

*Tumultuous years bring their voice to your bosom,  
Unfathomed past !*

*In what dark silence do you keep it gathered, covering it  
under your brooding wings ?*

*You move in secret like midnight hours realizing dreams ;  
often have I felt your muffled steps in my blood,  
have seen your hushed countenance  
in the heart of the garrulous day.*

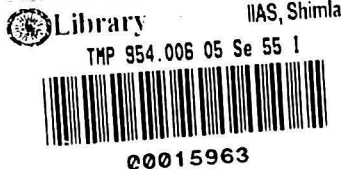
*You come to write stories of our fathers in unseen scripts  
on the pages of our destiny ;*

*You lead back to life the unremembered  
for the shaping of new images.*

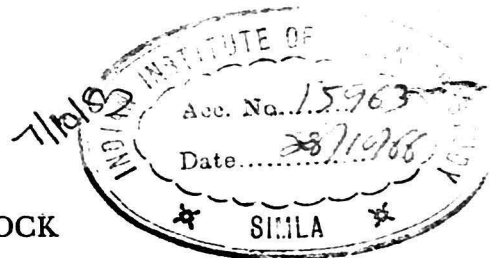
*Is not the restless present itself your own visions flung up  
like planets that arise  
from the bottom of dumb night ?*

*Rabindranath Tagore*





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## THE CITY OF JOB CHARNOCK

The city of Calcutta, the first and foremost in the whole of India, appears to be of rather recent origin. In Bengali the place is known as *Kalikata* and in mediaeval Bengali poems, like the *Manasamangala* of Vipradasa (said to have been composed in 1495 A.D.) and the *Chandikavya* of Kavikankana Mukundarama Chakravarti (composed between 1577 and 1597 A.D.), Kalikata is mentioned only as small hamlet, close to the sacred *tirtha* of Kalikshetra or Kalighat. The *Ain-i-Akbari* of Abul Fazl (c. 1590 A.D.) also refers to Kalikata as a *Mahal* within the *Sarkar* of Satgaon (Saptagrama). Saptagrama on the river Sarasvati was a famous inland port in those days and an important centre of trade and commerce in Bengal. Its decay however began with the silting up of the river Sarasvati and by the close of the 16th century A.D. Hooghly on the right bank of the main channel of the Ganges supplanted Saptagrama as the foremost commercial centre in Bengal. The piratical and other incendiary actions of the Portuguese merchants, settled there, led to a punitive expedition by the Mughals in 1632 A.D. and the fall of Hooghly meant the decline of the Portuguese trade. This almost synchronised with the grant of a charter to the English merchants by Prince Shuja for trading in Bengal on payment of Rs. 3,000/- per year. Late in the 17th century the English in Bengal came into conflict with the Mughal power and Job Charnock, the Agent of the English Company, ransacked Hooghly in 1686. On the approach of the Nawab's army he was compelled to retire further down to Sutanati, already a growing village on the left bank of the river Hooghly and contiguous to the village of Kalikata. A reconciliation was soon effected and permission was accorded to the English Company to carry on their trade at Hooghly as before. But the village of Sutanati, being within reach of sea-going vessels, offered greater attraction as a commercial station and Charnock stopped at Sutanati again in 1687 to "recruit provisions" and to "spin out the monsoon" and for the third time on August 24, 1690. Aware of the manifold advantages of the place he deliberately rejected the Nawab's proposal of an establishment at Hooghly and decided to settle at Sutanati in mud and thatched structures till ground for building a factory would be available.

Three villages, set amidst marsh and forest, occupied at that time the site on which the city of Calcutta was to grow. Sutanati, where Charnock landed, stretched lengthwise along the river bank from Chitpur southwards. Situated by the deep waters it provided safe anchorage to trading vessels and was already a growing centre of trade in cotton goods. Calcutta (Kalikata), occupying the high ground to the south of Sutanati, lay somewhat back from the river and extended southwards up to a creek, which coming from the marshy ground flowed to the river by a course that may

roughly be said to be marked by the present-day Hastings Street. Lower down the river was Govindapur extending along the bank up to the Adi Ganga or Tolly's nullah. This area at that time was covered by a jungle of heavy undergrowth and intersected by numerous water courses. All the three villages were just collections of mud and thatched hovels in marshy and swampy soil. It was amidst these adverse and unhealthy surroundings that foundations were laid of the premier city of modern India.

In an oft-quoted poem Rudyard Kipling described Calcutta as "chance-directed" and "chance-erected". The selection of this site for an English settlement in Bengal cannot, however, be said to be due to mere chance. On the decline of the port of Saptagrama four families of Basaks (Indian caste of weavers) and a family of Seth (Indian banker) had moved down close to the deep waters and settled at Sutanati. The fall of Hooghly in 1632 had diverted again a portion of the native merchants to this direction. Thus Sutanati with its accessibility to sea-going vessels and the prosperous colony of Indian merchants offered certainly greater attractions to a trading Company than Hooghly which was already declining. Favourably situated at the gate of the principal waterways of Northern India the site commanded practically all approaches to the rich Indo-Gangetic plains. Moreover, its position on the eastern bank of the river, isolated further by the Chitpur creek on the north and the Salt lakes—more extensive than now—on the east, rendered it strategically more immune from outside attacks and depredations. The old pilgrim road from Chitpur to Kalighat, "forming a string to the bow of the river", provided as good a communication with the interior as was possible in those days. "There can be no greater mistake", says Wilson, "than to suppose that the English settlement in Calcutta was fortuitous and ill-considered."

In 1690 Charnock, who became the first Governor of the establishment, invited by a proclamation people of all nationalities to come and settle in the three villages, Sutanati, Calcutta and Govindapur, and offered them special privileges and immunities. Unfortunately, however, the settlement did not fare well during Charnock's Governorship. Worn out by thirty-six years of hard work in an alien and exhausting climate he broke down under the distressing conditions in the new settlement and his declining years were spent in indolence and even in disorder. The affairs soon turned into a state of confusion. Though an imperial *firman* had been obtained in 1691 permitting the Company to "contentedly continue their trade" on payment of Rs. 3,000/- a year by way of all dues, nothing was done to mark out a site for the factory, to clear jungles, to construct roads or to build houses. A general letter to the Court of Directors, dated May 25, 1691, graphically summarises the life of the early traders in Calcutta: "They lived in a wild and unsettled condition at Chutanutee, neither fortified houses, nor godowns, only tents, huts and boats." Charnock died on January 10, 1692 and was buried in the burial ground of the settlement, Charles Eyre, his son-in-law, erected a mausoleum over his remains and this, believed to be the earliest piece of masonry raised up by the English, stands to this day in an excellent state of preservation in St. John's Churchyard.



