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The White Town of Calcutta Under the Rule of the East India Company

P. J. MARSHALL

Late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century Calcutta was the setting for the first sustained encounter between Asian intellectuals and the west. An Indian intelligentsia living in Calcutta responded in a most creative way to aspects of European culture that became available to them in the city. Much about this response is now contentious. If the term Bengal Renaissance is still generally applied to it, the implications of that term are disputed. It is no longer necessarily assumed that 'modern' India was born in early nineteenth-century Calcutta by a fusing of what was western and what was 'traditional'. Assumptions that Indian cultures in general and that of Hindu Bengal in particular lacked a capacity to change and to develop on their own internal dynamics, whatever the input from the west, now look more than a little 'orientalist'. Furthermore, even if the Bengal Renaissance can be shown to have had its roots in its own culture, to some recent critics it was still a movement whose impact was severely limited by the very narrow base on which it rested: an elite group enclosed in a colonial situation.[1] Yet, however the Renaissance may be reassessed, there can still be no doubt that Calcutta under the East India Company contained Indian intellectuals of exceptional talent, who absorbed much from the west. 'The excitement over the literature, history and philosophy of Europe as well as the less familiar scientific knowledge was deep and abiding', Professor Raychaudhuri has recently written.[2]

This paper will be concerned with the channels through which knowledge of the west passed to Indians in Calcutta; it will not attempt any assessment of the uses made of this knowledge or of

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[1] For recent discussions, see the essays in V. C. Joshi (ed.), *Rammohun Roy and the Process of Modernization in India* (New Delhi, 1975); B. De, 'A Historiographical Critique of Renaissance Analogues', *Perspectives in Social Science* (Calcutta, 1977–), I.

[2] *Europe Reconsidered: Perceptions of the West in Nineteenth-century Bengal* (New Delhi, 1988), p. 3.

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the controversies surrounding the Bengal Renaissance. It will argue that private self-indulgence by individual Europeans made a greater contribution to Indian awareness of the west than public policy. Any attempts made by the East India Company to propagate western knowledge, through educational grants after 1813, the founding of colleges or official encouragement of the use of English, probably had less practical effect than the largely accidental diffusion of western culture by the British elite of the white town of Calcutta. The whites of Calcutta lavished money and effort on creating for themselves the amenities of what they regarded as civilized British urban life on a scale that left abundant pickings for Indians who were minded to take advantage of their prodigality. A significant number of Indians were so minded.

The emphasis in this paper will be on accidental rather than on planned diffusion. There were of course Europeans who, if very much on their own terms, actively tried to develop cultural contacts with Indian Calcutta. Such people have received abundant attention in recent years. Much has been written about 'orientalist' scholarship, about men such as Nathaniel Halhed, Sir William Jones, Charles Wilkins, Henry Thomas Colebrooke or the Prinseps and the Asiatic Society.[3] Much too has been written about Christian missionaries, above all about the Serampore Baptists and their encouragement of Bengali prose as well as their concern for opening schools and colleges.[4] Other educational projects, such as the School Society and the School Book Society or the founding of Hindu College, also brought Indians and Europeans together. The wider significance of the employment of learned Indians at Fort William College to instruct young East India Company servants in Asian languages has also been elucidated.[5]

Welcome as it is, such a prolific body of scholarship may ultimately give a rather misleading impression about the European side of the cultural contacts that took place in Calcutta. Those who actively sought intellectual contact with Indian people were probably never more than a tiny minority of the British population at any time in the eighteenth or early nineteenth centuries. The vast majority were

[3] Eg. Rosane Rocher, *Orientalism, Poetry and the Millennium: the Checkered Life of Nathaniel Brassey Halhed* (New Delhi, 1983); Garland H. Cannon, *The Life and Mind of Oriental Jones* (Cambridge, 1990); O. J. Kejariwal, *The Asiatic Society of Bengal and the Discovery of India's Past* (New Delhi, 1988).

[4] Eg. Daniel Potts, *British Baptist Missionaries in India* (Oxford, 1967).

[5] David Kopf, *British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance* (Berkeley, 1969).

not interested in any exchange of ideas with Indians. They did not expect to give anything, still less to receive. They were solely concerned with sustaining British cultural life for themselves with as few concessions as possible to an alien environment. This paper will concentrate on the aloof majority, rather than on the minority who actively sought contact. It will try to show how the majority's cultural self-sufficiency and insistence on maintaining British norms to the fullest extent inadvertently provided a very rich feast for Indians curious about the west.

The white population of Calcutta during the period of the Company's rule never amounted to much more than that of a large village or small town. It probably did not exceed one thousand until late in the eighteenth century; 3138 'English' were returned in the 1837 census; 7534 'Europeans' in the 1850 census and 11,224 in the much more rigorous census of 1866.[6] Soldiers were always the main element: a nominal garrison of two or three hundred Europeans of very mixed provenance was maintained in the old Fort William. Work on a vast new Fort William began immediately after the recovery of the city in 1757. A British regiment, King's or Company's, was normally posted to Fort William as part of the garrison and large numbers of white troops were temporarily stationed there in transit to postings up-country. Fort William accounted for 2032 of the 11,224 Europeans on the 1866 census night. Depending on the time of year, large numbers of Europeans could be found in and around the port of Calcutta. The crews of the East India Company's ships that came into Calcutta were entirely European, as were the major part of the crew on the private ships trading from British, European or North American ports with the ending of the Company's monopoly. Calcutta was also the home port of a very large fleet of 'country' ships trading round Asia. Such ships were manned for the most part by Indian sailors, but some British seafaring men earned a living on them as gunners, bosuns or officers. On 8 January 1866 there were 112 European-owned sailing ships and twenty steamers in the port with 2052 whites recorded as being on the ships.[7] Soldiers and sailors were likely to be transient members of white Calcutta,

[6] For 1837 and 1850, see 'Growth of Calcutta', *Census of India 1951*, VI, pt iii, 2; for 1866, see A. M. Dowleans, *Report on the Census of Calcutta* (Calcutta, 1866), pp. 12–22.

[7] *Ibid*., p. 19.

except for the garrison in the fort, who, officers apart, lived in a fairly rigorous segregation.

