

Kolkata is known for many things. The dazzling festivities of Durga puja, mouth-watering *phuchkas*, caterpillaresque trams, a bustling book fair, India's first underground metro, plump *ledikenis* in puddles of syrup, cricket matches at the Eden Gardens, the majestic Howrah Bridge, and, more recently, the spooky comedy of Anik Datta's award-winning 2012 film *Bhooter Bhabishyat* (The Future of the Past), in which a trail of itinerant ghosts draws our attention to the tragic plight of the city's architectural heritage.¹ It is precisely the haunting splendor of colonial Calcutta infused with the pulse of contemporary Kolkata that Laura McPhee brings forth so vividly in *The Home and the World*, a book that is best described as a stream of photographic utterances about two quintessentially Bengali *paras* (neighborhoods), specifically, North Calcutta and Jodhpur Park, whose divergent landscapes, histories, and cultures are inextricably woven together in the modern-day urban incarnation we recognize as Kolkata. Reading between the lines, or in this instance, between the photographs, we encounter a complex web of visual and social encounters, some uplifting, and others uneasy and troublesome. Here we stumble upon tales of dazzling beauty and stunning neglect, of forgotten histories and erased memories, of the bloodied borders of Partition and new spatial identities, and of vibrant eccentricities whose oddities strain against the homogenizing contours of a pan-Indian modernity.

Place, borrowing from David J. Robinson, is "synergistic: it is created and it creates."² McPhee's photographs embody the very synergies of a living culture, or, in some instances, of absent presences. North Calcutta, with its winding lanes and narrow roads dotted with historic Bengali *rajbaris* (mansions), wholesale markets, colleges and universities, bookshops, mosques, synagogues, churches, Chinatown, sweetshops, and warehouses, has long appealed to photographers, writers, and artists, many of

whom have fetishized its historicity as a sign of fading *bhadrolok* (genteel) culture trapped in a colonial past. To be fair, this is unavoidable. The oldest section of the city, North Calcutta still retains the shadows and material vestiges of its colonial past while coming to grips with the demands of contemporary Kolkata. Remaining alert to these entanglements of past, present, and future, McPhee juxtaposes historic interiors with street life, two different and, at times, connected realms of sociability and exchange. She also intersperses North Calcutta with Jodhpur Park, a residential enclave whose mixture of shops, restaurants, and markets testifies to the haphazard expansion of south Kolkata driven by waves of Bengali immigrants who flocked to Calcutta from 1947 onward from what is now Bangladesh, and in whose footsteps followed Tamil, Punjabi, and Marwari settlers, and, more recently, Tibetan refugees.³ Punctuating these movements is an internal diaspora of residents who moved from North Calcutta to this rapidly developing southern neighborhood.

North or south, each slice of Kolkata brings to mind just how different the city can look, sound, and feel at a time when mobile phones, Singapore-style apartment complexes, shopping malls, and Bollywood celebrities have come to define metropolitan chic. That said, North Calcutta, as McPhee reminds us, still piques our curiosity about ghosts of the past while Jodhpur Park draws us into the bustling life of the modern *para*, whose textures have managed to defy the sterile disconnectedness of a globalized India exemplified by the much-touted South City Mall located nearby. For McPhee residing in Jodhpur Park, the "world" (*bahir*) outside streams past the garden gate of her "home" (*ghar*), the threshold at which she photographs her subjects.⁴ It goes without saying that she too is an integral part of this visual encounter, the only constant in an otherwise unpredictable flow of human life whose protagonists pause in front of her camera.

A collapsible 1950s Deardorff propped on a tripod might appear strikingly antiquated in today's snappy world of digital cameras. But a large mahogany box fitted with lenses is not necessarily out of place in a city like Kolkata, where a rich legacy of photography evolved soon after Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre invented the daguerreotype in the 1830s.⁵ By January 1840, Thacker, Spink, and Company was advertising one of its daguerreotype cameras in Calcutta, and in 1856 a newly minted photographic society in the city brought together photography enthusiasts eager to experiment with the exciting new technologies of reproducibility. Four years later, in 1860, a Daguerreian Gallery and calotype studios followed suit.⁶ Photographers and photography studios continued to flourish throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries with Europeans and Indians embracing the camera to record their surroundings, their friends and family, and themselves for posterity.⁷ Such a density of interest in a visual technology that could be deployed to focus on the glorious, the quotidian, and even the horrific signaled a powerful shift in the human need to spatialize the *lived* experience of history. The trajectory of human triumphs and disasters that emerged from mediations of land, rivalry, war, and defeat, and whose narratives were codified and enshrined in art and literature, had left little to the imagination when it came to ordinary everyday experiences. With the emergence of photography, the quotidian became desirable. In a sense, photography compelled history to be scrutinized and written about in ways that accounted for the ordinary individual, who became more visible than ever. As such, the camera nudged the messiness of the anecdotal into the hallowed space previously reserved for the gravitas of history.

The photograph, as Roland Barthes reminds us, "does not necessarily say *what is no longer*, but only and for certain, *what has been*."⁸ The notion that a photograph is not a straightforward,

static index of the past, but rather an imprint of the malleability of human "presence," redirects our attention to the changes generated by human exchanges and interventions.⁹ Change, in turn, is a complex morphology. It can be silent, subtle, brutal, and untidy. If the photographed "presence" can be understood as endorsing and even affecting change, it is understandably a complex mixture of the familiar, the unexpected, and the ineffable. In a city whose histories are sometimes sealed off, neglected, or overlooked by the Indian government, which has failed to put into place a systematic program of restoration or preservation since 1947, when India became an independent nation, the photograph is more than just a visible record.¹⁰ It is a dynamic assertion of the desire to hold on to the visibility of the past made legible in the present.

McPhee takes us into some of the "homes" in which Calcutta's histories were shaped well before Kolkata emerged. Certainly, *The Home and the World* is not the only book to give us a glimpse of the "worlds" that inhabit these "homes," but it is the first to be culled together from images taken with an antique camera. It also accentuates Calcutta/Kolkata as an *aesthetic* encounter, not just as a walk down memory lane.¹¹ Rarely is the reader expected to recognize the "home" or the "world" that McPhee filters through her Deardorff. Rather, we are invited to contemplate both the wonder and the contradictions that such spaces and their inhabitants might evoke. A reflection here, a fleeting shadow there, an empty courtyard, a brightly colored rickshaw, a Tibetan refugee, and a gaudy advertisement, to name a few, draw us into an extraordinary gamut of sensory realms. There is no continuous, nuanced narrative in *The Home and the World*. Rather, McPhee gives us a glimpse of the frenetic and stupefying experience of the city distilled into intense bursts of color, form, and shape. Here the eye pulls near and far, depending on its subject,

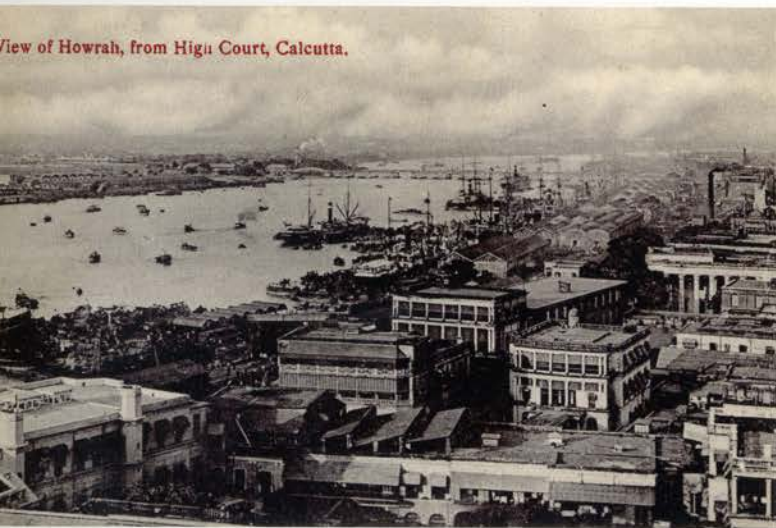


FIG 1
Johnston and Hoffmann, Calcutta,
View of Howrah, from High Court,
Calcutta, early 1900s. Photographic
print on postcard, $3\frac{1}{2} \times 5\frac{1}{2}$ in.
(8.9 × 14 cm). Author's collection

and confronts a bewildering mixture of piety, commodification, design, history, culture, space, time, and corporeality. What makes this especially gratifying is the astonishing crispness of photographic detail rendered by 8×10 negative film, a reminder that photographs appeal largely because they evoke the pleasures of seeing *and* touching.¹² By this I mean that the photograph invites the viewer not only to look but also to feel with the eye.

In the western imagination, Kolkata's foremost resident might be a sari-clad Albanian nun tending to the poor, but for the city's denizens, it is the eminent poet, novelist, artist, musician, and Nobel Prize winner Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941) who arguably towers above all others.¹³ Be it the city's roads or cultural venues, Tagore's name is everywhere. It is therefore fitting that his 1916 novel, *Ghare Baire* (The Home and the World) inspired the title of McPhee's book.¹⁴ Like Tagore's story, McPhee's photographs make us question what *ghar* and *bahir* might mean depending on the Kolkata one encounters. "Home" or, for that matter, the "world" can be an idea, a fantasy, a reality, or a combination of these elements. What is striking is that McPhee's images draw attention to these elements without defining their frameworks. Her pictures remain open-ended, coaxing the reader to recognize the *thresholds* at which "home" might embody the "world," and the "world" might be drawn into a sense of "home."¹⁵

BEGINNINGS

If there is any single threshold that articulates a "beginning" for Kolkata and its embodiments of the "home and the world," it must surely be the Hooghly, a thick ribbon of muddy water snaking across the marshlands of the Gangetic delta before emptying into the Bay of Bengal (fig. 1). The ancient port of Tamruk once stood on its banks, followed by Navadwip, the capital of the powerful Sena kings who ruled Bengal in the eleventh and twelfth centuries.¹⁶ By the early 1500s, enterprising Gujarati, Persian, Armenian, and Abyssinian traders were plying its waters to purchase fine Bengal textiles, rice, preserves, and sugar.¹⁷ So too were Portuguese merchants, the first Europeans to recognize the potential of trading in Bengal, so much so that by 1537, they had secured a settlement at Hugli along the banks of the river, a few miles downstream from Satgaon (Saptagram), one of the principal ports in sixteenth-century Bengal.¹⁸

The possibilities of developing commercial links with Bengal had only just begun to settle in the European imagination. Over the next two hundred years, the English and Dutch East India Companies would also make forays into this humid eastern terrain, beginning with the Dutch, who set up a trade entrepôt in Hugli in