However critics may disagree, the founder of Calcutta now stands forth as a "block of rough-hewn British manhood", possessed of a "resolute courage which no danger could daunt nor any difficulties turn aside". In the State papers he has been described as "always a faithful man to the Company". Ellis, his second in command who succeeded him, was a man of little character or ability. Charnock's son-in-law, Charles Eyre, who became the next Agent, had a commanding personality and strong initiative and enterprise and it was under his administration that the affairs of the Company in Bengal were brought to order. As early as 1693 Sir John Goldsborough, the Commissary-General and Chief Governor of the Company's settlements in India, had selected a site for a factory, not at Sutanuti, but at 'Dhee Collecotta', and had enclosed it with a mud wall. The site marked was on the highest piece of ground to the west of what is now Dalhousie Square by the bank of the river which then flowed much further east than now. Two fortunate circumstances, which happened about this time, materially helped to strengthen the position of the English in Bengal. The first was the rebellion of Shobha Singh in 1696 which secured for the English the long-delayed permission from the Nawab "to defend themselves". Immediately fortifications were commenced and by 1697 a walled enclosure with a bastion was completed on the site, marked by Sir John Goldsborough, and now occupied by the General Post Office, the Customs House and the East Indian Railway House. In 1700 the fort was named after William III, the then reigning British sovereign.

The appointment of Azim-us-Shan, a grandson of Aurangzeb, as Governor of Bengal represents another fortunate circumstance which materially assisted the English Company. The pleasure-loving young prince, on consideration of a gratification of Rs. 16,000/- received from the Company, granted them on August 1, 1698, the permission to purchase the three villages of Sutanati, Calcutta and Govindapur. Accordingly, the three villages were purchased from their proprietors for Rs. 1,300/- by a deed dated November 10, 1698. This was a great advance for the English Company as it secured for them a legally assured status, though the emperor's confirmation of their authority was still lacking. This they had a great difficulty in obtaining on account of opposition from interested quarters, particularly from the local government in Bengal. In 1715 the Company sent an embassy to Delhi for this purpose. The embassy had to wait long and another lucky incident, the cure of the Emperor Farrukhsiyar of a malady by Surgeon Hamilton of the English embassy, secured for the Company, in 1717, the desired *firman* which, along with a confirmation of the previous transaction, authorised the English to purchase 38 more villages on either bank of the river. With the imperial confirmation of their rights as legal owners of their settlement and the surrounding villages the English Company became firmly established in Bengal, and Calcutta "increased yearly in wealth, beauty and riches."

Until December 1699 the Bengal establishment was subordinate to Fort St. George, Madras. In 1700 the Presidency of Bengal was created and Charles Eyre, now a knight, returned to Bengal as its first President. The Fort, constructed in 1697, was simply a walled enclosure with a bastion, "looking more like a warehouse for fear of exciting the jealousy of the

Mogul". In 1699 the Fort was extended on the south and a new bastion put up in south-east angle. Eyre had instructions to execute further constructions and to name the Fort after William III. The British flag was hoisted for the first time in the Fort on October 6, 1702. The President's House, begun the same year, was completed four years later and has been described by Hamilton as "the best and most regular piece of architecture in India". A single-storeyed house for the servants of the Company—the first Writers' Buildings—was erected in 1706 on the site of the old factory house that was pulled down. The death of Aurangzeb in 1707 brought in a state of general insecurity and the English found in it an opportunity of adding to the fortifications by hastily putting up two more bastions on the river side. On the eastern side of the Fort the merchants had begun to build and the mud-walled and thatched structures of a quarter of a century before gave place to brick-built terraced houses with gardens. The tank in front, the present *Lal Dighi*, was re-excavated and deepened in 1709 for the supply of drinking water and the surrounding space was laid out as a park and planted with orange trees and ornamental shrubs. In the same year was built a church, the Church of St. Anne, which stood on the site now occupied by the western end of the present Secretariat Buildings and adjoined the main gate of the fort. Another church, the Church of St. Nazareth, was built by the Armenians in 1724 and is now the oldest church extant in Calcutta. The three villages had grown by this time into a thriving town with a population of some ten or twelve hundred Europeans and nearly a lac of Indians. The gentlemen and ladies in Bengal, mostly wives and daughters of the senior merchants, "lived both splendidly and pleasantly", as Captain Hamilton records. The place, however, remained as unhealthy as before and mortality was high.

Thus did the city prosper along with the growth of the Company's trade, the shipping about the third decade of the 18th century amounting to ten thousand tons every year. The terrible cyclone of 1737, accompanied by 15 inches of rainfall within five hours, devastated the country for sixty leagues up the Ganges and caused a good deal of damage to Calcutta. Many of the buildings were destroyed, including the tall spire of the Church of St. Anne, and an account of the harrowing details may be found in the *Gentleman's Magazine* for June, 1738. No sooner had Calcutta recovered from this calamity than a new menace appeared with the depredations of the Mahrattas which laid waste whole tracts of the country to the west of the river Hooghly. The inhabitants of Calcutta undertook to dig a wide ditch to extend like a semi-circle for seven miles round the three villages which formed the town. Work was begun in 1742 at the Chitpur end and in six months a ditch of three miles, following the line of Circular Road southwards as far as Jaunbazar Street, was completed. Seven batteries were also placed in different parts of the town in apprehension of the danger. The work on the ditch was stopped on the Nawab of Bengal coming to terms with the Mahrattas. The unfinished Mahratta ditch, which obtained the sobriquet of '*ditchers*' for generations of Calcutta citizens, remained for nearly sixty years, more or less as a pestilential drain, and was filled up in 1799 when the Circular Road was made.

Aliverdi Khan, the Nawab of Bengal, died in 1756 and was succeeded by his young grandson, Sirajuddaulah. The relations of the English merchants with the Nawabs of Bengal had never been cordial, as the latter could not possibly ignore the various unauthorised acts of the Company in those days of general lawlessness in strengthening and consolidating their position. The accession of the new Nawab brought the matters to a crisis which proved to be of far-reaching consequence not only to Calcutta or Bengal, but to the whole of India. It is said that the young Nawab looked upon the English as interlopers, perhaps not without reason so far as the authority of the state was concerned. As the head of the state he could not but view with misgiving the extension of the fortifications at Calcutta. Moreover, the shelter given to the family of Raja Rajbullubh by the English at Calcutta and their refusal to deliver them to the Nawab's officers when called upon to do so represented acts of open defiance to the Nawab's authority. Hostilities broke out and the Nawab marched upon Calcutta with an army. Despaired of any help coming either from Madras or from the French and the Dutch at Chandernagore and Chinsurah, the English merchants in Calcutta tried to defend the Fort with the small garrison that they had. The Nawab's army approached and surrounded the Fort on June 18, 1756, and women and children were evacuated on board the vessels in the river which was still in the command of the English. The Governor Drake and other senior officers fled in panic to the ships and set sail with the announcement that all was lost. Holwell, on whom the command fell under these cowardly circumstances, maintained defence valiantly for two days. The small garrison, however, was overpowered and the Nawab entered the Fort on June 20 1756. It is on this night that the so-called Black Hole Tragedy was said to have occurred. It is reported that after the Nawab had retired for rest his guards put the English prisoners, 146 in number, into the Fort prison which was a small cubicle, 18 feet by 14 feet 10 inches, and that the prisoners suffered immeasurably through the night in gruelling heat and succumbed one by one till the door was opened the next morning when only 23 survivors staggered out. The authenticity of this Tragedy, widely publicised though, has been questioned of late, and due to the physical impossibility of cramming 146 persons within a cubicle of the above dimensions and material discrepancies in other details the story of the Tragedy has been discarded as historically untrue.

