. In other words urban history has not yet evolved as a subject in its own right in India.

I think that there are three good reasons why we should be interested in urban history. I have already suggested that the duality of the development of market under the colonial system is nowhere better reflected than in the process of urbanization in the nineteenth century. Hence urban history should be a good guide to the nature of colonial expansion. Secondly, although the majority of the people in the Third World live in the villages and the most successful liberation movements in Asia, Africa and Cuba were peasant based, the cities are important centres of political, cultural and intellectual actions. The liberation movement in Vietnam, for instance, was not fully successful until the fall of Saigon, and no movement is without its leadership from the cities. Moreover one third of the total world urban population live in Asia alone. Hence no historian can ignore the cities of the Third World. Thirdly, methodologically urban history could be very exciting for historians interested in new

1 Since Gramsci most Marxist scholars admit that intellectuals are significant in revolutionary situations. For Gramsci's views see A. Gramsci, *Modern Prince and other writings*, London, 1957.
techniques of research. One can see history as a whole and discover the interconnection between demographic, social, economic, political and cultural history. One can combine the traditional methods of history with anthropological and quantitative methods to discover the totality of history.

There are a number of reasons why I find the history of Calcutta more exciting than the history of any other city in India. It is not because it was the second largest city in the Empire, nor because it was the capital of British India, but because Calcutta, unlike Bombay, had close links with its rural setting and because it was through Calcutta that the British capitalist system operated in India and left its deep imprint upon the city. Moreover, the exciting intellectual life in Calcutta makes it all the more rewarding to study its urban history. No urban history of Calcutta is complete without the mention of bad drains, poor medical service, unemployment, beggars and political unrests. But no serious historian can ignore the rich intellectual life of the city. The exciting intellectual and cultural activities go on in the same streets which are haunted by stark poverty and squalor. In fact one feels that there is a connection between the bad drains, dead puppies, crippled children and heated discussions on Ezra Pound, Elliot or Gramsci, or a musical evening with Nikhil Banerjee.

There is an additional personal reason why I am interested in Calcutta. I am weary of presentism in history. I have no desire to select some factors of history out of context to make them relevant to current concerns. Yet we must recognise that historians are not mere chroniclers of past events. We study the past from the present, recognising the fact that both history and historian are part of a process of development of awareness of ourselves and our environment. If we borrow a phrase from Collingwood, history is a process of 'self knowledge'.¹ I often think that in the lanes and byelanes of Calcutta in 1806 I am trying to discover my own identity and I think Collingwood would have liked us to write history in this way.

The histories of Calcutta that have been handed down to us

can be broadly divided into two groups. There are those historians who wrote about the exotic customs of the white people in a colonial city in the sun. These ‘memsahib in the sun’ type of articles filled the pages of the early issues of *Bengal Past and Present* and along these lines Buseed wrote a bestseller called *Echoes of Old Calcutta*, at the end of the last century. Many Bengali historians have followed Buseed and have been writing on what might be called ‘the babus and their nautch girls’ type of history. The other group of historians, mostly Bengali, have been interested in the intellectual history of the Calcutta elite. There appeared a corpus of literature on the so-called Bengal Renais-
sance, ever since K. C. Mittra wrote about the ‘moral revolution’ in Bengal in the *Calcutta Review* in 1845.¹ But so far no one has made a sustained effort to study the history of the city, her people, her social structure, her economic underdevelopment and her local politics. No one has tried to study the urban history of Calcutta in its totality.

The primary purpose of our research is to quantify social history of Calcutta. But we are not solely concerned with numbers; in our research we hope to weave together social, political, cultural and intellectual history based on records which have not hitherto been used, for example the Survey Records, now preserved in the India Office Library and the records preserved in the Library and Records Room of the Calcutta Corporation.

It is difficult to find hard statistical material for Calcutta in the nineteenth century. In other words, the numerical data that we have are not absolutely reliable. The first full scale census of the city was taken in 1866. There were, however, many attempts to discover the vital statistics of Calcutta. F. W. Simms’s *Report on the Survey of Calcutta, 1849–50*, for example was considered not reliable even by many nineteenth-century scholars. The Census Reports were thought to be not very reliable until 1881. Most social historians of Bengal, have relied rather too heavily on Census Reports.² It must be remembered that the statistical

data in the Censuses have already been aggregated for us and that the way they were collected is not very reliable. I wish to quote from the 1881 Census to illustrate this point. The methods that we have used for quantifying social history of Calcutta for the years before Censuses are certainly no less reliable than the Census Reports of the nineteenth century.

