A Journey through Bengali Culture: Avenues of Kolkata

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Abstract: **This paper presents an overview on Bengali culture.**

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1. Introduction

In the both underdeveloped and developed countries urban area is confronted with different ethnic communities having their own form of landscape. In the colonial period cities of the different countries are the lucrative opportunities open for business inertia. Some Indian cities are also not out of them. The present Kolkata previously known as Calcutta by the British colonial period made this piece of land as a cosmopolitan precinct. Different globe tottering Asian (Chinese), European (Armenian, Greek, Anglo-Indian) as well as provincial communities (Marwari, Gujrati, Punjabi, Bihari, Oriya, South Indians etc.) of India come over Kolkata mainly for testing their business fortune. In that connection multicultural community create a mosaic over city in different remarks. Nature of ethnic communities in urban area is very much complex because it create a cross cutting impact over racial characteristics, national heritage, language, religion etc. So, ethnic identity factors variably change according to the cultural practices. All the ethnic communities in urban areas try to make an interactive space between them. So these communities try to establish their group identities, as well as make group interaction, acceptance and adapt the multiple language. So in that sense Kolkata is one of the cities in India which has passed through glorious history from pre-colonial period to post-colonial period. Transformation from the small core of village to a metro city, people of diversified culture made vital imprint on landscape. These entire ethnic groups in Kolkata shared not only geographical space but also occupied social space. In that connection we can observe a shadow of local global linkage in the city.

2. Multi culturalism

To understand the concept of multiculturalism, we need to know what culture is. E.B. Tylor was the first 19th century anthropologist to define and make broad use of the term 'culture'. According to E. B. Tylor: "Culture is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, customs and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of Society."

The meaning of culture in the opinion of great author Mathew Arnold, "It is sweetness and light, it is the best that has been thought and said, it is internal to the human mind and general to the beauty and worth of human nature." Basically multiculturalism means the agglomeration of cultures within a certain space. Some definitions of multiculturalism are given below.

According to Turner Terence, "Multiculturalism is one manifestation of the postmodernist reaction to the delegitimization of the state and the erosion of the hegemony of the dominant culture in advanced capitalist countries." Alex Thio argues, "The co-existence of numerous sub cultures can develop into Multiculturalism, a state in which all sub-cultures are equal to one another in the same society."

According to Ramakant Sinari, "From a utilitarian point of view tolerance on the part of everybody is a prerequisite for the world community's unity, stability and progress, it ought to be the norm of one's behavior irrespective of the nature of circumstances one happens to be in."

In the words of Sarah Joseph, "Multiculturalism is used to refer to a desired end-state, as a way of referring to a society in which different cultures are respected and the reproduction of culturally defined group is protected and social diversity celebrated."

Bhikhu Parekh comments on the equal value of culture: "Multiculturalism makes culture the central fact of moral and political life and is committed to some form of moral relativism. It holds that individuals are culturally embedded and shaped, that their culture is the most important fact of their life, that cultures are self-contained wholes and neither permit nor can be evaluated by transcultural and universal standards, that they are or should be presumed to be equal value, and that cultural practices need no further authority than the fact they are part of a group's culture. "

According to Gurpreet Mahajan, "Awareness about the dangers of cultural majoritariansim, coupled with the emphasis on cultural diversity, has made preservation of minority cultures a primary concern of multiculturalism."

John Rex says, "Diversity has to be recognized within ethnic communities, as well as between the separate communities, and there must be the possibility of political expression for a variety of different types of individuals with differing types of affiliation to their own communities. The notion of diversity

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receives a positive value in the discourse of multiculturalism."

As a Rajeev Bhargava points out: "Multiculturalism brings together a number of distinct themes such as identity, recognition, cultural belonging, which all respond to common human needs but are understood and dealt with variously in different societies."

Samuel Freeman argues: "Multiculturalism advocates that one's cultural identity is so central to a person's good, each distinct cultural group in a multicultural society should recognize and respect the cultural practices of others and not impose its norms, particularly its liberal norms, on them."

Will Kymlicka says: "Modern societies are increasingly confronted with minority groups demanding recognition of their identity, and accommodation of their cultural differences."