To commemorate his victory the Nawab changed the name of Calcutta to Alinagar and left for Murshidabad after appointing a Governor who had his seat at Alipur, about three miles south of the Fort. The survivors of the defending garrison were set free, but Holwell and three others were taken into custody and sent to Murshidabad. Eventually they were also released on the intercession of the Nawab's mother.

The fall of Calcutta meant a great disaster to the English and an avenging army with troops and ships under Colonel Clive and Admiral Watson arrived from Madras late in December, 1756. Reaching Falta, where the English refugees had taken shelter, Clive landed his troops on the Calcutta bank and marched upwards with little or no opposition, while Watson sailed up the river. On the approach of Clive and Watson the

Nawab's garrison speedily retreated and on January 2, 1757 the British flag was once more hoisted at Fort William. The Nawab again advanced upon Calcutta, but his position being attacked he had to withdraw his troops from near the town. On February 9, 1757 was concluded a treaty by which the Nawab restored the trading privileges of the Company and offered to make restitution for damaged property.

About this time was set a sordid drama of treachery and intrigues against the Nawab, and the English under Clive joined it whole-heartedly to turn the situation in their favour. The war between France and England in Europe also complicated matters in India. The strained relations between the English and the French in Bengal precipitated the hostilities between the Nawab and the English which ultimately led to the Battle of Plassey on June 23, 1757. The English under Clive won the battle without much fight and set up Mir Jafar, an uncle of Sirajuddaulah, who played an important role in the intrigues of Clive, as the New Nawab. Mir Jafar lost no time in expressing his gratefulness by making free gift of Calcutta and zemindary rights in the tract of land from the south of Calcutta up to Culpee to the English. Heavy compensation was paid to the Company and to the Company's officers and permission was granted for the establishment of a mint.

The victory at Plassey established the English virtually as the supreme authority in Bengal and opened the way for further territorial and political aggressions. Their headquarters at Calcutta, there can be no doubt hence, prospered beyond measure and the city began to expand in area as well as in importance. With part of the compensation money received from the Nawab the village of Govindapur was cleared of its forest and foundations were laid of the present Fort William in 1758. The Fort was completed in 1781 at a cost of two millions sterling. The clearance of the jungle round the Fort led to the creation of the *maidan* the broad expanse of which forms one of the chief attractions of Calcutta. A portion of the compensation money was also utilised in erecting a mint and other public buildings. The European quarter, once located between Bowbazar and Hastings Streets, began to spread southwards along the Chowringhee. The houses of important officers of the Company were stately buildings within the city, while palatial garden-houses sprang up in the suburbs, such as at Dumdum, Alipur, Garden Reach, etc. But the city and its buildings grew up in a haphazard manner and, as a contemporary writer records, the town was "a confusion of very superb and very shoddy houses, dead walls, straw huts, warehouses and I know what not."

From 1757 to 1772 when Warren Hastings became the Governor of Bengal the English in Calcutta played the most important part in the affairs of Bengal, making and unmaking Nawabs, each such change bringing in additional powers to the Company and fabulous emoluments to its principal officers. With the grant of the Diwani of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa to the Company by the derelict Emperor Shah Alam II the Nawab became a mere pensioner in the hands of the English who became virtually the rulers of this vast tract of territory. Calcutta gained further in prestige when in 1774 the Governor of Bengal became the Governor General with

authority over Bombay and Madras, and Calcutta became the metropolis of the English government in India. A Supreme Court of Judicature was established at Calcutta, the Exchequer was transferred from Murshidabad to Calcutta and on the abolition of the five Provincial Revenue Councils at Burdwan, Dacca, Dinajpur, Murshidabad and Patna a Committee of Revenue was set up at Calcutta. Apart from increased importance and prestige in the political sphere, Calcutta took the lead in the intellectual sphere also with the establishment, in 1784, of the Asiatic Society which initiated studies in the humanities and the sciences on modern lines and has ever been at the root of all cultural and scientific activities in India. The scheme of building a Presidency Church took shape in December, 1783 when a Building Committee, with the Governor General as the President, was appointed to receive subscriptions for this purpose. Money was also raised by lotteries and a state aid and certain unauthorised diversions of state money were managed by the Governor General. With the money thus raised the old Cathedral of St. John was completed in 1787. The administration of Warren Hastings, however critics may condemn, was responsible for raising Calcutta to a status of foremost pre-eminence among the other cities of India. The dominant English power made the city the nerve centre of the whole of India.

William Hodges, a noted English painter, travelled over different parts of India between the years 1780 and 1783 and left an excellent account of Calcutta which may be extracted to visualise the grand panorama of the city in those days. "As the ship approaches Calcutta the river narrows; that which is called Garden Reach, presents a view of handsome buildings, on a flat surrounded by gardens: these are villas belonging to the opulent inhabitants of Calcutta. The vessel has no sooner gained one other reach of the river than the whole city of Calcutta bursts upon the eye. The capital of the British dominions in the East is marked by a considerable fortress, on the south side of the river, which is allowed to be, in strength and correctness of design, superior to any in India. On the foreground of the picture is the water-gate of the fort, which reflects great honour on the talents of the Engineer—the ingenious Colonel Polier. The glacis and esplanade are seen in perspective, bounded by a range of beautiful and regular buildings; and a considerable reach of the river, with vessels of various classes and sizes, from the largest Indiamen to the smallest boat of the country, closes the scene." After landing he continues, this great city "extends from the western point of the Fort William, along the banks of the river, almost to the village of Cossipoor: that is, about four and a half English miles. The breadth in many parts is inconsiderable. The streets are broad: the line of buildings surrounding the two sides of the esplanade of the fort is magnificent: and it adds greatly to the superb appearance that the houses are detached from each other, and insulated in a great space. The buildings are all on a large scale. The general approach to the houses is by a flight of steps with great projecting porticoes, or surrounded by colonnades or arcades, which give them the appearance of Grecian temples." The magnificence of the city he attributes to the liberal spirit and excellent taste of the Governor General, meaning Warren Hastings.



