

# Kolkata Chronicles

by bhattoos



BlueRoseONE.com  
S t o r i e s   M a t t e r

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*An illustrated chronicle on Kolkata by Bhattoos*



# Introduction

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Durgapur days in early 2010 or 11, had no consequence of my joining full time in teaching there. I was almost jobless that time searching for a good employment and a roof over my head. Few sketches originated from my hand and I preserved those for some future days, when color will come back to my life. Now in the lazy, idle days of COVID pandemic in 2020 summer, when my photogenic memory of every art gallery of New York from Brooklyn to Bronx, was fading, I decided to take to pen and brush to resurrect it. And that is the first shot to start my drawing and painting class. One by one, each month was chronologically assessed and how many drawings could be made was estimated for my company's break-even calculation. Accordingly, my company was floated and the name was "bhattoos", selected out of few equally strong alternatives.

By 2022, I was pretty familiar with the printing world of Kolkata and its lanes and bye-lanes and few thousand shops dealing in it. 2023 had equally spirited production graph, and the COVID fear was gradually decaying and the painting and printing world was looking shinier again. 2024 came with too many art shows and long waiting line of gallery bookings, which gathered momentum again in my artist friend circle. I saw a gold mine in publishing industry if sketches, drawings and story-telling go hand in hand to make a diary of everyday Kolkata, which is fast changing after covid recovery.

Now in 2026, when the illustrated story book is ready and hits the stalls and global publicity by the publisher enable it to enter and infiltrate the drawing rooms of the readers, study rooms of the

researchers, the library of the scholars, shipment outside the country, I finished the first part of my job and thank the publisher, distributors, book shops, readers, connected persons and hordes of well-wisher for collaborating on the first part of the sketch book series as a success. After due reception and review of the book, second illustrated part will be handed over to the readers and book lovers to add more color to their joyful living. Bon Jovi...

# Preface

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Kolkata, a very old and congested metropolis housing twenty million population of varied ethnic groups, mixed races and colors, different languages, religion and occupation clamoring for a foothold in the fastmoving city of eastern India. Through the eyes of a person, shocked and appalled by the tragic covid global pandemic lockdown, and its after-effect, he witnessed the overnight magnum change of the cityscape, human behavior and related socio-cultural and economic issues. The non-performing, withdrawing and callous attitude of the authority-in charge, and relentless failure to stop the paranoia, is the reason to transcript this sketch book to highlight the ongoing events in national and international front. The unrecorded, fleeting, temporal, vanishing and theatrical scenes in the household and outdoors, and at roads, towns and villages have been captured and depicted with the help of natural memory, cognitive perception and artistic will and modern digital & computerized technology, with a lucid story at the background.

Like world wars, the silence and stiffness in life choked the daily routine during pandemic. Rationing of food stuffs, control over transport & movement, vaccination, hospitalization, closure of business houses, office and educational institutes, indefinite shutting down of shops and establishments, barren roads, lifeless daytime, cashless ATMs and "Service Closed" banks months after months, with no hope of easing the situation, became the theme of the illustrated chronicles.

Then the onset of Fall, gradually unlocking process started and in winter of 2020 & 2021, little respite was obtained at the end of excruciating two full years. Work from home was the name of the game and all remunerative works were suspended and joblessness crippled the middle class. The upper class and proprietor class saw down trend in their real assets, net worth and businesses. This left effect on everybody's real worth and foreseeing miserable trends, the knack to start business from home initiated. Those with small capitals preferred to invest more on their intellectual property taxing their personal knowledge and experience. In such context in the wee hours of watching decaying trends in global pandemic lockdown, the nascent idea of founding and incorporating a company to remedy such criminal act and activity was formulated and promulgated. Purpose, behind such effort, is nothing but bridging the gap in understanding and communication between the two society. Themes are mostly city-centric observations and depictions and behavioral aspects of human being living a hard city life, extracting juice out of it and balancing their rural and migratory background.

Insight into the digital world and exploiting the digital art technology over art show in city art galleries and museums were the dual advantage to reach more viewers and to be widely accessible from all corners of the world. Intention is to promote urban art and sketches forming an acute perspective or an extra-ordinary visionary angle, or an unique 3-D view surpassing the camera shoot and directing it on oil & canvas and story-telling behind it, to integrate the whole in paperback edition for ISBN accreditation.

Kolkata throughout last half century has witnessed movements on art and culture, literature and theater, sports and games, design and construction, seminars and planning, etc. Drawing and drafting skill

were derived from the multinational design houses, who were into building trades, construction works and contracting in erection of townships, bridges and roads. Creation of outdoor spaces and gaudy interiors, color sense, contrast, silhouette, brightness, balance in light and shade, dark mode, objects reflecting light source, straight line and curvature, height versus length and breadth, void and composition, were all the experiments undertaken in architects' studio, before a structure was envisioned, planned, designed, tested and retested for a final, foolproof and perfect erection in Kolkata's newer and olden parts. Low-rise to fifty storied office blocks were crowding in all nooks and corners of the city. Stone chip, cement, concrete, iron and steel were as commonly everywhere as our own neighbors, relatives and friends are face to face every day. To overcome the heaviness, dull and lifelessness left by such mechanization and industrial activity; surrealism, ideation, abstraction, modern and fine arts were introduced to blow and supply a rare, sweet fragrance in this rotten, decaying metropolitan living. By twisting the actual or real event, its direction and meaning, for more gainful, purposeful cross-results; the virtual, cyber and web-based assistance were inducted to make a book for pleasurable reading and cherishable discourse. The raw data in the form of roadshow, street view and each conscious and unconscious manual gestures were analytically screened, examined and converted to fathomless artform as a welcome relief in this hot, bitter world of monotony and strict convention.





# CHAPTER-1

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## **Introduction.**

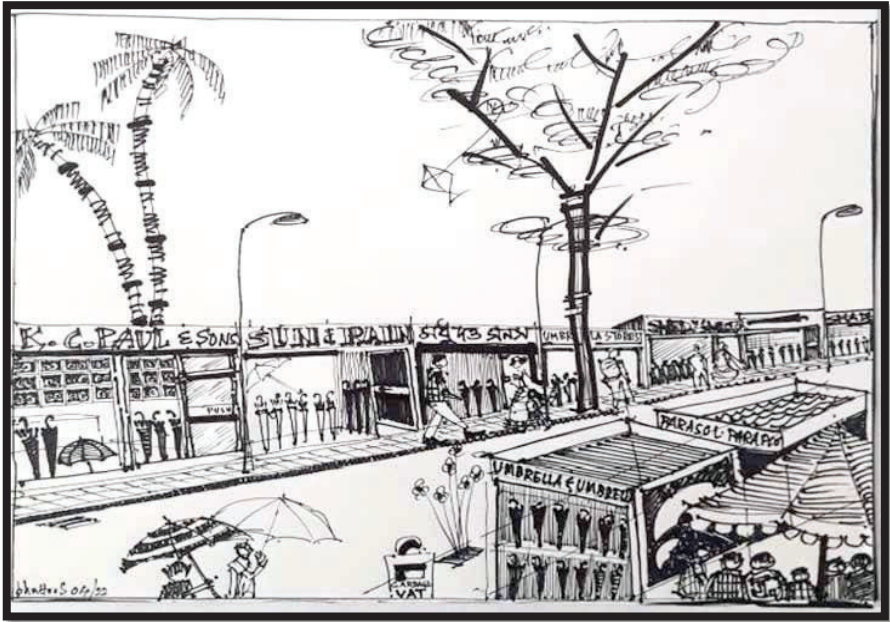
The story revolves around three main characters, I, Anil Babu and collectively Pawan Lama and his native village friend from Sikkim hills Bishtu Thapa.

The days were passing romanticizing in and around Kolkata in the decade of early twenties of this century. I had no qualm on my role as an onlooker and adventurer with an artist's mind and view point. My eyes were rotating everywhere in the city and I loved to monitor, record and list them.