To the rest of white society, European soldiers and sailors were objects of apprehension. Their hard drinking and potential for violent crime were notorious. White soldiers and sailors featured prominently in all judicial proceedings involving murder or robbery with violence. Events in 1795 marked something of a climax. A European gang was responsible for a series of robberies. One of its members turned crown evidence and revealed that 'when the whole gang was collected, consisting of Europeans, Portuguese, Italians and other foreigners, they would muster 200 strong, when they intended to execute a design they had in view of robbing the Hindostan Bank.' Six of them were executed, 70 'vagrant' whites were rounded up and, after a separate episode, two privates of the Company's Europeans were branded and imprisoned with hard labour for highway robbery in the middle of Calcutta.[8]

In spite of careful attempts to prevent it, there was a steady seepage from the ranks of transient sailors and soldiers into the established population of resident white inhabitants. Deserters presumably had to go to ground for a time before seeking regular employment, but soldiers of accepted good character and some substance seem to have had no difficulty in buying themselves out and remaining in India as civilians. With a vast and adaptable Indian labour force readily available in Calcutta, openings for unprivileged whites were not very great. But even in the mid-eighteenth century there were some European domestic servants, artisans and shopkeepers, as a census for 1766 reveals.[9] In the first half of the nineteenth century the numbers of such people increased. Great houses continued to employ European coachmen, footmen and ladies' maids. Shops opened under European management, wine merchants being the most numerous; no fewer than 27 were counted in an 1844 publication. Master builders, tailors, shoemakers, cabinetmakers, coachmakers, watchmakers, carvers and gilders set up their businesses employing Indian craftsmen. There were four dancing masters, five professors of the violin and two guitar teachers from which to choose.[10] There was some demand for European clerks and bookkeepers. A limited transference of western technology also created

[8] *Selections from the Calcutta Gazettes of the Years 1789–1797* (Calcutta, 1865), pp. 417–19.
[9] O[riental and] I[ndia] O[ffice] C[ollections], Eur MS G/37/18, no. 9.
[10] J. H. Stocqueler, *The Hand-Book of India* (London, 1844), pp. 212, 346.

employment for mechanics and engineers in shipbuilding, distilleries, paper-making or operating steamboats on the Ganges and the steam engines being applied to some industrial processes.[11]

At any time during the rule of the East India Company there was a heavy predominance of males over females among the European population of Calcutta. For the eighteenth century the disproportion cannot be quantified but it is likely to have been very marked indeed. By the 1850s it had become less pronounced for the civilian population, but remained very great for the huge mass of European soldiers and sailors. Throughout the period the great bulk of Europeans who went to India were relatively young men. Even if they were already married, they were not likely to be accompanied by their wives. For regiments of the regular British army there were limits on the number of wives permitted to travel abroad. Although by then 12% of a regiment's strength was permitted to take wives with them, in 1861 only 6.5% of the soldiers of the Queen's regiments were in fact married and many of the wives were unlikely to have been of European origin.[12] The proportion of married Company's soldiers was higher, but nearly all their wives can be assumed to have been Indian Christians or people of mixed race. For most of the elite in the eighteenth century and vitually all of it by the 1850s, 'marriage' meant choosing a person of European origin. Such marriages were not very common in the eighteenth century. Delaying marriage until one's return to Britain, while cohabiting with Indian concubines, was a very common pattern. It has been estimated that only one in ten of the Company's army officers and one in four of its civil servants married in Bengal from 1757 to 1800.[13] By 1861 the proportion of married civil servants in India as a whole was over 45%.[14] The 1866 census of Calcutta showed that if the overwhelmingly male populations of Fort William and the port were excluded, the proportion of males to females had fallen to 118 to 100.[15]

Most European women presumably came to Calcutta as people already married. In the late eighteenth century the alleged migration of single women seeking rich husbands in India became matter

[11] Discussed in B. B. Kling, *Partner in Empire: Dwarkanath Tagore and the Age of Enterprise in Eastern India* (Berkeley, 1976).
[12] *Parliamentary Papers* 1863, XIX, i, 101.
[13] S. C. Ghosh, *The Social Condition of the British Community in Bengal 1757–1800* (Leiden, 1970), pp. 58–61.
[14] *Parliamentary Papers*, 1863, XIX, i, 101.
[15] Dowleans, *Report on Census of Calcutta*, p. 15.

for comment, much of it ill-natured. Newly-arrived unattached ladies were virtually put on display for potential suitors in a ceremony called 'sitting up'. The term 'the fishing fleet' had a much longer life. By the 1840s, however, it was confidently asserted that such practices were a thing of the past.

> The reproach of mercenary purposes does not lie at the door of those who go to India at the present day. The great majority proceed thither as the wives of officers or civilians who come to England to seek partners for life, or they go out, after receiving a fitting education, to join their parents, brothers, sisters, or other relations, and to take up their abode with them permanently.[16]

From its earliest days, white Calcutta had the reputation of being a settlement dominated by wealthy men who lived high. By the 1720s the Company's servants in their permitted capacity as merchants on their own behalf had won for themselves considerable wealth from Asian seaborne trade. In the words of a contemporary, 'Most gentlemen and ladies in Bengal live both splendidly and pleasantly'.[17] The Directors in London complained bitterly about stories of 'an expensive and extravagant way of life, particularly in equipage and show' and that the Governor had 'a sett of musick at his table and a coach and six with guards and running footmen'.[18]

To the austere, the sacking of Calcutta in 1756 seemed to be just retribution meted out to an extravagant and dissolute settlement, but ways were most emphatically not changed when the city was recaptured. Huge sums were paid in restitution by Mir Jafar, who also gave lavish rewards to anyone even remotely involved in his accession. Trade by sea quickly revived and obstacles to participating in Bengal's internal trade were swept away. From 1772 Calcutta became the administrative capital of Bengal. Company servants filled a range of posts remunerated at first by huge unofficial perquisites and profits and later by generous official salaries. Very great fortunes were made out of trade and office-holding for a few years. Competition to get appointed to Bengal, above all as a member of the Company's civil service, where prospects of a fortune were thought to be brightest, became so acute that only young men of wealthy and politically influential families stood much chance of suc-

[16] 'An Old Resident', *Real Life in India* (London, 1847), p. 144.

[17] Alexander Hamilton, *A New Account of the East Indies*, 2 vols (London, 1930), II, 7.