Under Lord Wellesley, whose sense of the value of pomp has earned for him the title of "Sultanised Englishman", the present Government House came into existence. Commenced in 1799 the "great apartments" of this magnificent house were opened for the first time on May 4, 1802, the anniversary of the fall of Seringapatam, and on January 27, 1803 a "most splendid entertainment" was given at the new Government House "in honour of the general peace" and, perhaps, as a fitting display to grace the formal opening of the new palace. To Lord Wellesley again the city owes many civic reforms which led to improved sanitation and increased convenience and comfort of the inhabitants of the city. "The town of Calcutta", says Lord Valentia who visited it in 1803, "is at present well worthy of being the seat of our Indian Government, both from its size and from the magnificent buildings which decorate the part of it inhabited by Europeans. The citadel of Fort William is a very fine work, but greatly too large for defence. The Esplanade leaves a grand opening, on the edge of which is placed the new Government House, erected by Lord Wellesley, a noble structure, although not without faults in the architecture, and, upon the whole, not unworthy of its destination. On a line with this edifice is a range of excellent houses, chunamed and ornamented with verandahs. Chowringhee, an entire village of palaces, runs for a considerable length at right angles to it, and forms the finest view I ever beheld in any city." The Indian quarter with its dirty and narrow streets, and mud and thatched structures, occasionally interspersed with brick buildings of two storeys, presented a sad contrast to the pleasing spectacle of the European quarter. The gradual growth of municipal administration in Calcutta and the introduction of the system of ordered town-planning did much to improve the situation.

Since Wellesley's time Calcutta continued to prosper systematically with the expansion of the British dominions in India. The abolition of the Company's monopoly in trade by the Charter of 1813 encouraged private trading agencies and corporations and resulted in increased trade and prosperity to the city. The failure of five of the Agency Houses between 1830 and 1834 and of the Union Bank in 1847 brought in a crisis in the commercial sphere ; but the crisis was only temporary and recovery was almost immediate. Perhaps, as a result of such circumstances the Calcutta Chamber of Commerce, the forerunner of the Bengal Chamber of Commerce of the present day, was constituted in 1834. The Calcutta Trades Association came into existence slightly earlier.

A desire for improvement of the city is also manifest among the public spirited inhabitants. A century and a half ago a lottery was the most popular means of raising funds for any public purpose. St. John's Church, it has already been observed, was built with money obtained partly by lottery. In 1804 one such lottery was organised for the erection of a Town Hall and was repeated for several years. The Town Hall was commenced in 1805 and completed in 1813. So popular did the Town Hall Lottery become that later on it was merged into a larger scheme of lotteries, instituted by an order of the Governor-General in Council, the Lottery Fund being applied "to the expense of excavating new tanks and filling up of old ones, of opening

new streets or roads, of constructing aqueducts, bridges, ghauts, and other similar works calculated to improve the health, convenience and comfort of the inhabitants of the city and the suburbs." Excellent work was carried out with the Lottery Fund. From this period date some of the most important streets of the business quarter of the city. On the receding of the river further out the Strand with its busy wharves and warehouses was constructed. The handsome thoroughfare, stretching southwards from the Shambazar corner under the name of Cornwallis—College—Wellington—Wellesley—Wood Street was laid out, as also Amherst Street connecting Maniktola with Bow Bazar. The group of streets commemorating the various titles of Lord Hastings and his wife, such as Moira Street, Loudon Street, Hungerford Street, appears also to be the work of the Lottery Committee. Free School Street, Kyd Street, Hastings Street, Creek Row, Mangoe Lane, and Cossaitollah Gully (renamed Bentinck Street) were widened and straightened. Very few of the Calcutta streets were metalled at that time and a systematic plan for metalling the roads was also taken in hand. Squares, such as Cornwallis Square, Wellington Square, etc., were laid out. Babu Ghat was built at that time and a fine avenue of trees was laid out along the river bank from the Chandpal Ghat to the Fort, and was known as Respondentia Walk for the Calcutta Society to promenade in the cool evening. Much of this old walk has now been absorbed in the famous Eden Gardens, laid out under the direction of Miss Edens, talented sisters of the Governor General Lord Auckland. Scalch's Map of 1825 affords ample testimony to the progress that was made. Old Calcutta now appears thickly populated, the streets being mostly lined by continuous rows of houses. In the southern quarter especially there has been a marked increase of masonry buildings since 1794.

Though the old Cathedral was completed in 1787 the Bishopric of Calcutta was created only in 1813 and Middleton, the first Bishop was enthroned a year later. The old St. James' Church was built in 1820. St. Thomas' in 1831 and St. Peter's within the Fort in 1835. The Calcutta congregation had been growing and the accommodation in St. John's was not sufficient for the growing needs of the community. In 1839 the scheme for building a new Cathedral took definite shape when the foundation stone was laid of a new Cathedral on a site on the Chowringhee. This Cathedral, the St. Paul's, was consecrated in 1847 and the St. John's, now popularly known as the old Cathedral, fell back from its leading position. Other stately churches were also built at various sites for the needs of the Christian community of the different orders, and these, standing on their extensive grounds with slender and soaring spires, supplied beautiful landmarks of the growing city.

The port of Calcutta is one of the leading ports in the East. A large volume of trade is carried on through this port and because the navigation is difficult on account of shifting shoals and sandbanks the maintenance is naturally expensive and demands expert technical service. The Port Commissioners, instituted in 1870, administered the Calcutta Port and to this body are due the modern scientific improvements of the port and its appurtenances.

Calcutta with the rest of Bengal felt the first impact of Western ideas and culture and this impact manifested itself in various ways. In the first half of the 19th century Raja Rammohan Ray started the Brahma Samaj which meant an emancipation from the shackles of tradition and made the people receptive to new ideas and thoughts. This new religious system may also be said to have been the root of several reformist movements, social, intellectual as well as political. Raja Rammohan was a champion of the move for the abolition of the Suttee. The movement for remarriage of widows was also started at Calcutta, and it was mainly through the initiative of Pundit Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar that the widow-remarriage Act of 1856 was passed. Vidyasagar also started a campaign against the institution of polygamy and this movement has been able to change public opinion in such a way that polygamy is practically unheard of in Hindu Society now a days. With Calcutta are also associated the hallowed names of Ramkrishna Paramahansa and Swami Vivekananda, the latter inspiring a world-wide humanitarian organisation like the Ramkrishna Mission. In the spread of Western education Calcutta took the lead and research institutions, scientific as well as cultural, came into being and made important contributions to the advancement of knowledge. It was in Calcutta again that the first awakenings of political consciousness were felt, and the British Indian Association (1852), the Indigo movement, the Indian Association (1876), etc. paved the way for the Congress organisation which played so important a part in the country's liberation. "What Bengal thinks today India thinks tomorrow", said Gokhale. This eulogy is due to the fact that Calcutta has been the birth place of all advanced ideas in this country.

