EPILOGUE

As I review the deliberations of the all too brief seminar days and of the two informal get together (adda) that followed, I get the feeling that in spite of an uneven coverage of topics, the encounter between anthropologists and scholars in other disciplines and in the different creative fields, has been quite fruitful. First of all, we have become keenly aware of the lack of detailed systematic information on almost every aspect of social life in Calcutta. It has also become apparent that this gap in our knowledge cannot be filled up by the researchers of any single field. There is need for continuous exchange of information and ideas across the disciplines.

Certain aspects of the cultural profile of the city come out in relief as we scan the series of papers discussed in the seminar. We find that the urban milieu of Calcutta is particularly permissive about the persistence of primordial social identities—languages, dialects, religious groups, castes etc. The co-existence of these nearly isolated social worlds is not however as peaceful as it may appear on the surface. The study on inter-group stereotypes indicate the existence of sharp unfavourable images between the groups in some cases. We would naturally like to know more about the mutual interaction pattern of the numerous ethnic groups and also about the institutions and processes through which they maintain their social and cultural boundaries.

The social significance of the resilience and proliferation of the religious institutions in contemporary Calcutta continues to intrigue us. We have observed how the temple complex of Kalighat accommodates the pressures of urbanization and modernization, but it is not clear how this adaptive persistence of religion affects the growth of a secular approach to civic life,
The paper on the slum-dwellers brings out a dismal picture of the almost irreversible perpetuation of poverty. From Dikshit Sinha's report it appears that the slum dwellers do not feel that they can find a way out of the social quagmire into which external social pressures have pushed them. We would, however, like to know from a wider spectrum the range of social deprivation in the Calcutta slums.

Gouranga Chattopadhyay's paper on the social world of the business executives emphasizes the feature of alienation of this professional class. They seem to be isolated from kinship network and also from the society at large. Since this career is increasingly attracting the imagination of the educated youth, the picture of alienation and built-in social incapacity is quite alarming.

Although Calcutta may not breed as many psychotics as one would have expected under the various pressures of the city, Ajita Chakraborty portrays a sad picture of social apathy about care of the mentally ill. The paper on the goondas bring out the factors of congestion and poverty but spells out only feebly the links of power and business elites in the matter. Also, the penal code definition of a goonda needs to be supplemented by a broader sociological understanding of the phenomenon. What we need now are depth studies of the world of the rowdies from close (participant?) observation.

It has been reported by Benoy Ghose that the Calcutta intelligentsia (elite) are predominantly leaning towards Marxism. Here again, we would like to know about the shades and quantities. Much have been said in recent years about how Indian scientists compartmentalize their world into science and rationality inside the laboratory and traditional rituals at home. One may find similar compartmentalization among Marxist intellectuals—their revolutionary egalitarian ideology coexisting with the middle class social drive for upward mobility. The kind of rationalization that make this possible should be deeply probed. This may bring into relief the latent persistent values of the Bhadralok class in Calcutta.
In the session on creativity it was evident that our contributors felt that there was a sizeable core of personalities in the various creative fields in Calcutta who sought and asserted their identity as modern practitioners in their respective fields, expressing their arts in a language which had a certain degree of universality beyond the province and the nation. The consensus was that although the stimuli and models for modern forms came decisively from the West, Calcutta personalities in the various creative fields have naturalized them quite effectively. Obviously, the pattern of naturalization will vary according to the home-base of the particular arts and also in their levels of abstraction. The degree of positive correlation and relative independence of the various art forms from the contemporary social and political stresses needs detailed exploration.

Calcutta claims a high level of political awareness of her citizens. Are there spokesmen of the different prevalent political ideologies among the creative artists? Professor Nirmal Bose stated that regardless of the particular political ideology of the creative artists, one observes in recent years an urge for communication with the masses. Alokranjan, however, has indicated a recent trend towards loneliness and withdrawal from politics among the poets. All these impressionistic ideas and insights demand detailed corroboration in the field. We would like to have a clear picture of the social nexus of the creative artists, their addas, cliques, factions and leadership, the actual process of emergence avant-garde groups, and so on. Apart from these details, the social sources of vitality of the creative spirit in Calcutta, which seem to defy all the pressures of congestion, poverty and malnutrition continues to intrigue us. We have talked about the Bhadralok’s thirst for a refined style of life, the role of adda in stimulating free circulation of ideas, the tenderness of dada-bhai relationship, response to the spirit of nationalism and a quest for social justice in an urban situation. But we now need concrete observations to substantiate our hunches,
In the natural sciences, particularly physics and chemistry, the main problem of the Calcutta scientists was not that of developing a local intellectual tradition but to participate in expanding the universal frontiers of science and to apply the results for improving the material condition of the people. Although the number of scientists and their publications have grown rapidly since independence, confident and enthusiastic schools of researchers have not grown in this city. Among the various factors responsible for such a state, the historical situation of expansion taking place without the support of a critical number of able and active leaders of science, has been highlighted.