[18] OIOC, Letters of 25 January 1730, 3 December 1731, E/3/104, p. 674, E/3/105, p. 337.

cess. This produced an elite who prided itself on its gentility: sons of English landed, professional and financial families, together with a very large number of aspiring Scots, some two hundred of whom celebrated St Andrew's day in Calcutta in 1794 to 'the joyous sound of the bagpipes'.[19] The manner of life of the rich of Calcutta became even more elaborate and expensive. William Hickey described the rituals of celebrating the King's birthday or the new year, the public breakfasts of the Governor and Councillors and a hectic round of private hospitality. Money was spent lavishly on dress, on horses and carriages and on food and drink.[20]

Calcutta of the first half of the nineteenth century was not the gold-rush city that it had once been, but it was still dominated by a rich white elite who spent freely, and it struck strangers as one of the most expensive places on earth in which to try to maintain a respectable standard of life. At the very highest level, Governors General, blessed or cursed, according to their points of view, with Wellesley's vision of the splendour of their position and with his palatial Government House, had little alternative but to live with a pomp and circumstance appropriate to both. Civil servants of any seniority were expected also to maintain proper standards. The leading members of the business community, the partners in the private banks, insurance companies and the ubiquitous agency houses, some thirty of which managed shipping, indigo factories and a wide range of activities beyond the scope of the Company's own trade, seem generally to have shared the civil servants' outlook on what was an appropriate way of life. John Palmer, for instance, was 'called the Prince of Merchants from his unbounded liberality, amiability and wealth ... His house was always open and a dinner table for nearly 20 always spread and nearly always filled. No stranger arrived then in Calcutta without dining there as a matter of course'.[21] Such men enjoyed a somewhat febrile prosperity, vulnerable to sudden collapses of credit in the 1830s and 1840s. Professional men also flourished in early nineteenth-century Calcutta. The Supreme Court, founded in 1774, dealt with a huge body of litigation involving Indians as well as Europeans, to the profit of the local bar and a number of well-established European attorneys, notorious for the

[19] *Calcutta Gazettes 1789–97*, p. 399.
[20] There is much material on this period in Ghosh, *The Social Condition of the British Community in Bengal*.
[21] Cited J. P. Losty, *Calcutta City of Palaces* (London, 1990), p. 88.

fees they charged. Doctors held in high regard could also charge extravagantly for their services.

Conspicuous consumption began with housing. Although they never achieved the kind of segregation that Europeans later established in some Indian towns by withdrawing to cantonments and civil lines, the British in Calcutta always aimed to live in their own town and were largely successful in this aim. A considerable part of Calcutta came to be known as 'the white town'.

The private enterprise of its inhabitants was the engine of the white town's growth and development. The Company greatly resented spending money on bricks and mortar in India. The first Fort William was built at its expense at the end of the seventeenth century, but private housing quickly grew up round it. Rebuilding and dramatic expansion followed Plassey. The Company took very little part in this beyond two immensely expensive projects, which must have confirmed its worst fears about building in India. A huge new Fort William was created, costing more than £1 million, much of which was attributable to fraud and over-charging, and Wellesley saddled the Company with the cost of a Government House built to his own specifications. Most other official buildings were put up as private speculations and then rented by the Company. The author of *The Hand-Book of India* of 1844 thought that Calcutta possessed only eighteen buildings specifically erected for public purposes, such as the Town Hall, the Writers' Building, colleges and various churches. The closest the Company came to being directly involved in such projects was in supporting the public lotteries like those for the Town Hall, which was completed in 1813. It was, however, the common opinion that Calcutta was distinguished not for its public buildings but for the 'private mansions' which dominated the white town.[22]

The topography of the white town has been reconstructed with much skill by J. P. Losty in his *City of Palaces*, published in 1990 in connexion with the British Library's exhibition of that title. A distinct British Calcutta began to take shape in the 1690s between the villages of Suttanuttee and Gobindpore on the right bank of the Hooghly river. A cluster of factory buildings had been fortified as Fort William by 1700. The fort was extended in the early eighteenth century and a church and a number of private British houses were

[22] Stocqueler, *Hand-Book*, p. 266. For a list of public buildings in 1850, see F. W. Simms, *Report on the Survey of Calcutta 1850* (Calcutta, 1851), p. 34.

built outside it, forming an embryo white town, 'built without order, as the builders thought most convenient for their own affairs, every one taking in what ground best pleased them for gardening, so that in most houses you must pass through a garden into the house, . . .'.[23] One of Dr Losty's plates, 'Fort William from the land side with St Anne's Church, c. 1730' shows ambitious buildings in an uncompromising European style, set in a spacious park. The Indian town, whose rapid growth reflected the huge volume of the Company's and private individuals' trade being transacted at Calcutta in the early eighteenth century, was well to the north, separated from the English settlement by Portuguese and Armenian neighbourhoods, each with its own church. In the British town private houses were built on land leased from the Company as Zamindar of Calcutta. 'Pottahs' were granted initially for thirty-one years with automatic renewal. A ground rent was paid to the Company.[24] The white town of the first half of the eighteenth century was sacked by Siraj-ud-daula's troops in 1756, but it had already set the pattern to be followed by the white town of the future: separation from Indian Calcutta would be maintained, the buildings of the white town would remain entirely European in inspiration and no attempt would be made for many years to plan the use of space or to lay out the town in any order.

The battle of Plassey set off a prolonged and vigorous building boom in white Calcutta. Much British and Indian capital was put into bricks and mortar. No systematic study of how the rebuilding and expansion of white Calcutta was financed has as yet been attempted. Most rich British people no doubt ultimately hoped to repatriate their capital to Britain. Investment in housing for them was likely to be a short-term speculation unless they judged the return from rent to be so favourable that they were willing to leave funds in India. Evidence of the heavy involvement of rich members of the Indian community in the development of the white town is abundant. A number of great Bengali entrepreneurs had done as well out of the Plassey 'revolution' as any European and were looking for attractive investments. Gokhal Goshal was certainly one of these. He had amassed a great fortune through trade and revenue administration at Chittagong by his death in 1779.[25] At least Rs 4,63,384

[23] Hamilton, *New Account*, II, 6.
[24] OIOC, Bengal to Directors, 27 November 1716, E/4/2, p. 84.
[25] OIOC, Bengal Revenue Consultations, 26 November 1784, P/50/55, pp. 222–3.

had been invested in 24 separate town properties. His heir, Jaynarayan Ghosal, was disposing of other Calcutta houses of his in 1783.[26] Ownership of property in white Calcutta frequently occurs in a series of published extracts from inventories of the estates left by rich Indians.[27] By the mid-nineteenth century most of the land in the white town was said to be owned by Indians.[28]

A number of architects were available for those wishing to build houses for Europeans to occupy. Some were professional engineers, employed by the Company on their forts and barracks, who also practised as private architects. John Fortnom, the Company's official civil architect from 1765 to 1779, Lieutenant James Agg, an army engineer who designed St John's Church and Warren Hastings's garden house at Alipore, and Colonel John Garstin, who was responsible for the Town Hall, fall into this category. Edward Tiretta, by birth a Venetian, who spent many years in Calcutta, and Thomas Lyon, who was sent to Calcutta at the Company's expense as a master carpenter and was able to return to Britain and buy an estate in Somerset after twelve years of private practice, were other prolific architects whose names appear very frequently in the records of transactions in town property. Some Calcutta householders bought the leases to their houses, but renting was a very common practice. For all the zest with which new houses were put up, the high level of rent in white Calcutta remained a matter of perennial complaint.

