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CALCUTTA CITY

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## PREFACE

CALCUTTA now belongs as much to West Bengal as to India and the world. Her features, intensely local and individual, have acquired universality. Originating as a small town she is now bursting at the seams with overgrowth. She holds the record for density. Her population is steadily, steeply on the increase, due, as a deputy chairman of the city's Corporation fifty years ago claimed, to 'the benefits conferred by the much abused Calcutta Corporation', as much as to the fact that the city is as acceptable to the man in search of a situation in her vast folds as to the much travelled and educated mind.

### GROWTH OF POPULATION

The increase in population within the last twenty years has been as remarkable as her growth during the past two centuries. The present area of Calcutta is 32.32 square miles (28.34 within municipal limits) and the population on March 1, 1951, 2,548,677; in 1931, with almost the same area, her population was 1,163,771. In twenty years the population has thus more than doubled. In 1801, the area of the town was only 4,997 acres and its population under 140,000. In 1701, the area was only 1,682 acres with a population of 10,000. The regular decennial census began in 1881 with a total population that year of 684,658. In 1901, the population was 949,144 or just over thirty-seven per cent. of her present population. The rate of increase of the population of the metropolis of India has been greater than most cities of comparable size.

The average density is 88,953 persons per square mile or 139 persons per acre within the municipal area. The places of greatest density are Jorabagan (491 per acre), Jorasanko (458) and Colootola (399); they have been the heart of the city since the seventeenth century. There are, however, wards like Watganj and Hastings with a density as low as 31, while wards 15 to 32 (excepting ward 23) are generally on the low side. The Calcutta Improvement Trust are developing areas on the fringe of the city—tanks and paddy fields are being gradually covered with bricks and mortar and rural lanes and muddy paths transformed into macadamized roads, with kerb and channel stones—and offer them for sale, which serve to attract hungry settlers away from the congested areas of the city and distribute the density. The State Transport Department and the Calcutta Electric Supply Corporation are laying on public services and electricity with commendable speed, helping people to settle over a

larger area, while several schemes are under the active consideration of the government to improve suburban rail and road services; and the city's police have quietly and steadily done a great deal to keep the road traffic reasonably mobile, and bring the far flung suburbs within less than an hour's bus ride to the heart of the city.

The population in the immediate surroundings of the city, that is, in areas which are within half an hour's bus ride to a city terminus, has remarkably increased in the course of the last ten years, and is now 1,024,475. They are the spill areas of Calcutta, served by municipalities, and include Garden Reach (109,160), South Suburbs (Behala: 104,055) and Tollyganj (149,817) in the south; the Dum Dum group (Dum Dum, South Dum Dum and North Dum Dum: 87,549) in the north-east; Baranagar (77,126) in the north; and Howrah City (433,630) and Bally (63,138) in the west. This may be called the well-knit Calcutta Area, the population of which, including Calcutta's, comes to 3,573,152. The corresponding population in 1941 was 2,839,726, and in 1931, 1,581,335. In twenty years the population of this area has increased 2.3 times.

The 'displaced' or refugee population returned from this area is 624,164 (Calcutta 433,228) which is roughly a third of the entire displaced population in West Bengal. An official survey reveals that about one hundred and ten colonies of all sizes of Displaced persons have sprung into existence within this area east of the Hooghly river.

But this account of averages or even what is said below can at best give only an approximate idea of the real condition of the people. An area covered by buildings of 'the character of Queen Anne's mansions in London', or nearer home, in the Camac Street area, and having the same density per acre as an area covered by the class of structures found in a Calcutta *bustee*, would obviously be inhabited by a population which lived in conditions essentially different from those prevailing in the latter area. We can, therefore, arrive at a much more correct idea of the actual condition of the people by considering the question of house accommodation. The city's housing and other amenities, meagre and unsatisfactory since her origin have been put to a sudden and serve strain since 1947. On March 1, 1951, there were 606,026 census units consisting of one room or more each and 710,579 living rooms; the average number of living rooms per census unit came to 1.17. They accommodated 2,548,677 persons or 4.2 persons

per census unit. Of these, 453,822 persons did not lead family lives and 2,094,855 live on a normal family pattern in 350,916 families. The average works out at 3.6 persons per living room (an average which masks acute cases of congestion where more than two families of different castes were frequently found to occupy the same room), and 6.0 persons per family, also a high figure which indicates that most families are now obliged to 'keep' distant relations or unrelated persons. The full impact of the sudden influx of a large Displaced population (433,228) cannot be analyzed in this short space, but it will be sufficient to reflect that in the 3,615 *bustees* of Calcutta, having 21,556 huts and 155,624 living rooms, containing 617,374 souls (almost a quarter of Calcutta's population) no less than 112,515 are Displaced refugees (18.2 per cent. of the *bustee* population).