The 20th century saw many sweeping changes in the city and the passing away of many old landmarks. The growth of industrial organisations has enriched the city and has extended her importance in manifold ways. Along with increased prosperity the city came to be adorned with many beautiful buildings, public as well as private. The Victoria Memorial Hall, undoubtedly the most stately building erected in India in modern times, owes its conception to Lord Curzon. The Calcutta Improvement Trust, constituted in 1912 with a view to largescale improvements of the city, have literally "changed the face" of Calcutta by laying out broad streets, open parks, lakes, etc. and by extending the city to the south as well as to the north. Large and beautiful residential areas have grown, the business quarter of the city has been improved beyond measure, the narrow and congested areas have been liquidated, and the result is a new and more stately city with varied attractions and entertainments. With the transfer of the capital of India to Delhi and the partition of Bengal, Calcutta remains politically as the headquarters of a truncated state. But little has the city lost thereby. Still the first and foremost city, Calcutta continues to be the nerve centre of India, and due to her pre-eminent position is justly known as the "Queen of the Eastern Seas".

S. K. S.



*Once two hundred years ago  
the trader came meek and tame.  
Where his timid foot first halted  
there he stayed . . . .  
Thus the mid-day halt of Charnock—  
more's the pity  
grew a city.  
As the fungus sprouts chaotic  
from its bed  
so it spread—  
Chance-directed chance-erected,  
laid and built,  
on the silt.  
Palace, myre, hovel—  
poverty and pride  
side by side ;  
And, above the packed  
and pestilential town  
Death looked down.*

—RUDYARD KIPLING



## THE ASIATIC SOCIETY

One hundred and seventy-two years ago, in August 1783, Sir William Jones was at sea on his way to India. He found one evening that India lay before him, Persia on his left, while "a breeze from Arabia blew nearly" on the ship's stern. It gave him "inexpressible pleasure" to find himself "in the midst of so noble an amphitheatre, almost encircled by the vast regions of Asia". He could not help thinking "how important and extensive a field was yet unexplored, and how many solid advantages unimproved". Such enquiry could only be made by the joint efforts of many, and he hoped that "if in any country or community such an union could be effected", it was among his countrymen in Bengal.

Shortly after Sir William Jones' arrival in Calcutta he organised a meeting of the European inhabitants of the city. The inaugural meeting held on January 15, 1784, was presided over by Sir Robert Chambers, the second Judge of the Supreme Court, and attended by 30 gentlemen. It was resolved to form an association called the 'Asiatick Society' and hold weekly meetings in the Court House every Thursday evening at 7 o'clock.

The first meeting of the Society took place on January 22, 1784. Thirteen members were present including John Hyde, Sir William Jones, David Anderson, Francis Gladwin and Jonathan Duncan. Sir William Jones moved that the following letter be addressed to Warren Hastings who was then the Governor-General, and his Council: "A society of which we are members having been instituted for the purpose of enquiring into the history and antiquities, the arts, sciences and literature of Asia, we are desirous that you will honour us with accepting the title of Patrons . . ." By a separate letter Warren Hastings was also requested to accept the office of the President. But Warren Hastings declined the offer, because he did not have "the leisure requisite to discharge the functions of such a station", and because of the "superior talents" and abilities of the members of the Society. Instead, he suggested the name of the "gentleman whose genius planned the institution". Sir William Jones became the first President and continued to hold the office till his death in 1794. The Governor-General and the members of his Council, however, accepted the title of patrons to the Society. Warren Hastings, Edward Wheeler, John Macpherson and John Stables became the patrons. During the administration of Lord Bentinck the practice of asking the members of the Governor-General's Council to be patrons was abandoned, and only the Governor-General continued to be the patron of the Society.

In the early days of the Society, the members were not required to pay any subscription. There was no hard and fast rule regarding membership or procedure. Jones proposed "to establish but one rule, namely to have no rules at all." There was to be "no confinement, no trouble, no

expenses, no unnecessary formality." In all cases the decision was by ballot, and no new member was to be admitted unless he voluntarily expressed a desire to join the Society. The Society extended its invitation to "all curious and learned men" to send their papers, and dissertations on various subjects were communicated to the Society. Papers read in the first few years of the Society included, "A Geography of Cochin China—some particulars relative to the manners, custom and history of the inhabitants, "A short description of the kingdom of Nepal and account of Wars with the King of Gurkha", "A Treatise on the course of the Nile", "A dissertation on the nature of Gods of Greece, Italy and India", a translation of a portion of the Ramayana from an Italian version of the original, and "An account of the present state of Delhi". It is natural that all members did not regularly attend the meetings of the Society. In the last quarter of the 18th century, Calcutta had earned the reputation of a gay city, and the prospect of an evening spent in the learned and perhaps slightly dull atmosphere of the Society's room did not appeal to many. In ordinary meetings the number of members present was about a dozen or a little more. But on special occasions a large number was present. When the first instalment of Chapman's paper on the Geography of Cochin China was read on April 15, 1784, eleven members attended. The remaining instalments were read on April 22, April 29, and May 6. On the second day thirteen members were present, but on the last two occasions there was a sharp fall in attendance and on both occasions only seven members attended.

When the Society was first started there was no Indian member. In his preliminary discourse Jones said to the members of the Society, "whether you will enrol as members any number of learned natives, you will hereafter decide." But papers written by Indians were welcomed. In the annual meeting held on February 24, 1785, Jones said that much might be expected from "the communication of learned natives, whether lawyers, physicians or private scholars", who would eagerly send their writings to the Society, "some for the sake of advancing general knowledge, but most of them from a desire, neither uncommon nor unreasonable, of attracting notice, and recommending themselves to favour". Jones suggested the publication of a short memorial in Persian and Hindi explaining the objects of the Society to the Indians. He also proposed that a medal might be awarded annually with inscriptions in Persian and Sanskrit to the writer of the best essay or dissertation among the Indians. The first paper written by an Indian was read on June 10, 1784. It was an account of different modes of trial by ordeal among the Hindus translated from Persian by Jones. Ali Ibrahim Khan, the writer of the treatise, was the Chief Judge of Benares, a friend of Warren Hastings and a well known person of his time. On April 14, 1785, a Persian paper on "The care of the Elephantiasis and other disorders of the blood" written by a Mahomedan physician was translated and read with an introduction added to it by the President. But it was not till 1829 that Indians may be said to have taken active interest in the Society. In January of 1829 Indians were for the first time elected as members. They were Prasanna Kumar Tagore, Dwarka Nath

Tagore, Shib Chandra Das, Haromoy Dutt and Ram Kamal Sen. This was immediately followed by the entry of other Indians in the Society. In the same year Maharaja Baidyanath Rai, Kasinath Mallik, Raja Bonwarilall, Asutosh De, Rajchandra Das and Syamlal Thakur were elected.