1635.¹⁹ In sharp contrast to their European competitors, the English were latecomers. For the English East India Company's factors stationed in Surat, Bengal was a "hot country" filled with "very poor Gentiles." Worse still, the Dutch and the Portuguese had already secured themselves there, leaving little "hope of benefit" for other Europeans.²⁰ To pursue trade links with Bengal meant overcoming more difficult physical, political, and financial challenges than the company's factors were willing to shoulder. The resistance from Surat left Sir Thomas Roe, the English ambassador to the Mughal emperor Jahangir's court, fuming.²¹ As Roe saw it in 1616, Bengal "feedes this Countrie [India] with wheate and rise; it sendes sugar to all India; it has the finest Cloth, Pintadoes, Musck, Ciutt and Amber" and "raretyes," a far cry from the dismal picture painted by the reluctant Surat factors.²²

By October of the following year, Roe had applied for a "*Firman* for Bengala" from Jahangir, which the emperor granted,²³ permitting the English to establish trading posts in Bengal. But it would not be until 1651, thirty-five years later, that the company would set up a factory at Hugli, only to be driven out in 1686 by the Mughal governor of Bengal, Shaista Khan, who accused the English of being "base, quarrelling people, and foul dealers."²⁴ Among these dubious "dealers" was a shrewd thirty-year veteran of India, Job Charnock, the chief factor at the company's base at Cossimbazar (Kasim Bazar), who had proven himself adept at enhancing the company's trade while raking in a private fortune.²⁵ It was also Charnock who helped determine the fate of a settlement that would crystallize into the company's chief entrepôt in Bengal, and later, into the capital of British India—the grand, sprawling city of Calcutta. In the sweltering heat of August 1690, when war with the Moghuls had finally subsided, Charnock sailed across the Hooghly, arriving at the humble fishing village of Sutanuti. Ever the skillful maneuverer, he cultivated connections with the wealthy traders (Setts) and weavers (Basaks) who had settled in the region during the early 1400s, and who shared the valuable nugget of information that Sutanuti and the nearby village of Kalikata offered access to deeper waters than the settlement of Hugli. Quick to realize that this meant ocean faring ships could drop anchor more safely, an astute Charnock began to envision the wealth of commercial possibilities that these rural locations might offer if they could be developed under the company's aegis.

But not everybody in the company's higher echelons saw eye to eye with Charnock. A disgruntled Elihu Yale,²⁶ president of the company's headquarters on the Coromandel coast, Fort Saint George in Madras (present-day Chennai), complained to the



FIG 2
Sir Charles D'Oyly (1781–1845),
*View of Calcutta and Its Environs:
Town and Port of Calcutta*. Water-
color and gouache over graphite,
10¹/₄ × 15 in. (26 × 38.1 cm). Yale
Center for British Art, Paul Mellon
Collection, B1977.18.3

company's court of directors in London that Charnock "continues contrary to all reason, and consent of the Government" to secure himself at Sutanuti, a move that might reignite "our troubles and disoblige the worthy good Nabob."²⁷ Yale's objections did little to deter the ambitious company official in Bengal. Eight years after Charnock's arrival in Sutanuti, his son-in-law Charles Eyre purchased the trading rights to Sutanuti, Govindpur, and Kalikata from the Bengali *zamindars* or landlords, among them the Subarna Roy Choudhurys of Barisha.²⁸ It was from the converging interests of this motley cast of characters—Charnock, Eyre, the Setts, Basaks, and the Subarna Roy Chaudhurys—that a cluster of villages grew into the lively metropolis we know today as Calcutta or Kolkata. And like the mixture of its Bengali and British founders, the city would be distinguished by a potpourri of architecture that cut across the borders of its Black (Indian) and White (European) Towns punctuated by the *maidan*, a large expanse of uninterrupted land that flanked the fortified complex of Fort William and stretched all the way to the Palladian splendor of Chowringhee and the Esplanade.

COLONIAL SPACES, IMPERIAL SPLENDOR

In Sir Charles d'Oyly's drawing from the early 1800s depicting the *maidan* (fig. 2), a grassy promenade stretches along the banks of the Hooghly. Gone are the fishing villages where Charnock had once landed. Instead, a bustling port appears before us, its waterfront opening onto a panoramic view of White Town, which had evolved within Calcutta's growing urban expanse, and that d'Oyly had literally picked out in white gouache across the horizon, a concrete reminder of the boundaries threading across an otherwise harmonious spectacle of colonial bonhomie in a growing metropolis. By 1821, for instance, the Race Course—a popular place for leisurely drives along the river Hooghly—and Respondentia Walk, along the same river, were restricted to Calcutta's European residents between five and eight o'clock in the evening and morning.²⁹ In the decades that followed, the *maidan* crystallized into a highly visible, public domain where rules were not only enforced, they were also occasionally broken. Here, in the late 1870s, Kadambari Devi, the talented wife of Jyotirindranath Tagore (of the illustrious Tagore family), galloped about on horseback, much to the consternation of her neighbors and passersby. Several other privileged Bengali women did the same, rejecting the rigid conventions of the *purdah* while embracing one of the most fashionable pursuits of the city's European residents.³⁰

If Kadambari Devi riding across the *maidan* against the majestic backdrop of White Town toppled the impression that Calcutta

was a strictly European city, then the mansion in which she lived at Jorasanko swept aside any fixed parameters of Bengali taste for a *rajbari* in Black Town. Like many other “native” palaces located in the area situated beyond the limits of d’Oyly’s drawing and north of Fort William,³¹ the Tagore residence was heavily influenced by European design. McPhee’s photographs take us into the heart of some of these magnificent residences that still stand in the narrow alleys and winding lanes of North Calcutta, some hidden away from view and others towering over the roadside like ornate, pillared giants. The Debs of Sovabazar, the Duttas of Hatkhola and Rambagan, the Mitras of Kumortuli, the Nandys of Cossimbazar, the Sinhas of Paikpara, and the Thakurs or Tagores of Pathuriaghata and Jorasanko all left their mark here, building one sumptuous palace after another, from 1800.³²

In her photograph of a side entrance to the Mitra House in North Kolkata (plate 45), McPhee captures the fading magnificence of one such *rajbari*. Dilapidated pillars march across the courtyard and the veranda, their startling colors and pitted facades framing velvety pools of darkness. The picture forces us to confront the ravages of time and neglect. Were it not for the fading crimson glory of the Corinthian columns, we might not be aware of the palatial setting in which we are sequestered. Like some tattered badge of pride, the crumbling pillars have held out in a city whose landscape has changed radically (and not always for the better). And in their ornate details and haunting splendor, we are transported back to another Kolkata.

“Even the house in which the Normal School was situated was ever so mysterious. An enormous *rajbari*; a mind boggling web of corridors, nooks, and crannies, a room here, a locked veranda there, and *thick columns lit up by sparkling sunshine*. I would wander around exploring all this.”³³ The eminent artist Abanindranath Tagore’s reminiscences of his schooldays in late nineteenth-century Calcutta evoke the awe-inspiring atmosphere of the grand, if not somewhat daunting, school building located on Nimtola Street. As far as appearances go, the architecture of Government Normal School was very much in tune with the Palladian facades and pillared edifices that had begun to crop up in Black Town in the late 1700s, their imposing visibility confirming the growing wealth of the Bengali mercantile community. Equally striking was the desire for European neoclassicism shielding the complex worlds of “native” life tucked away from view: a soaring column here, a Greek-style pediment there, a copy of a Roman statue dotting a private garden, and Venetian shutters through which, in the words of a young Rabindranath Tagore (Abanindranath’s famous uncle), a hidden spectator could keep

“gazing and gazing” at the world outside.³⁴ At first glance, such architectural details and ornamentation might be seen as reflections of anglicized taste. Yet they also mirror Bengali ambition to which key figures in colonial Calcutta’s British administration were beholden. As the *Hindoo Patriot* observed, “[W]hen the British lion began to ‘rule supreme’ over the destinies of India,” he “lavished” a number of “empty and high-sounding titles and honors” upon the “protégés and servants of English Governors to ingratiate himself into their favor.” There was “Nubkissen Moonshee, of Sobhabazar, Romlochun Roy, of Andool, and Joynarain Ghosaul, of Bhoocoyloss,” among several others.³⁵

Of these gentlemen, the first named, “Nubkissen” or Nabakrishna Deb of Sovabazar, exemplified the nouveau riche Bengali entrepreneur who had cultivated strategic connections with high-ranking company officials.³⁶ A clever negotiator with a knack for public relations, Nabakrishna would soon become an urban legend in colonial European circles, his unwavering loyalty to the company elevating him to the exalted position of a steadfast “native” friend and ally or, as one guidebook put it more than a century after his death in 1797, “that famous Calcutta worthy, the Munshi of Clive and the Company’s Banyan.”³⁷ Beginning his career as a humble junior servant in the Mughal administration, Nabakrishna by 1750 was appointed to the rank of Persian *munshi* (tutor) to a young Warren Hastings, and went on to supply key information to Robert Clive when the English general was busy plotting the downfall of Siraj-ud-Daula, the nawab of Bengal. When Murshidabad, the seat of *nawabi* power in Bengal, began to disintegrate, Nabakrishna became an immensely rich man.³⁸ Working his way up through the ranks, he emerged a powerful member of Calcutta’s growing Bengali elite, and as if to proclaim his newly minted status, he built several palaces that occupied an entire street block in Calcutta’s Black Town.

Two main palace complexes stand out today: the buildings on the north side of Raja Nabakrishna Street inherited by Nabakrishna’s adopted son Gopimohun, and those on the southern side inherited by his younger, biological son, Rajkrishna.³⁹ Their architectural layout is fairly typical of the layout that came to be favored by Calcutta’s Bengali elite: a large central courtyard flanked by a *thakur dalan* (pavilion for a deity) on the northern end,⁴⁰ and a publicly accessible *bahir mahal* (outer compartment) that connects to a more private *andar mahal* (inner compartment) through a series of galleries, corridors, and courtyards.⁴¹ Stepping inside the public courtyard of the northern complex, one sees a raised *thakur dalan* at the far end, its Mughal-inspired composite columns, scalloped arches, and wall alcoves forming a

striking contrast to the neoclassical details of the mansion's exterior.⁴² While such architectural choices draw attention to the ornamental interior of an eighteenth-century *rajbari*, by the nineteenth century Calcutta's urban palaces began to sport more elaborate facades, partly because of the influence of European design on Bengali taste and also because of the desire to connect with the hustle and bustle of Calcutta's busy street life.⁴³ By then, an imposing lion gate had been added to the entrance of Nabakrishna's *rajbari*, a very public mark of deference to Britannia or, borrowing from the *Hindoo Patriot*, to "Britain's lion."