#### PREDOMINANCE OF MALES OVER FEMALES

When the results of the 1901 census were submitted the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal observed that, next to the general expansion of the population of the town which proceeded during the nineteenth century, 'at a more rapid rate even than that of London', the most prominent features of the population were 'the predominance of males over females', and the 'increasing immigration of upcountry men'. It is significant that these two features still continue to be pre-eminent.

The excessive predominance of the male element has been an abiding feature of Calcutta. In 1901, there were almost twenty males to every ten females. In 1951, in spite of the immigration of a large number of 'displaced' families, the unbalance is almost just as great: 515 females to 1,000 males in 1901, 570 females to 1,000 males in 1951; in 1931, it was as bad as 465 females to 1,000 males. As in 1901, this is largely due to the large number of immigrants who have come to the city for work, having left their women behind at home, and proves that business, work, and livelihood are still the city's predominating characteristic. It is evident that in Calcutta there has never been much of family life and associated conditions; this is reflected not a little in her configuration. Until the Improvement Trust was constituted there were very few exclusively residential areas; business and factory areas made large inroads into them, and *bustee*—hives of artisans and labourers designed for single lives—were overrun by countless families. A great deal of disorder and untidiness persists with which the Improvement Trust, the transport network, and the police wage daily battle. It is by no means stretching a point too far to argue that the

notorious instability of the city's civic peace is attributable to a certain measure to this disparity between males and females, the absence, encouraging recklessness, of family life which restrains moods of violence, the proximity of residence to place of work.

A cursory examination of Calcutta's civil condition will further illustrate this point. For lack of space figures of 1901 and 1951 only are quoted but an analysis of the figures of intermediate censuses will broadly confirm the conclusions of this paragraph. In 1901 there were 274,747 unmarried, 532,436 married and 113,750 widowed persons of both sexes: a total of 920,933. Their proportion to the total population were therefore 29.8, 57.8 and 12.4 per cent. respectively. The ratio of unmarried males to unmarried females was a little less than 5:2, that of married males to married females 2.7:1, indicating that a large number of married men left their wives behind at home. On the other hand, there were considerably more than three times as many widowed females as widowed males. In 1951, in a systematic sample of 211,102 persons from a population of 2,115,449 (exclusive of the Displaced population of 433,228 which will be discussed separately), there were 89,597 unmarried, 104,766 married and 16,739 widowed or divorced persons of both sexes. Their proportion to the sample population (the same proportion may be taken to apply to the whole population) was 42.5, 49.6 and 7.9 per cent. respectively. The ratio of unmarried males to unmarried females was 1.8:1, and that of married males to married females 2.4:1. Widowed or divorced females are about twice as numerous as widowed or divorced males. An important point to remember in this connection is that there is always a considerable prostitute population in Calcutta. In 1901, the majority of them returned themselves as widows, whereas, in 1951, as a result of a recent Act seeking to suppress immoral traffic, most of them except those who are matronly, have returned themselves as married. This point duly considered, it will appear that Calcutta has made little progress towards normal home life. A total of 433,228 Displaced population shows 234,242 males and 198,986 females. The proportion of unmarried, married, and widowed among them to their total population is 55.5, 36.1, and 8.4 per cent. respectively. The ratio of the males to their females is very nearly 1.2:1 (1000:849), that of unmarried males to unmarried females 1.6:1, and that of married males to married females 1.05:1. Although among them widowed females are more than six times as numerous as widowed males, yet, considering the more even ratio of males to their females and the parity between their married males to married

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females, it may be concluded that the Displaced population has introduced an element of social health in the life of the city. A point although trite is worthy of note in this connection. The bulk of refugee demonstrations that have protested on the streets of Calcutta in recent years were composed of persons imported from outside the city. Normal family life is a big stake to be risked in minor civil strife.

### POPULATION DISTRIBUTION BY RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES, NATIONALITIES AND MIGRANTS AND LANGUAGES SPOKEN

Of the total population of 2,548,677, Hindus number 2,125,907, Muslims 305,932, Christians 75,836, Sikhs 14,166, Jains 11,741, and Buddhists 9,427. Together they account for 2,543,009. The remainder (5,668) is made up of Jews (1,935), Zoroastrians (1,623), other religions, atheists, and persons who did not return a religion. The proportion of females to 1,000 males among the main religions is, for Hindus 578, for Muslims 398, for Christians 1,389, for Sikhs 587, for Jains 569, and for Buddhists 602.