A few years after the establishment of the Society, the interest of the members appears to have slackened. Meetings became less frequent. In 1788 there were five meetings, in 1789 only two, and in 1790 there were six. In 1794, the Society sustained a great loss in the death of Sir William Jones. On August 10, 1796 it was resolved to hold a meeting "for the special purpose of considering the best means of rendering the institution permanent". At the next meeting of the Society held on August 19, Sir John Shore who had succeeded Jones as President proposed that application might be made to the King for a Charter of Incorporation for the Society, that a house be provided for the use of the Society and that a committee of nine be appointed for carrying the resolution into effect. On September 29, the Committee recommended that the application should be made to the King through the Governor-General in Council and the Court of Directors, that a 'commodious house' should be built as soon as the funds would permit, and until then there should be at least one meeting every month. For collecting funds for the building and for defraying the expenses of the Society, it was proposed to raise subscriptions from the members. Every resident member was to pay four gold mohurs a year. New members were to pay two gold mohurs in addition as admission fee. The same amount was also raised from the old members, as they had not paid any admission fee when elected. This rate of subscription continued till 1859 when it was reduced. In 1805 the Asiatic Society secured the gift of a piece of land from the Government at the corner of Park Street and Chowringhee where the Asiatic Society is situated to-day. The building was completed in 1808.

Immediately after the foundation of the Society Sir William Jones expressed his intention of "presenting the Asiatick Miscellany to the literary world". But for a long time there was no official journal of the Society. In 1787, Manuel Cantopher, Superintendent of the East India Company's Press, agreed to publish the transactions of the Society. It was a private venture and it was understood that every member of the Society would buy a copy. This proposal was placed before the Society on July 6, 1787. Between 1788 and 1797 five volumes of the 'Asiatick Researches' were published and attracted much attention. From the sixth volume the Society began to bear the expenses of the publication, but it did not prove to be a financial success and after the issue of the 20th volume in 1829, the publication was stopped. In the same year another series was started by Captain J. D. Herbert. It was called "Gleanings in Science" and contained among other things papers read in the Society and summary of the proceedings of the meetings. After one year Captain Herbert accepted service with the Nawab of Oudh and left Calcutta. But the paper was continued by James Prinsep. On March 7, 1832, the Asiatic Society passed a resolution that the journal "Gleanings in Science" should be permitted to assume the name of the "Journal of the Asiatic Society". The first issue of the

journal came out in March 1832, but it was not officially recognised as an organ of the Society till ten years later.

In the preliminary discourse to the members, Sir William Jones explained the limits and aims of the Society. "The intended objects of our enquiries", he said, are "Man and Nature; whatever is performed by the one or produced by the other". It will be well to remember that it was not purely thirst for knowledge that led to the foundation of the institution. There were also other factors. Jones' estimate of his countrymen in Bengal was very flattering but it was not shared by many. Wellesley, for instance, considered them "so vulgar, ignorant, rude, familiar and stupid as to be disgusting and intolerable". They were not however blind to the political advantages that might result from a better knowledge of India. About the time the Society was established, only a portion of India had passed under the direct rule of the British. The struggle for supremacy with the Marathas was not over and Tipu's power was growing to be a menace in South India. In such circumstances any information about this country was of supreme interest to the Company. Sir William Jones was probably hinting at this when he referred to the "solid advantages" that might accrue from a study of eastern affairs. In the second annual meeting of the Society, he made it clear when he said that the history of India "must be highly interesting to our common country; but we have a still nearer interest in knowing all former modes of ruling these inestimable provinces, on the prosperity of which so much of our national welfare and individual benefit seems to depend."

But the political condition in India has undergone a complete change from the days of Sir William Jones. To-day it serves as a bond of union among scholars all over the world.

P. C. G.

## INDIAN HISTORY CONGRESS

The Indian History Congress had an inconspicuous beginning. It made its first debut under the chaperonage of a Poona Society. The Bharat Itihasa Samsodhaka Mandala celebrated its silver Jubilee in 1935 and it was in that connection that the Modern History Congress was convened. It is doubtful whether the sponsors expected it to be a permanent forum for students and teachers of Indian History. Though it was inaugurated by Lord Brabourne, then Governor of Bombay, and presided over by Sir Shafaat Ahmad Khan, Professor of History of Allahabad the Congress could not claim to be a representative organisation. All the Universities of India had indeed been invited to send delegates but most of the Vice-Chancellors contented themselves with a formal message of good will. Happily among the minority that deemed it worth their while to associate actively with the proceedings of the new Congress were the Universities of Allahabad and Calcutta to whom it fell to nurse the Congress in its early infancy. The Modern History Congress had a very brief session at which a few papers were read and might have been now for all we know a thing of the past but for a question mooted by Professor Datto Vaman Potdar. He suggested that the Congress should be given an all India character, and organised on a permanent basis for furthering historical investigations in India. When the scholars present gave a sympathetic response the question of its scope and constitution naturally followed. There was a feeling that as the Oriental Conference offered a suitable platform for all students of ancient and medieval history the Congress might more usefully limit its interest to modern history without trespassing into realms already appropriated. This view however found no favour with the majority and the Modern History Congress emerged from its chrysalis as the Indian History Congress. But its future was still uncertain, for the second session was not held until three years later. It was due to Sir Shafaat Ahmad Khan who took the onerous duties of the General Secretary that the Congress survived its infantile maladies and met at Allahabad in October, 1938. Professors Datto Vaman Potdar and Sir Shafaat Ahman Khan are the real founders of the Congress.

The Congress that met at Allahabad attracted scholars from all over the country. It divided itself into eight sections and discussed many unsolved problems that had so long engaged the attention of our savants. The Allahabad session had for its president an orientalist of international fame, Professor D. R. Bhandarkar of Calcutta and the Vice-Chancellor of the Calcutta University journeyed five hundred miles to invite the Congress in person to hold its next session at Calcutta. During the next sixteen years the Congress has grown from strength to strength and to-day its members number more than four hundred. There is no University of India, no learned association, that does not deem it an honour to have the Congress



as its guest. Calcutta is extending its hospitality to the Congress for a second time after an interval of fifteen years. In the meantime it has met at Lahore, Hyderabad, Aligarh, Madras, Annamalainagar, Patna, Bombay, Delhi, Cuttack, Nagpur, Jaipur, Gwalior, Waltair and Ahmedabad, all University centres except one. To-day it is the unquestioned representative organisation in India to be consulted on all questions of historical interest.