Much of the new building was on a grandiose scale. Strict classical models were applied with very few concessions to climate or available building materials. Visitors commented on 'the superb appearance' of houses with 'great projecting porticos, or surrounded by colonades or arcades, which give them the impression of Grecian temples'.[29] Another one wrote of

> spacious and showy houses, such as in appearance eclipse, (not to speak of London) almost any thing in Paris or Italy. I say in appearance for they will not bear an examination, they are all of brick plastered over and white washed, but all attempt some order of architecture and you see nothing but portico's, columnades, galleries etc etc, some few in good taste, several tolerable, and many more wretchedly bad.[30]

[26] W. K. Firminger, 'Materials for the History of Calcutta Streets and Houses 1780–1834', *Bengal Past and Present*, XIV (1917), 8.
[27] P. Sinha, *Calcutta in Urban History* (Calcutta, 1978), pp. 140–59.
[28] Stocqueler, *Hand-Book*, p. 246.
[29] W. Hodges, *Travels in India* (London, 1793), p. 15.
[30] L. S. Sutherland, 'A Letter from John Stewart', *The Indian Archives*, X (1956), 5.

Thick walls and high ceilings were intended to reduce heat. Verandahs offered further protection; these 'project on the sides which are most exposed to the sun and they are shaded at pleasure by large sheets of canvass which fall down and cover them from the sun . . .'.[31] Stone was not available for building in Calcutta. Brick was used, to which a stucco of white lime, or 'chunam', made from burnt shells, was usually applied. If the surface was kept in good repair, the effect of glistening white buildings was very striking.

The building boom began on the site of the old white town. A new square, called Tank Square, was laid out on the land once occupied by the park. Old Court House Street led out of Tank Square to the south, intersecting with the new Esplanade which ran from east to west to the river. Further south still was the Chowringhee Road, which formed the western boundary of the area of extensive new European building called Chowringhee, laid out around new streets, Park Street, Theatre Road or Russell Street. The density of housing in this area was still low. Houses were set in extensive gardens. What were regarded in the eighteenth century as secluded 'garden houses' had been built even further to the south or the west, in Garden Reach, where they very much impressed visitors coming up the river from the ships, in Alipore or Ballygunge.

Although many of the houses in the new white town that had grown up south and west of Tank Square were owned by Indian investors, their occupants were exclusively European. Map-makers of the early nineteenth century confidently delineated the outlines of white and black town. The main Indian town, itself undergoing dramatic growth, was still located in northern Calcutta. Some racial intermixing did, however, take place to the north of Tank Square. European business premises in Lall Bazaar, Bow Bazaar and Dharamtollah merged into what Dr Pradip Sinha has called the 'intermediate town', inhabited by poor whites, Indian Christians and people of mixed race.[32] Even in the main white town the Indian presence must have been overwhelming. The topographical scenes depicted by the great illustrators of Calcutta, the Daniells, Sir Charles D'Oyly or James Baillie Fraser, invariably depict European buildings in a setting of Indian people going about their business in ways that might or might not have concerned the ladies and gentlemen of the

[31] Mitchell Library, Glasgow, George Bogle to Elizabeth Bogle, 29 August 1770, Bogle MSS, 7.

[32] Sinha, *Calcutta in Urban History*, pp. 37–44.

white town. There was also an extensive resident Indian population. In the 1770s a jaundiced British observer commented that: '. . . the natives were made to know that they might erect their chappor (thatched) huts in what part of the town they pleased . . . Every man permitted his own servants to erect straw huts against the outside of his house, but without digging holes, to prevent more disagreeable neighbours from occupying the spot.'[33] Nineteenth-century accounts describe the proliferation of Indian huts in the interstices of the white town. The term 'bustee' was being applied to them.

Contemporary illustrations not only make it clear that strict racial segregation never operated, but they also show that white Calcutta grew in an entirely unplanned way. What were called 'streets' were largely dirt tracks, evidently deeply rutted by carts in the dry seasons, flanked by open ditches. Houses were built along these streets as individual speculations, apparently without any regard to one another. Contemporary British ideals of a classical townscape into which buildings were to be harmoniously fitted according to an overall pattern were disregarded. Mrs Kindersley wrote of white Calcutta in the 1770s:

> . . . it is as awkward a place as can be conceived; and so irregular, that it looks as if all the houses had been thrown up in the air, and falled down again by accident as they now stand: people keep constantly building; and every one who can procure a piece of ground to build a house upon, consults his own taste and convenience, without any regard to the beauty and regularity of the town; . . .[34]

The Comte de Modave, a French visitor who was used to properly regulated and laid out colonial towns, was shocked by the sight of 'A ridiculous mass of buildings without any proportion among themselves'.[35] In the early nineteenth century some attempts were made to align new streets, embank the river and dig tanks, even if the right of the private builder to follow his own inclination remained essentially intact. These initiatives were taken by a succession of lottery committees between 1809 and 1833.[36] The creation of the Circular Road was the most conspicuous development of this period.

It is entirely characteristic both of the history of Calcutta and of British towns in general before the Municipal Corporation Act of

[33] Cited *Census of India, 1951*, VI, pt iii, 9.

[34] *Letters from the Island of Teneriffe, Brazil, the Cape of Good Hope and the East Indies* (London, 1777), pp. 273–4.

[35] *Le Voyage en Inde du comte de Modave*, ed. J. Deloche (Paris, 1971), p. 78.

[36] *Census of India, 1951*, VI, pt iii, 13–15.

1835 that the most vigorous attempts to regulate the town should have come from a voluntary body, the lottery commisioners, rather than from any official one. The East India Company's administration neither undertook much direct regulation of the affairs of the town nor encouraged its citizens to do so through representative institutions. The Company based its authority on the *zamindari* rights over the area of Calcutta which it thought that it had received from the Nawab in 1698. These powers were executed by a European official, who called himself the Zamindar. Following a further grant of rights extracted from Mir Jafar in 1757, the official in charge of Calcutta was renamed the Collector. The Zamindar's and the Collector's duties were largely fiscal: the levying of revenue through ground rents and duties. They also presided over courts. The provision of any kind of municipal service, such as drainage or police, were their responsibility too. No Zamindar, Collector or other Company official seems too have supposed that he had any concern with trying to plan the growth of the city. In the years after Plassey the city rapidly outgrew any services which the Collectors felt obliged to provide. Attempts were made during Warren Hastings's governorship to create a special police commission, paid for by a rate on property, which would try to cope with rampant crime in the city and also have authority to supervise drainage and road repairs.[37] The legality of any such body and especially of its powers to enforce a rate were bitterly contested. The issue was not definitively resolved until clauses in the East India Company Charter Act of 1793 authorized the appointment of Justices of the Peace for Calcutta with power to raise rates.