When such overt signs of allegiance to the British were mixed with details borrowed from Mughal architecture, the message was clear: members of a newly prosperous Indian mercantile class in Calcutta were eager to reinvent themselves as the colonial city's Indian nobility. As the brilliant nineteenth-century Bengali satirist Kaliprasanna Sinha put it, the "immaculately dressed" English-speaking Bengali gentleman "loved to talk about the grandeur of the nawabi era, nawabi pomp, and nawabi manners!"⁴⁴ Elements of Mughal style evoked an aura of nawabi sophistication, whereas aristocratic European emblems like Britannia's lion staked a strategic claim on the city's growing British imperial identity.⁴⁵ Looking around nineteenth-century Calcutta, where neoclassical buildings abounded, it would have been hard to miss the similarity between Nabakrishna's lion gate and the magnificent entryway to Government House, the palatial residence of the governor general (and later, of the viceroy) (fig. 3). By adopting neoclassical features like Britannia's lion for their own mansions, wealthy Bengalis like the Debs ensured that they appeared no less powerful than the British colonial elite, and certainly far more regal than the average colonial European resident. In their strident attempts to create a neoclassical city, British colonials had linked themselves to Greek and Roman imperial legacies (to which they saw themselves as heirs). They had also paved the way, however inadvertently, for colonial Bengalis to graft their own "native" emblems of prestige and power from those very same legacies.

But alliances between Calcutta's Bengalis and Britons were often fraught with troublesome exchanges. In 1861 some eminent members of the Bengali community gathered in the Deb residence to protest against the British administration's sentencing of the Reverend James Long for his supervision of the English translation of Dinabandhu Mitra's Bengali play, *Nildarpan* (Mirror of Indigo), a scathing critique of the British government's brutal handling of farmers who had been forced to cultivate indigo.⁴⁶ That the *rajbari* could be a hub of protest and patriotic pride

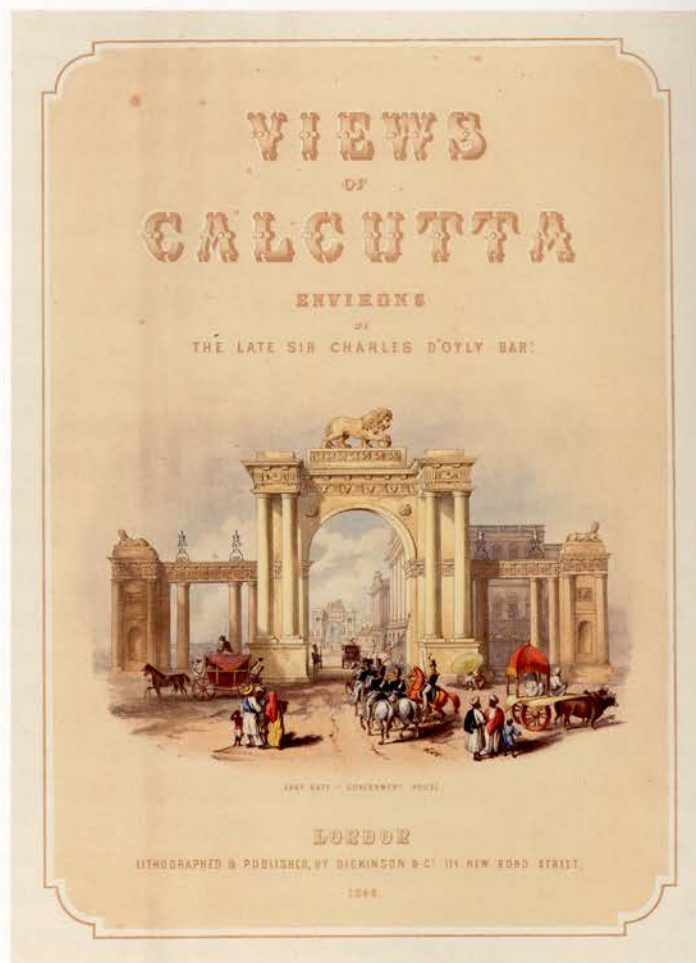


FIG 3
William Robert and Lowes Dickinson, after Sir Charles D'Oyly, *Views of Calcutta and Its Environs* (London, 1848). Hand-colored lithoint, 21¹/₂ × 15 in. (54.6 × 38.1 cm). Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection, T 497 (F° b)

confirms that Black Town was far from being a quiet, marginal, “native” landscape hovering somewhere outside White Town. Instead, both sections of the city were frequently entangled, socially, politically, and physically with more fluid boundaries than the terms *Black Town* and *White Town* might suggest. While Mughal culture might have given the Bengali elite the tools with which they could shape their own nawabi image and nawabi preferences, encounters with colonial Britons made them conscious of creating and preserving a deeply Bengali heritage.

What emerged from such borrowings and mixings was a quintessentially affluent Bengali urban culture whose vestiges can still be spotted in North Calcutta, where private mansions become public spectacles of celebration during the city’s most lavish Hindu festival—Durga puja.⁴⁷ McPhee’s photograph of Alope Krishna Deb, one of Nabakrishna’s descendants, praying before his family’s Durga *pratima* (deity) in the *thakur dalan* of the Sovabazar Rajbari captures the very intimacy of devotion mingled with the gravitas of a historic ritual (plate 72).⁴⁸ Here, the *pratima*, festooned with garlands of fresh flowers and framed beneath the striking arches of the *thakur dalan* at an oblique angle, becomes a mysterious, hidden object of veneration. Among all the photographs in McPhee’s book, this image stands out as the most densely stratified palimpsest of social and cultural vignettes. Standing with folded hands in front of the goddess *and* his ancestors, whose painted portraits adorn the freshly painted walls of the *dalan*, Deb is the principal living figure caught in the swirl of family tradition that harks back to a colorful colonial past with Raja Nabakrishna as its focal point (Nabakrishna appears in the oil portrait to the left, a portly figure walking in front of a servant carrying a parasol).

COLONIAL GODDESSES

Legend has it that soon after Robert Clive triumphed at Plassey in 1757, he discovered, much to his dismay, that he could not offer his thanks for his victory at Saint Anne’s Church in Calcutta. The church had been razed to the ground a year earlier by the nawab of Bengal, Siraj-ud-Daula.⁴⁹ A shrewd Nabakrishna stepped in at the nick of time and suggested that Clive show his gratitude instead to the goddess Durga (fig. 4).⁵⁰ He had the perfect venue in mind: the *thakur dalan* of his *rajbari* at Sovabazar built in the wake of Clive’s victory at Plassey, a battle that had made him, and others like the infamous Mir Jaffar, fabulously rich (Nabakrishna received a generous portion of the vanquished nawab’s immense wealth after Clive’s triumph at Plassey).⁵¹ So began the tradition of “Company puja” with high-ranking company officials like Clive



FIG 4
Unknown artist, *Durga*, 1860.
Watercolor on paper, 17³/₄ × 13 in.
(45.1 × 33 cm). Victoria and Albert
Museum, London, IS.80-1959

regularly visiting Sovabazar and other Bengali palaces to celebrate Durga puja in grand style.⁵² For their part, the Bengali *bhadralok* spared no expense. Some issued invitations in the leading English newspapers, others competed for power and prestige as they drew up impressive guest lists brimming with colonial Calcutta's *crème de la crème*, and still others quarreled over whom they had invited.⁵³

As early as the 1760s, the Calcutta-based surgeon and interim governor of Bengal, John Zephaniah Holwell, observed that at the “grand general feast of the Gentoos, usually visited by all Europeans (by invitation),” guests were “treated by the proprietor of the feast with fruits and flowers in season” and were “entertained every evening while the feast lasts, with bands of singers and dancers.”⁵⁴ The pomp and ceremony of Durga puja continued to impress a nineteenth-century reporter for the *Calcutta Journal* (1819), who compared the glittering spectacle of the festival with “the splendid fiction of the Arabian Nights.”⁵⁵ Be it the pleasure of indulging in an orientalized fantasy, “feasting” on “beef” and “ham” washed down with wine (served only to European guests), listening to the “drum beats of merry English music,” or watching “lavish musical performances and dances” hosted by the “Shobhabazar kings” (and other members of Calcutta's Bengali elite), Durga puja offered the colonial European elite a secure foray into a Hindu festival whose celebrations were carefully choreographed to cater to European taste.⁵⁶ For the Bengali host, the puja was a domestic ceremony that enabled him to accentuate his role as the patriarchal head of his family on a lavish scale. It also gave him the chance to solidify connections with the city's

prominent businessmen. As Nabakrishna's biographer Bipinbihari Mitra noted in 1879, “[F]amily and close relatives were invited together with general citizens: Hindus, Muslims, Jews, Armenians, and the English.” Guests were “welcomed with respect and esteem,” and the “music, singing, and dancing had no rest for a full fifteen days.” Even the customary “head of state along with other officials [attended] the ceremony.”⁵⁷

In his 1840 watercolor drawing, the Calcutta-based merchant and amateur artist William Prinsep depicts the heady atmosphere of an evening's entertainment arranged for European visitors seated in front of the *thakur dalan* in a sprawling *rajbari* (fig. 5). The main focal point of the festival, however—the magnificent Durga *pratima*—is reduced to a shadowy ten-armed outline relegated to the background. What is striking is Prinsep's emphasis on the *nautch* (dance) for which Calcutta's mansions had become famous, especially during Durga puja when *baijis* (*nautch* girls or dancers) were hired to entertain visitors.⁵⁸ Calcutta's affluent Bengalis may have transformed Durga puja into an opulent spectacle, but not everybody was impressed. A Mrs. Atkinson was chastised by her detractors in the local English newspaper, *The Friend of India*, for dancing publicly in the Sovabazar *Rajbari*, while a fiery young British poet condemned those who had succumbed to “Doorgah's mysteries” as “Infidels to England's God.”⁵⁹ Even a pious Bengali or two expressed his discontent. Bullorum Mullick, a Bengali judge posted in Cooch Behar in North Bengal, was dismayed by how Durga puja had been reduced “to mere commonplace things” in Calcutta, “meaning consumption of European dishes and liquor and patronising dancing girls.”⁶⁰

FIG 5
William Prinsep (1794–1874),
*Europeans Being Entertained by
Dancers and Musicians in a
Splendid Indian House in Calcutta
During Durga Puja*, 1840. Water-
color, 9 × 17 in. (22.9 × 43.5 cm).
©The British Library, WD 4035



