Chapter 6

Reimagining Kolkata: Subaltern Narratives and the Colonial Urban Dystopia in *Kallol* Magazine's Literature

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Abstract

Kallol (1923-1929), a prominent literary magazine of Bengal published under the joint editorship of Dineshranjan Das and Gokulchandra Nag, became a mouthpiece for challenging the dominant Bhadralok hegemony in the Bengal Presidency. As the colonial capital and centre of modernisation, Kolkata was both a place of hope and frustration for young migrants arriving from mofussil towns in search of better lives. However, the Bhadralok account, disseminated by the city's bourgeoisie, tended to overlook the realities experienced by the underbelly. Kallol, as a cultural and literary movement in Bengal, portrayed Kolkata as a city of stark contrasts, defined by fragmented spaces and marginalised lives. Drawing on Lefebvre's conception of space as a political construct and Certeau's framework of tactics versus strategies, this paper analyses how Kallol's stories, poems, and essays expose the city's "third spaces" of resistance, where marginalised clerks, labourers, and migrants navigate oppressive urban hierarchies. By closely reading the texts that appeared in Kallol, this article examines how the cityscape of Kolkata becomes a place where illusions of progress are subverted by economic exploitation, poverty, and the erosion of human dignity. These urbanscapes in Kallol stand not only for physiographic locations but also for psychological topographies that bring to the fore the desperation of clerks confined to demeaning jobs, labourers exploited in industrial areas, and families suffering from squalor and uncertainty. This portrayal underpins the attempt to constitute Kolkata as a fractured entity, where the relentless pace of modernisation left its residents in disconnection, disillusionment, and confinement within its dystopian boundaries. This paper will trace the contours of an uncompromised critique of *Kallol* in reimagining Kolkata as a dystopian space that reveals the human cost of colonial modernity and rapid urbanisation.

Keywords: Urban Dystopia, Elite Hegemony, Spatial Politics, Colonial Urbanism, Resistance, Subaltern Agency, Fragmented Cityscapes.

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6.1 Introduction

Kolkata, the city of joy, once served as the political capital of Colonial India. During colonial times, it catered to the largest population of educated novice Bengali middle-class. Bengal was the region where the wealth of the Presidency was most concentrated. The British presence had left the deepest impact here, reshaping land tenures, revolutionising education, and establishing the largest city in Asia. As Das (1990) observes, "When the Raj sought to impart Western education, Calcutta was the experimental site" (p. 15; see also pp. 15–26). The *Bhadralok* class, as defined by J.H. Broomfield (1968) was not just a socioeconomic division; rather, it was deeply embedded in Bengal's cultural dynamics. Education emerged as a defining characteristic of *Bhadralok* status, particularly education conducted in the English language, which facilitated access to university colleges in Kolkata and subsequent white-collar employment. As noted in a 1928 report by the Bengal Government, "The school is the one gate to the society of the *Bhadralok*" (Broomfield, 1968, p.8). The early 20th century's expansion of education, evidenced by the proliferation of schools, colleges, and universities, resulted in an excess of degree-holders confronted with diminishing employment opportunities. Advocacy, once a bastion of *Bhadralok* self-reliance, became unaffordable due to overcrowding, and teaching offered poverty rather than prestige. Provincial reorganisation and anti-terrorist policies deliberately severed Eastern Bengal's youth from agrarian or artisanal support, while state surveillance suppressed dissent. The result was a burgeoning proletariat of educated unemployed, concentrated in Kolkata - the unchallenged epicentre of Bengali political, economic, and cultural life - as well as secondary towns like Dhaka.

Meanwhile, national consciousness had spread significantly across all parts of India. However, the burgeoning sense of nationalism coincided with the simultaneous emergence of regional identities. It came to fruition not only in Bengal but also among politically aware people in many other parts of India. Therefore, there existed a distinct, if not necessarily intrinsically contradictory, nationalist and regional split. Political consciousness in Bengal up to the 1910s was imbued with an intense consciousness of superiority, and Bengalis tended to look down upon themselves as politically more advanced than those in the rest of India. Bengal was the keeper of Indian nationalism, taking the lead in political discussion and activity in the area. But this superior Bengali perspective fell in the 1920s (Broomfield, 1968; Aloysius, 2020).