The Justices of the Peace remained the official authority for the municipal government of Calcutta almost until the end of the Company's period. They collected rates with which they maintained a police force and a scavenging department. Few thought that they did their work to good effect. As the first serious attempts were made to investigate the condition of the black town and the suburbs of Calcutta by medical men like J. R. Martin or F. P. Strong, a horrifying picture emerged of a huge population living in undrained swamps with a totally polluted water supply. Their accounts were supported by stark statistical estimates of mortality.[38] Mortality in the white

[37] OIOC, Bengal Public Consultations, 9 June 1777, P/2/19, pp. 460ff.

[38] J. R. Martin, *Notes on the Medical Topography of Calcutta* (Calcutta, 1837); F. P. Strong, *Extracts of the Topography and Vital Statistics of Calcutta* (Calcutta, 1848).

town had fallen markedly by the mid-nineteenth century (at 27 per 1000 the death rate for Europeans was thought to be half that of the Indian population in 1866),[39] but, although a disproportionate part of the rates was said to be spent on the white town, even white rate-payers seemed to get very little for their money. The standards of police, paving and lighting were said to be 'considerably behind [those of] a second-rate English provincial town'.[40]

Officially sanctioned channels through which the white population of Calcutta could try to exert influence over the governance of the town were very limited. The offices of mayor and aldermen were created by charter in 1726, but they were nominated by the Governor and Council, whose control over appointments was strengthened by a revised charter in 1753. The functions of the corporation were purely judicial; the mayor and aldermen conducted the Mayor's Court, eventually displaced by the royal Supreme Court in 1774. Although formal authority remained in the hands of the Governor and Council, the whites of Calcutta, along lines followed by the inhabitants of towns without effective corporations in contemporary Britain, developed institutions which they could use for their own purposes. There was a series of Anglican churches, St Anne's from 1704 to 1756, St John's, later the first cathedral, from 1787, and the new St Paul's Cathedral consecrated in 1847. The parish organization for these churches consisted of a general and a select vestry.[41] The select vestry assumed certain administrative functions. It ran a charity school from early in the eighteenth century. In 1800 the select vestry established a fund for the relief of distressed Europeans. Within a few years it was receiving contributions from other sources, including the Company, and making donations to the poor of all races. In 1830 management of the fund was transferred from the vestry to a new District Charitable Society, which paid 'monthly pensions to aged and infirm paupers of all denominations, including several hundred Hindoos and Moosulmans'. The Grand Juries of the Company's Mayor's Court and the royal Supreme Court could use their right of presentment to bring matters to the attention of the Governor and Council. Issues deemed to be of particular importance were occasionally referred to specially summoned meetings of the white inhabitants. Such meetings were normally called for what the

[39] Dowleans *Report on Census of Calcutta*, pp. 28–9.
[40] Stocqueler, *Hand-Book*, p. 256.
[41] H. B. Hyde, *Parochial Annals of Bengal* (Calcutta, 1901).

Company regarded as unexceptionable purposes: votes of congratulations to Governors or army commanders and pledges of loyalty to crown and constitution. Some assemblies, however, chose to sail closer to the wind. A meeting was held in 1785 to draw up a petition protesting against clauses in Pitt's India Act. In 1806 the Directors ordered that no public meeting be held without official permission and an approved agenda. This power was said to have been used to prohibit a meeting in 1827, but large and much publicized meetings that condemned Company policies deemed restrictive of the rights of British subjects, such as limitations on press freedom or Macaulay's 'black act', were held in 1835 and 1836.[42]

The absence of a formal structure of representative institutions did not necessarily mean an absence of participation in the affairs of the city. As in British towns of the period, most local initiatives were taken by voluntary bodies raising subscriptions to be run by elected committees. The lottery committees for the improvement of the town were a conspicuous example. While the Company maintained a European hospital from early in Calcutta's history, most other institutions to relieve suffering or to provide conveniences were created by the private societies, which 'the philanthropy, the policy, the taste and the ambition of Englishmen in India have at various times founded'.[43] In 1824 Charles Lushington published *The History, Design and Present State of the Religious, Benevolent and Charitable Institutions founded by the British in Calcutta*, which listed 25 'benevolent' and 'charitable' institutions. A newpaper congratulated the white population of Calcutta in 1839 on having 'founded more than forty societies having for their object the instruction or the comfort of the people'.[44] White Calcutta fully participated in the contemporary British movement for 'improvement by subscription'.[45]

The orphans of European soldiers were cared for by a Military Orphan Society, funded by subscription of the officers themselves as well as by Company subventions. In addition to the provision for military orphans, there was a European Female Orphan Asylum supported by private funds. The medical care offered by the Company's Presidency Hospital was augmented by the privately funded Howrah

[42] *A Report of a Meeting of the Inhabitants . . . on the 5th January 1835* (Calcutta, 1835); Sinha, *Calcutta in Urban History*, pp. 216–18.

[43] Stocqueler, *Hand-Book*, p. 315.

[44] *Glimpses of Old Calcutta*, ed. R. R. Choudhury (Calcutta, 1978), p. 39.

[45] The phrase is Paul Langford's, see *Public Life and the Propertied Englishman 1689–1798* (Oxford, 1991), pp. 492–3.