Writing in the 1880s, Mullick blamed the “Metropolitan” Hindu for this farce. This urban sophisticate had no qualms wasting a fortune on “new jewels and ornaments” and “holiday costumes,” yet he was willing to spare only “a few rupees” for the *puja itself*.⁶¹ Perturbed by the trend that was started a century earlier by men like Nabakrishna who hired *nautch* girls (Nabakrishna had procured dancers from Murshidabad and from as far away as Lucknow),⁶² Mullick was convinced that the sanctity of Durga puja had been ruined by rich Bengali urbanites. Even the fashionable Great Eastern Hotel, purveyor of culinary delicacies like sugar-dusted cherries (a favorite of Gunendranath Tagore’s pet monkey),⁶³ tender spears of asparagus from Bhutan, *pâté de foie gras*, green mango ice, and fine champagne, was not spared in his diatribe.⁶⁴

By 1897 the *rajbari* that made “Company puja” de rigueur hosted another prominent guest, this time the patriotic Bengali “monk” Swami Vivekananda (1863–1902), who was welcomed back to Calcutta by Nabakrishna’s descendent Raja Rajendra Narayan Deb Bahadur at a grand reception organized in the Swami’s honor on February 28, soon after Vivekananda had returned from his travels in North America and Europe (Vivekananda’s 1893 speech at the World’s Parliament of Religions in Chicago remains an iconic event in the Indian imagination). The framed black-and-white image seen hanging beneath Nabakrishna’s portrait in McPhee’s photograph is a reproduction of the famous picture of the reception published in the March 1 issue of the Bengali newspaper *Amrita Bazar Patrika*.⁶⁵ Keeping these details in mind, McPhee’s glimpse of Alope Krishna Deb praying to the goddess Durga is more than just a straightforward image of filial piety. It embodies all the tangled networks of Calcutta’s precolonial and colonial histories to which Deb’s ancestral heritage belongs. More to the point, Vivekananda’s image reminds us of another *pratima* with which Kolkata is intimately associated—the goddess Kali.

An ardent disciple of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa (1836–1886), the famous Bengali mystic Vivekananda (like his guru) also worshipped Kali, whose icons permeated Kolkata’s landscape, then, as they do now. Sailing down the Hooghly, it is impossible to miss the Kali temple at Dakshineswar, built between 1847 and 1855 by Rani Rashmoni (1793–1861), on the outskirts of Calcutta, where Ramakrishna served as head priest, his extraordinary devotion to Kali spawning numerous legends during his lifetime (McPhee’s photograph of Durga puja at Rani Rashmoni’s palace in North Calcutta can be seen in plate 74). Kolkata has also been linked to another, older pilgrimage

site—the Kali temple at Kalighat, completed around 1809. But the city’s connections with Kali stretch back even further to when Charnock arrived at Sutanuti and the area was already known as Kalikshetra (“the realm of Kali”).⁶⁶ Since then, temple complexes like Kalighat and small neighborhood temples and shrines have ensured a permanent place in the city for Kali, whose devotees have ranged from Ramakrishna to British colonials (*Phiringee Kali*), from *zamindars* (landowners) to dacoits (*dakat-Kali*).⁶⁷ Not surprisingly, traces of Kali surface in several of McPhee’s photographs, revealing the extent to which she (unlike Durga) holds sway as a distinctly metropolitan icon.

Among these images, *Fists of the Goddess Kali* taken in a Kali temple in Howrah harnesses the power of iconography spread across multiple materials and surfaces (plate 14). A cavalcade of closed fists sculpted in clay in the traditional gesture of holding an *astra* or weapon (a highly unusual visualization of Kali) appears in startling blue and crimson paint against a background of pastel pink porcelain tiles on which a kitschy sticker depicting Shiva, Kali’s consort, has been pasted. If McPhee draws our attention to the commoditized strata in which devotional imagery is embedded and distributed in India—temples, shrines, calendar art, stickers, and photographs—then she also accentuates the tactile layers of porcelain, plastic, paper, clay, and so forth, that shore up those images. Brightly lit and garishly colored, McPhee’s photograph taps into the fluctuating densities of those tactile layers, hard and soft, old and new, playing in turn with the viewer’s perception of the sacred and the secular, the devotional and the supernatural.

If a single element blurs the boundary between the earthly, material world and the sacred, ethereal realm, it must surely be the smudged blue paint bordering the sculpted relief, which McPhee highlights as a blue mist. As a result, Kali’s hands appear to float above the matrix of commercially manufactured porcelain tiles. Interestingly, the only object to dispel this illusion is a photograph of a Hindu guru or saint, partially visible in the bottom left corner of the image. Encased in a frame whose upper edge overlaps with the sculpted relief and the blue smudge, the photograph within McPhee’s picture reminds us of the fluidity of the visual encounter in which material thresholds and pictorial depths can be easily manipulated to produce different realities. Seen this way, the photograph emerges as the principal artifact through which the sacred is continually interwoven with the secular and material worlds. On the one hand, we have McPhee’s photograph and on the other we have the image of a framed photograph—two different strata of space and temporality fused together in a single image that pushes far beyond the desire to



FIG 6
Unknown artist, *Kali*, 1860.
Watercolor on paper, 17³/₄ × 11 in.
(45.09 × 27.94 cm). Victoria
and Albert Museum, London,
IS.78-1959

document and record. What we have here is a desire for the mystical, which is paradoxically anchored by the artifice of a photograph.

What stands out in this tension between the devotional and the material is Shiva's head plastered on a mass-produced sticker. Even though McPhee strays away from the main icon of Kali enshrined in the temple, she has spotted the very object that reminds us of Kali's iconographic ensemble: a goddess who steps upon Shiva while grasping weapons with which she destroys evil forces (fig. 6). McPhee's photograph, framed as it is, is a powerful evocation of a familiar Hindu icon, despite the highly deconstructed state in which Kali appears: commercially manufactured materials (stickers and tiles) alongside traditional materials (clay and paint) used to create a *pratima*. In a sense, the image demonstrates McPhee's penchant for visual metonymy: a single, well-chosen detail draws us into other complex worlds with which those details are inextricably linked and, by extension, into other histories, landscapes, and realms of taste and consumption. What then can we make of other interiors, of other spaces in Kolkata that she has photographed, where a different register of visual exchanges and negotiations has been generated since the eighteenth century? What social, cultural, and political orbits do they inhabit?

INTERIORS

"My sister-in-law had a model war-ship under a glass case, which, when wound up, rocked on blue-painted silken waves to the tinkling of a musical box."⁶⁸ A childhood memory of a treasured music box evokes the many "worlds" that settled into the nooks and crannies of Calcutta's Bengali mansions as a prosperous port grew into a cosmopolitan city. French and Italian oil paintings and sculpture, Persian carpets, Chinese porcelain, German clocks and mechanical devices, ornate furniture, books, and even an American painting or two could be found in a *rajbari*, collectibles that reflected the eclectic taste of their wealthy Bengali owners and patrons.⁶⁹ Not surprisingly, as successive generations acquired more objets d'art, their mansions came to resemble modern-day *Wunderkammern* (cabinets of curiosities) whose staggering array of contents embodied, in Abanindranath's words, "the archives of lives lived, the records of past times."⁷⁰

Among McPhee's photographs to best evoke a sense of "lives lived" in a North Calcutta mansion is her image of a room in the Laha House with ivory door casings and a music box (plate 19). Here, a crystal chandelier is arguably the most iconic remnant of the opulence for which these urban palaces became famous. The brilliant light effects created by one such magnificent explosion

of cut glass prompted the amateur artist Mrs. Sophia Charlotte Belnos to rhapsodize that “the eye is dazzled by a blaze of lights from splendid lustres.”⁷¹ Finding herself in a “splendid hall” in a North Calcutta palace decorated with “pier glasses, pictures, sofas, chairs, Turkey carpets, etc.,” Belnos is entranced by her surroundings illuminated by “triple wall shades” and “chandle brass.” Here “the gay circle of European ladies and gentlemen” exchange pleasantries with “the *Rajah* and his equally opulent guests,” while “the delicious scent of utter [attar or perfume] of roses and sandal[wood]” infuses the air. For Belnos, this “whole scene” is “but a fairy vision.”⁷² In her illustration accompanying these recollections, a sparkling chandelier hangs overhead while candles sputter away in wall sconces, the profusion of crystal capturing the elegance of the interior, which had so impressed her (fig. 7). Many decades later, Abanindranath Tagore would discover his own “fairyland” (*paristan*) at Jorasanko, a storage room in which crystal chandeliers, vases, glass lampshades, porcelain lamp holders encased in delicate spiders’ webs, gathered dust on the shelves.⁷³

Where in colonial Calcutta could one procure a chandelier? By the end of the eighteenth century a wide array of European imports including “fashionable light fixtures” like chandeliers could be purchased in “Europe shops” (it is worth noting that homes built by Europeans and furnished in opulent style with pictures, carpets, and chandeliers were the exception rather than the norm).⁷⁴ Sir Charles D’Oyly gives us a variety of crystal chandeliers hanging from the ceiling of the fashionable auctioneers Taylor & Company in Calcutta in his 1828 watercolor drawing, where European consumers inspect an eclectic spread of European goods. By the end of the nineteenth century, the Calcutta-based firm of F. & C. Osler (“Glass Manufacturers in Ordinary to Her Majesty the Queen”) regularly advertised their array of “frosted” and “cut crystal glass” lamps.⁷⁵

The chandelier did something more than simply mimic the splendor of a European palace (fig. 8). It also ensured that Calcutta’s local “rajahs” came across as no less extravagant and no less cosmopolitan than nawabs and maharajas. Indian royals had ensured a robust market for European luxuries, like crystal chandeliers, ever since the middle of the eighteenth century when contact with European taste and consumption became more palpable in the Indian landscape.⁷⁶ Not surprisingly, the acclaimed Bengali film director Satyajit Ray focused on the brittle splendor of this quintessential fixture of the Bengali palace to convey the downfall of aristocratic excess in his 1958 masterpiece, *Jalsaghar* (The Music Room). If the chandelier had



FIG 7
A. Colin after Sophia Charlotte Belnos (b. 1795), “A Nautch.” From Belnos, *Twenty-Four Plates Illustrative of Hindoo and European Manners in Bengal* (London, 1832). Hand-colored lithograph, 11 × 12 in. (27.9 × 30.5 cm). Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection, T 458 (Folio A)