The consequences of India's Non-Cooperation Movement (1921) were a wide gulf of despair: political aspirations were shattered by a sudden disconnection, while economic uncertainty deepened, culminating in a crisis of the system. Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das's founding of the Swarajya Party in 1923 had initially created hope through legislative action and election enthusiasm; however, Das's untimely death in 1925 deflated this enthusiasm, leaving Bengal in despair. The despair went beyond the political realm and was in fact an economic collapse. The transfer of the imperial capital from Calcutta to Delhi in 1911, together with the economic pressures generated by Britain's wartime demands, contributed to a growing sense of political and economic marginalisation in Bengal (Chakraborty, 1990; Chatterjee, 1997). War industries' interference, excessive taxation, and static entrepreneurial activity led to the economic anarchy that contemporary eyewitnesses testified to. The breakdown of the boycott-based economy of Non-Cooperation further ensnared financial uncertainty, leaving Bengal's youth

stranded in a world of broken dreams. Meanwhile, a demographic crisis was in the process of unfolding.

The first two decades of the twentieth century were the most transformative years for Kolkata. By the end of the 1920s, the intelligentsia of the city had ballooned to include the first generation of migrants from rural districts. Newcomers to Kolkata, most of whom came from East Bengal, were always much more integrated into village life than established citizens. They brought rural-urban dialogue to the creative works produced in the city, reminding one of the countryside and embracing ambivalence. The influx of these rural migrants had remade the cultural map of the city. The experiences and perceptions of these migrants brought a new zeal to the cultural fabric of Kolkata, which is otherwise dominated by intellectuals and upper-class elites. Rural distress added to this urban influx: malaria epidemics, agrarian decline, and cultural desolation of village existence clashed with the magnetism of Kolkata's modernity. The surrounding cities with factories promised survival, but yielded crowded bustees (informal, densely populated urban settlements or slums) and exploitative work. Although unquestioned after World War I (1914-1918), Kolkata's supremacy was contradictory; it represented a national revival but embodied the pathologies of the era: unemployment, inflation, and religious confusion.

> About the same time, as the industrial revolution increased production efficiency, urban areas received the influx of a large percentage of agricultural labor, creating a pool of surplus population. These potentially rebellious unemployed and displaced workers needed to be depressurized… bourgeois leaders had to conceal their class interests, which sharply conflicted with the interest of the populace at large. (Miyoshi, 1993, p.731)

By the 1920s, the concept of Bengal had undergone a radical change from its earlier understanding. The entire scenario changed dramatically since the Swadeshi movement, which emerged as a response to the partition of Bengal in 1905. This socioeconomic fissure was bound to recast the gender relations. Postponed marriage for the educated elite made education for women obligatory (*strisikkha*, a form of female education aimed at producing morally refined and domestically skilled wives), rearranging the *andarmahal* (women's quarters within the household) as arenas for incremental emancipation. However, for women who came into the city as students, employees, or immigrants from rural destitution, urban opportunities usually meant confinement within new hierarchies of danger and exploitation.

The aftermath of the Non-Cooperation Movement generated a climate of political uncertainty and economic strain in Bengal, prompting new ways of perceiving Kolkata's urban environment. Rather than appearing as an unquestioned emblem of colonial progress and modernity, the city increasingly came to be represented as a fragmented and unequal space shaped by social exclusion, bureaucratic control, and the everyday struggles of its inhabitants (Das, 1990; Chattopadhyay, 2005). Henri Lefebvre's injunction that "social space is a social product" (1974/1991) is our point of departure: colonial Kolkata embodied capitalism's contradictions in geographically segregated spaces—*Bhadralok* enclaves and bustee slums, imperial offices and exploitative factories. It was not a tabula rasa, but what Lefebvre called "abstract space": a regime in which power (British colonial and *Bhadralok* elite) strategically mapped territory to maximise control and extraction.