Seamen's Hospital, a Leper Asylum and the Native Hospital, founded in 1793, to which the Company made contributions. In addition to the poor relief dispensed by the parish vestry (later the District Charitable Fund), there were also denominational funds and alms houses. The Charity School of the early eighteenth century was the first of many attempts to provide education for impoverished Christian children. A Free School was added in 1789, the two institutions merging in 1800. In the early nineteenth century other Christian denominations also ran such schools. In 1835 the La Matinière interdenominational Christian school was opened. Schools primarily intended to provide education for the Indian population were mainly the concern of missionary societies with some support from the government and the European community as a whole through the Calcutta School Society of 1818. Colleges, Hindu College, Bishop's College, the Baptist College at Serampore, Medical College, the Sanskrit College or the Madrasa, reflected much the same mixture of support by the government, the missionary societies and public subscriptions, Indian as well as British.[46]

Voluntary bodies also came into existence to promote the dissemination of knowledge. The Asiatic Society of 1784 was by far the most distinguished. Sir William Jones's statement of its aims reflected the pride in being centres of learning which was becoming common among sizable British towns. 'A society instituted at Calcutta', he wrote, 'on the plan of those established in the principal cities of Europe, might possibly be the means of concentrating all the valuable knowledge which might occasionally be attained in Asia'. Its field was to be comprehensive. It was to cover 'history, civil and natural, the antiquities, arts, sciences and literature of Asia'.[47] The enormous significance which has come to be attached to one part of its studies, 'oriental' learning, may well distort its original purpose. It was to be a general 'philosophical' society, in the full eighteenth-century sense of the term, on the lines of the Royal Society or provincial British societies. The Agricultural and Horticultural Society of 1820 again had very obvious affinities with similar local agricultural societies in Britain. As they were intended to raise standards of farming in the surrounding countryside, the founders of the Calcutta Society took it upon them-

[46] There is a list of charitable institutions in 1850 in Simms, *Report of the Survey*, p. 40. Much information about them can be derived from the directories, almanacs or registers for Calcutta, which were published annually from early in the nineteenth century.

[47] *Asiatick Researches*, I (1789), iv–v.

selves to introduce 'industry and virtue in the room of idleness and vice' throughout Bengal.[48] By the mid-nineteenth century there was also a languishing Mechanics Institute, intended to imbue 'the natives and the East Indians with a taste for mechanics',[49] and a Medical and Physical Society founded in 1823 for medical men. Libraries were established early in Calcutta. The Company maintained one in the old Fort William. A number of commercial libraries were in operation in the late eighteenth century.[50] A Library Society was launched in 1819. The Calcutta Public Library was opened in 1836. In 1843 it was said to have 130,000 volumes.[51] Europeans paid a subscription; 'native students' were admitted free.[52]

In the eighteenth century great figures in the Company's service like Clive and Warren Hastings sent orders for London booksellers to ship out parcels of books to them. Books were also imported with other European merchandise for shopkeepers to retail. By the mid-nineteenth century India had become a very major outlet for the British publishers. Consignments of books were shipped out in such huge quantities that prices were generally kept low. American editions competed with London ones. Ten European booksellers were said to be operating in Calcutta. The famous bookshop, Thacker's, was called 'the most magnificent establishment' in the city. The booksellers were often undercut by auction sales which enabled Indian hawkers to offer books at cut-price rates. Eager vendors were inclined to thrust books into carriages and palanquins upside down. Many accounts agree that, whatever the expense of other imported items, Calcutta was a city where books could usually be had in abundance at very little cost. Emma Roberts thought that anyone could acquire 'a library of the best authors . . . at a small expense'.[53] A newspaper commented in 1836: 'The works of authors reputed the best, meet us at almost every corner of the streets, and they can be transferred to the possession of any one at the cheapest rate . . .'.[54]

Cheap and abundant imports meant that there was little incentive to develop book publishing in India on any scale. Publishing was

[48] *Selections from the Indian Journals*, II, *The Calcutta Journal* (Calcutta, 1965), p. 210.
[49] Stocqueler, *Hand-Book*, p. 309.
[50] Graham Shaw, *Printing in Calcutta to 1800* (London, 1981), p. 23.
[51] G. W. Johnson, *The Stranger in India* 2 vols (London, 1843), I, 59.
[52] *Glimpses of Old Calcutta*, pp. 8–9.
[53] Emma Roberts, *Scenes and Characteristics of Hindostan*, 3 vols (London, 1835), III, 8–12.
[54] *Glimpses of Old Calcutta*, p. 5.

largely limited to calendars, almanacs and to books of specifically Indian interest. Calcutta was, however, a city with a very vigorous printing industry: the names of forty printers with seventeen presses have been identified as operating before 1800.[55] In 1852 seventeen European-owned presses and six lithographic presses were listed.[56] Many of the presses were associated with newspapers. White Calcutta sustained a remarkable number of newspapers and journals in English. Between 1780 and 1800 24 weekly or monthly magazines came into existence.[57] The first daily newspapers, the *Hurkaru* and the *Calcutta Journal* began in 1819. By 1831 three daily papers were being issued, together with two which appeared three times a week and four appearing twice a week. There were also four monthly, three quarterly and six yearly publications. The total circulation of English-language publications was put at 3000 'at a rather low estimate'. The *Hurkaru* alone printed 800 copies[58] These are astonishing figures for so small a community.

A recent study of eighteenth-century British towns has described an 'Explosion in the demand for and provision of high status leisure' from the middle of the century.[59] Facilities for enjoyment comparable to those in an English county town or in a popular resort came into existence in increasing profusion in the white town of Calcutta. These facilities were provided either by yet more societies and subscriptions or by the efforts of individual entrepreneurs. The assembly was the focal point for a town's fashionable social life. It has been estimated that sixty British towns boasted assemblies by 1770.[60] White Calcutta had its assemblies too. Public entertainments were given in the Old Court House, but by the 1770s regular subscription assemblies were being held in the Harmonic Tavern once a fortnight in the cold weather. These occasions involved a 'concert, ball and supper'.[61] In the 1780s the Harmonic Tavern had a competitor in the London Tavern, while masquerades were still held in the Old Court House.[62] The new Town Hall enabled even larger entertain-

[55] Shaw, *Printing in Calcutta*, p. 3.
[56] *Scott and Company's Bengal Directory 1852* (Calcutta, 1852), pp. 374–7.
[57] Shaw, *Printing in Calcutta*, p. 4.
[58] James Sutherland's evidence, 16 March 1832, *Parliamentary Papers*, 1831–2, IX, 121–2.
[59] P. Borsay, *The English Urban Renaissance 1660–1760* (Oxford, 1989), p. 117.
[60] *Ibid*., p. 151.
[61] *Letters of Eliza Fay*, ed. E. M. Forster (London, 1925), p. 192.
[62] *Selections from the Calcutta Gazettes 1784–8*, ed. W. S. Seton-Karr (Calcutta, 1864), pp. 54–6, 203.

ments to be given. More exclusive patterns of sociability were developing in the early nineteenth century with the rise of the club: the Bengal Club of 1827 and the United Services Club of 1845.