FIG 8
George Percy Jacomb-Hood
(1857–1929), *Maharaja Sir
Pradyot Coomar Tagore and
His Wife*, 1927. Oil on canvas,
98 × 62 in. (249 × 157.4 cm).
Lake Family Collection

entered the drawing rooms and halls of the *rajbari*, it was also drawn into the splendor of the *thakur dalan*, further accentuating the penchant for luxuries nurtured by the influx of wealth (note the chandelier in the photograph of Alope Krishna Deb praying before the goddess Durga). So pervasive was this crystal concoction that Durga puja was mockingly dubbed “chandelier puja” by Bhabani Chandra Bandyopadhyay in his 1823 critique of the social changes created by Calcutta’s newly moneyed Bengali compradors.⁷⁷

Public spaces mirrored the sumptuous atmosphere of the *dalan* with chandeliers used to decorate *baroari* (public) celebrations like Durga puja (a practice that continues today). As Kaliprasanna Sinha informs us in his 1862 satirical sketch, *Hootum Pyanchar Naksha*, “twenty chandeliers of various colours (white, green, red, etc.)” were “hired from the Fouzdari Balakhana” on Chitpur Road for a community *puja*.⁷⁸ McPhee tunes into this very same civic practice of embellishing a *pandal* (tent) during Durga puja in her photograph of a *puja pandal* in Baghbazar (plate 71). Here, the crystal glory of an eye-catching chandelier stands out against yards of colorful fabric, its brilliantly lit profusion of cut glass focusing our attention on the explosion of colors and textures fused together to create a dramatic spectacle inside the *pandal*. The contemporary setting pinpoints the extent to which a colonial European artifact has become a permanent fixture in a Bengali Hindu festival, such that it is impossible to imagine a *pandal* without its customary chandelier. When comparing this picture with that of the interior of the Laha House, the very embodiment of quiet solitude, we see the sharp contrast and are instantly reminded of the dazzling ornamentalism of a public space whose visual density is meant to grab the attention of the visitor.

In his reminiscences of his childhood at Jorasanko, Abanindranath Tagore charts a veritable map of memories, each linked to a relative who inhabited a particular section of the mansion. And each room was linked in turn to a constellation of objects or activities. *Chotopishima* resided in a room filled with wondrous pictures (“oil paintings with a distinctly Indian flavor”)⁷⁹ that captivated the budding artist; *Boroma* lived in a room on the third floor with her pet parrots Lalmohan and Hiremohan;⁸⁰ Abanindranath’s mother’s bedroom, with its luxurious inlaid tile floors, expensive wooden furniture, crystal vases, oil paintings, and profusion of orchids, was impressive yet utterly daunting.⁸¹ While sumptuous artifacts may have defined these interiors in Abanindranath’s memories, the lively flow of conversation marked his recollections of his grandfather’s domain in the

veranda on the southern side of the house. Here, every evening, the delicate perfume of jasmine blossoms permeated the air as *Dadamoshai* (grandfather) settled into his gathering of friends.⁸² But mapping these spaces of sociability did not necessarily mean that the *rajbari* was a porous landscape where one could roam freely. To the contrary, social boundaries were very strict as a result of which parts of the palace remained a mystery for the ever-curious Abanindranath.

It is precisely the allure of the unknown within seemingly familiar spaces that McPhee highlights in several photographs of North Calcutta's mansions. Wrought-iron balconies, white-washed walls, candy-color trimmings, chipped paint, exposed brick, delicate plaster carvings, the odd creeper sprouting from a Corinthian column, all draw our attention to private landscapes trapped in the visual extravagance of the past. By lingering on the aesthetic pleasure of these interior details, McPhee captures the very spirit of the *rajbari*, which despite its ornamental sophistication was in reality a sequestered enclave guarded fiercely by rules established by the family patriarch. This was a private universe inhabited by aunts, uncles, cousins, grandparents, great aunts and uncles who shaped a unique legacy of personal experiences, anecdotes, and histories.

McPhee gives us a hint of this social universe in her photograph of the Monmotho Ghosh house, in which a patriarch's bust looms over a wrought-iron staircase descending onto the first floor (plate 8). The image is strongly reminiscent of a seventeenth-century Dutch painting by Jan Vermeer or Pieter de Hooch in which doors and windows represent the thresholds at which different worlds open up into each other. Upstairs, an open door leads into a room with an elegant wooden chair and an antique switchboard, quiet reminders of the layers of space and time embodied by the *rajbari*. These are palaces of hide-and-seek, where the eye is constantly coaxed to wander, pause, and caress the myriad textures of past memories. If photographs capture both the shadowy and concrete presences of the past that infuse these interiors, they do so only by inserting them into the present. McPhee experiments ever so subtly with this interplay between space and time in the reflection of a woman captured in an ornate mirror adorning the drawing room of the Bose House in Howrah (plate 17). Transformed into the illusion of a painted portrait, the woman's mysterious figure draws out the photograph's capacity to blur the boundary between past and present. Rendered static and inert in a frozen portrait in the photographed surface, she appears to belong to a bygone era. But when seen within the context of McPhee's *lived* experience of photographing the drawing room, she is a living

member of the Bose family, whose fleeting yet timely reflection happens to be captured on camera.

If these photographs frame the ornate worlds of long forgotten inhabitants and their family histories, then McPhee's picture of the interior of Minerva Theatre on Beadon Street (plate 43) brings to mind the lively scene of Bengali theater and patronage in nineteenth-century Calcutta that was fostered by the Pathuriaghata and Jorasanko Tagores, the Paikpara Rajas, Charuchandra Ghosh and Saratchandra Ghosh, Kaliprasanna Sinha and Ramgopal Mullick (among many other Bengali notables).⁸³ Built in 1893 and altered in 1922, the Minerva Theatre saw the likes of the charismatic Bengali actor Girish Chandra Ghosh perform upon its stage.⁸⁴ His protégé Binodini Das recalls the theater being part of the Great National Theatre (where she performed her first role).⁸⁵ Plays aside, Minerva Theatre also functioned as a cinema palace where silent films were screened accompanied by live music, dances, and theatrical performances.⁸⁶ Starting in May 1903, Amarendra Dutt, one of the earliest patrons of Bengali cinema who supported Hiralal Sen's forays into the realm of motion picture-making, leased Minerva Theatre for three years.⁸⁷ What followed was a tale of fluctuating fortunes for this grand Calcutta landmark. The empty theater in McPhee's photograph hones in on the poignancy of its history, its decaying splendor mirroring the rise and fall of its fame and fortune.

THE LIFE OF THE STREET

If the stage showcased the trials and tribulations of human life, then the streets of Calcutta constituted a social universe where, in the words of Abanindranath, "all the variety of life" was "visible":

*Through the blinds on this side I watched life go by. Something would be happening there at any time of the day. People walking, talking, sitting down, getting up—people with such diverse characters, such different styles and manners, colours and fashions, and surrounded by so many horses and vehicles. People and animals going about their business, each part of a seamless story, like a reel of film, passed my eyes without rest or pause. Each picture was sufficient in itself, without gaps or breaks, flowing in an unending unflagging stream, as I watched the varied and fascinating events unfold.*⁸⁸

An ever-changing, unpredictable pattern of images and events, the jumbled life of the street was especially enticing to a boy sequestered in a mansion where strict rules and regulations allowed for very few deviations. Occasionally, this life spilled over into the

rajbari, especially during the *puja* season when tailors, shoemakers, and perfumers armed with their measuring tapes and *attar* (perfume) bottles, trooped into the veranda on the southern side of the house. There was the “Chinaman” with his newspaper folded into a measuring ribbon; the Punjabi shawl seller from Burrabazar with his bundle of exquisite fabrics; and Gabriel sahib, the Jewish perfumer with his aromatics from Istanbul (Abanindranath’s uncle Rabindranath also recalled a “Jew” in “his embroidered gabardine, who came to sell *attars* and scented oils” at Jorasanko).⁸⁹ For these outsiders, the sprawling *rajbari* must have been a formidable enclave, but for those cocooned within its folds, it was the “outside” or the *bahir* that held a special allure.

Rabindranath and, later Abanindranath, peeking through the Venetian shutters at Jorasanko, were entranced by the *bahir* they saw. They were equally fascinated by the world they heard. At three o’clock in the afternoon, Abanindranath would hear “bangles for sale, toys for sale,” the cry of the peddler conjuring visions of “flower vases of coloured glass, bunches of bangles, porcelain dogs and cats,” knickknacks with which he would have been intimately familiar in his home. At night, just as he was about to fall asleep, the clip-clop of horses’ hooves ringing on the street outside would awaken him from his slumber.⁹⁰ More than anything else, it was the sense of human connectivity in even the most fleeting of encounters that fascinated him. As North Calcutta was emptied of these brief yet soulful moments, he found a different Kolkata had settled into its spaces. “Nowadays the ice-man’s cry, the flower-seller’s cry, and many other sounds have fled the city, and instead, we have the horns of cars, the hissing of trams, the ringing of telephones.”⁹¹ One wonders what Abanindranath might have thought of today’s Kolkata, where traffic has grown tenfold and where the sounds of the city have intensified in cacophonous proportions.

McPhee’s photographs convey a silence that seems to be at odds with a metropolis where blaring horns compete with each other, eclipsing the “hiss” of Abanindranath’s tram and the sonorous ring of a vintage telephone.⁹² Yet the silence in her pictures forces us to look harder. Like most densely crowded cities, Calcutta offers the luxury of solitude in a sea of strangers. It also offers the opportunity to *look*, not just see. In McPhee’s *View from the Roof of the Dawn House*, a dense web of rooftops stretch into the distance, each roof a tiny walled-off enclave knitted together with an adjacent terrace (plate 68). Here is an odd mixture of freshly painted walls and colonnaded terraces jostling for attention alongside the fading gray and beige of a Calcutta

from the 1950s and 1960s, whose buildings remind us that Black Town continued to grow and develop well beyond the colonial thresholds of the *rajbari*. In the jumbled pile of rooftops in the distance, a child studies McPhee photographing the city, her fingers curled into two circles as if to mimic a pair of binoculars. Looking often means opening oneself up to the possibility of being looked at. McPhee, the American photographer armed with her Deardorff (a camera hard to miss), has just become a part of the playful, if not voyeuristic, encounter of rooftop gazing.