## Lane with glorious past

In the year of 2015, when nobody was aware of covid and the term was unheard to Indians like many French, Italian and Spanish word, one summer afternoon, getting down from bus, I took a short cut through Raja Ramakrishna Deb Lane, to avoid a short unexpected spell of rain. The potholed, unfamous, uncared lane, connecting a busy Kolkata artery, safely ferries all its residents all seasons all throughout the year, irrespective of rain, storm, blow hot-blow cold weather. That day I completely soaked in rain, left the idea of visiting my aunt's house and decided to hit College Street area, famous for its varieties of umbrella stores. I rang my old, ailing aunt of my change of decision and spoke to her with confidence for an opportune next time.



## Umbrella stores

College Street area, a book bazaar, has one part exclusively dealing in sales of umbrella throughout the year to keep their monopoly business running and insured against any rain, hailstorm, natural threat and calamity. I, was running without umbrella for more than a decade and every monsoon, settled the cloud rage by standing under a car porch or projecting verandah or a nearby bus stand or shelter. Going there, I was exposed to new styles and designs of the parasols and paid a neat 1000 for a nylon, push-button, automatic Chinese gent's umbrella with seller's one year guarantee tag.

By 9 at night, when the last trace of evening rain was gone, carrying the new umbrella home, my mind travelled to the hills of Darjeeling, where the whole mountainous district used a special type of umbrella, much bigger than that of plains. Wider, taller and covering maximum

rain in one go. Once I heard this couplet about them in hilly areas of Sikkim. That story is next.



## Hilly road

Jack and Jill go up the hill,  
To fetch their groceries down.  
On their way “hi, hello” they exchange,  
To all the folks, they meet and bump in the town.



## An old mansion

An unguarded, unseen Victorian mansion at night, on my way to work, is under the auspice of a sole burning electric bulb, lightening the first-floor air outside the partly curtained window. This old mansion is in southern part of the city and with the help of a yellow bed lamp, at the turn of the street, stands with its historical past, loaded with memories and stories of events. A lone caretaker in the first-floor corner room lives awake in the standstill night to guard the story book.

The Sikkim story of the year 2007, is about Pawan Lama, a Gorkha young lad of his last teens. He bumped at me at Gangtok Bazar accidentally at a paan shop, where he was buying gutkha and asked me, “You look like coming from plains. I am from outskirts of

Gangtok. Guwahati or Siliguri, are known to me. Can you give me a job at Kolkata? Then I will travel with you tomorrow”.

I hesitated for a moment and took his mobile number for some better days to call him for a job at Kolkata.

After about a year, I rang him to know about his availability. On hearing the job profile on phone, he didn't hesitate to give his approval. The old mansion got a guard after many vacant years, with this Anil Babu was relinquished and relaxed. The old mansion is solely under Pawan's auspices and midnight control for last ten years.

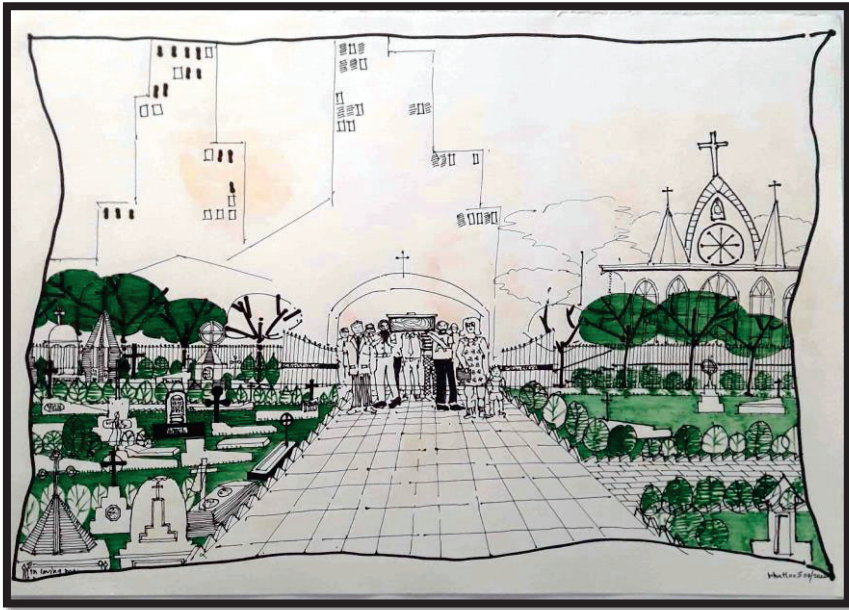
Anil Babu has handed over the key of the mansion long time ago to Pawan for safe keeping of the house and he himself has chosen to stay at Chowdhury Bagan, near Adra, Purulia, to be away from the humdrum of the city life.





## **Bijoya Dashami afternoon**

Immersion procession with goddess on the shoulders of the porters in the twilight hours in the village. The only living descendant and owner Anil Babu of Kolkata stays here. Since last 200 years after the completion of the mansion in Victorian Style, Anil Babu, has not seen many of his earlier ancestors. He lives in this village, at a distant district of Bengal, on his own wish to be away from his ancestral house in very busy Kolkata. In this rural town, every year in autumn months, the procession carrying Goddess Durga and her family return to their heavenly abode after immersion in local stream. The deity, made of clay is half-submerged in shallow water, when wooden sticks and bamboo poles guide it to deep water.



## Departure Finale

On the other side, Pawan from Sikkim village, crosses the Burial ground in a church compound, jutting a busy road, on his way to market every day. He sees its gate open today. A lively scene at the entrance of the city cemetery, where pall-bearers and relatives bring their old man for the last rite. Another few minutes' walk to reach the spot.

On the way back to the old mansion, about five minutes' walk, prior to the mansion and behind the municipal market, this burial ground is suddenly active today. It is said that a notable lady from Mount Carmel, Darjeeling was buried here long ago. This story is stale to Pawan Lama, hearing it so many times in ten years. He, on his way to market, looks at the closed gate sometimes. Today, seeing a curious local crowd in front of the cemetery gate, he joined them and first time experienced the procession of living men, carrying the dead coffin to its last journey.





## Evening drizzle

Pawan Lama, generally circles in one kilometer radius every day for meeting his daily needs, buying vegetables, fishes for frying, kerosene for emergency, soap and detergent for washing and so on. Some evening is spent, when occasional rain dampens the mood and becomes painful for indoor living. In hurry to go to nearby muri-telebhaja shop holding umbrella in hand, few come by scooter, motor bike or bicycle, others completely drenched, Pawan sets his foot outside to participate in the rain-soaked evening gathering.

Dark and deep monsoon clouds throughout the day washed away roads and buildings and frequency of drizzle soared the humidity, followed by sparse rain, dampening the spirit. This is the monsoon scenario every year.

Sudden splash again in the evening chased Lama's spirit today to nearby tea stalls capturing his torn and holed umbrella to cover head. The nearby buildings, chronically and structurally poor, worry for assuranceless, nightmarish existence. The evening drizzle, nothing new to massacre one more mundane day, drew Pawan to the road. Keeping the old mansion spick-and-span is not an easy task. The premium and well-built existence of his old mansion is an envy in the neighborhood.