Beverley, Census Commissioner of Calcutta, in 1881 wrote:

‘On the night of the Census I drove through a considerable part of the town in company with Mr. Bourdillon, the Deputy Superintendent of Census operations in Bengal. Every where the scene was striking and impressive. The hum of business was hushed earlier than usual, and a great silence had fallen on the town. Streets that are ordinarily crowded with passengers were that evening totally deserted. At 8 P.M. the town was as quiet as it usually is at midnight. The people had all retired to their houses and were sitting in expectation of what would happen next. It was said that the street lamps were to be extinguished at that hour and that persons then found outside their homes would get into trouble. In some places the wildest rumours were afloat...It had been requested that a light might be kept burning in each house until the enumerator had paid his visit, and it is possible that this request gave rise to much surmise and speculation in the minds of an imaginative Oriental people. Everywhere, however, the request was complied with. As we drove along, we could see that a light was burning in each house, showing that the inmates were awake and still expecting the arrival of the enumerators. From time to time these officers were met with, accompanied in each case by a constable and perhaps an assistant or two...Judging from the manner in which the people kept to their own homes, the interest they took in the matter, and the general alacrity with which they supplied information and did their best to second the exertions of the authorities, there can be little doubt that the result of the night’s work was very complete and successful.’

Beverly might have thought that his task was ‘very complete and successful’; we shall always have serious doubt about the information supplied to the enumerators on such a night.

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full of expectations. This is not to deride the census reports, in fact much interesting information can still be gathered from them, but they should not be accepted uncritically.\footnote{Perhaps historians of India should follow some of the English urban historians, who have recently subjected their Censuses to quantitative analysis. See H. J. Doys (ed.), \textit{The Study of urban history}, London, 1968.}

II

The primary purpose of this paper is to give a report of our pilot survey of Calcutta in 1806. We hope to show how one can use the Computer to gather statistics regarding land use and land ownership prior to the Census Reports, how bits and pieces of information about single individuals or a single plot of land at the same point in time, or at different points in time can be disaggregated and then reaggregated with the aid of the Computer. We can try to discover a pattern behind these otherwise unimportant bits and pieces of information. But we also hope to show the limitations of the use of the Computer and the quantitative methods in general, for the study of urban history. From our pilot survey we have learnt some important lessons which have helped us to improve our techniques of research. We hope to share them with our readers.\footnote{For an interesting study of the use of quantitative methods for social history, see Ellen E MacDonald \textquoteleft Use of Quantitative Materials in Historical Research; Methods and Conceptual issues in The Social History of the Indian Educated Elite\textquoteleft. Unpublished paper read at Minnesota Conference on Indian Historiography, June, 1969.}

For our pilot survey we have used the House Assessment Books of the Corporation of Calcutta (henceforth HAB). In the eighteenth century, at last since 1781 some attempts were made to levy house rates to organize Municipal funds.\footnote{Bengal (Home) Public Consultations, 2 July, 1781, State Archives of West Bengal. There is a copy of a letter from the Commissioner of Police, with a complete estimate of the value of all shops, land, houses, tenements, etc. in the Town of Calcutta \textquoteleft as well as assessment of Tax for the year 1781\textquoteleft.}

In 1792 there was a petition from a Ramgopal Basu and a Giridhar Babu, \textquoteleft on behalf of the native inhabitants of Calcutta, representing the hardships of the poor people on account of the rigorous enforcement of the collection of house tax in Calcutta, and soliciting redress\textquoteleft. \textit{Bengal (Home) Public Consultations, 24 August, 1792.}
1794 that statute 33 GEO-III C. 52 gave the Justices of Peace in Calcutta legal authority to assess house rates.\textsuperscript{1} It was then decided that rates should not exceed 5\% of the estimated value of the property (house and ground), irrespective of whether such property was rented or occupied by the owner. In practice however, the rates were determined at 5\% of the supposed quarterly rental value of the property. But many premises including Churches, Mosques and Temples were exempted from house tax.

According to Goode,\textsuperscript{2} the first regular assessment was made by a Mr. Mackey in 1795. Two other assessments were taken before 1840, one in 1809 and the other in 1819. They were supposed to have covered the whole town of Calcutta. The boundaries of the town were determined by the same Act which gave the Justices of Peace municipal authority. The northern boundary was Maratha Ditch, the eastern boundary Circular Road (which was constructed along the eastern portion of the Ditch), the western boundary the Hooghly and the southern boundary ran along the Lower Circular Road to Kidderpore Bridge and Tolly's Nullah to the river including the Port and Cooly Bazar (Hastings).