Modern technology makes it possible to surpass the limits of vision, to zoom into the vignettes of life (in this instance, spread across roofs and terraces), with unabashed curiosity. Even so, the photographer behind the camera or, for that matter, the spectator behind a make-believe pair of binoculars, has to reconcile with what Rabindranath describes as the “mysteries” of the “far distant dwellings.”⁹³ In one of his illustrations published in Rabindranath’s memoir *My Reminiscences* (1917), the artist Gaganendranath Tagore evokes the enigmas of an unknown cityscape that Rabindranath described so poetically as “the various shapes and different heights of the terraced roofs of Calcutta, flashing back the whiteness of the midday sun.”⁹⁴ Glimpsed through an arched opening overlooking the “inner garden” of the Tagores’ Jorasanko residence, the view suggests that the spectator has stumbled upon an unexpected landscape. Suddenly, all that is familiar has turned into something mysterious, tantalizing the eye yet remaining elusive and ungraspable. This strangeness of the familiar has its own charm, for as Rabindranath put it, the inexplicability of a landscape so close yet so unfamiliar made him feel like “the beggar at the palace door who imagines impossible treasures to be held in the strong rooms closed to him.”⁹⁵

McPhee has gone knocking on that “palace door,” braving the rooftops of a modern metropolis with her Deardorff to photograph the contemporary pulse of life as it plays out across the houses and homes of North Kolkata in which she situates herself. For every potted plant dotting a terrace, we are aware of the invisible *mali* (gardener) tending to this makeshift garden in the summer heat, puddles of water staining the concrete beneath each pot. For every sari hanging dry, a maid has dunked yards of cotton in a brightly colored plastic bucket filled to the brim with cool water, and wrung out a dripping bundle of cloth before casting its colorful rectangle of fabric over a clothesline (occasionally patting down the cloth to smooth out wet wrinkles). If these roofs have different stories to tell, then they are corollaries to the streets threading their way below. Each is a complex spatial framework, a dynamic space that enlivens the static

solidity of the architecture with which they are connected. For McPhee, the camera gives her the agency to peer into the pulsating metropolis. From rooftop to street (or vice versa) may be a leap in space and time, but such transitions remind us that the optical experience of the metropolis is kinetic and ever-shifting, despite the desire to “fix” or “capture” a view through a lens. The density of a city overwhelms not just because of its sheer mass of visual detail but also because of its fluidity, its unpredictable rhythms and patterns. Here, encounters can be unexpected and untidy. So can visual experiences.

“So in the streets of Calcutta I sometimes imagine myself a foreigner, and only then do I discover how much is to be seen, which is lost so long as its full value in attention is not paid. It is the hunger to really see which drives people to travel to strange places.”⁹⁶ If Rabindranath, Calcutta’s most revered citizen, envisioned himself as a stranger wandering about his beloved city, then what might a “foreigner” exploring the streets of Kolkata see? In his view of the bazaar leading to Chitpur Road (1824–26), the Scottish artist and travel-writer James Baillie Fraser captured the hustle and bustle of a local market where semi-naked fakirs (holy men) rub shoulders with a fruit vendor chasing away a bull, and where Afghans pause to converse (fig. 9). A major thoroughfare weaving its way through Black Town, Chitpur Road (known

today as Rabindra Sarani) was as famous for its bazaars as it was for the streets that peeled off its main artery, for it was in these narrow lanes that many of Calcutta’s famous Bengali mansions were situated (Jorasanko, for instance, is located on Dwarkanath Tagore Lane off Chitpur Road). It was also here that local processions took place throughout the nineteenth century, parading the customs and practices of colonial Calcutta’s Bengali traditions.⁹⁷

Not surprisingly, for visitors like Fraser and for the European residents of Calcutta, Chitpur Road was one of the best-known thoroughfares of Black Town. But its colonial incarnation was a far cry from the dirt track that once snaked through dense forest all the way to the area known as Chitpur. By the middle of the seventeenth century, this humble track had become a major pilgrimage route connecting the famous Kalighat temple in the south to the temple of Chitteswari in the north. When Calcutta’s metropolitan landscape began to crystallize, another landmark temple—the Nabaratna Mandir (Nine Jewels Temple)—built in the area in 1730, guided European sailors navigating their way across the Hooghly (the temple’s tower collapsed seven years later in a violent cyclone).⁹⁸ With its colorful history enlivened no less by its astonishing vignettes of life and spread of architecture, Chitpur Road, in Rabindranath’s opinion, was Calcutta’s most flavorful artistic subject.⁹⁹



FIG 9
Frederick Christian Lewis
(1779–1856) after James Baillie
Fraser (1783–1856), “A View in the
Bazaar, Leading to the Chitpore
Road.” Plate 24 from James Baillie
Fraser, *Views of Calcutta and Its
Environs* (London, 1824–26).
Hand-colored aquatint, 11 × 17 in.
(27.9 × 43.1 cm). Yale Center for
British Art, Paul Mellon Collection,
T494 (Folio B)

McPhee's photograph of Chitpur Road with the famous Nakhoda Masjid (mosque) looming in the distance conjures up the energy of this North Calcutta corridor that Rabindranath had so keenly felt (plate 52). Framed through a tangled web of wires, the labyrinthine street dissolves into a ghostly haze, the chaotic rush of cars and pedestrians distilled into a disembodied blur in sharp contrast to the hard contours of brightly lit shops and neon lights lining the length of the road. Illuminated by the light of passing traffic, even the metal curves of tram tracks snaking across the street appear to glow in the dark like molten red ribbons. If this mixture of jostling forms, colors, patterns, and visual densities conveys the turgid anxiety of a metropolis, then the hustle and bustle of business and pedestrian life amplifies the strangeness of strangers crowding the road, their dislocated identities literally erased in the onslaught of urban chaos. What is striking is that these dislocations are even more emphatic when seen alongside the Masjid. As such, McPhee's photograph pulls in two different directions: the anchoring presence of a well-known landmark and the disquieting incoherence of city life. Yet this tension is also integral to Calcutta's cosmopolitanism, for it is in the constant absorption and transmutation of both the familiar *and* the foreign that we can chart Kolkata's evolution.

Founded in 1926, Nakhoda Masjid was completed in 1942.¹⁰⁰ Built by the Kutchi (Cutchi) Memons (also known as *nakhodas* or sea-farers), a business community of Sunni Muslims who settled in the city in the nineteenth century, the mosque is testament to the commercial prosperity of colonial Calcutta, whose trade links with Europe, Southeast Asia, and China attracted merchant communities from all over the globe, spawning in turn a diverse spectrum of sacred and secular landscapes within its metropolitan sprawl. That Durga puja is celebrated only a few yards away from the Masjid does not surprise, for Fraser's Chitpur Road continued to expand and diversify into a major urban artery over the next 150 years, its ever-widening orbit of sensory abundance, religious pluralism, and political disruptions demonstrating in the words of Mónica Degen that "bodies make places and places make bodies."¹⁰¹ Aside from the Kutchi Memons, there were many other "bodies" who inhabited Chitpur Road—the Chinese, Portuguese, Armenians, Marwaris, Jews, Parsis, and even the odd Venetian, all made their mark here with their bazaars, opium dens, shops, synagogues, and churches.¹⁰² So too did the Brahma Sabha, a monotheistic society founded in 1828 by the Hindu reformer Raja Rammohun Roy and his close friend, the entrepreneur Dwarkanath Tagore (Rabindranath's grandfather).¹⁰³

As much as it sustained and was in turn managed by the aspirations of its inhabitants, the social, cultural, and commercial landscapes of Chitpur Road could also unravel when those aspirations clashed, producing fresh histories and meanings for the city and its landmarks. When reports of Mahatma Gandhi's arrest followed in the wake of a nation-wide *hartal* (strike) against the Rowlatt Act in April 1919, Chitpur Road erupted, with the Nakhoda Masjid area serving as the nerve center of political agitation. Marwaris, Sikhs, Jains, Bengalis (both Hindu and Muslim), and Bhatias came together in a storm of protest against the British government, transforming the street into a violent spectacle.¹⁰⁴ Seen against this backdrop, McPhee's tranquil view of Chitpur Road is anchored in the tremendous potential of change that a city's inhabitants can mobilize in order to alter the course of shared histories and personal legacies.

If "bodies" are subsumed in the visual blur of movement streaking across a street in North Calcutta, then they are the primary focal points in McPhee's photographs taken in Jodhpur Park located on the other side of Kolkata. A residential enclave whose leafy lanes and quaint neighborhood shops, markets, and boutiques still retain the cozy sensibility of a Bengali *para* amid snarling lanes of traffic and shopping malls on nearby Prince Anwar Shah Road, Jodhpur Park echoes with the kind of cosmopolitan jumble that once marked Chitpur Road. Here, Tibetan immigrants and schoolgirls in starched uniforms, parrot sellers and rickshaw drivers, street performers and transvestite dancing girls, pause at the garden gate where McPhee is stationed with her Deardorff. With the gate as her open-air photo booth, McPhee gives her subjects a boundary at which to pose for the snapshot-like pictures she composes with her camera. The resulting images may have the feel of a candid camera trained upon unsuspecting passersby, but their protagonists, although strangers in transit, are very much active participants in these photographic encounters. They have paused, posed, looked directly at the camera, and exchanged information, so much so that McPhee can put names to faces in her book. Yet, their portraits remain deeply poignant reminders of the anonymity of a cityscape where faces and names swiftly become question marks in the stream of fleeting encounters.

What is clear is that the city continues to evolve through its people—through its vast and complex networks of refugees, immigrants, servants, vendors, performers, and middle-class residents. These are the pedestrians who articulate the modern life of the modern street, their idiosyncrasies accentuated in the photographed space, and their diversity summing up the city's

syncretic character. A powerful counterpoint to the *bhadrolok* nostalgia for historic North Calcutta captured by McPhee in her images of *rajbari* interiors, their photographs unsettle the stable boundaries of class and gender that were so carefully orchestrated within the North Calcutta mansion. In these pictures, McPhee tackles the dynamic spectacle of the city head on, a radical departure from her more contained, empty interiors of North Kolkata or distanced views of Chitpur Road. Here, “bodies” deposit specific memories onto the local landscape by invoking specific senses. Thus, the street performer with the monkeys (plate 32) reverberates with the chatter of furry creatures and the beat of a drum (to which the monkeys are made to dance), and the ice-cream man with his cart (plate 29) reminds us of the refreshing coolness of an icy snack on a hot summer’s day. Both represent the working poor whose professions are shaped by very different domains and commercial impulses: one harks back to a form of entertainment that could be found in the nineteenth-century streets of Calcutta, while the other exemplifies the global onslaught of multinational companies (note his uniform). Will they coexist as Kolkata struggles to define itself as a contemporary city? Or will one or the other disappear as more multistoried apartment complexes and malls spring up, isolating the middle and upper classes from the vagaries and surprises of street life?