So, by the above definitions multiculturalism means the coexistence of different cultures within a certain space and the diversity of culture makes a united society.
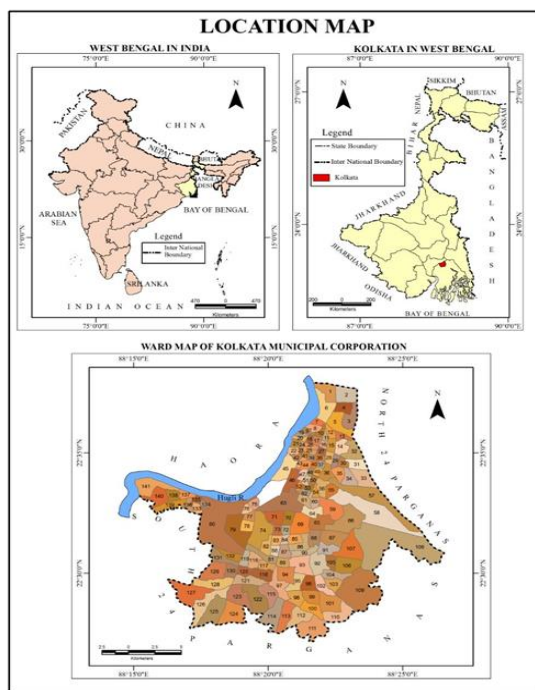
3. Geographical personality of Kolkata

Fig. 1. Location of map

Kolkata (known as Calcutta till recently) has undergone certain clear phases of growth into a metropolitan complex. The most significant phases that have impacted upon its socio-economic, cultural and political profile are: the partition of Bengal (1905); the independence of the country (1947) Bangladesh War of independence (1971); and finally the onset of liberalization and the entry of the world market. All these events on the one hand sullied its slowly emanating 'urban' image; and on the other heightened to almost institutional levels the revolutionary potential that had already been rooted in the region, as a result of the widespread growth of education and social reforms all through the nineteenth century. These events

also witnessed huge population displacements, refugees, impoverished ruralites, and the plain fortune seeker found these moments opportune to relocate to the emerging eastern metropolis of India. This to all intents did not allow the pure urban form to develop. On the other hand, the gross inability of the administrative structure to address the issues of growing poverty and political non-representation of all the classes fueled collective action, either as direct political agitation, or through written protest. To all intents it cannot, since its composition, its representative character and its spirit of agitations both verbal and written reflect a continuing pre-modernity, not visible in other metropolises in like measure.

A. Traditional Bengali Culture in kolkata

A person who proud to be a Bengali, is a Bengali. Culture contains religious belief, language, dressing, food habit, architecture etc. Bengali language is the heart of Bengali culture. People of Bengal as Kolkata use to talk in Bengali, which is the sweetest language of the World. Anybody can call you 'Dada'(brother) if they does not know your name. where you are seven or seventy, Dada is a common term to use to can any person in Kolkata. Apart from language bengalies have their own dressing style. Women of Bengali people use to ware Saree and men use to ware Dhuti and Punjabi. Housing structure of Bengali people in Kolkata is really different from any other cultural group. In every Bengali house, there must be a corridor. An open space in centre of the house has to be there for family gathering. 'Mach-Vat' (Fish and rice) is Bengali's favourite food ever. Fish must be there in every bengali's lunch plate everyday. Bengalies never think any food meal without fish. Apart from fish item, bengalies wants 4-5 types of dishes in their plate. It has started from fried vegetables to end of meat curry. And in the end sweet dish must be there. 'Rosogolla'(sweet) stays in every bengali's heart. Any bengali's birthday is incomplete without having 'Payes' from his mother's hand. Joint family is so common in Kolkata. Bengalies are love to stay together with all family member. Every Bengali wanted to meet and talk to their neighbours. Neighbours are became family to them. They used to talk in free time, play together, in every festival they participate together. Children of Bengali family must have to learn singing (Rabindra Sangeet) or dancing (Indian classical). A poet is always hidden in every Bengali man. Traditional bengalies are full of religious faith, customs, belief and rituals. A common term is always use as 'Bangalirbaromaseteroparbon' which means bengalies have 13 festivals in 12 month. Bengali's festival has started from Bengali new year celebration which is called Poila Baisakh. In this day people wish everyone, eat good, business men of Bengal start their new year credit-debit details book called 'Halkhata'. Sweets are there in every festival of bengalies. After new year celebration, 'Jamai Sasthi' is there. Where every son-in-lows being honoured by their mother-in-lows. 'Bhaiphota' is a sweetest festival for every Bengali brother and sister. Through different worship of God and Goddess, Bengali comes to the biggest festival of them, the