If our records are to be believed, assessments were made irregularly and they did not always cover the whole area of the town. We have no records of assessment before 1806 and then only 3 HABs which covered only a part of the town. At the back of each book there usually is an index of streets covered and dated signature of the collector in charge of the particular area. By comparing these street indexes we have reached some conclusions about the books. It seems that groups of books fall into sets that cover substantially the same area (that is, roughly the same streets, the exception being streets that are presumably new after 1806). For instance Books 1, 3, 4A, 6, 11, 12 cover the same area, while Books 2, 4, 9 cover another area. For the year 1806 we have only 3 books, Books 1, 2 and 2A, covering 107 streets of Calcutta. The northern boundary of this area was just south of Narain Chatterjee's Road (modern


Keshab Sen Street) including Tuntuneah's Bazar (with the exception of Hari Ghosh's St., and Mudden Dutt's Lane, Moonshy Suderuddy's Lane at Machooa Bazar which was north of Narain Chatterjee's Road). The western boundary ran along Cossitollah St. (Bentinck St.) and Lower Chitpore Road, while the eastern boundary was somewhere west of Circular Road. The southern boundary ran along the Burial Ground Road. When we closely examine the 107 streets that are covered by 3 HABs we find that all streets between Durrumtollah St. and Bow Bazar St. and between Durrumtollah St. and Chowringhee were well covered. This survey left out the densely populated Northern Division of the town, the administrative centre round the Tank Square, the European residential areas and the Cooli Bazar of the Southern Division.

Although it covered only a small area of the town we have chosen 1806 assessment for our pilot survey. This area was interesting, fairly densely populated, cosmopolitan in character (Europeans, Eurasians, Armenians, Muslims, Hindus and others lived here), and we have good records of at least 46 streets of this area for the first six decades of the nineteenth century. Moreover, it seemed to us that 107 streets are a large enough number to give a fair indication of what we might expect in other areas at other points of time; yet it is small enough to handle.

It must be remembered that the purpose of HAB was to record valuations made on the basis of estimated and actual rental value of property owned, for the purposes of taxation by municipal government. The information is organized by address. Streets are arranged in order of their numbers (as assigned probably by the Justices of Peace). The data are in a standard format: lot number, description of the premises, name/s of the person/s assessed, rental value or estimated rental value for the lot, and tax. In the next page we give an example of HAB entries on Machooa Bazar Road of another year.

The premise description is structural rather than functional, for example, HAB would say 'upper roomed house' even though it was used as a charity school. But there are exceptions to this. In 1806 for instance, we have one entry of a 'brothel' and we come across many entries of 'liquor shops' and 'flour shops'.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. of House</th>
<th>Premises</th>
<th>Persons assessed</th>
<th>Rent per month</th>
<th>Tax per quarter</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>55</td>
<td>19 Straw huts 31 Straw shops 3 tatties &amp; bazar</td>
<td>Maulobe Budder Ally</td>
<td>100/-</td>
<td>15/-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50</td>
<td>8 Straw huts</td>
<td>Saik Gomany &amp; Saik Bajoo</td>
<td>5/-</td>
<td>-/12/-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>57</td>
<td>1 Lower Room and Moozeed</td>
<td>Bholkey Raunr</td>
<td>7/-</td>
<td>1/-/16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>58</td>
<td>17 Straw huts &amp; 1 Straw Bungalow</td>
<td>Nemychunder Mullick</td>
<td>15/-</td>
<td>2/-/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>59</td>
<td>4 Oil mills 72 S. huts 1 Tiled hut 1 S. shop 1 T. h. 2 cocadoon oil shop and large fish pond</td>
<td>Muttychund Baboo</td>
<td>50/-</td>
<td>7/-/8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60</td>
<td>1 Upper 6 Lower Rms. 16 S. huts, garden &amp; tank</td>
<td>Ramsoonder Ghosaul</td>
<td>30/-</td>
<td>4/-/8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61</td>
<td>6 S. huts &amp; cocadoon garden</td>
<td>Hurrolaul Ghose</td>
<td>5/-</td>
<td>-/12/-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>62</td>
<td>1 Old Lower Room house &amp; 6 S. huts</td>
<td>Colleydoss Ghose</td>
<td>5/-</td>
<td>-/14/8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>63</td>
<td>1 &quot; &quot; 4 &quot; &quot;</td>
<td>Groodoss Mozoomdar</td>
<td>4/-</td>
<td>-/9/12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>64</td>
<td>1 New 2 &quot; &quot;</td>
<td>Collepyrosaud Dutt</td>
<td>12/-</td>
<td>1/12/16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65</td>
<td>4 Straw huts</td>
<td>Bonmaley Sircar</td>
<td>3/-</td>
<td>-/7/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>66</td>
<td>1 New Lower Room &amp; 2 Straw huts</td>
<td>Bindabun Cassary</td>
<td>10/-</td>
<td>1/-/8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
We do not know whether the numbering system was like the present day, one of odd numbers on the one side of the street and even numbers on the other, or whether some other pattern prevailed. We hope that survey records for later years will be able to help us with this. In the ‘persons assessed’ column there are sometimes entries for ‘so-and-so others’. Consequently we lose the names of some of the owners.