CONCLUSION

McPhee’s book arrives at an opportune moment when so many of Kolkata’s heritage buildings face the danger of being torn down and the very sociability of a *para* might be obliterated by the frenetic explosion of real estate development. *The Home and the World* emphasizes a living, breathing city whose very thresholds are being challenged by the pressures of corruption, callousness, and greed. Only time will tell if its unique complexities will survive. Kolkata may pride itself on its contributions to art, literature, music, philosophy, and political consciousness, but its very cultural signposts might succumb to political apathy, ignorance, and neglect. What is badly needed is a sense of pride in the city’s local landscapes and histories. Only when such a sense of belonging is forged will Kolkata be able to move forward with a deep appreciation of its past and the desire to connect that past with its future. Only then will its many “worlds” articulate the collective sense of “home” and identity it truly embodies.

I am grateful to Laura McPhee for inviting me to write this essay and for answering all my questions with cheerful aplomb. My thanks also to the editors of Yale University Press in New Haven, and to Linda Truilo for her meticulous attention to detail. Writing this essay was possible only because of the generous help I received from Arundhati Ray in Kolkata (India), Ralph Lake in Greensboro (North Carolina), Elisabeth Fairman and Sarah Welcome in New Haven (Connecticut), and Debashish Banerji and Pratapaditya Pal in Los Angeles. Although Calcutta was renamed Kolkata in 2001, I have used the older moniker when referring to earlier periods of the city’s history.

1 *Phuchkas* are a savory street food; *ledikeni*, named after the vicereine Lady Canning (1817–1861), are deep-fried sugary confections; Durga puja is Calcutta’s most lavish Hindu festival and is celebrated every autumn.

2 David J. Robinson, “The Language and Significance of Place in Latin America,” in *The Power of Place: Bringing Together Geographical and Sociological Imaginations*, ed. John A. Agnew and James S. Duncan (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 157.

3 For an insightful study of Calcutta’s spatial transformations, see Raka Ray and Seemin Qayum, *Cultures of Servitude: Modernity, Domesticity, and Class in India* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 32–44; Douglas P. Hill, “Politics, Capital and Leisure in India: Situating the Port and Multiplex in Kolkata,” 4–6, http://150.203.231.34/ASAA2010/reviewed_papers/Hill,_Douglas_1_.pdf (accessed April 29, 2013).

4 The gate belongs to the Jodhpur Park residence of the internationally acclaimed Bengali novelist Amitav Ghosh. McPhee stayed in this house during her first visit to Kolkata.

5 The calotype process produced images on chemically sensitized paper, unlike the daguerreotype process, which produced photographs on a chemically treated metallic plate.

6 Christopher Pinney, *Camera Indica: The Social Life of Indian Photographs* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 17; Malavika Karlekar, *Re-Visioning the Past: Early Photography in Bengal 1875–1915* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005), 1–2, 46–47; Pratapaditya Pal and Vidya Dehejia, *From Merchants to Emperors: British Artists and India,*

1757–1930 (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1986), 182–85.

7 Das Studio, a photography studio started by a Bengali photographer in 1909, continues to flourish today. Rabindranath Tagore recalls being photographed in a “big English photographic studio” while growing up in Jorasanko. See Rabindranath Tagore, *My Reminiscences* (London: Macmillan, 1917), 52. For an insightful essay about early photography in Calcutta, see Siddhartha Ghosh, “Early Photography in Calcutta,” *Marg* 41, no. 4 (June 1990): 35–50.

8 Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982), 85. Italics are Barthes’s.

9 *Ibid.*, 87.

10 Like the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) formalized in 1861, the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH), established in 1984, has also been committed to preserving India’s “natural, living, tangible, and intangible heritage.” But unlike the ASI, INTACH is a nongovernmental organization with limited legal jurisdiction. <http://www.intach.org> (accessed March 21, 2014).

11 Italics are mine.

12 McPhee’s photographs range in size from 30 × 40 inches to 60 × 72 inches.

13 For an excellent overview of Tagore’s contributions to literature, art, music, and dance, see Pratapaditya Pal, ed., *Something Old, Something New: Rabindranath Tagore 150th Birth Anniversary Volume* (Mumbai: Marg Foundation, 2011).

14 Tagore’s novel was adapted for the screen in 1985 by the Calcutta-based Bengali filmmaker Satyajit Ray (1921–1992).

15 Italics are mine.

16 Samaren Roy, *Calcutta: Society and Change, 1690–1990* (Lincoln, Neb.: iUniverse, 2005), 1–2.

17 Sanjay Subrahmanyam, “Notes on the Sixteenth Century Bengal Trade,” *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* 24, no. 3 (1987): 265–89. For their part, merchants sold a wide array of commodities—ranging from rosewater and *caurie* shells to cinnamon and

- Malabar pepper—to their counterparts in Bengal. See also Sushil Chaudhury, “The Rise and Decline of Hugli—A Port in Mediaeval Bengal,” *Bengal Past & Present (A Journal of Modern Indian and Asian History)* 86, no. 1 (January–June 1967): 33–67.
- 18** Roy, *Calcutta*, 3–4. Aside from Satgaon, located on the banks of the Saraswati (a distributary of the Bhagirathi-Hooghly rivers), Chittagong at the mouth of the river Karnaphuli was the other preeminent port in sixteenth-century Bengal. By 1580 Hugli had replaced Satgaon as the main port in western Bengal. It is unclear as to which was named first, the town of Hugli or the river Hooghly. On the subject of the three ports, see Subrahmanyam, “Sixteenth Century Bengal Trade,” 265, 282.
- 19** The English and Dutch East India Companies were established in 1600 and 1602 respectively. The latter abandoned their settlement in Hugli in 1636, but returned to it between 1645 and 1647. Their main focus, however, was the village of Chinsurah, about a mile farther downriver where they built a factory and a port in 1656. Om Prakash, *The Dutch East India Company and the Economy of Bengal, 1630–1720* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1985), 36–41; Sir William Wilson Hunter, *Imperial Gazetteer of India*, vol. 13 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1908), 173–74; Chaudhury, “Rise and Decline of Hugli,” 33–67.
- 20** Letter from the Factors at Surat to Sir Thomas Roe at Ajmere (Suratt, May 26, 1616), reproduced in William Foster, ed., *Letters Received by the East India Company from Its Servants in the East Transcribed from the “Original Correspondence” Series of the India Office Records*, vol. 4 (London: Sampson Low, Marston, 1900), 315.
- 21** Sir Thomas Roe accepted the East India Company’s invitation in 1614 to visit Jahangir’s court as England’s first ambassador to Mughal India, a decision sealed by royal approval from James I. “Roe, Sir Thomas (1581–1644),” Michael Strachan in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); online edition, ed. Lawrence Goldman, May 2011, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/23943> (accessed February 9, 2013).
- 22** Sir Thomas Roe quoted in Sir William Foster, ed., *The Embassy of Sir Thomas Roe to the Court of the Great Mogul, 1615–1619*, vol. 1 (London: Printed for the Hakluyt Society, 1899), 218, 5n. Factors managed the factories established in the East India Company’s trading posts.
- 23** Foster, *The Embassy of Sir Thomas Roe*, 2: 436–37.
- 24** R. Barlow, transcr., *The Diary of William Hedges, Esq. (Afterwards Sir William Hedges), During His Agency in Bengal: As Well as On His Voyage Out and Return Overland (1681–1687)* (London: Printed for the Hakluyt Society, 1887), 3: 153.
- 25** “Hedges, Sir William (1632–1701),” Gary S. De Krey in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, online edition, January 2008, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/12860> (accessed February 10, 2013).
- 26** Elihu Yale would become the chief benefactor of Yale College in 1718.
- 27** “Extract of Fort St. George Letter to Court, of 2nd November 1691,” in R. Barlow, transcr., *The Diary of William Hedges, Esq.*, 2: 88. The word *Nabob* is a corruption of the term *nawab*, meaning a high-ranking Muslim nobleman who served as a governor or a viceroy of a province or a district in the Mughal empire. In Yale’s letter, the “Nabob” in question was Ibrahim Khan, who served as the Mughal governor of Bengal between 1689 and 1697 during the reign of the emperor Aurangzeb.
- 28** Roy, *Calcutta*, 8; Krishna Dutta, *Calcutta: A Cultural and Literary History* (Northampton, Mass.: Interlink, 2003), 12.
- 29** Swati Chattopadhyay, *Representing Calcutta: Modernity, Nationalism, and the Colonial Uncanny* (London: Routledge, 2006), 91.
- 30** Chitra Deb, *Women of the Tagore Household*, trans. Smita Chowdhry and Sona Roy (New Delhi: Penguin, 2010), 80–81.
- 31** Partha Mitter, “The Early British Port Cities of India: Their Planning and Architecture Circa 1640–1757,” *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 45, no. 2 (June 1986): 102.
- 32** Dutta, *Calcutta*, 33. Furthermore, the names of executors of well-known Bengali urban estates cropped up frequently in early nineteenth-century records, indicating that colonial Britons and members of the Bengali elite were keenly aware of each other’s metropolitan presence. See, for instance, the case of “Ramnarian Bysack and Sibnarian Bysack” of Pathuriaghat cited in *The Quarterly Oriental Magazine, Review, and Register* (March and June 1824), 1: 119. On the mixture of Mughal and European architectural elements found in Bengali mansions, see Chattopadhyay, *Representing Calcutta*, 153–67.
- 33** Abanindranath Tagore, *Jorasankora Dhare* (Calcutta: Vishwabharati, 1963), 16. Translation and italics are mine. Established in 1851 with the goal to train English and Eurasian female teachers, the Calcutta Normal School was integrated with the Calcutta Female Native Education Society by 1857. John F. Riddick, *The History of British India: A Chronology* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2006), 162. Its illustrious pupils included Abanindranath as well as his famous uncle, Rabindranath Tagore.
- 34** Tagore, *My Reminiscences*, 10.
- 35** Benoy Ghosh, ed., *Selections from English Periodicals of Nineteenth Century Bengal*, vol. 3: 1849–56 (Calcutta: Papyrus, 1980), 224.
- 36** Chattopadhyay, *Representing Calcutta*, 151.
- 37** Reverend Walter Kelly Ferminger, *Thacker’s Guide to Calcutta* (Calcutta: Thacker, Spink, and Company, 1906), 64. The term *banyan* cuts two ways: on the one hand, it refers to the *bania* or merchant; on the other, it invokes the banyan tree. For the connection between a *bania* and a banyan, see Romita Ray, *Under the Banyan Tree: Relocating the Picturesque in British India* (London: Yale University Press, 2013), 108–10.
- 38** Chattopadhyay, *Representing Calcutta*, 151; Dutta, *Calcutta*, 63.
- 39** Chattopadhyay, *Representing Calcutta*, 154.
- 40** A *thakur dalan* is a pavilion for a deity.
- 41** Chattopadhyay, *Representing Calcutta*, 151–54.
- 42** *Ibid.*, 156–57; Nilina Deb Lal, ed., *Calcutta Built Heritage Today: An INTACH Guide* (Kolkata: INTACH Calcutta Regional Chapter, 2006), 35.
- 43** Chattopadhyay, *Representing Calcutta*, 157.
- 44** Kaliprasanna Sinha, *The Observant Owl: Hootum’s Vignettes of Nineteenth-Century Calcutta*, trans. Swarup Roy (New Delhi: Black Kite, 2008), 38.
- 45** On the latter subject, see Chattopadhyay, *Representing Calcutta*, 160.
- 46** Sumanta Banerjee, *The Parlour and the Streets: Elite and Popular Culture in Nineteenth-Century Calcutta* (Calcutta: Seagull, 1989). The eminent Bengali poet and dramatist Michael Madhusudan Dutta (1824–73) translated the play. Chattopadhyay, *Representing Calcutta*, 140, 159, 185–86.
- 47** The term *puja* can be applied to both “public celebrations” and to more private, domestic rituals of “worship and devotion.” Anjan Ghosh, “Spaces of Recognition: Puja and Power in Contemporary Calcutta,” *Journal of South African Studies* 26, no. 2 (June 2000): 289, note 1. For an excellent overview of the public and private celebrations of Durga puja, see Jyotirmoyee Sarma, “Puja Associations in West Bengal,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 28, no. 3 (May 1969): 579–94. Other goddesses were also worshiped in Calcutta, most notably, Kali and Jagadhatri. Jagadhatri puja was less spectacular than Durga puja.
- 48** The *pratima* is a statue made of unfired clay. It is consecrated before the rituals and prayers of Durga puja commence.
- 49** Jaya Chaliha and Bunny Gupta, “Durga Puja in Calcutta,” in *Calcutta: The Living City*, ed. Sukanta Chaudhuri, vol. 2 (Calcutta: Oxford University Press, 1990), 332–33; Dutta, *Calcutta*, 55.
- 50** The principal figure in an assemblage of five deities, the goddess Durga stands on top of a lion while vanquishing the demon Mahishāsura disguised as a buffalo. She is flanked on either side by her four children: Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth; Saraswati, the goddess of knowledge; Ganesh, the god who bestows success; and Kārtik, the god of courage. Sarma, “Puja Associations,” 583–84. Sovabazar Rajbari’s Durga *pratima* is one of the few in Kolkata to still include a traditional white lion whose form is more reminiscent of a horse than a feline animal. Several nineteenth-century Bengali *pata* paintings depict just such a lion, including an 1860 drawing of the iconic ensemble situated beneath a semi-circular *chalachitra* (painted backdrop) supported by columns embellished with neoclassical elements (figure 4). The hybrid blend of European architectural