It has gained this unique position of prestige by its accommodating spirit and liberal policy. From its very inception the Congress refused to work in isolation and offered willing co-operation to such other bodies as the Numismatic Society and the Museums Society, for though their scope was limited their contribution to our knowledge of the past could by no means be ignored. Often did the three associations hold their annual sessions at the same venue and not infrequently the same scholar addressed all the three. Nor did the Congress feel shy officially sponsored organisations like the Indian Historical Records Commission and the Government department of the Archaeological Survey. Two Director Generals of Archaeological Survey, the late Mr. K. N. Dikshit and Dr. N. P. Chakravarti presided over the Aligarh and Ahmedabad sessions respectively. The Commission and the Congress met at Calcutta in the X'mas week of 1939 and though they could not always find a common venue the dates of the annual meetings for many years were so fixed as to enable the common members, and there are many, to go from the one to the other without any inconvenience. In fact once the non-official Congress and the official Commission had a common Secretary, so closely allied were they in their aims and objects. It is to be noted that the neighbouring island of Ceylon has been sending a delegate to the Congress since 1941 and the ancient cultural tie between the two countries has been thus maintained.

The Congress has been fortunate in its Secretaries. The first Secretary Sir Shafaat Ahmad Khan, whose achievements were not limited to academic fields alone, had to leave India to look after her interests in the South Africa and his mantle fell upon the capable shoulders of Dr. Tara Chand, now India's Ambassador at Teheran. He relinquished his office when he was elected President in 1945, but his duties were ably conducted by Dr. Bishweshwar Prasad now Professor of History at Delhi and Director, Historical section Ministry of Defence. He was succeeded by Dr. P. C. Gupta of Calcutta. He retired last year as he wanted to respect the spirit of the new rule that precludes all persons from holding any office for more than three successive years, though a strict legal interpretation would permit him to continue in office a year longer.

Of the Presidents, Sir Shafaat Ahmad Khan, Prof. D. R. Bhandarkar, Prof. Krishnaswami Aiyangar, Mr. K. N. Dikshit and Prof. C. S. Srinivasachari are no longer in the land of the living. They were scholars of whom any country may be rightly proud. They gave their best to the Congress and steered its course during the difficult days of the second world war. Sardar K. M. Panikkar will preside over the present session. A professor, publicist, an administrator and a diplomat in turn he combines in himself the rare gifts of a poet with the discriminating industry of a

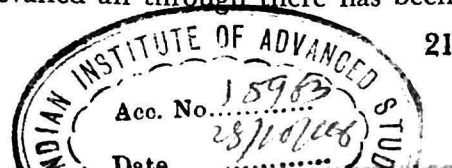


historian. In the past the Congress contributed two diplomats to the country's service, the diplomatic service in its turn now gives the Congress a President who will substantially add to its strength.

A scholar may very well spurn the worldly goods but a learned association cannot do without its sinews of war if it is to succeed in its cherished aim of extending the bounds of knowledge. The Indian History Congress would not have been what it is if it divested itself of that ambition. We are deeply indebted to western pioneers who did so much to unravel the mysteries of our past. In the world of learning there is no barrier of colour, caste or creed and the Congress will always welcome the co-operation of the scholars of the west. But it felt that the time has come when Indians must interpret the history of their country to the world outside not in a spirit of narrow chauvinism, but in the spirit of scientific objectivity. At the Lahore session therefore it was decided to compile a comprehensive History of India in twelve volumes. Funds had to be collected before this stupendous task could be seriously undertaken and during the war funds were not easy to get. But, for Dr. Tara Chand there was no difficulty which could not be surmounted. He approached the wealthy industrialists of the country, the ruling princes of India and the custodians of the public purse and in a few years raised the not inconsiderable sum of two lakhs of rupees. Of the princes His Exalted Highness the Nizam and His Highness the Holkar of Indore donated twenty five thousand each. The Tatas, as usual, made a substantial contribution and the Government of India gave ten thousand rupees. Financial support came from men of all walks of life. A Committee was appointed with the late Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru as its head to administer the funds and to arrange for the publication of the projected volumes. The first hurdle was over but another remained to be negotiated.

India is admittedly a poor country and it is equally admitted that we cannot boast of a plethora of talents. No waste of money or labour could therefore be tolerated. The Bharatiya Vidya Pith of Banares had a similar scheme in view but the same writers and almost the same editors were expected to implement both these schemes. This obviously involved unnecessary duplication of work and avoidable waste of money. Dr. Tara Chand next approached Dr. Rajendra Prasad with a view to harnessing the resources of the Congress and the Vidya Pith for furthering the common object for which both the organisations had been striving. Thanks to the tact and moderation of the two spokesmen a compromise was effected. Since then Dr. Rajendra Prasad has been taking a keen interest in the progress of the joint scheme. Even after his elevation to the President's Office Dr. Rajendra Prasad has unsparingly given his time and advice to the publication committee of which he continues to be the patron. It will be inexpedient to cite instances but it will not be out of place here to say that the Government of India have always given due weight to its resolutions regarding ancient monuments and historical records.

I shall not refer to the many difficulties which the Congress had to encounter during its brief career of twenty years. Suffice it to say that thanks to the spirit of toleration that prevailed all through there has been



no defection, no schism. All the states into which India is divided to-day have found fair representation on its executive bodies and there has been no power politics or attempt to dominate. The office bearers always placed the interests of the Congress above personal feelings and cheerfully bore their burden.

India has her moorings in the past ; the past therefore needs accurate and scientific interpretation. Those who are engaged in that task do not indulge themselves in mere academic speculation. To the country their labour is of no inconsiderable value. The Indian History Congress therefore deserves well of the country and its people. Calcutta has done the right thing in inviting the Congress once again.

S. N. S.

INDIAN HISTORY CONGRESS  
EIGHTEENTH SESSION : CALCUTTA

PROGRAMME

*Friday, 30 December, 1955*

- 9-00 A.M.—11-00 A.M. .. Inaugural Meeting in the Pandal.  
Opening of the Exhibition.
- 2-00 P.M.— 3-30 P.M. .. Presidential Addresses: Sections I, II  
and V.
- 3-30 P.M. .. .. Meeting of the Executive Committee.
- 5-00 P.M. .. .. Lecture on 'Forts in Maharashtra' by  
Mm. D. V. Potdar (Asutosh Hall).
- 6-00 P.M. .. .. Musical Programme (Pandal).

*Saturday, 31 December, 1955*

- 8-30 A.M.— 9-30 A.M. .. Presidential Addresses, Sections III and IV.
- 9-30 A.M.—10-00 A.M. .. Presidential Address of the Museums  
Association of India (Pandal).
- 10-00 A.M.—12-30 P.M. .. Reading of Papers (All Sections).
- 2-00 P.M.— 4-00 P.M. .. Reading of Papers (All Sections).
- 6-00 P.M.— 7-30 P.M. .. Symposium on 'The Problem of Sasanka'  
(Asutosh Hall).
- 8-30 P.M. .. .. Entertainment (Pandal).