In the background of the then-prevailing circumstances of political disillusionment, economic stagnation, and urban degeneration, *Kallol* magazine (1923–1929) appeared, voicing the language of the disillusioned, the marginalised, and the rebel to map this dystopian spatial order. This study contends that *Kallol*'s discourse transcends superficial visual rebellion. The *Kallol*ans charted the dystopian landscapes of Kolkata from a subaltern point of view, demonstrating how colonial modernity distorted space, labour, and gender, fragmenting Bengali society. Editors Dineshranjan Das and Gokulchandra Nag utilised literature to reveal how Kolkata's progress depended on the fragmentation of subaltern lives. This paper aligns with Michel de Certeau's dialectic of strategies versus tactics (1984) where *Bhadralok* elites and colonial state-imposed strategies like zoning, surveillance and cultural hegemony. *Kallol* documented subaltern tactics - the everyday acts of survival by clerks, migrants, and widows who "walked the city" to reclaim agency.

The selection of *Kallol* magazine as the main corpus for this study is both strategically imperative as well as historio-graphically justified. Despite other coeval periodicals available for perusal, *Kallol* differentiated itself by virtue of its overt editorial aim in opposing then-existing literary and societal norms. It became the main forum for a later wave of literary aspirants - most of whom were immigrants facing the vicissitudes of urban life. The magazine cultivated a literary landscape that redirected attention from the bourgeois domestic spaces traditionally associated with the Bhadralok to more public and marginal locations such as footpaths, mess houses, and bureaucratic institutions. Through this shift in spatial focus, it foregrounded the everyday realities of socially and economically marginalised groups, creating a counter-narrative to dominant elite representations. The selection and arrangement of these texts suggest a conscious engagement with alternative social experiences and perspectives, contributing to a broader challenge to established literary and cultural hierarchies.

As such, its selection is fundamentally intertwined with the magazine's inherent identity; its pages served as a purposeful as well as cohesive discursive "Thirdspace" in which dystopian circumstances of colonial Kolkata were not only alluded to but systematically disclosed and theorised in diverse forms like fiction, poetry, and essays. A study of *Kallol* provides a carefully constructed but real window into the shared consciousness of a disenchanted subaltern urban population at a moment of profound socio-political upheaval. These narratives transformed marginal sites into zones of insurgent knowledge, exposing the "real-and-imagined" (Soja) experience of colonial urbanism. With such a Lefebvre-Certeau Soja model, the article has examined how Kallol revealed elite spatial strategies, listed subaltern spatial tactics, and reclaimed the city as a space of radical potential.

6.2 The City as Palimpsest

The intentional focus of educational spending on the privileged not only widened the socioeconomic divide but also sustained a cycle of exclusion, perpetuating the poor in a state of deprivation with limited social mobility and political participation. "The *Bhadralok* redefined social power and authority by defying social norms and at the same time clung to the criteria of hierarchical social ranking". (Roychowdhury, 2014, p.6) Thus, the image of the *Bhadralok* at the turn of the society became very clear in Bengal's context –

> a socially privileged and consciously superior group, economically dependent upon landed rents and professional and clerical employment; keeping its distance from the masses by its acceptance of high-caste proscriptions and its command of education; sharing a pride in its language, its literate culture, and its history. (Broomfield, 1968, p.13)

The power structure that was set up during colonial rule had a big impact on how Indians thought about their country. The idea of a nation-state with clear borders began to take hold as the British strengthened their hold on the subcontinent.