detail and Bengali craftsmanship is very much in tune with the setting in which the goddess might be displayed—the neoclassically inspired *rajbari*.

51 Tithi Bhattacharya, "Tracking the Goddess: Religion, Community, and Identity in the Durga Puja Ceremonies of Nineteenth-Century Calcutta," *Journal of Asian Studies* 66, no. 4 (November 2007): 939.

52 Chaliha and Gupta, "Durga Puja in Calcutta," 332–33.

53 Quoted in Rachel Fell McDermott, *Revelry, Rivalry, and Longing for the Goddesses of Bengal: The Fortunes of Hindu Festivals* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 41.

54 John Zephaniah Holwell quoted in McDermott, *Revelry, Rivalry, and Longing*, 41.

55 Quoted in McDermott, *Revelry, Rivalry, and Longing*, 41, 271, 9n.

56 Chaliha and Gupta, "Durga Puja in Calcutta," 333; Bhattacharya, "Tracking the Goddess," 941, 944; Brajendra-nath Bandyopadhyay quoted in Bhattacharya, "Tracking the Goddess," 959. When the first wave of Calcutta's English merchant houses ran into financial trouble in the 1830s, the fortunes of Bengali merchants collaborating with them fluctuated as well. As a result, lavish festivals like Durga puja became markedly less elaborate and, as one English newspaper pointed out, less desirable for the European elite (only "less reputable Europeans" and "natives" were in attendance). See Banerjee, *Parlour and the Streets*, 40–41.

57 Quoted in Bhattacharya, "Tracking the Goddess," 940.

58 Bhattacharya, "Tracking the Goddess," 944–46. As Bhattacharya points out, these forms of entertainment established new visual and social registers in a city where a cohesive urban identity was still in flux in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

59 Quoted in McDermott, *Revelry, Rivalry, and Longing*, 47.

60 Bulloram Mullick, *Home Life in Bengal: An Account of the Everyday Life of a Hindu Home at the Present Day* (Calcutta: W. Newman, 1885), 156.

61 *Ibid.*, 156.

62 Bhattacharya, "Tracking the Goddess," 939.

63 Tagore, *Jorasankora Dhare*, 15.

64 Minakshie Dasgupta, Bunny Gupta, and Jaya Chaliha, *The Calcutta Cookbook: A Treasury of Recipes from Pavement to Palace* (New Delhi: Penguin, 1995), 158.

65 Nirbed Ray, *Swami Vivekananda: A Pictorial Tribute Released on the Occasion of 150th Birth Anniversary of Swami Vivekananda* (Kolkata: The Asiatic Society, 2012), 104–5, 117–18.

66 Pratapaditya Pal, "Kali, Calcutta, and Kalighat Pictures," *Marg* 41, no. 4 (June 1990): 1–16.

67 McDermott, *Revelry, Rivalry, and Longing*, 186–87; Pal, "Kalighat Pictures," 4.

68 Tagore, *My Reminiscences*, 68.

69 On the subject of American paintings collected by Calcutta's *bhadralok*, see Susan S. Bean, "An Art World Transformed: Paintings from 19th Century Calcutta at the Peabody Essex Museum," *Orientalism* 34, no. 6 (2003): 42.

70 Abanindranath Tagore, *Apon Katha: My Story*, trans. Rimi B. Chatterjee (Chennai: Tara, 2004), 95.

71 Mrs. S. C. Belnos, *Twenty Four Plates Illustrative of Hindoo and European Manners in Bengal* (London, 1832), n.p. See Belnos's description accompanying "The Nautch."

72 *Ibid.*, n.p.

73 Tagore, *Jorasankora Dhare*, 23.

74 Amin Jaffer, *Furniture from British India and Ceylon: A Catalogue of the Collections in the Victoria and Albert Museum and the Peabody Essex Museum* (New Delhi: Timeless, 2001), 61–62.

75 Advertisement in *Cook's Oriental Travellers' Gazette and Home and Foreign Advertiser*, March 1892, 4.

76 Jaffer, *Furniture from British India and Ceylon*, 110–11, 118.

77 For more about Bandyopadhyay's observations published in his book *Kolkata Kamalalaya*, see Chandikaprosad Ghosal, "Kolkata's Changing Puja Ethos,"

Economic and Political Weekly 41, no. 6 (November 18, 2006): 4729.

78 Sinha, *Observant Owl*, 33.

79 Translation is mine. Tagore, *Jorasankora Dhare*, 20. *Chotopishima* is a paternal aunt; specifically, one's father's youngest sister. *Dadamoshai* is a grandfather (Girindranath Tagore was Abanindranath Tagore's grandfather).

80 *Boroma* or Older Mother (literally "Big Mother")—typically, an older female relative (aunt or great aunt). Tagore, *Jorasankora Dhare*, 21.

81 Tagore, *Jorasankora Dhare*, 22–23.

82 *Ibid.*, 65.

83 Rimli Bhattacharya, "Binodini Dasi and the Public Theatre in Nineteenth-Century Bengal," in Binodini Das, *My Story and My Life as an Actress*, trans. Rimli Bhattacharya (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1998), 4. See also Das, *My Story*, 131.

84 Dutta, *Calcutta*, 223.

85 Das, *My Story and My Life*, 131.

86 Dutta, *Calcutta*, 234.

87 Michael Kinnear, *The Gramophone Company's First Indian Recordings 1899–1908* (Bombay: Ramdas Bhatkal for Popular Prakashan Private Limited, 1994), 16.

88 Tagore, *Apon Katha*, 35.

89 Tagore, *Jorasankora Dhare*, 62, translation is mine; Tagore, *My Reminiscences*, 68.

90 Tagore, *Jorasankora Dhare*, 19.

91 Tagore, *Apon Katha*, 65.

92 With an underground metro snaking through the city's tunnels, the tram is now a quaint artifact in Kolkata's overcrowded roads, while the ubiquitous mobile phone with "ring tones" ranging from popular Bollywood jingles to salsa dance beats has supplanted the black box with its rotating dial and unwieldy receiver.

93 Tagore, *My Reminiscences*, 14–15.

94 *Ibid.*, 15. Gaganendranath and Abanindranath Tagore were brothers.

95 *Ibid.*, 15.

96 *Ibid.*, 90. Italics are mine.

97 Chattopadhyay, *Representing Calcutta*, 154.

98 Also known as the "Black Pagoda," the Nabaratna Temple was built by Gobindaram Mitra, a tax collector employed by the East India Company. Dutta, *Calcutta*, 48; Roy, *Calcutta*, 161.

99 Rabindranath Tagore, *The Diary of a Westward Voyage*, trans. Indu Dutt (New York: Asia Publishing, 1962), 120.

100 Dutta, *Calcutta*, 50; Janice Leoshko, "The Mosques of Calcutta," in *Changing Visions, Lasting Images: Calcutta Through 300 Years*, ed. Pratapaditya Pal (Bombay: Marg Publications, 1990), 68.

101 Mónica Degen, *Sensing Cities: Regenerating Public Life in Barcelona and Manchester* (London: Routledge, 2008), 199.

102 Dutta, *Calcutta*, 51, 76, 169; Jael Silliman, *Jewish Portraits, Indian Frames: Women's Narratives from a Diaspora of Hope* (Lebanon, N.H.: Brandeis University Press, 2001), 37–38; Anne Hardgrove, *Community and Public Culture: The Marwaris of Calcutta, c. 1897–1997* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 65–74.

103 David Kipf, *The Brahmo Samaj and the Shaping of the Modern Indian Mind* (New Delhi: Archives, 1988), 162.

104 Srilata Chatterjee, *Congress Politics in Bengal 1919–1939* (London: Anthem, 2002), 19–20.