# CHAPTER-2

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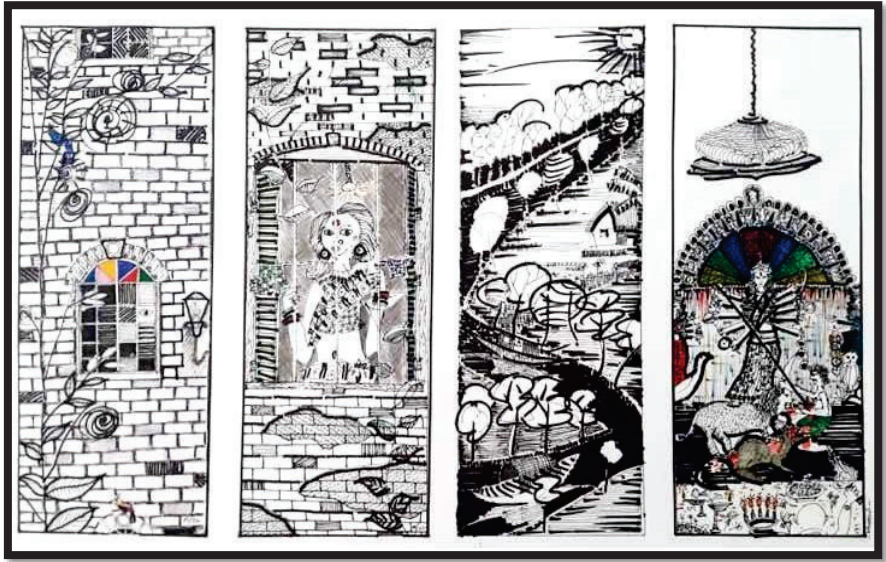
Anil Babu, hailing from a high family, with zamindary root of his ancestral forefathers, inherited the old mansion. Now it is in his sole possession, but he lives in a remote district village 100 miles away from Kolkata to enjoy natural and pristine setting, fresh from urban clutter.



## Benaras Ghat

Anil Babu travels from his remote location to many nearby places many times a year, but without coming to Kolkata. Deliberately he avoids visiting Kolkata and instructs Pawan over phone, when urgent. The last and lone descendant of a family of Zamindars, Anil Babu, visited last year Allahabad and Varanasi for personal ambition and religious demand.

River bank at the century old, historic Benaras city in descending evening light with populated steps, where an "arati" (worshipping) in progress, is spectacular in all sense. Benaras, famous for its river bank, dotted with numerous old temples and punctuated by shops and middle-class tenements, has an inward pull for him. Hired umbrellas at the ghat to cover the visitors and restrict the onslaught of harsh weather are symbolic landmark in the Ganges bank.



## Dream

There, at Benaras, one night while returning from attending arati at the river, Anil Babu noticed a young woman gripping the first-floor window grill is looking out at the bustling street down. Anil Babu, himself, was very tired after the whole day's sight-seeing and other works. Unaccustomed by the moving tongas, rickshaws, pushcarts and occasional stray ox and bull, encroaching the narrow road crosswise to hamper the flow of both pedestrian and vehicle, he was attracted by the sight.

He first examined the old red brick building, uncared and unmaintained by both the tenants and the legal owner. Plants and creepers are up to the top floor, their roots are deep in the mortar region. Upper floors are dark and prompt no sign of habitants. A stone masonry building exterior has a partly open window with the woman standing at it, perhaps, trying to visualize the incoming autumn at her native birthplace.



A woman's dream in city captivity, relating to her past, present and future, is written large on her face. The woman, symbolic of an expectant housewife, little tense and anxious of late arrival of her husband or offspring. Anil Babu tried to hide from the gaze of the woman and secretly looked from the opposite lane corner the beauty of captivity in the woman. The woman must be having in her mind the stream of life outside her lane at Benaras city and eager to go back to her ancestral root and native village, where in every autumn, the season dresses at its best gear and welcomes the Saradiya Durga Puja.



## Stadium before the football final

By reaching hotel around 10 at night, he noticed a big gathering at the lobby, unusual around that time. Some boarders sitting, some standing, some fixing TV connection and changing channels. He

joined them, not knowing the important telecast, they had been waiting for. After few minutes, the horizontal waves in spectrum of color rolled up from the bottom of the screen. With a sudden screeching sound, the TV started. The roar came from the boarders, who joined there after finishing their dinner.

The commentator wearing a cap on head, in high earnest and under rapid crowd pressure, was shouting on top of his voice “Welcome to Kolkata’s Yuva-Bharati Krirangan. In a short while the final match, termed as the battle of the titans, will kick off. The last night’s rain was a spoil sport till last few hours and no surety came from the police and match authority on starting the final. About two hours delay and success in suction of ground water very fast, the tickets already distributed to the spectators, were confirmed and reconfirmed for a wholesome game to go on in a short while and a tongue twisting result in hours...”

Anil Babu knew the dinner will not be served so late. He made a quick entry to the dining room, showing a volte-face to the assembled boarders in their night dresses. The commentator in TV, at peak of his voice is reciting “Rain was a dampener before the long-awaited final throwing uncertainty over its start. Few minutes to go before the start, the spectators are in queue and patiently waiting to reach their respective seats. Anxious moments all over...”

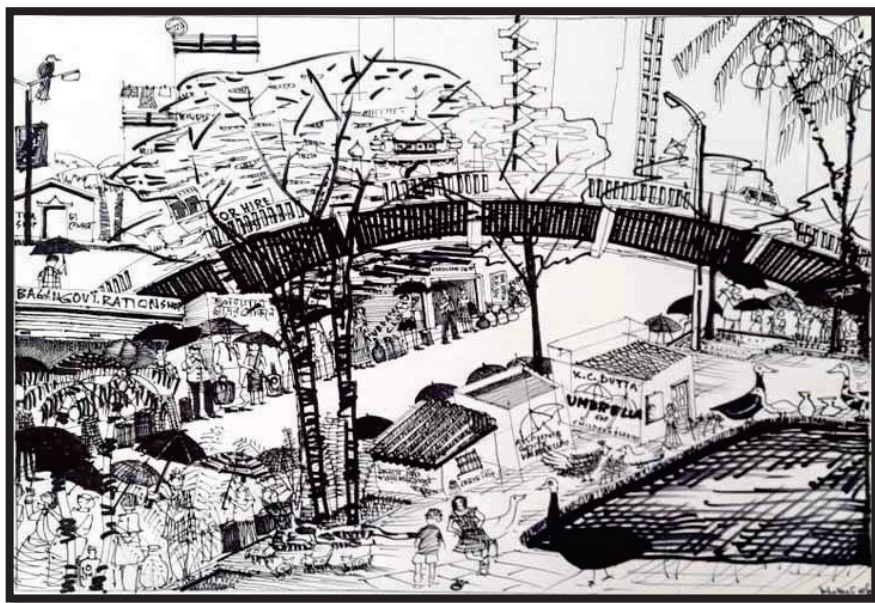




# CHAPTER-3

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My involvement and love for seasons, especially monsoon, autumn and winter.



## Ration Shop

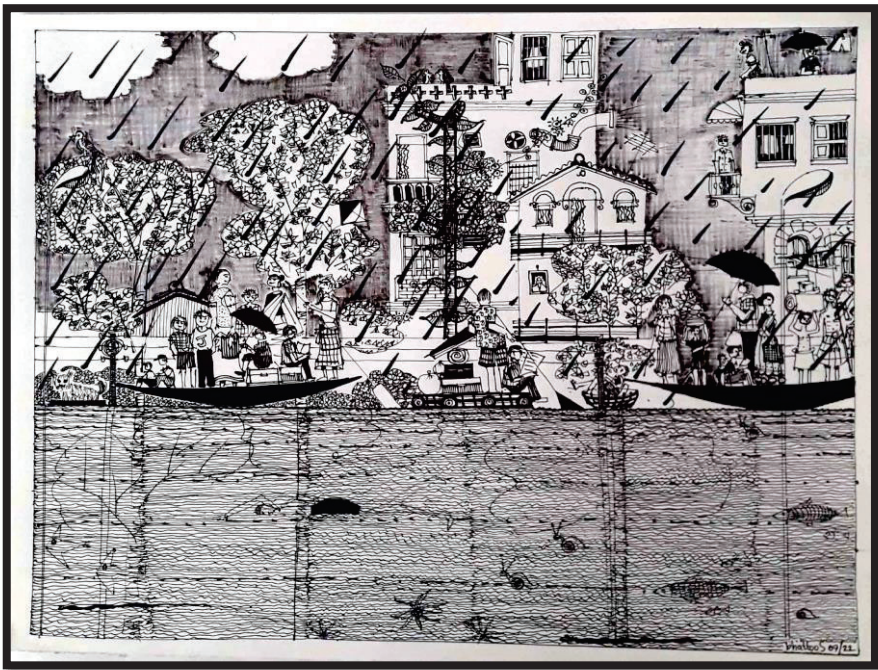
The umbrella purchased that day from College Street, had few days of bed rest, due to prevailing better weather condition at a stretch and my inability to be on road due to excessive soaking that day.