As British legal, administrative, and educational systems were put in place, the people living in the colonies became more and more aware of the idea of a unified nation-state. The borders that separated British India, along with new ways of governing and communicating, helped different groups feel like they were all part of the same thing. While the elites often embraced this new political identity, the concept failed to permeate other sections of society, leading to the failure of a unified national consciousness among the masses. "It is generally recognised that the intelligentsia were central to the rise of nationalism in the colonial territories". (Anderson, 1983, p.116) According to Sekhar Bandopadhyay, as quoted in G. Aloysius (2020), "When the nationalist movement arose" the subaltern section of society "perceived it as a Bhadralok affair, antagonistic to their own interests, and stood apart from it" (p. 7).

For the *Bhadralok*, nationalism became a tool to advance their own social and political power, but it remained an exclusive project, detached from the lived experiences of the underprivileged classes, who worked under oppressive conditions for the zamindars and wealthy landlords. These labourers, many of whom belonged to lower castes, were subjected to harsh economic exploitation and social marginalisation. The writers of the *Kallol* magazine thus tried to bridge this disillusionment and despair through their writings; they not only portrayed the forgotten heroes of the nationalistic movements but also highlighted the exploitation of these heroes in the hands of elitist mainstream nationalism in the city capital Kolkata.

> The first half of the twentieth century witnessed a number of important spatial and cultural changes in Kolkata that led to the formation of a significant and identifiable body of Bengali literature, paintings, plays, films, as well as literary and art criticism that dealt with various notions of nationalism and modern Bengali identity and claimed the city as its own. (Chattopadhyay, 2005, p. 5)

The *Kallol* group was a prominent advocate of nationalism, and the narratives and novels produced by its authors frequently encapsulated the implicit conflicts and socio-political transformations instigated by the national movement. Although *Kallol* writers' literature primarily focused on societal issues, personal dilemmas, and the intricacies of urban life, their works inadvertently reflected the zeitgeist of the time, as nationalist fervour was pervasive throughout the country. An illustrative example of this is found in the novel "Michil" by Premendra Mitra.

> A village boy, within the small confines of rural life, I dreamt of serving the Nation. Sitting at home, I have spun the charkha, dressed in a single piece of cloth woven by my own hands, I have endured harsh cold winters, thinking that I was practising austerity for the country. I have gone late at night in groups, encouraged by rural organisation efforts, to cut down bamboo groves in others' gardens and pour kerosene into others' ponds, and

> it's not as if I was not thrashed and castigated for that.
>
> Then, I came to Kolkata with the intent of going to jail, carried by the zeal of the Non-Cooperation Movement. I met Sachin in jail.
>
> About twenty-five of us slept in a long room (Mitra, 2020, pp. 9–10; all translations from Bengali are the author's unless otherwise stated).

The Bengali *Bhadralok* elite's nationalist project was fundamentally discordant with the material conditions of rural migrants moving to colonial Kolkata. Enthralled by the possibility of belonging to an integrated anti-colonial movement, these young men were instead confronted with what Ranajit Guha (1998) describes as the dualistic colonialism of the bourgeoisie, who "professed and practised democracy at home" but uncompromisingly exercised "autocracy" in India. (p.4) Their path from rural residences to the exploitative periphery of the capital reveals the insincerity of the *Bhadralok*'s egalitarian rhetoric. According to Guha, "The destruction of the colonial state was never a part of their project". (p.5) The circumstances of these migrants were then structurally obliterated: not only did they fall outside nationalist historiography, but they were systematically erased from its fundamental account. The *Bhadralok*'s self-aggrandising narratives generated through personal memoirs, institutional documents, and reformist writings erased subaltern realities in the interests of elite hegemony. *Kallol*'s literary productions reveal this epistemic violence by tracing the barren urban landscape of these migrants. The cityscape reveals a high level of destitution, with crumbling infrastructure and poor roads. The poverty here is visible, meaning that it is not localised in specific places or hidden behind attempts at modernisation.