Music was an essential part of assemblies, and a sophisticated taste for music developed early in white Calcutta. Performances among families and friends were reinforced by the 1780s by a group of professional musicians. For a time in the late eighteenth century a serious interest developed in a form of Indian music called 'the Hindoostanie air'. For the most part, however, Calcutta taste followed trends at home, Corelli and Handel, for instance, losing ground to Haydn in the late eighteenth century.[63] Calcutta residents' enthusiasm for music stimulated a brisk trade in musical instruments imported from Britain. In 1786 a shop was advertising its services to sell, tune and repair instruments and to provide teachers for the harpsichord and the violin.[64] In 1797 'the largest orchestra ever assembled in India', consisting of over 40 instrumentalists and 28 singers, performed a marathon selection of Handel. The performance was put on for two days, for which a thousand tickets were sold, suggesting that few members of the elite of Calcutta did not attend.[65] Operas were put on in the early nineteenth century. 'Don Giovanni' was performed for the first time in 1831. In 1837 'the French company' gave a performance of Weber's 'Der Freyschutz' in the presence of the Governor General.[66]

The rich of white Calcutta, like their counterparts in contemporary British towns, were avid patrons of theatre. Buildings specifically used as theatres can be identified from the old playhouse of the early eighteenth century. A new playhouse was opened in 1775 and remained in being until 1808. Its replacement was the theatre at Chowringhee, which had a life of over 25 years until it was destroyed by fire. A new Sans Souci theatre was built in 1841 at a cost of £8000.[67] The staples of the eighteenth-century Calcutta theatre were Shakespeare and contemporary comedies. The casts were composed of such local talent as could be found in the white community. In the early nineteenth century professional actors and actresses began to make their careers in Calcutta. When the Chowringhee theatre was burnt down, it was mourned as having provided 'support

[63] Raymond Head, 'Corelli in Calcutta', *Early Music*, XIII (1985), 549–52.
[64] *Calcutta Gazettes 1784–8*, pp. 179–80.
[65] *Calcutta Gazettes 1789–97*, pp. 468–71.
[66] *Glimpses of Old Calcutta*, p. 13.
[67] Sushil Mukherjee, *The Story of the Calcutta Theatres* (Calcutta, 1982).

to many deserving professional artistes'.[68] It was said of the cast of the Sans Souci in 1841 that: 'The gentlemen performers are for the most part amateurs; the ladies are paid handsome salaries'.[69]

In their patronage of painting, for a few years in the late eighteenth century the whites in Calcutta probably outdid any contemporary British city except for London itself. Rumours of the wealth being made by potential clients brought a stream of British artists of high distinction to India. Most of them naturally made for Calcutta. Johan Zoffany, Arthur William Devis, Tilly Kettle, William Hodges, Thomas and William Daniell and Ozias Humphry were among professional artists who made the trip there.[70] Most of them did portraits of rich British sitters. Some, like Hodges, were interested in Indian landscapes and in portraying Indian 'types'. The Belgian François Baltazard Solveyns published a huge porfolio of such studies. The Daniells left a record of Calcutta street scenes. Most professional artists seem to have returned to Europe with their earnings, but one or two lived out their lives in Calcutta. George Chinnery, who arrived in Calcutta in 1807 and remained there until 1825, was probably the last British artist of real distinction to make the trip to India, although the services of portrait painters continued to be advertised in Calcutta directories. In the early nineteenth century, however, the European community in Calcutta revealed that it included a number of talented amateur painters, to whom scholarly attention has recently been given.[71] Many prints were shipped out from Britain and some engraving was done in Calcutta. William Hickey was able to fit out his new house with 'a number of beautiful pictures and prints, forming altogether a choice and valuable collection'.[72]

The life of the white town was dominated by males. European women in India were already being accused of the vacuous idleness, so often to be held against them in the future. Mrs Sherwood described the typical day of the wealthy Calcutta lady as a round of visiting, evening drives on 'the course', dinners, balls and assemblies,

[68] *Glimpses of Old Calcutta*, p. 42.
[69] Stocqueler, *Hand-Book*, p. 308.
[70] Sir William Foster, 'British Artists in India', *The Walpole Society*, XIX (1931); M. Archer, *India and British Portraiture 1770–1825* (London, 1979).
[71] M. Archer and T. Falk, *India Revealed: The Arts and Adventures of James and William Fraser 1801–35*. (London, 1989); M. Archer and R. Lightbown, *India Observed*. (London, 1982).
[72] *Memoirs of William Hickey*, ed. A. Spencer, 4 vols (London, 1913–25), III, 357–8.

interspersed with a little reading and fancy work and long periods of rest.[73] A contributor to the *Calcutta Review* pointed out that 'selfishness and inanity' were indeed temptations for women in India. Very few mature women were unmarried and therefore presumed to be free to pursue any activity outside their homes. Within the home, the scope for a woman's energies was much more restricted than in Britain. Children beyond a certain age were customarily sent away to Britain and whereas in England, 'a vast proportion of the details of active charity are carried out by women, . . . here . . . we hardly know how to exert any kindness, beyond that of giving money'. The Indian poor were not like the poor in Britain. They could not be visited or ministered to. Nevertheless, the author concluded, 'business and occupations are to be found'. Women should cultivate 'reading, music, drawing and working' and 'archery, riding and gardening are available to all'.[74]

There is clear evidence that white women in Calcutta did indeed pursue 'business and occupations'. Women undertook businesses as milliners and dressmakers, keepers of taverns and hotels and managers of schools for female pupils. Esther Leach, 'the Siddons of Calcutta', was for a time proprietoress of the Sans Souci theatre.[75] The main public sphere for female abilities in Calcutta, as in contemporary Britain, was, however, in the organization of charity.[76] Societies specifically catering for the needs of females and children were established and managed by women. Lushington's *Charitable Institutions founded by the British in Calcutta* of 1824 lists a Female Juvenile Society for Bengallee Female Schools, a Ladies Society for Native Female Education and a European Female Orphan Society, all managed by committees of ladies. By the 1840s missionary enterprises were being supported by Calcutta 'auxiliary' societies run by women to raise contributions from women.

The white elite of Calcutta prided themselves on having created in India an environment in which the best of contemporary British

[73] *The Life and Times of Mrs Sherwood*, ed. F. J. Harvey Darton (London, 1910), pp. 358–9.

[74] 'English Women in Hindustan', *Calcutta Review*, IV (1845), 104–7, 120; 'Married Life in India', *ibid*., 411–13.

[75] E. W. Madge, 'The Sans Souci and its Star', reprinted in *Bengal Past and Present*, CIX (1990), 104–5.