Calcutta provides a series of contradictory pictures—the assertion of universality of the creative artists and the intellectuals vis-à-vis social isolation as linguistic and religious groups; the urbanity of the Calcutta middle class and village like intimacy in neighbourhoods; the soaring wealth of the new rich and the perpetually condemned poor. Over-riding all these is the elemental and unbearable pressure of population. There are too many people in all spheres of life—in homes, neighbourhoods, buses, trams and suburban railways, offices, courts, class rooms and streets. Calcutta’s pattern of adaptation to this elemental pressure of all round over crowding demand very serious probing. One gets the feeling that the pressure has been carried even beyond the unlimited threshold of tolerance of the Calcuttans. There are symptoms of ‘loss of nerve’ in the control system of Calcutta society and a fundamental breakdown of communication and credibility across the generations and the classes. It is high time that social scientists and intelligentsia of Calcutta get seriously involved in systematic study of the operation of the key control institutions of the city such as, bureaucracy of the Secretariat, the police system, the judiciary, municipal administration, education etc.

Before concluding I take this occasion to record that Indian Council of Social Science Research has not only favoured us with a substantial grant for the publication of the proceedings
of the Calcutta Seminar, but, we have also received a grant from them for the study of the social world of four important minority groups of Calcutta—the Marwaris, Punjabis (Sikhs), Hindi Speakers and the South Indians. For all these, we are very grateful to J. P. Naik, Member-Secretary, I.C.S.S.R., who has taken a lively interest in our research programme. We also hope that an active addu group will grow around this programme, generating new ideas and research activities.

I must also express here my deep appreciation of the work of my colleague Arabinda Basu, Managing Editor of our Society’s Journal. Without his untiring zeal the publication of this volume would not have been possible. We are very thankful to Purnima Sinha for the cover design and drawing in which she has made an attempt to graphically depict the spirit of the seminar. We are grateful to Subrata Kar for his active help throughout the processing of the cover.

EDITOR
PARTICIPANTS IN THE SEMINAR

AJITA CHAKRABORTY, Post-Graduate Institute of Medical Sciences, Calcutta University.

ALOKERANJAN DASGUPTA, Bengali Department, Jadavpur University, Calcutta.

AMLAN DATTA, Department of Economics, Calcutta University.

AMULYA R. BANERJEE, Department of Anthropology, Calcutta University.

BARUN DE, Senior Professor of History, Indian Institute of Management, Calcutta.

BENOY GHOSE, Social Historian, Calcutta.


B. P. MAHAPATRA, Anthropological Survey of India, Calcutta.

DIKSHIT SINHA, Senior Fellow, Anthropological Survey of India, Calcutta.

DWIJENDRA N BASU, Department of Philology, Calcutta University.

GOURANGA CHATTOPADHYAY, Indian Institute of Management, Calcutta.

HIRENDRA K RAKSHIT, Anthropological Survey of India, Calcutta.

KANAN BAGCHI, Department of Geography, Calcutta University.

MANJUSRI (CHAKI) SIRCAR, Instructor, Washington Dance Workshop, Washington D.C.

MOHIM ROODRO, Painter, Calcutta.

MRINAL SEN, Film Director, Calcutta.


NIHAR RANJAN RAY, Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Simla.

NIRMAL KUMAR BOSE, Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, New Delhi.

PRANAB K. DASGUPTA, Anthropological Survey of India, Calcutta.

PURNIMA SINHA, Central Glass & Ceramic Institute, Calcutta.

RADHARAMAN MITRA, Calcutta.

RAJYESWAR MITRA, Music Critic, Calcutta.

RAMKRISHNA MUKHERJEE, Indian Statistical Institute, Calcutta.
CULTURAL PROFILE OF CALCUTTA

RANJIT BHATTACHARYA, Senior Fellow, Anthropological Survey of India, Calcutta.

SAMIK BANDOPADHYAYA, Rabindra Bharati University, Calcutta.

SUDHIR C. PANCHBHAI, Anthropological Survey of India, Calcutta.

SABYASACHI MUKHERJEE, Central Detective Training Institute, Calcutta.

SUDHENDU MUKHERJEE, Calcutta Metropolitan Planning Organization, Calcutta.

SURAJIT SINHA, Anthropological Survey of India, Calcutta.

TULIKA SEN, Department of Anthropology, Calcutta University.