At first glance the information about Machooa Bazar Road does not appear to be very significant. But on close study we realize that each column contains some sociological information. As a whole they present an interesting social pattern. The richest man (in terms of ownership of property) in this neighbourhood was a Muslim Maulavi whose neighbours were two Muslims, a Brahmin, one Kansari, one Sadgop, three or four Kayasthas, one well-known Babu, one Subarnavanik and a prostitute. The lots were not equal in size or value. The Brahmin and the Babu had very large plots containing many residential quarters, gardens and tanks, but the Maulavi’s Bazar and his shops were more valuable than the former’s property. The Sadgop had the cheapest and smallest plot in the neighbourhood; he owned 4 straw huts whose rental value was only Rs. 3. The prostitute owned a small lower roomed house and a mosque. She was richer than many others in the neighbourhood.

If we look at one area over a period of time we can form an idea of social change: change in the size of lots, types of premises, ownership of property, and value of land. On the other hand, if we were to study a number of streets at a given point of time we begin to see the social morphology of Calcutta at that point of time, giving us patterns of land use, ownership of property, value of property and types of neighbourhoods. So, after reaggregation of the discrete data, an interesting social pattern emerges.

Our problem was to find a method of reorganizing the data for the purpose of historical research. We soon abandoned the idea of manually classifying and co-relating 180,000 entries from the HABs of first sixty years, not to mention other quantitative data which we had gathered from the Street Directories and Survey Records: we decided to use the Computer and to carry out a pilot survey of 3 HABs of 1806. Preparing the data and
Code Book, transferring the data to the data sheets according to the Code Book, writing up a program (for which we were helped by the Computer Centre, University of Sydney), arranging the printout formats and finally, analysing the printouts, took longer than we had expected.

The first step in preparing the data consisted of standardizing the spellings of the street names and giving each of them a number. Each collector had had his own system of numbering and nearly every clerk had had his own system of spelling Indian street names. We also wanted to standardize the spelling of the owners' names. So we calculated the number of owners in 72 streets. Two research assistants worked full-time for twelve days. They identified 2,881 owners in these streets, but another 33 at least could not be identified. We could never be sure, for example, that Ghulam Hussain of one street was the same Ghulam Hussain of another street or whether Ahmad Jehmader was the same person as Ahmat Jumudar. Ultimately we abandoned the idea of using individual names as a basic working unit. Instead, the owners of Calcutta properties were divided into 9 broad groups: European, Muslim, Non-Bengali Hindu, Bengali Hindu, Parsee, Chinese, Voluntary Society, Government and Unclassified (a category which includes some low castes and others who could not fit into any of the other categories, or whose caste could not be determined). The Bengalis were further subdivided into 33 caste groups (Weavers of Calcutta are separated from the Tantis of the rural areas, hence they are a separate category for the Computer). Provisions were made to record female owners under each caste group (we have, however, discovered that our Computer program cannot calculate the amount of property owned by females). A provision was also made for recording ownership of property by prostitutes.