[76] F. K. Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy in Nineteenth-century England* (Oxford, 1980).

institutions were faithfully reproduced. Most of them would also have added that they believed that their society embodied their own particular virtues: open-handedness, hospitality, generosity and philanthropy. In part, at least, their image of themselves would be hard to contradict. White Calcutta under the Company was a remarkably British place. Like so many British towns, it lacked an effective administration, but also, like them, it was a hive of private voluntary endeavour. Its development was largely unplanned and its main services, such as drainage, roads and police, were of a low standard. But it had individual buildings of considerable ambition, the relics of which now seem undeniably impressive, and its wealthy citizens enjoyed many amenities: books, theatre, music and learned societies. Even if the first call upon it was usually the poor of their own community, philanthropy certainly flourished among the rich whites of Calcutta. Considering that the European community was in its own eyes a transient one, its members eventually committed to leaving India and retiring in Britain, so much investment of effort and resources is the more remarkable. Yet contemporaries were not always prepared to take white Calcutta at its own estimation. To sophisticated sojourners its pretensions could seem absurd. 'Vile acting—viler opera singing . . . The conversation is the most deplorable twaddle that can be conceived', Macaulay reported.[77] Many found the petty ceremonies and rigid respect for hierarchy distasteful. Even more were shocked by the expense and the apparently extravagant ways of life from which there seemed to be no escape.

Expatriate British communities that have sought uncompromisingly to perpetuate their own values overseas and to ignore those of the societies around them have been little to the taste of most strands of opinion in the twentieth century. Liberal-minded historians have searched, with very little realistically to show for their efforts, for some evidence of a redeeming racial intermixing in eighteenth-century if not in nineteenth-century Calcutta. While small European communities at the courts of Muslim rulers might practise a degree of intermixing in cities like Lucknow or Hyderabad, the British in Calcutta always kept to themselves. With notable exceptions, like Hickey's love for Jemdanee, most eighteenth-century cohabitations seem to have been close to prostitution. Until the generation of Rammohan Roy or Dwarkanath Tagore it is hard to envis-

[77] *The Letters of Thomas Babington Macaulay*, ed. T. Pinney, 6 vols (Cambridge, 1974–81), III, 162.

age any section of society in Indian Calcutta that would have desired more than formal or commercialized contact with the British. Nevertheless, a powerful sense of racial exclusiveness certainly reinforced British isolation. The generally harsh treatment of people of mixed descent is abundant evidence of this sense of race.

Whatever they intended, the white town could not live in total isolation from the black town or confine its dealings with Indians to the transaction of business or trade and the hire of services. Apart from some adaptions of diet and dress, all but a tiny handful of quite exceptional people kept Indian influences on their life to the barest minimum. Rather more began slowly to recognize some degree of fellow citizenship in the hundreds of thousands of people living round them and to accept that they might owe some sort of obligation to them. Some voluntary activities were specifically aimed at providing medical care, education, instruction in agricultural or mechanical skills, books in Indian languages or access to libraries for Indian Calcutta. Some lives, most obviously those of missionaries and teachers, were wholly devoted to these causes.

Yet remarkable as was the work of men like William Carey, David Hare or Alexander Duff, it may well be that Indians ultimately gained most from the profusion which the white town lavished on itself. Social contact might be neither offered nor desired, but many Indians evidently had no inhibitions about helping themselves to this profusion which was so easily accessible to them, in spite of the exclusiveness of the white town. They did not necessarily need the help of intermediaries, such as the oriental scholars or the missionaries. By a mechanism which remains unexplained, architectural styles moved from the white town to the black town. Classical European elements were reproduced in the great houses of north Calcutta. Rich Indian customers evidently bought furnishings, especially glassware, at the European shops. There is little evidence of Indian interest until later in the century in European music or their visual arts, but European theatre was clearly of absorbing interest to some. A Hindu Theatre on European lines to put on plays in Bengali was established in 1831, characteristically of Calcutta, by a committee. Selections from Shakespeare's 'Julius Caesar' were among the first productions.[78] As a knowledge of English spread, members of the Calcutta intelligentsia showed themselves to be widely read in western literature. Their access to such books was no doubt in part

[78] Mukherjee, *Calcutta Theatres*, pp. 13–15.

provided by school and college libraries or by the public or the commercial libraries; in 1838 a Calcutta Circulating Library was established by a group of 'enlightened Hindoos'.[79] But many Indians seem also to have been accumulating collections of British books of their own. The abundance and cheapness of books for sale in early nineteenth-century white Calcutta would have made the building up of private libraries in the black town an easy task for those with an inclination to do so. The ownership of printing presses ceased in time to be a European monopoly. Indian-owned presses proliferated and three Bengali newspapers came into existence in 1824–26, finding 'abundant supporters in that large class of the Hindoo population of Calcutta who have become imbued to a certain extent with English tastes and notions'.[80] Indians became involved in some of the European voluntary societies, such as the School Book Society or the District Charitable Society. In time the model of the voluntary society with subscriptions and managing committee was adopted with exclusively Indian membership for their own religious, literary or social purposes.[81] European ventures into political campaigning dragged a few Indians in their wake. At the meetings of the inhabitants of Calcutta in 1835 and 1836 some Indians attended and spoke in support of the grievances of European citizens. The role of the radically-minded European resident in India in stimulating the first attempts to articulate an Indian political point of view has been clearly demonstrated.[82]

The process of cultural exchange in Calcutta from the late eighteenth century was an unbalanced one. The willingness of Calcutta's Indian intellectuals to explore and adapt new things from the west was very much stronger than the willingness of Europeans to receive anything in return. Indeed, so strong was it that it was unlikely to have been satisfied by the conscious efforts to communicate that were made by certain whites. The role of the great body of Europeans who had no real interest in communicating therefore seems to have been an important one. Unattractive as many features of the white town now seem, its elite were determined to have nothing but the best in British terms. This included much that would conventionally be regarded as dross. This account of the white town's tastes has been a somewhat sanitised one, without references to alcoholic con-

[79] *Glimpses of Old Calcutta*, pp. 43–4.
[80] Cited M. Barns, *The Indian Press* (London, 1940), pp. 182–3.
[81] See list of associations in Sinha, *Calcutta in Urban History*, pp. 235–8.
[82] S. R. Mehrotra, *The Emergence of the Indian National Congress* (Delhi, 1971), ch. i.

sumption, gambling, racing or field sports, which at least in theory, if not always in practice, were of no interest to the paladins of the Bengal Renaissance. But Indians who were inclined so to do had things of real worth to explore and to adapt. White Calcutta under the East India Company was no doubt a place dominated by arrogant self-sufficiency and racial exclusiveness, but in some degree it surely avoided the provincial philistinism of which later expatriate communities have, fairly or unfairly, so often been accused. A community sustained by the wealth of Bengal spent this wealth profusely on its own pleasures. A tiny proportion of Bengal's population indirectly became the beneficiaries of this profusion.