I, hearing the ration shop is distributing few precious items on controlled basis, scooted to the spot carrying the umbrella in one hand and two nylon bags and a jerry can in other. Five folds of the queue to facilitate the plying vehicles on the narrow road, the milling crowd were waiting patiently for last few hours, knowing fully well that the shop would remain open till the supply lasts. I, with umbrella open and my containers, stood at the last of the queue and replied to the new comer's question "Yes, I am the last" and accommodated him.

The similar scene that day, when hot summer with chances of thunder squall in the evening, Kerosene being distributed from the same ration shop after a longtime was heard. Those who came to know the news,

spread it in their vicinity and rushed to the spot with containers, bottles, jerry cans and other handy pans singly or in group to stand in a half-mile long queue for few litters of gold. The ration shop is located little away from our neighborhood, bordering a highway and at a side lane with ponds, water bodies, vacant land, few non-descript houses, number of isolated shops on two sides of the narrow lane. In the company of poultry and livestock all around.

Patiently the buyers stood in a serpentine queue. Many in the queue unaware of the front and the tail of the queue. This is one example of my romantic life in the first quarter of this century, when GenZ groups are monopoly in the market.



## Heavy Flood

Another example of GenZ cooperation. Next day's incessant rain devastated the locality again. The whole household was seized and the

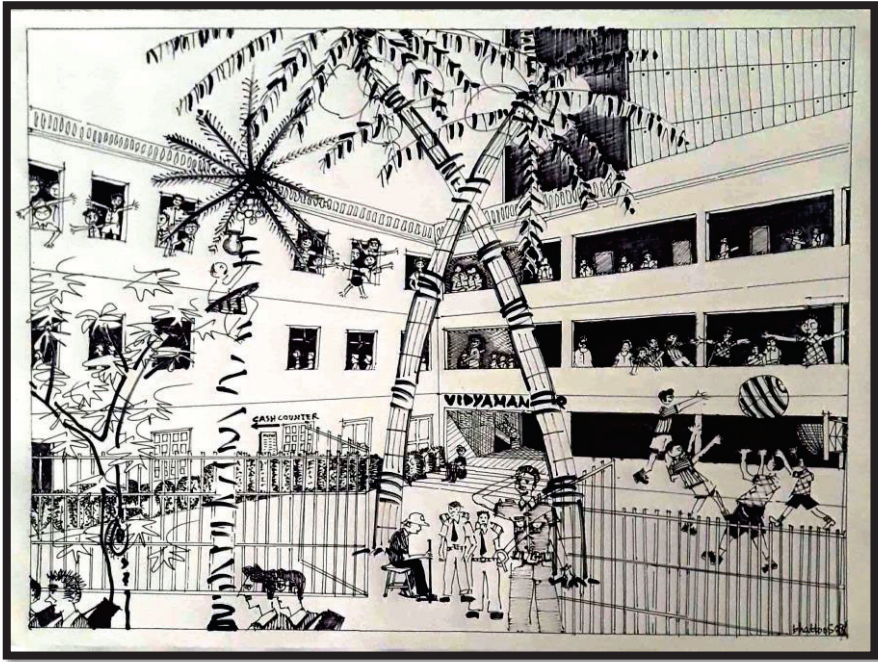
items, bought from the ration shop proved to be a boon at noon time. The city experienced 200 millimeters of rainfall overnight by radio broadcast and the suburban rail service crashed. The government declared 'Emergency' and army assistance was called for.

The scenario, all of a sudden, turned to be volatile and military to keep normalcy in basic service operations like medicos, transport, food and water, power transmission, etc. plied gunny boats and fishing trawlers in places to ferry people from one spot to other. The street lampposts were submerged with their top under water and few extraordinary maritime skills were observed by the youngsters in GenZ age group, in the form of deep-sea diving, swimming under water and floating as a sub-mariner for salvaging and rescue operation.

Five years ago, the same scene in this village-like semi-urban place. Man-high, deep flood paralyzed the normal life. People moved from place to place by makeshift transit transport like gunny boat, plank, unsafe overloaded ferry and on brother's head or relatives' shoulder. Deep water gushing over the main thoroughfare of the road for last few days, flooded successive square kilometers, devastating power lines, transport operation, human life and paralyzing normal life to a standstill. Only slim option left to active working life is the introduction of personal boat and irregular government ferry, brought adversely from the tourism operators of local lake and water route.

My indoor book-reading hours were sparsely disturbed by this flooding scene and accompanying requests for volunteering service anticipated by the youths of the local clubs.





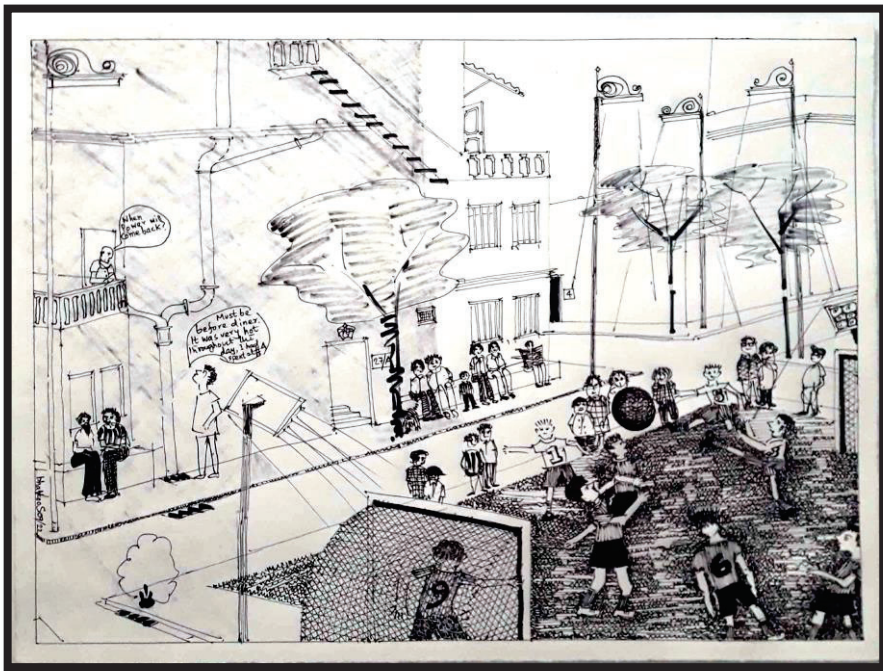
## School Compound

After incessant and hectic few days, 10 days later, the sun rose in the morning and life on the road was gaining momentum again. Pawan Lama's village folk Bishtu Thapa rejoined duty as the security guard and gatekeeper of the Vidyamandir School. His right-hand salute after many days again became viral among the students and their guardians. When the school goes on and the din of the students makes a harmony in the distance, Bishtu enjoys keeping the gate, his age virtually comes down to that of the students, and his mind gets spirited and he thanks Pawan for bringing him at Kolkata, at Vidyamandir, at his locality.

Senior and junior students after a long closure, meet and greet Bishtu Da from Sikkim, smilingly at the gate of the walled school compound. The class room for juniors waits for the teacher to come, the corridor

of the first floor almost reachable by the players playing basketball in the ground courtyard. Second floor verandah railing has few viewers to watch the proceedings below, as final year students leave the school.

Only the security staff on duty Bishtu Thapa controls the enthusiasm of the boys and his. He calls Pawan over his mobile sometimes to pass the information of this side. The two friends discuss and gossip, however Pawan has limited story to narrate, due to his single nature of duty as a lone night watchman of the old mansion.



## Real Estate Ballgame

Nearby the school, there is an empty plot, nobody knows from when this plot is idle. The oldest man in the block, the centenarian Bhutu Dadu, can't even remember anyone specific ever came for inspection in that open plot from town authority or contractor's end.