> He has a widowed mother back in the village and a few younger siblings. With great hope, his widowed mother, having deprived herself of all comforts, likely sent him to Kolkata to study. However, the boy never returned home. He does not even send any word as to whether he is still alive……. My mother is starving at home, and here I am serving the nation – quite ironic, is not it? Don't you think so, Ravi da?..... But then, every son of Bengal's mothers has already perished, Ravi da. In comparison, how small is my mother's sorrow? (Mitra, 2020, p.27)

The ubiquity of poverty in Kolkata is such that it pervades every corner of life and, in effect, erases the lines between public and private spaces. This pervasiveness is a characteristic of poverty that shapes the vision and experience of the city for everyone who lives there, making it an inescapable part of everyday life. Kolkata has become synonymous with the promise of "Third World" futures and is a form of unfulfilled modernity. The city's failure to emerge as a classic modern city makes it a paradigm of the failures that some developing cities have undergone or might face. It is a yardstick by which other cities that have succeeded in overcoming such failures are measured.

Such accounts also reveal the sacrifices of people in pursuance of the nationalist cause in the region. People were shown to be donating their properties, savings, and material resources to the fighting funds of the revolution without hesitation, sometimes sacrificing their interests for the benefit of the nation. This portrayal of selflessness and generosity further highlights the fact that the struggle for independence was a universal movement in the sense that it was carried out by people who believed in the righteousness of the cause. In such stories, material riches fade into the background in favour of a greater commitment to freedom from one's own nation's greater

good, which is more than enough to justify many sacrifices that involve relinquishing property for the cause. Under colonial rule, the *Bhadralok* elite's ambitions were inherently shaped by oppression dynamics. Their primary goal was to displace the colonial ruling class, which they viewed as the oppressor of one nation over another. This historical context dictated that their pursuit of power had to be framed in universal terms, and this universal aspiration took the form of nationalism. Initially, the subjugated bourgeoisie expressed their desire for power in the language of the colonisers, making their vision of hegemony inseparable from the nationalist discourse. To advance their position, the bourgeoisie had to present their class interests as representative of the entire nation's well-being. To do so, they portrayed themselves as the unifying force capable of transforming a fragmented society into a cohesive nation. The only way to realise their hegemonic goals was to construct their aspirations as the collective interests of all members of society. Thus, nationalism became the ideal vehicle for framing their ambitions, presenting their desires as aligned with the common good and as the logical, rational path to self-determination and freedom from colonial rule. "However much the Swadeshi *Bhadralok* wanted the movement to take on a popular character, the gulf between the *Bhadralok* leaders and the masses lower down the social scale could not be bridged". (A. Roy, 2020, p.435)

6.3 Abstract Spaces, Concrete Sufferings

Kallol's unemployed writers, socially stigmatised "spoilt boys" and economically bruised by the shortage, translated their corporeal experiences of precarity into literary excavations of colonial Kolkata's abstract space (Lefebvre, 1974/1991). While the *Bhadralok* elite narrated the city as a site of nationalist progress, *Kallol*'s writers mapped its dystopian underbelly: the psychological and material wastelands in which unemployed graduates were victims of capitalism's "strategic" order (Certeau, 1984). Despite their education and potential, they were relegated to survival at the margins, far removed from the influential circles of *Bhadralok* leadership that directed Bengal's political discourse. One of the leading writers associated with *Kallol* – Premendra Mitra, … once wrote in a letter (originally in Bengali) to Achintyakumar Sengupta (see Sengupta, 1950).

> Right now, I cannot manage to gather the fee… Send me ten takas within five days. I know that you will do what you can. I'm relying on you… If I take a complete leave, what will I eat? One thing I know well is that poverty can dry up all forms of idealism. I don't want to become rich at all, but I don't have the strength to struggle with poverty and create literature simultaneously. (1950, pp.239 – 240)

The same tone has reverberated in his Bengali short story "Sankranti." From his own mess-house deprivations, Mitra plots a protagonist's collapse from shame to opium suicide, exposing how unemployment deconstructs identity under colonial modernity. Here, the "third space" of the "desolate house" is an archive of middle-class fracture: a letter from a previous occupant revealing the cyclical violence of poverty.