57,335 persons have returned themselves as non-Indian nationals, of whom 41,576 are males and 15,759 females: 32,330 as Pakistani, 8,717 as British, 6,645 as Nepali, 5,710 as Chinese, 679 as American, 411 as Australian, 316 as Burmese, 265 as Armenian, 175 as Afghan, 168 as Portuguese, 162 as Irish, 146 as Dutch, 133 as French, 132 as Goanese, 125 as Italian, 122 as Danish, 114 as Israelite and 106 as Iranian. Eleven nationalities have returned between 25 and 100 persons each while twenty-eight others have returned below 25 persons each. Some are lone representatives of their country:

The extent of migrants who have swarmed into Calcutta may be judged from the fact that only 846,500 persons or less than a third (33.2 per cent.) of the total population returned themselves as having been born in the city, another 313,154 (12.3 per cent.) having been born in other districts of West Bengal. 677,071 (26.6 per cent.) persons were born in other States of India, of whom 430,320 (16.9 per cent.) were born in the States neighbouring West Bengal. 685,672 persons (26.9 per cent.) were born in Pakistan, of whom 433,228 (17 per cent. of Calcutta's population) are now settled as 'displaced' in the city. Excluding those born in Pakistan, the number of persons born in 'countries in Asia beyond India' (including U.S.S.R.) is 19,690, in European countries, (excluding U.S.S.R.) 5,444, in Africa 112, in the two Americas 926, in Australasia 104. The number of mother tongues spoken is 80 of which 29 are non-Indian (not counting English which is the mother tongue of a large number of Indian nationals). Bengali is the mother tongue of

1,670,601, Hindi of 516,953, Urdu of 171,339, Oriya of 57,835, English of 27,288, Gurumukhi of 20,855, Nepali of 16,508 and Gujarati of 13,533. Another eight languages claim between 2,000 and 10,000 persons each as their mother tongue, and a further eighteen between 100 and 2,000 persons each; the remainder below 100 persons each. 206,052 persons (8.1 per cent. of the total population) speak a subsidiary Indian language (English being omitted as a subsidiary Indian language) besides their mother tongue, the chief subsidiary languages used being Hindi (93,226), Bengali (79,160), Urdu (24,324), Oriya (3,415) and Assamese (1,717). This gives a brief idea of the very complex mosaic that is Calcutta's population.

### DISTRIBUTION BY OCCUPATION

No less impressive are the city's occupations. For the purpose of the census all principal livelihoods were divided into two broad classes—agricultural and non-agricultural. Each class was further divided into four categories: the agricultural into (i) cultivators of land wholly or mainly owned and their dependants, (ii) cultivators of land wholly or mainly unowned and their dependants, (iii) cultivating labourers and their dependants, and (iv) non-cultivating owners of land, agricultural rent receivers and their dependants; the non-agricultural into persons (including their dependants) engaged in, (v) production other than cultivation, (vi) commerce, (vii) transport, and (viii) other services and miscellaneous sources. Category (i) claims 4,697, (ii) 309, (iii) 285, (iv) 17,405, (v) 547,262, (vi) 756,168, (vii) 287,681, and (viii) 934,870. In the agricultural occupations (i to iv—22,696) 6,081 were self-supporting persons, 16,280 fully dependants and 335 earning dependants. In the non-agricultural classes (v to viii—2,525,981) 1,106,429 were self-supporting persons, 1,391,232 fully dependants and 28,320 earning dependants. Among self-supporting persons of all categories 76,001 are females (about 3 per cent. of the total population) and 4,954 females are earning dependants. The three per cent. is significant inasmuch as employment for women except in teaching, midwifery, nursing and domestic service was thrown open in other directions only after the advent of World War II. For each of about 211 occupational groups adopted under the Indian Census Economic Classification Scheme, Calcutta claims a fair number of adherents. Among self-supporting persons engaged in profitable occupations, 52,037 persons returned themselves as employers, 700,860 as employees and 327,452 as independent (on own account) workers. The corresponding figures of self-supporting females are 580, 52,059, and 15,138 respectively: a total of 67,777.

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### SMALL SCALE INDUSTRIES

A census of small scale industries, that is, those which do not fall under the Factories Act, was taken in the city. 20,575 such industries were found to operate, of which only 98 were handloom

establishments employing 301 handlooms and 606 persons. The rest include a very great diversity of small scale production of food, raw materials and finished merchandise and employ a total of 72,428 persons.