The plot invites in the afternoon time, the local boys to play football, cricket, hockey, badminton, etc. depending on the season. At winter night, light connection is arranged from Bhutu Dadu's house after his permission. This is only for Badminton and Volleyball game in winter, when the school is closed and Bhutu Dadu like to watch from his first-floor bedroom. Bishtu and Pawan, two friends from hills, spend some time together to see boys playing and tête-à-tête on the playgrounds of their hills and their difference with that of plains. Kolkata is their heartthrob in every sense.

Tranquil middle-class localities of this side are typical nowadays to lose the land and undergo enriched real estate reincarnation. Every now and then old houses are being sold at a premium to give way to high rises to open the flood gate of huge burgeoning population, profit and commerce. The kids and infants ignorant of this passage, keep playing football in an open corner plot, uninhibited till now by any land shark. Power shortage dominate the area in the grip of a forthcoming long dark night.

This is the domain of our everyday work, routine activity and urban existence.



## Roadside Market

Similarly, another favorite spot for them is the market at the street corner. Cheaper eatables are abundant in the morning to make a choice from sea of vegetables and types of fish, chicken and meat.

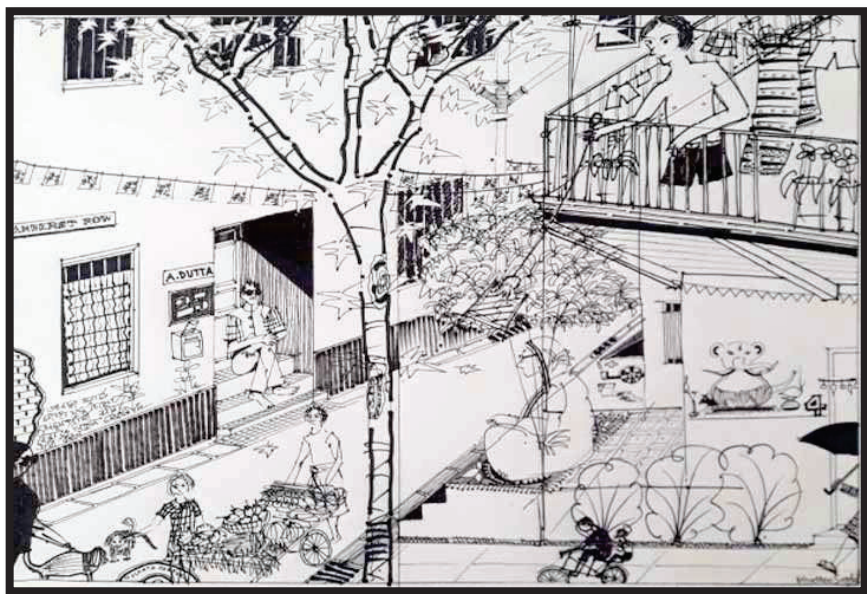
This is a temporary bi-weekly market at road junction. Morning sunlight in April is too harsh for the market goes to even spend couple of hours there. All types of food items, vegetables, fish, mutton all abundant in the roadside stretch. The sellers have colored big umbrellas to cover them and their commodities. It is an assembly and bonhomie of joy and satisfaction for all and sundry in the road corner. Pawan and Bishtu come from two opposite directions and meet in the market most of the time. They prefer the rates of the commodities and spend some time drinking tea, eating gutkha, before they split again for their day's work.



# CHAPTER-4

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The eternal real estate power play of Kolkata land, is now shown to Anil Babu, when he came from his village stay.



## Childhood Friends

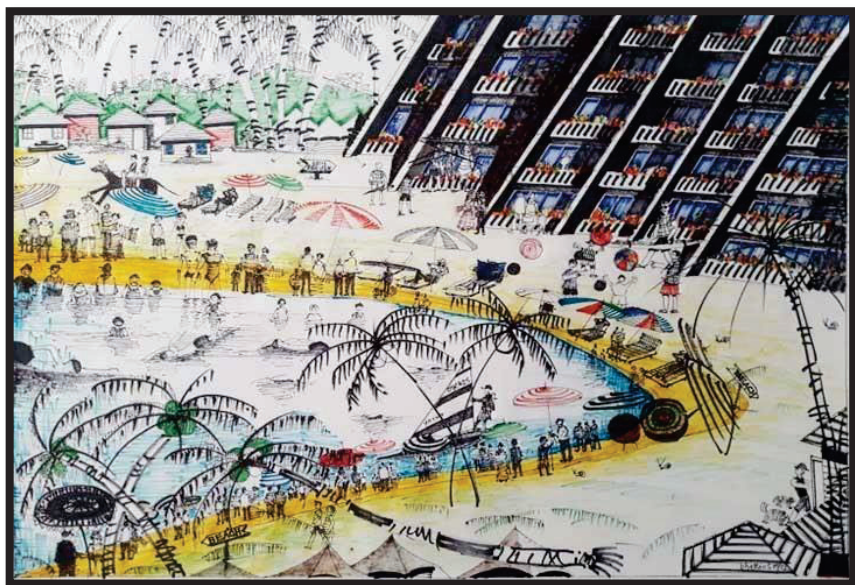
Two aged neighbors from opposite houses gossip in evening darkness, as they have been doing so last 70 years or so. The locality too has not changed much in the meantime. They every evening anticipate footfall of some stranger in the lane...

One fine morning, Anil Babu got a phone call from Pawan. After talking, he decided to leave his district town to catch a train to Kolkata with the purpose of meeting Pawan and giving him some valuable instructions on the matter and money to pay taxes and bills.

Later he planned to make a visit to his childhood friend's house in the northern part of the city. At sunset hours, entering the lane, he was surprised to see a sea change in the lane. During decades of absence, a big enemy in the name of oblivion struck him intensely and his eyes couldn't detect any known details to identify the door. He could see the name plate, similar to his old friend, on enquiry, he came to know it belongs to his friend's grandson with the same initials.

He also knew from them that his childhood friend Dutta Babu had expired just on the onset of covid and the front of the property has been remodeled by his family members to bring a new look in the bye lane. The neighbors, across the house, are the same. Only the first floor has been let out and the tenant family, serving a nationalized bank, lives there. Hari Da had sold his house long before his death and one Mr. Oberoi, after due renovation, has kept it locked and vacant for a decade. Although the land value is escalating fast, no other case of property sale in the lane was reported to him.

The old timers in the evening, sit face to face on their doorstep and verandah along the narrow, serpentine lane with teacups and pakoras in hand. The cast iron lampposts from gas age, with time, have continuously updated in their fitting of bulbs with advancement in technology. Only the high mast at the main road junction is new and the sole lane representative to face the lighting galore on the main road, where many city bus routes operate and go places. Anil Babu restricts himself from knowing more on changes, due to his cognitive limitation. He returns to old mansion to spend the night with his caretaker Pawan Lama.



## Last point of the drastic sea

“The last breaker of the infinite sea kisses the shore in this point. An endless voyage culminating to an end point. Standstill water receive the swimmers’ frolics. Cottages and cabins abundant to cater to the milling crowd, coming to witness the last point of the drastic sea, already traversed” ...the voice of one suited gentleman with the microphone in hand was narrating the words, pointing a cursor to the power point slides on the wall screen.

Anil Babu’s short stay at Kolkata was extended by some exigencies. He was called by a business group holding a business conference on “Travel, Tourism and Hospitality” in a prominent hotel. The investors in a five-star hotel showed a seaside hotel plan in the projector.

The presentation was unthinkable and flabbergasting, because of the highest structural innovation and top-quality design. Huge pyramidal main structure of 500 room hotel, flanked by single storied individual

cottages for independent family booking, aristocratic landscape and serene beach must be a big crowd puller according to the investors' estimate. Anil Babu's interest in investing in the project was on the watch by the promoters. He reciprocated with few nods on the targeted business success at the time of high tea and seeing outside lights are on, he set foot on the busy street. He understood his unnecessary curiosity and involvement will ruin the show.