The term 'European' is used rather loosely. It includes Europeans, Eurasians and Armenians (and perhaps one or two native Christians with European names). 'Muslims' describes both Bengali and non-Bengali Muslims for we found it difficult to determine Bengali Muslims from their names. It proved to be most difficult to identify Bengali Hindu caste names. Some caste names are easy for they are often used as endname, for instance, Dome, Muchi, Kamar, Kansari and so on. There are also some
surnames which are peculiar to certain caste groups, for instance all Mukherjees are Brahmins. But there are surnames, such as Das, which are common to more than one caste. There are some titles such as Majumdar which are used as surnames by many castes. We decided to rely on Risley\(^1\) and Bhattacharya\(^2\) for caste names in the nineteenth century. Accordingly we made a list of surnames under each caste group, then extracted those surnames which were common to more than one caste. We arranged these names in alphabetical order and put all possible castes against those names. We also studied Bengali names as they appear in Brajendra Nath Banerjee’s *Sangbad Patre Sekaler Katha*\(^3\) and Benoy Ghosh’s *Samayikpatre Banglar Samaj-chitra*\(^4\) and Bengali works in print before 1850. We came to some interesting conclusions. Bengali castes were determined according to the following assumptions: most of the Bengali migrants to the city before 1850 came from the West Bengal districts (we assumed for instance that Calcutta Nandis were from West Bengal and not East Bengal, hence they were *Tilis*, Nandis from East Bengal being mostly *Kayasthas*). Most high castes tended to have Sanskritized first names. Low castes tended to adopt *Vaisnava* first names, for example Govardhan, Hariballabh and so on. Many *Kayasthas* and other upper castes had *Sakta* style names, such as Kaliprasad, Kashinath, Gouri Sankar and so on. It is also interesting to note that rich but ritually low caste, such as the *Subarnavaniks*, had *Vaisnava* names. With the exception of Raja Nubkissen’s descendants, many adopted Krisna as their second names. Although their family was recognised as *Maulik Kayastha* and later received *Kulin* status, there are good reasons to believe that they originated from *Subarnavanik* caste.\(^5\)

\(^{3}\) B. N. Banerjee (ed.), *Sangbad patre sekaler katha*, 2 Vols. Calcutta, 1356 (Bengali Era).
\(^{5}\) In the ‘Chelat’ (Khelat) account of Bengali year 1173 (1766-67), Nubkissen is referred to as one of the men belonging to Clive and Sykes and was called Nubkissen Cawndoo (Navakrishna Kundu). Kundu was and still is one of the surnames of the *Subarnavaniks*. It was widely be-
We have also determined castes according to neighbourhoods. It is assumed that artisan castes tended to live together, that kinsfolk lived in the same neighbourhood and that lower castes mingled easily with Muslims, non-Bengalis and prostitutes (they did not suffer from pollution complex). I am sure that we have made some mistakes and have determined some castes wrongly. But every possible care was taken to avoid such mistakes.

The identity of the prostitutes has been determined by their first and last names. Thus we assume that John Bibi was a European or Eurasian prostitute, Razina Bibi a Muslim prostitute and Fulmani Raur a Hindu prostitute. For the Computer we have given each caste and each community a literal symbol. Eu for European, BR for Brahmin and so on. These symbols are used in some of our Tables. The Computer was asked to record the ownership of property according to caste and community, for each street and for the area as a whole. A provision has been made to record the ownership of property by leading families of Calcutta. It has been assumed that the political and social leadership came from the dalapatis, leading abhijats of Calcutta.¹ As dalapatis operated through their dals based on kinship and friends we decided to use family as the basic unit for leadership. A list of ‘famous families’ was made on the basis of our studies of the lists found in the Foreign Miscellaneous Series, National Archives of India, in L. N. Ghose’s work and in the proceedings and reports of public meetings and associations as reported in the newspapers. When we made our list we took into account the political and social allegiance of a particular kinsgroup, hence we have two Tagore

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¹ ‘Daladali in Calcutta in the nineteenth century’, pp. 60 ff.
² Foreign Miscellaneous Series, Vols. 130 and 139, National Archives of India.
families and two Deb families. On the other hand there were leading men like Rev. Krishna Mohun Banerjee who had no families. With the aid of L. N. Ghose, *Sambandha Nirmay*¹ and N. N. Basu’s *Banger Jatiya Itihas*,² genealogies of most of these ‘famous families’ were made. Each ‘family’ was given a number; all ‘family’ members whose names appear in the family genealogy and who lived between c. 1800 and 1870, received a family number. For instance no. 3 refers to all members of Gopimohan Deb’s family.

The Computer was asked to record the total value of property owned by each family over the whole city, types of premises owned and the streets in which they were situated.

The premises recorded in the HABs are divided into 2 broad groups, residential and non-residential. They were further subdivided into 7 residential and 15 non-residential groups according to their structures and functions. We wanted to discover the pattern of land use in Calcutta, how many premises were residential, how many non-residential and where they were situated.