> From beneath the blanket, Akhil could hear everything around him. Downstairs, the maid at the mess had once again started her daily quarrel with the cook. The irritable middle-aged gentleman in the adjacent seat was rattling his phlegm-filled, monotonous cough that made one's ears ring. In between these, came the sounds of a student in the next

> room reciting geometry aloud, the cawing uproar of a flock of crows over the ash heap behind the mess, and the metallic wails of pots and pans as the angry maid, venting her fury on the utensils, created a chorus of misery that reached Akhil's ears. (Mitra, 2007, p.312)

Mitra's genius lies in finding a balance between raw realism and imaginative resonance, refusing to aestheticize despair. The issues of Kolkata are not so much because it failed to become modern but because it failed to modernise. Unlike other colonial cities, which benefitted from modernisation, Kolkata failed because it could not deliver the economic and architectural benefits which modernisation had promised. The city has a high incidence of poverty, as evidenced by the deterioration of infrastructure and the deplorable state of the streets. Poverty is tangible, indicating that it is not confined to specific areas or masked by progress in modernisation. This marks a difference from other cities that attempt to present a more modern and sanitised image by confining poverty to specific areas.

"As in any other Indian city, the immigrants found in Calcutta poverty as severe and dehumanizing as in the villages". (Chakraborty, S.C. 1990, p.4) Likewise, Sarojkumar Roychoudhury's Bengali short story "Duniyadari" maps Rangalal's ruin—a B.A. graduate shunning clerk-work but driven to it by necessity.

> Uncle said, "Damn jobs, Ranga—you should go into business. One of my brothers-in-law made a fortune selling *haritaki* (myrobalan)—he's a millionaire now, owns four houses on Chowringhee, and has two motorcars at home."
>
> A millionaire! Ranga's eyes widened in astonishment.
>
> This was life! Racing through the streets of Kolkata in a motorcar, a radiant, beautiful wife beside him, her veil slipping off now and then in the breeze, her saree's end fluttering in the wind… (2011, p.60)

Rangalal's dream of starting a successful business venture and crafting a vibrant life in colonial Kolkata is immediately thwarted as soon as he visits the Dick Tomson Company office on Clive Street. The description of the street is a stark, unadorned reflection of the disenchantment that often accompanies the urban migrant's dreams. Rather than symbolising opportunity and progress, Kolkata reveals the harsh material conditions and bureaucratic indifference that define the everyday experiences of those who arrive in the city with hopes of social and economic mobility. "Clive Street. Motors whizzed by with a constant whooshing sound; there was no way to cross the road. On the footpath, everyone hurried busily, with no moment to waste". (Roychowdhury, 2011, p.60)

Rangalal's coercive conversion from a would-be entrepreneur to a badly paid clerk may be understood through the framework of "Thirdspace" (Soja) - lived and struggled space where objective structures and subjective experiences meet. Having dropped his plan to start a business in Kolkata, he agrees to accept a clerical job paying him 40 rupees per month—a salary barely sufficient for his basic needs. When questioned by his sister-in-law about his meals, Rangalal brusquely replies that he survives on water during the evenings and at night. Despite being grossly underpaid and overworked, resignation is not an option because his family is entirely dependent on him. This financial instability is exacerbated by his family's decision to marry him off. Rangalal's

circumstance serves as a reminder of the predicament that many educated individuals in colonial Bengal faced when their qualifications and skills failed to guarantee a dignified life. He follows de Certeau's "tactics of the weak" (1984) by wandering on the street and through ultimate compromise. He is forced to lead a life of unspoken torment as a result of being torn between his family obligations and systemic economic exploitation. This serves as a symbol of widespread disillusionment with the promises of modern education and urban mobility. Unlike Mitra's suicidal hero, Rangalal lives on after sacrificing his principles. Lefebvre's claim that colonial space "reproduces social relations" (1974/1991) as a result of economic necessity is supported by this hollow victory.