## **Mr. Giant**

Unusually tall, exploding all proportions, a high rise stands in a timid neighborhood. In an otherwise petite locality with houses of ordinary heights, a giant of a skyscraper building towered with uncountable number of floors, gives an astonishing stunt to Anil Babu.

The approach lane has a long driveway to reach it from the bustling main road. Curiously he peeps in. On his way back from the hotel banquet, where he had spent the whole day in the complicated matrices of business projection and promoters' alluring profit making proposal, Anil Babu, longtime a foreigner in Kolkata, developed a different idea on the city.

Now that the sparkling and fast-moving city in the evening started to show him its texture, fabric, shine and gloss, his old idea of the city started to outgrow. Tall buildings, relatively seem to be much taller, if positioned strategically at a long vista end of a long narrow lane. One such building is this Mr. Giant with its towering presence at the end of a long narrow walkway, administers highest control and weightage over the immediate surrounding.

Anil Babu thought in his mind that in their time, there was no permission of such tall building like Mr. Giant, then how much technology advancement can build such structure to stand safely and unthreateningly in a low-rise residential zone!







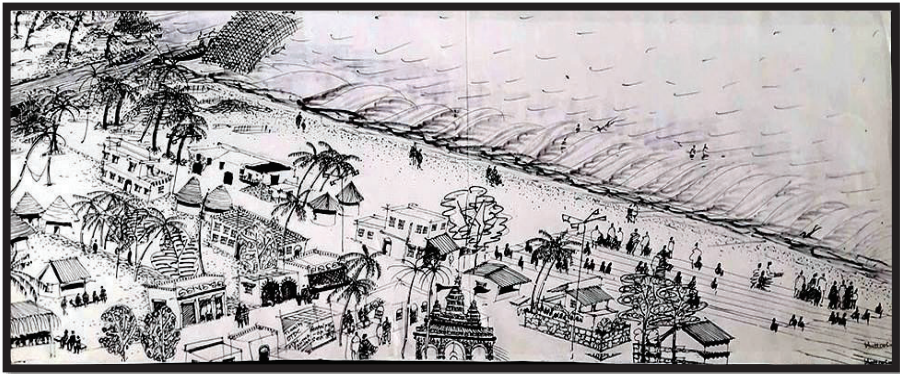
## Bakkhali Sea View

“A sea beach, unlisted in the world tourist destination map, is only frequented by the local residents and city dwellers” as said by Mr. Suresh, sitting next to the driver. This is the first time Anil Babu was inducted in the group of investors, who organized the travel and Tourism conclave that day, to accompany them for a tour to Bakkhali to inspect few possible sites of the hotel project.



Bakkhali is the last motorable point of this state, where the sea beach has an unobstructed view of the Antarctica, along with the uninterrupted view of the bay. Afternoon sun glowing in the southern sky, casting its orange glow on the yellow sandy shores. Few gulls and cranes are on their costal duty. Nearby few food joints are open, but very few takers.

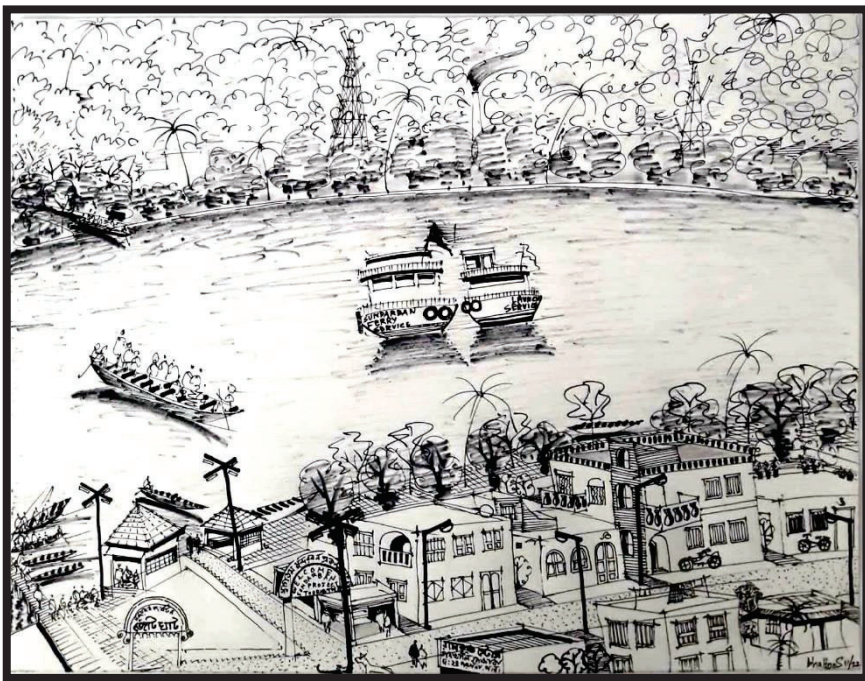
Suresh emphasized neglect in the zonal development plan of this Sundarbans District Authority and showed sceptics of the hotel project here.



## Gopalpur-on-sea

“A common man's sea beach on the eastern shore of Odisha. Zigzag village road takes the tourists to the spot where sound and splash of high tide strikes both ear and body. Long walk along the stretch of the sea, will never be dissatisfying, nor tiring. A stormy day at Gopalpur, on southern tip of Odisha state, is worth visiting and prohibited for the bathers, swimmers and fishermen in cyclonic weather. Shop roofs, flags on temple tops, the heavy trees swinging in the high coastal wind signaling a cyclone is worth visiting”, Mr. Abinesh Panda's deliberation returned us to consciousness from temporary drowsiness in the car. We were returning from Bakkhali tour.

Last night at Bakkhali Sea Resort, at his room Anil Babu, tiringly remembered the earlier conversations with Panda Babu from Odisha, who is an important member in the team. He, being new in the team of this prestigious delegate group, thought of refreshing his ideas on hotels located at international tourist spots. He googled the Holiday Inn site for knowing more. Enroute, he found some Getty images of Indian beaches. He clicked on Gopalpur-on-sea, a safe haven of Odisha Tourism, to verify Mr. Panda's words. It highlighted with force the availability of good food, warm hospitality, world class ambience, easy to reach and unforgettable sweet memory of the place.



## Route to Sundarbans

The world-famous mangrove delta is waiting for a boatman. One hour from the nearest railway station, the bus stops at the last point to let the passengers take a ferry to the waters of Sundarbans. Through a

narrow passage to the jetty, flanked two sides by food stalls and honey shops, in a sloped manner, passengers move towards the boat. The concrete road has two side flow of passengers coming from and going to Sundarbans in every 10 minutes. The dark water of the inviting river and the forested other side has huge attraction for a good night stay. This side of the bank has few residential houses with their balconies open and window curtains waving in a windy day. This was the last memory of Anil Babu of Sundarbans in his prime time, when he had been working with Simplex Construction and visited the spot several times for a soil research work.

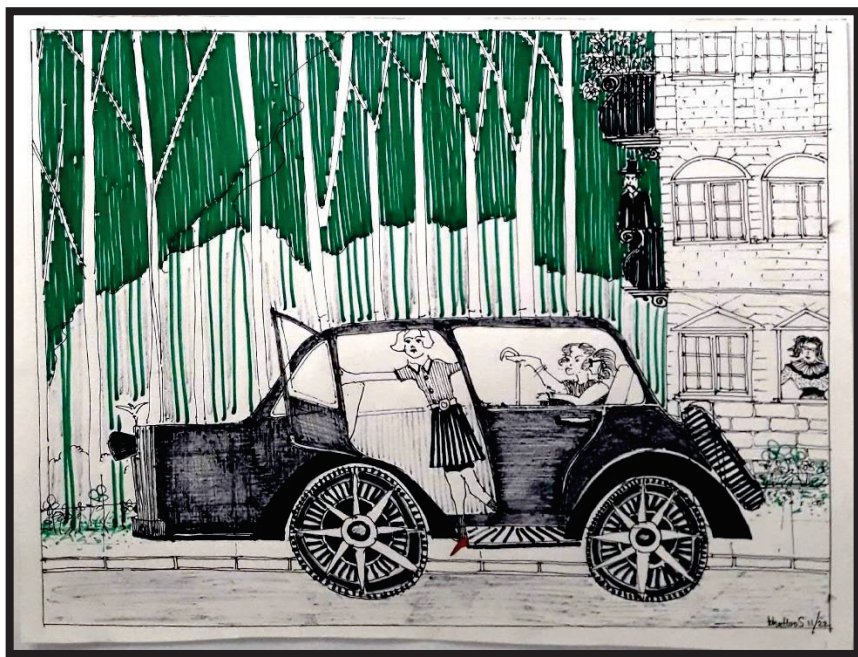
On their return journey from Bakkhali, on his request the investors left him near Diamond Harbor. The Sundarbans was neither in the itinerary of the investors, nor Anil Babu's. But Anil Babu had an inkling to buy honey from there for taking to his district home. He has the habit of drinking one teaspoonful of fresh honey each morning for last five years. It is giving good result at his old age.