Notice the salient feature of our research: the major part of our time was absorbed in disaggregating and rearranging the data prior to the application of the Computer. We analysed HABs with the aid of non-quantitative sources and applied the Computer to read, to identify, to count, to classify and co-relate our variables. The Computer is asked to do the tedious job of counting, but decisions about the data are made by the researcher. His power is however limited by the very nature of the Computer program. Many individual characteristics of our variables cannot be quantified and are lost in the IBM Punch Cards. To save some of this interesting information we have used a system of comment cards. For instance we have been able to retain some information about a prostitute called Moynah Tackooraney who owned two lots in Moonshy Saderuddy’s Lane in which there were 14 straw huts, one upper roomed house and a mosque. We do not however know who were her clients and

whether they prayed in her mosque. The comment cards also preserved such information as that of a brothel in 235 and 236 Bow Bazar St., owned by a member of Dwarkanath Tagore's family. It had 43 rooms for prostitutes and its rental value was Rs. 140.

III

The file output contains Tables as follows:

1. Proprietor groups versus counts, rent and premise types for each street (107 Tables).
2. The same information, total over the city (2 Tables).
3. ‘Famous family’ versus rent and premise types over the city (2 Tables).
4. Same information for streets in which ‘famous families’ owned properties (60 Tables).

The Tables in this text, the analysis of the patterns of ownership by famous families, and of some of the streets and finally our report are based on studies of these 171 Tables.

The central and south-eastern part of the Town of Calcutta was residential (29,794 out of 44,220 premises). The majority of the people lived in straw huts (23,938). The Europeans and seven Bengali Hindu caste groups owned residential property and probably constituted the upper and middle strata of the society. The Non-Bengalis and Muslims constituted the bulk of the urban lower order, living mostly in straw huts and tiled huts and most probably employed in transport service. It is interesting to note that in this area only 23 premises were used as palmkin stands, horse drawn carriage stands and stables. It is highly likely that the majority of the people in this area were Muslims. They held the largest number of lots (26.9%) and premises (14,680), not very valuable property (Rs. 8 the average per lot), and there were 13 mosques. The poorest section (in terms of ownership) of the community were the untouchables and poor artisan castes such as Muchis (their average per lot was less than Rs. 5).

The prostitutes must have played a very significant role in this town of migrants. They owned a significant portion of the
property (5.8% of the total rental value of premises) and the European prostitutes were well-off by 1806 standard (average per lot being Rs. 15).

If our calculation of owners of 72 streets is any indication, most residents of Calcutta owned property. There were 2,881 owners for about 3,000 lots.

The largest number of non-residential premises were petty shops (1,129 out of 11,426) and only 222 premises were used for large scale commercial purposes (warehouses, timber yards etc.) and 43 premises were used for petty industries such as oil mills. A vast area of the town was still not urbanised—727 premises were used for agricultural purposes, 8,487 plots were vacant and a large number of the 722 social service premises were water tanks.

We have chosen 5 streets from 3 HABs to show varieties of land use and land ownership in 3 different areas of the Town:

COSSITOLAH STREET

The following proprietor groups were found in this street: European, Government, Muslim, Non-Bengali, Brahmin, Kayastha, Subarnavanik and Weaver. Europeans owned nearly all the most expensive properties (21 houses, 2 Commercial Residential, each on a separate lot). Muslims owned the largest number of both residential and non-residential premises (28 and 20) but they were crowded in 9 lots and the rental value of these premises was very low (Rs. 38 the average per lot). Non-Bengalis owned one large house, 13 huts, 8 shops in two lots. The house was rather expensive. One Brahmin proprietor owned 6 shops (Rs. 4-3-0 per shop). Kayasthas owned 7 shops and 3 premises used for governmental purposes; they were situated in 5 lots. One lot containing one shop was owned by a famous Kayastha family (Rasiklal Dutt, family no. 23). Subarnavaniks owned rather poor property, Weavers on the other hand owned one large upper roomed house whose rental value was Rs. 125. It is possible that the two large houses owned by a non-Bengali and a Weaver were rented out to the Europeans.

Most of the non-residential premises were shops (49 out of 56). Nearly half of these shops belonged to the Muslims (20 out of
49). The only commercial properties in this street belonged to the Europeans (2 C and 2 CR). There were 39 owners for 45 lots and no female proprietor.

CHITPORE ROAD

17 different categories of owners were found here: European, Government, Muslim, Muslim Prostitute, Non-Bengali, Unclassified, Hindu Prostitute (UCP), Brahmin, Gandhavanik, Goldsmith, Kalu, Kayastha, Moira, Pod, Sunri, Subarnavanik and Tili.