Moreover, the spatial violence associated with colonial urbanism, as illustrated in *Kallol*, exhibited profound gendered characteristics. The abstract spatial framework of the city instituted specific hierarchies for women, thereby reconstituting rather than dismantling the patriarchal structures of the *andarmahal* within the emergent urban economy. For the educated *Bhadramahila*, the urban environment provided a limited route to emancipation via *Strisikkha*, yet this often-necessitated adherence to the politics of respectability and new forms of dependency. In contrast, for poorer women who migrated as widows, students, or labourers, the urban landscape represented an arena of increased vulnerability, wherein they maneuvered between the exploitative demands of industrial labour and the oppressive moral scrutiny imposed by both colonial and indigenous elite societies. Their mobility was constrained by survival strategies that were distinctly different from those employed by their male counterparts - managing not only economic deprivation but also the constant threat of sexual exploitation and social ostracism. The narratives of these women, embedded in *Kallol's* expansive narrative universe, enrich the overall understanding of a city that fractured communities along both class and gender dimensions. These stories dispense with redemption and portray unemployment as systemic erasure. Pavement dwellers and job seekers are not marginal but central to *Kallol* s reimagined city: human junkyards where the promise of nationalist uplift turns bitter into expendability.

6.4 Tactics of Survival

Gandhiji led a nationwide mass movement combined with the Russian social revolution spearheaded by communists, which initiated the spread of communist and socialist ideas in India. Subsequently, the impact of the non-cooperation movement and the Russian Revolution further solidified public awareness. The individualist characteristics of the 19th century gave way to a broader social consciousness among the young intellectuals of this era. Youth became aware of the harsh realities faced by the poor through their own financial hardships. Thus, the scope of narrative literature expanded during the *Kallol* Age. The early literature of this period, marked by mass consciousness and a supposed communist stance, largely reflected a middle-class youth mentality and a form of sentimental philanthropy. Nazrul's 1922 poem "Samyabadi" exemplified this trend: "I sing the song of equality/ Where all barriers and differences have merged into one."

In the Bengali short story "Swami" by Bhabataran Basu, Bikas' progression from Swadeshi idealism to bleak capitulation epitomises the structural betrayal engineered by *the Bhadralok* elite. His comrades' detachment in his "path of self-reliance" culminates in a bitter revelation: how

colonial Bengal permits only one mode of subsistence, servitude. As he retreats to his sickbed, Bikas recognises the *Bhadralok*'s Faustian pact with the empire:

> Despite knowing the country's condition, every Bengali, without hesitation, invests all they have to educate their descendants in servitude rather than providing them with any skills for self-sustenance. Instead of opposing this dishonourable education imposed on their people, they indirectly endorse it, and the consequences are now apparent in the ongoing plight of the nation. (Basu, 2007, p.39)

Bikas' disappointment exposes the *Bhadralok*'s involvement in colonial systems. Their stake in "dishonourable education" (Basu, 2007, p.39) and English-medium education that replicated clerical servitude revealed a Faustian choice on whether to provide subaltern futures as sacrifices to maintain elite privilege. It is not indifference but an active complicity of "strategic oppression" (Certeau), the structural relegation of subalterns to zones of expendability while claiming equality. His father-in-law, a zamindar, also embodies this complicity. He starves his tenants to fund foreign education and performs hollow philanthropy ("donating to the New Zealand Feminine Fund"), weaponising wealth as spectacle ("feasts of peas and beans") (Basu, 2007, p.39). His surrender, "I will have to follow that path" (Basu, 2007, p.40), is not defeat but epistemic rupture. It exposes the violence of "dominance without hegemony" where the elites profess nationalism while reproducing the very structures that enslave their people. (Guha, 1998)

Satinath Bhaduri's Bengali narrative "Jhapot" focuses on an indigent clerk who gets by on a meagre income of 30 takas per month. "They therefore work for low wages, under conditions dangerous to their health, and most often on a part-time, early-morning, or graveyard-shift basis, when offices, hospitals, universities, shopping malls, airports and train stations are empty". (Verges & Bohrer, 2021, p.1) Despite a lifetime of diligent saving and careful spending, his financial reserves were utterly depleted by the overwhelming costs of his family's medical treatments. This narrative reveals his intensifying desperation, aggravated by a system which turns a blind eye to his plight and preys on his vulnerability. A physician who is motivated by financial gain and privileges wealthier patients heartlessly refuses to provide care for the clerk's suffering wife and son without immediate payment. This is not just a personal tragedy but a harsh denunciation of a healthcare system that capitalises on human life.