The internationally acclaimed mangrove had an adventurous attitude with its riverine delta, forested islands, world famous flora-fauna, wildlife and tourism portfolio. It was calling Anil Babu for long. So, he didn't forget to make one more dent there.

# CHAPTER-5

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I am feather touching Kolkata and observing as a spectator and not an actor of the ongoings in the city.



## Quick, Mr. Chauffeur

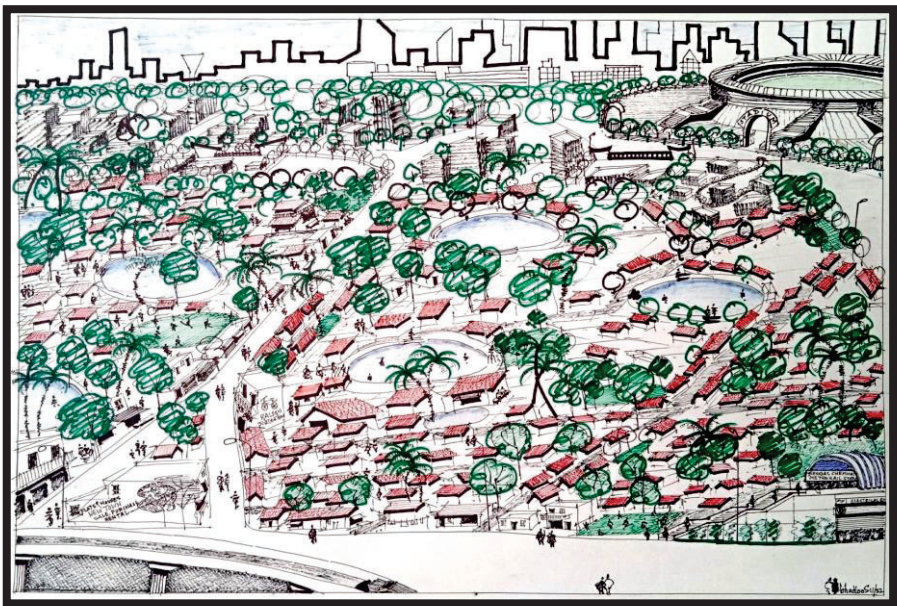
I, for few months, without moving anywhere from my shelter, observe day and night the fleeting kaleidoscope of ongoing events on streets, cafes, market place, to and fro after the major pandemic outbreak's diminishing return.

The schools have opened and students are on top priority to make up for the lost days. Numbers of private and chartered school buses transport kids from home to school and vice-versa. Very few schools who operate their own bus with painted school name, have stricter admission procedure. This girl somehow missed it and took to her family car and was waiting for the chauffeur and calling him frantically not to be late in school. Afterwards, the chauffeur will leave her grandmother and sister, seating in the backseat, to a family gathering at Hazra Road. This was overheard by me, without their knowledge, while passing near the car.



The private and chartered school buses are very particular about timing. If you miss for a second, that day your student will either be late or absent. This is my observation. In our time, the scope of school bus was not at all in vogue, and public transport was the only remedy. Getting late for the absence of a driver was an absurd thought. School kid calling the driver of the car, whereas her guardians wait in the back seat and the rest of the guardians waive from the departing house, is a daydream or nightmare in equal sense.

It was better to be admitted in boarding school, I thought in my mind, when the driver whizzed past me and now, they are nowhere in the picture frame.



## Urban Sprawl

“Rich and poor demarcation fast vanishing due to high rate of urbanization. Commercial strip eating up east Kolkata wetland and green verge. Highrise, stadium, offices clamor for built space.

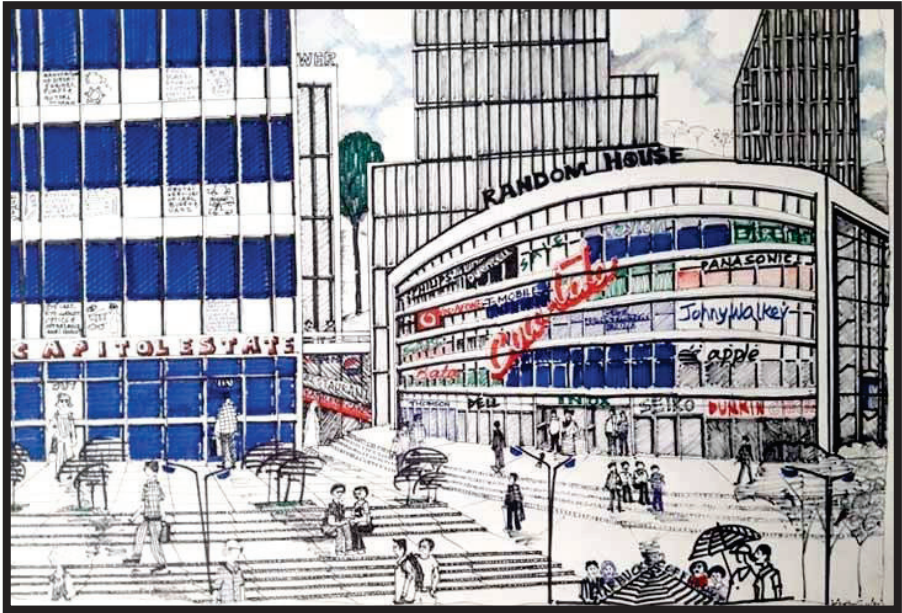


Overnight skyscrapers change the topography. Whatever little green space left, has exorbitant demand”, the last lines of the newscaster were these, when I switched off the television. The present-day newspaper topic, top headlines are all about the escalating land price, booming real estate market and the licensing raj.

After 10 in the morning, when banking operations start in the city, I proceed for my day’s work. The spectacular growth and maze of high rises on a marshy, wetland is unbelievable in our locality. I thought in my mind, on my way to bank, that the height of scientific imagination and technological advancement have reached such a crescendo that no construction is impossible.

The tile roofed, fragile houses under the cluster of banyan and mango trees, by the side of small small water bodies are the best ecological example of East Kolkata’s wetlands. Like the Sundarbans, it is also demarcated as top priority environmental conservancy project for balancing the lung of the metropolis.

At its edge, the new township with wide, tree lined roads, beautiful garden houses, parks and green verge looks like the panoramic silver screen of Hollywood film. At its fringe, the tall skyscrapers, foreign IT offices, Microsoft building with attractive shapes and forms, imported from the magazine pages of “World urbanism”, shine picturesque at noon time. My slow sauntering style, appreciating the two sides of the road, elongate the length of my outdoor hours.



## Urban nooks & corners

Another likeable spot is sectors of New Township, where ongoing construction activity is the major talk-of-the town. Its buildings are most futuristic and depend mainly on Smart City technics.

Different angles and corners expose different visuals through the building side spaces. Developers when don't keep a single square inch left for greenspace and the majestic high-rises, commercial complexes, departmental stores and office blocks, with their plaza, piazza, podiums and pedestals, create symphony in stone and concrete, the nooks and corners, automatic side spaces and angles, become vital for continuity of free and open space. On top of that, sudden exposure of green space or garden courtyard, a tall tree or a famous sculpture in it, through the myriad artifacts and maize of building rejuvenate the mind and eye.