There were 367 residential and 263 non-residential premises. Kayasthas owned the largest number of premises (195), consisting of 24 houses, 5 bungalows, 57 shops, 8 commercial, 90 straw huts and 10 tiled huts. The rental value of their property was low (Rs. 28 was the average per lot). Europeans on the other hand owned lesser number of premises (160), which included 48 houses and 50 bungalows; the rental value of these premises was much higher than that of any other proprietor group (Rs. 51 was the average per lot). The Subarnavaniks were the only other caste who owned significant property (94 premises, of which there were 12 houses, 2 bungalows and 56 shops). The other 13 categories of owners had no significant property. A Moira had two shops. The Pods owned all the industrial premises in the street and Europeans and non-Bengalis between them shared the transport premises. Beside the prostitutes there was one European female proprietor and 10 famous families who held property in Chitpore Road. There were 151 owners of 189 lots.

MUDDEN DUTT'S LANE

This small street was completely residential (43 premises), and not expensive (Rs. 14 the average per lot). There were 8 proprietor groups, Brahmin, Muslim, Muslim Prostitute, Unclassified, Hindu Prostitute, Kayastha, Sadgop and Subarnavanik. It included 3 famous families who had 17 houses and 26 huts. Brahmins owned 20 huts. There were 15 owners for 15 lots.

JAUN BAZAR 3rd LANE

This was another small street, and the rental value of proper-
tics was rather low (Rs. 7 average per lot). But there were ten proprietor groups who held 24 lots; they were Muslim, Muslim Prostitute, Hindu Prostitute, Unclassified, Brahmin, Goldsmith, Kaibartya, Kayastha, Napit, Tanti and Tili.

The Sonars (Goldsmiths) dominated the street with 3 houses, 7 huts and 9 shops. Each of their houses was valued at about Rs. 12. Muslims again owned a large part of the total property, 8 premises being vacant. The Kayasthas owned the largest number of huts (22) and their one lower roomed house had a rental value of about Rs. 25 per month. This was by far the best property in the street although its value was low in comparison to other Calcutta houses. There were 18 vacant premises 7 of which were owned by one female of Napit caste, who had to pay Rs. 1-3-0 tax per quarter for them.

COLINGAH MOOCHI PARA LANE

This was an unusual and interesting street. It was a very poor area with 115 lots whose total rental value was Rs. 93 (Rs. 6 the average per lot). 10 categories of owners were found here: European, Muslim, Muslim Prostitute, Unclassified, Hindu Prostitute, Brahmin, Dhopa, Kayastha, Muchi, Pod, Sadgop and Subarnavanik.

The Muchis owned the largest number of properties and their average per lot was higher than their average per lot over the city (Rs. 6 as against Rs. 5). There were no female or famous family owners. There were 524 vacant plots, 108 of which belonged to the Muchis and 340 to the Muslims.

Table I shows the total figures of lots and various types of premises over the city. As already noted, Calcutta was an underdeveloped city, a vast area was still vacant, where a large number of premises were used for agricultural purposes and the majority of the residential quarters were straw huts. Yet there were a substantial number of pukka houses (4,694), some commercial and industrial areas and a significant number of premises provided modern social services such as hospitals, schools and public toilets.

It would seem that there was a significant and thriving middling group who lived in the brick houses and the vast majority
of the urban poor lived in straw huts probably employed in service industries. There were fewer tiled huts (only 1,262), probably indicative of the absence of a substantial number of fairly well-to-do artisans.

Table II shows the rental value of property owned by each community. The Government, according to our HABs, owned the best property in this part of the city (Rs. 72 the average per lot). But they owned only 12 lots and the total rental value of their premises was Rs. 864. The Europeans were at the apex of the society; they owned 823 lots (12.9% of the total number of lots) valued at Rs. 40,792 (40.5% of the total rental value). Their average per lot was Rs. 49. Muslims, by contrast, owned the largest number of lots (1,716 or 26.9%), valued at Rs. 14,802 (4.7%) and their average per lot was only Rs. 8. The value of properties owned by Muslims was lower than that of the Bengali Hindus, high and/or rich castes, European Prostitutes and non-Bengalis. By grading the rental value according to average per lot per community we have:

| Rs. 50 and above | Government |
| Rs. 25 – 49      | European   |
| Rs. 15 – 25      | Brahmin, Kayastha, Baidya, Subarnanvik, Tili, Weaver, Gandhavanik and European Prostitutes |
| Rs. 11 – 13      | Non-Bengali |
| Rs. 6 – 10       | Muslim, Muslim Prostitutes, Unclassified, Aguri, Chasadhopa, Goldsmith, Hari, Kamar, Kumor, Kalu, Kansavanik, Moira, Mali, Napit, Pod, Sadgop and Sunri |
| Rs. 1 – 5        | Bagdi, Carpenter, Dhopa, Dome, Jelia, Kalvartya, Muchi and Tanti |

It is interesting to note that the majority of the abhijat bhadralok of Calcutta came from six out of the seven Bengali castes whose rental value of property was lower than that of the Government and the Europeans but higher than that of all other owner groups.
Table III shows owners and premise types. All proprietor groups owned straw huts although the Muslims owned the largest number (7,787). They also owned the largest number of vacant plots (5,208), lower roomed houses (402) and commercial premises (59). One can deduce from Table II that rental value of these brick houses was very low; they should be considered as brick huts and in our new Code Book we have entered them as such.