*Sunday, 1 January, 1956*

- 8-30 A.M. .. .. Reading of Papers (All Sections).
- 10-00 A.M. .. .. Presidential Address of the Numismatic  
Association of India (Pandal).
- 11-00 A.M.—12-30 P.M. .. Annual Business Meeting of the members  
of the Indian History Congress (Asutosh  
Hall).
- 2-00 P.M. .. .. Excursion for members of the Indian  
History Congress.

# INDIAN HISTORY CONGRESS

## EIGHTEENTH SESSION

CALCUTTA, 1955

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upto 711 A.D.

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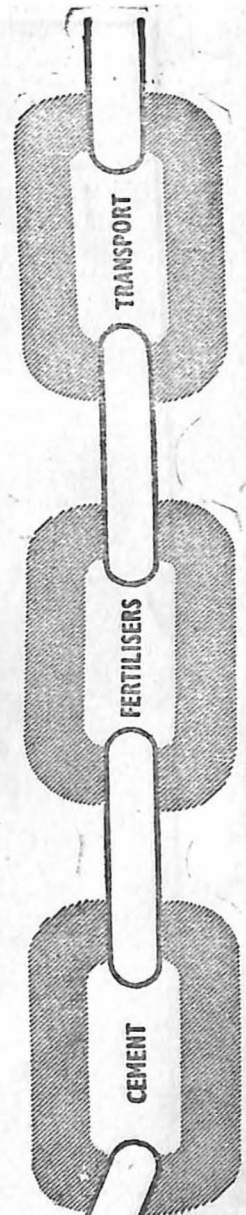
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**I bind many industries together**

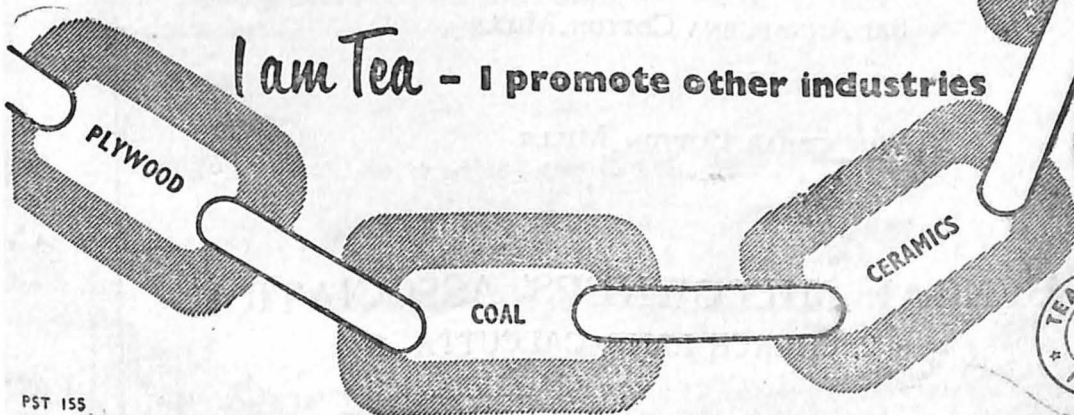
I feel proud that I am of service to the several industries allied to me. For instance, to pack my weight running into several millions of pounds, I need six million plywood chests every year. Practically this entire quantity is now being made from Indian material and by Indians, thereby giving employment to thousands of my countrymen—and what is even more important saving several lakhs of rupees every year which would otherwise be spent in buying tea chests from abroad. Ceramics, too, have to keep pace with my increasing popularity by making millions of tea pots, cups and saucers for homes, hotels, clubs, offices, etc.

Again, coal, cement, fertilisers, machinery are constantly in demand by the tea gardens where I grow and by the tea factories where I am given the familiar form by which I am daily recognised. Then, there is the question of providing transport. When it comes to sending me down to the ports, I need the services of railways, boats, airways and lorries. Think of the numbers of men who are employed in such services and who have come to depend on my prosperity.

So, I am the greatest ally of the several industries with whose fate I am inextricably linked.



## I am Tea - I promote other industries



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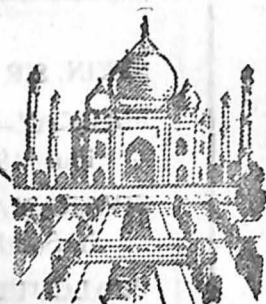
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# CIRCULAR TOUR CONCESSION TICKETS *and* EXCURSION SPECIALS



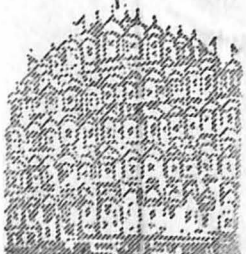
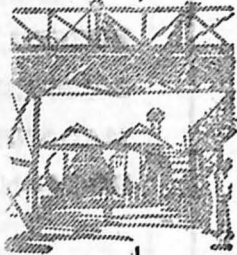
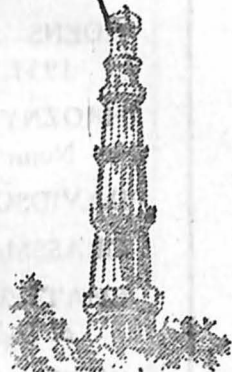
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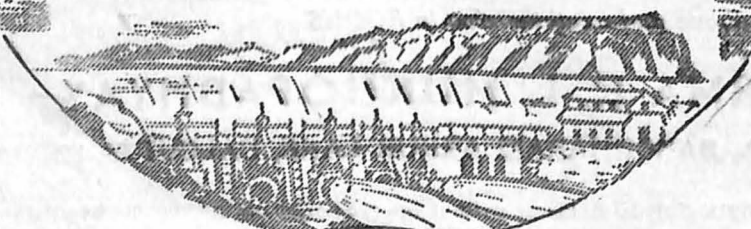
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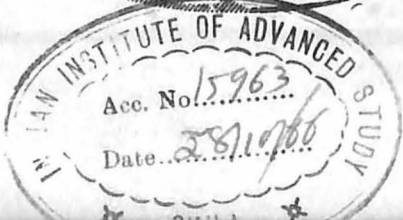
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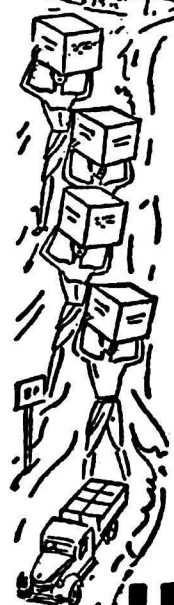
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