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Durga Puja. Puja pandals are there, worshiping of Goddess continues four days, pandal hopping are there etc. Bijaya Dashami (last day of celebration) is celebrated by hugging each other and feeding with sweets. Worshipping of Goddess Laxmi in every Bengali family is common. Then, Bengali celebrates the festival of lights. 'PoushPrbon' is quite tempted festival in winter for bengalies. They use to make different sweet dishes for celebrating this festival. 'DolYatra', festival of colours happens in the end of every Bengali year. And bengalies are preparing for another year. Above all bengalies love their culture, it stays in their heart. Only bengalies can count the days after Puja for next year Puja. Only bengalies are love to eat Pithe next day morning of that festival. Rabindra Sangeet, Najrul Geeti etc. are bengalies pride. Novels, play, poem, story writing etc. intellect stays with bengalies. Rabindranath Tagore is always bengalies pride and inspiration. Tagore is the only Bengali writer who wrote nation antham of two States. Feluda, Bomkesh etc. detective characters are always favourite of bengalies. Satyajit Roy is always best film maker for bengalies. Bengali culture fills bengalies. Bengalies are emotionally attached with their culture.

4. Modernization: Overview

Modernization theory both attempts to identify the social variables that contribute to social progress and development of societies and seeks to explain the process of social evolution. Modernization theory is subject to criticism originating among socialist and free-market ideologies, world-systems theorists, globalization theorists and dependency theorists among others. Modernization theory stresses not only the process of change but also the responses to that change. It also looks at internal dynamics while referring to social and cultural structures and the adaptation of new technologies. Modernization theory maintains that traditional societies will develop as they adopt more modern practices. Proponents of modernization theory claim that modern states are wealthier and more powerful and that their citizens are freer to enjoy a higher standard of living. Developments such as new data technology and the need to update traditional methods in transport, communication and production, it is argued, make modernization necessary or at least preferable to the status quo. That view makes critique difficult since it implies that such developments control the limits of human interaction, not vice versa. And yet, seemingly paradoxically, it also implies that human agency controls the speed and severity of modernization. Supposedly, instead of being dominated by tradition, societies undergoing the process of modernization typically arrive at forms of governance dictated by abstract principles. Traditional religious beliefs and cultural traits, according to the theory, usually become less important as modernization takes hold.

Historians link modernization to the processes of urbanization and industrialization and the spread of education. As Kendall (2007) notes, "Urbanization accompanied modernization and the rapid process of industrialization." In sociological critical theory, modernization is linked to an overarching process of rationalisation. When modernization increases within a society, the individual becomes increasingly important, eventually replacing the family or community as the fundamental unit of society.

A. Modernization in Bengali culture: A critical view

Although it is not very much constrained to Bengali culture and applies to globally, but it is especially and boldly true for Kolkata. Globally, there is a trend going on, named Anti-intellectualism. We can see the rise of Global leaders who are showing different trajectory to it. Apart from the global trend, we have seen a unique picture in Kolkata. Here, intellectuals change their position based on the possibility of attaining powerful positions in the administration and money. This mostly happened in recent few years. This probably didn't happen so pervasively in the other parts of the World. During the period of 2009 – present, lots of the intellectuals often change their political support. While this kind of change did not occur because of the ideological issues. Rather, that change was greatly motivated by personal gains. Because of intellectuals' such behaviour, general public somewhat lost their trust to the intellectuals. Because of intellectuals' brazen affiliations to the corrupt political personalities and their promotions of incorrigible leaders, public lost interests in this higher class of culture.

It is being believed that general public has now become more populists. They are following the culture of other state of India. We had our own affections towards the contemporary art, drama, parallel films. However, that has been lost somewhere down the line. Public is now interested mostly to the popular Hindi films and songs. Even popular Bengali films which are mostly copies of South Indian films are not doing business well. The reason is that those films are now available with dubbing in Hindi in most TV channels.

Now, people are even publicly shaming intellectuals for being intellectual. It is true that, in a culture there are always some populist methods of communication which are favoured. However, now-a-days, everything which needs some thoughts is abhorred greatly. People just don't want to think any more. It is very disappointing because the great Bengali director once said in one of his movies, "Think, think and practice to think."

5. Conclusion

Kolkata is perhaps the most important cultural centre of India. The city is the birthplace of modern Indian literary and artistic thought and of Indian nationalism, and its citizens have made great efforts to preserve Indian culture and civilization. The blending of Eastern and Western cultural influences over the centuries has stimulated the creation of numerous and diverse organizations that contribute to Kolkata's cultural life. In addition to the universities, these include the Asiatic Society of Bengal, the Bengal Literary Society (Bangiya Sahitya Parishad), the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, the

Academy of Fine Arts, the Birla Academy of Art and Culture, and the Maha Bodhi Society.

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