The Europeans owned the largest number of bungalows, upper roomed houses, agricultural plots and transport premises. They had 498 vacant plots.

The largest number of shops were owned by the Kayasthas. They owned the second largest number of premises (4,802 residential and 441 non-residential), and 199 upper roomed houses. The Brahmins owned the largest number of industrial premises (19) and 169 shops. The Subarnavanik was the only other Bengali Hindu caste who owned some substantial property in the city (1,841 premises), including 111 shops, 71 upper roomed houses and 134 lower roomed houses.

It would seem that the good residential properties belonged to the Europeans. They also owned the largest number of agricultural plots.

38 'famous families' owned properties in 60 streets, though none of them had any substantial property in these streets (the total rental value of all the premises owned by the 38 'families' was Rs. 7,361). None of these 'families' had a domain or an area of influence in a particular street or in a particular neighbourhood; their properties were scattered all over the city. It must be remembered however that the bulk of their properties was in the Northern Division of the city and a number of 'families' in our list had not become 'famous' yet.

Table IV shows 'famous families' and the ownership of premises. Nearly all of them had straw huts. One Brahmin family owned 19 industrial premises. Not many owned upper roomed houses in this area. Nemai Charan Mallick and his family (no. 5) owned 4 upper roomed houses, 663 straw huts, 4 lower roomed houses, 21 tiled huts, 2 commercial upper, 18 commercial, 10 shops and 1 agricultural plot. The total rental value of their property was Rs. 971 (13.2% of the total rental value of
property owned by the ‘famous families’). Gukul Chandra Mitra’s family (no. 16) was the richest in the area, the total rental value of their properties was Rs.1,508 (20.5%); they owned 8 premises including one large commercial property in Durrumtollah Street. The rental value of this property was Rs. 1,500. A close study of 60 streets shows that the following ‘families’ owned properties in almost each street Deb (no. 3), Tagore (no. 9), Tagore (no. 44), Mallick (no. 5), Mallick (no. 22), Mitra (no. 15), Datta (no. 23) and Das (no. 36). Most of the other 30 ‘families’ owned properties in more than one street.

**CONCLUSION**

The picture of Calcutta that emerges is of a commercial city, still involved in agriculture, where land was not fully utilised for urban development. The richest single group of owners were Europeans. Muslims in the central and south-eastern part of the town constituted the bulk of petty owners and perhaps also the bulk of the population. Seven Bengali Hindu castes and European Prostitutes were richer than all other categories of owners except the Government and Europeans, and the non-Bengalis closely followed. The Brahmins, Kayasthas and Muslims owned property in almost every street and they owned all types of premises, which perhaps indicates that these are very broad categories, including rich, middling and poor classes.

These are not very startling discoveries. They confirm many impressionistic views of the city. We have however numbers to support our theories, and we have a clear view of the houses, tanks, warehouses, brothels, temples and other structures and their owners in 107 streets in 1806.

It must be remembered that this is a survey of one area only and our Computer program was not perfect. We have not been able to calculate the total amount of property owned by females; and we have not been able to use individual owners as our basic unit. We did not identify the Untouchable proprietor groups nor distinguish between low cost brick houses and high cost brick houses. We have subsequently made a number of changes in coding and programing. There are some serious limitations in using quantitative methods.
The final survey will be a study of the physical structure of the city and the owners (and perhaps for later years, occupiers and the occupations of the occupiers), not urban history in its totality. We shall provide the scaffolding and, with the aid of other sources and other methods, we shall build the edifice. Talking about history and class consciousness Gorg Lukacs made a distinction between 'actuality' and reality: 'actuality is what is contingent, or merely existent; reality is the truth coming into being. The explosive possibilities inside the actual'.¹ We shall present the 'actuality' of Calcutta but as historians we are concerned with the 'reality' of the city. We cannot, however, ignore what is 'contingent' or 'merely existent'. Hence our efforts have not been in vain.