> Before the night ended, he rushed to the doctor's house again. After waiting for a long time, he saw the doctor, but the doctor did not come. The doctor mentioned that unless the remaining visit fees were paid, he would not come to see the patient… Driving his vehicle, he went out to visit a wealthy person's house. (Bhaduri, 2007, p.407)

The pervasiveness of poverty in Kolkata is so thorough that it permeates every moment of life, effectively breaking down the distinctions between public and private spaces. The ubiquity of poverty affects how all inhabitants see and interact with the city, such that it becomes a persistent reality in life.

Thus, Kolkata has come to symbolise the futures of the Third World, a specific form of unfulfilled modernity. The city's failure to achieve a standard modern form renders it a case study of the problems that many developing urban complexes might encounter. It is used as a standard by which other cities that have successfully overcome similar problems can be measured. "In most

of the pertinent urban literature, the categories of black/white, coloniser/colonised remain uncontested". (Chattopadhyay, 2005, p.7)

6.5 Conclusion

"She is the 'primate city', the great magnet for survival-seekers from one of the poorest and most populous segments of the subcontinent". (Chaudhuri, 1990, Introduction) Kolkata's problems are not just because it did not become modern, but also because its modernisation attempts failed. Other colonial cities succeeded in modernisation, but Kolkata did not because it could not fulfil the economic and architectural potential that modernisation had to offer. "The earliest views of Kolkata in the early eighteenth century are all depictions of the port and fort of Kolkata, two symbols of emerging British dominance in Bengal". (Chattopadhyay, 2005, p.46) This study argues that the literary work of *Kallol* magazine is a revolutionary reimagination of colonial Kolkata - not as a signifier of nationalist modernity, but as a dystopian urban presence marked by spatial violence, economic disillusionment, and epistemic erasure. Drawing upon Henri Lefebvre's discursive theory of space as socially constructed, Michel de Certeau's account of everyday resistance, and Edward Soja's theory of Thirdspace, this research has shown how *Kallol* was a discursive space in and through which the subaltern lives of the city clerks, workers, widows, migrants could be written outside hegemonic *Bhadralok* or colonial narratives.

Within the context of this scholarship, Kolkata is not only presented as a failed experiment in modernity but also as a fractured topography in which colonial extraction and elite complicity rework social and spatial relations. The built space of the city, its mess houses, walkways, industrial spaces, and administrative routes actively construct the affective and material experience of systemic marginalisation. The tales explored here deconstruct the nationalist myth of mobility by exposing how educated subalterns were co-opted into a system that reproduced servitude under the aegis of civilisational advancement. "Sweltering metropolis of squalor and wretchedness, cauldron of agitation and political violence, Calcutta seems to fit almost anybody's description of the perennially explosive Third World city" (Chatterjee, 1997, p.183). Through the revelations of spatial strategies of survival and the nuances of daily negotiation, *Kallol* makes an important literary and political intervention. The authors recover histories and subjectivities erased by hegemonic historical discourses, thus making a "junkyard episteme"– a counter-archive comprised of memory and resistance, underwritten by the lived experience of the people to whom the promises of colonial modernity were never fulfilled.

In this project, *Kallol* not only documents the lives of marginalised urban existence under colonial pressures but also sets down necessary pathways for theorising postcolonial urbanism through the lens of the disenfranchised. The legacy of these narratives requires a rethinking of how the futures of the city are imagined, remembered, and contested through peripheral narratives and by those historically excluded from the dominant narrative.

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