Going there in the new township, the close-up view is abysmal. Those skyscrapers, seen in long shots, are creating interesting angles and corners to generate and incite thought provoking visions in close-up view, unattainable by any layman or unmatched by any human standard. Of course, this is my self-made idea. Others will form their own visions and ideas.

It is artistic paradise and the daily passengers in busload and office workers by Metrorail, are lucky to spend a thankful life in such high-profile enclosure of steel, concrete, glass and elevator. The rules and regulations of development in costliest city area, have intrinsic potential to transform the land into a flourishing powerhouse of profit and viability, unmatched in any IT (Information Technology) scale.



## Immersion Procession

“Jubilant procession leading to the immersion tank. Parade led by seniors with drums, bugle, trumpets and fire crackers warn the

surrounding for a powerful procession crossing the area with Goddess Durga and her children on the shoulders of members who had spent last few days with her. In the last journey, also join their pets, brothers and local kids. This won't be found any more", as said by the tea stall owner's son to me.

I, after finishing my breakfast at a small teashop in the marshy wetland, asked the owner of the stall, "How do you feel that your small shop is a stone's throw from opposite Pizza Hut?"

He explained pointing the road, "Here from the boundary of development is demarcated, Sir" Then moving spoon in a glass of hot tea, he reasoned out "exorbitant land price in the vicinity within last five years skyrocketed the sale of plots in black market. Quick buck and hefty amount made the sellers rich and the ownership transfer invited foreign investment and paved the way for an iconoclastic township".

His voice broke in pathetic down tone, and continued "five years ago, Sir, a few acres of land with coconut tree, water body, green field and few tenements were very common. But today there is no sign of it. From sunset, Toyotas and Hondas are coming. With them heaps of cement bags, iron bars and Bombay contractors, masons with yellow helmet on head, holding drawing in two hands to understand the building plan with the help of engineers as the day progresses. Many tea stalls here have their birth history written at the same time of the start of the construction activity."

What I understood after finishing the tea, is that these lands were their childhood playground and their memories shuttled between playing games there to organizing community pujas, social and political gathering, blood donation camp, annual sports and so on throughout the year. To ascertain the words, the boy of the tea stall owner fished

out his mobile from the pocket and showed a governing shot, taken few years back, of an immersion procession and pointing at his dancing position in the group photo. The turbo-charged procession is moving towards a nearby pond for final rituals.

That community club is also non-existent today along with the yearly Durga Puja. Gone are those waterbodies under landfilling drive. Few of the boys in the photo are now found at the nearby construction sites, engrossed in the clanking sound of concrete mixer, helping bar bending work, loading and unloading materials in and out of obnoxious, shabby and polluting trucks.

## **Carnival**

Our area has a greater number of fairs in a year, than the number of months in a calendar. The carnival scene in local fair ground is rampant in winter. Carnival parties come from distant states and spread their tents in vacant lands. A fantasy fair in an open field at a high-rise corner attract multitude of passersby in its fun, games and circuses for over a month. I had similar experience in my area, where a big sized corner plot, throughout the year, caters to the bus operators, tours and travel carriers, for-hire carriages, and free parking, gives way in winter to a carnival company from western India.

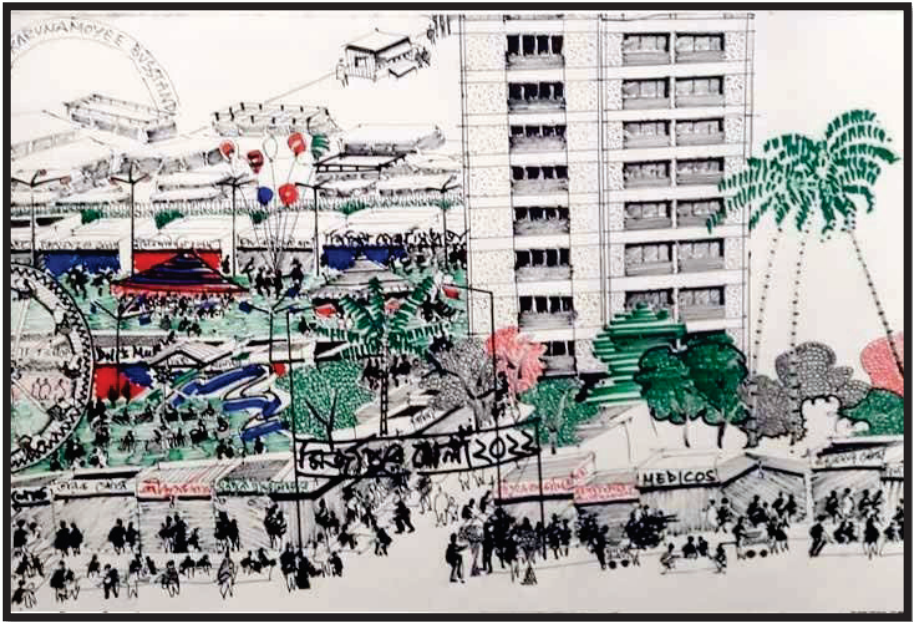
My mobile camera had few shots of that place on different dates and time. Last winter, the same company came with more men and exhibits and erected the fair for two full months.

I showed the boy “Mirzapur Mela 2022, bhai” and asked him, “have you ever been here?”

The boy scrutinized the image in detail, by enlarging it partially. A merry-go-round, rotating London Eye, high speed electric cable cars, spiraling chairs, snakelike fast moving undulating electric train,



jumping-bumping rubber kids' game are the blockbuster crowd puller. Handicraft stores, dress materials, furniture, utensils and crockery are the major attractions. Food stalls and Chinese, tandoor and other culinary items had separate zone full with seating and waiting visitors in different tables.

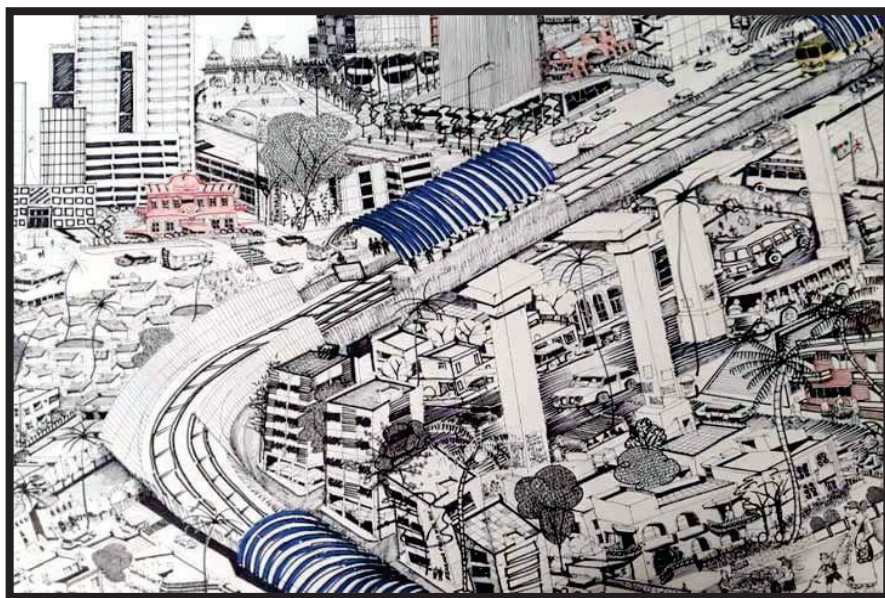


The height of the merry-go-round crossed the overall metro corridor height and top view of the fair from the nearby high-rises was fantastic and resembling a thermal power plant of 1000 megawatts at night.

The boy mused for some time, and coming back from his thought, retorted, “Not a single known face, no known stall owners, not any particular face in the crowd is my friend’s or locality’s, Sir. Even the shop signboards are new.”

I understood the extent of progress and futuristic projection, when expected and guaranteed, people turn to be so dumb on feeling and reciprocating.



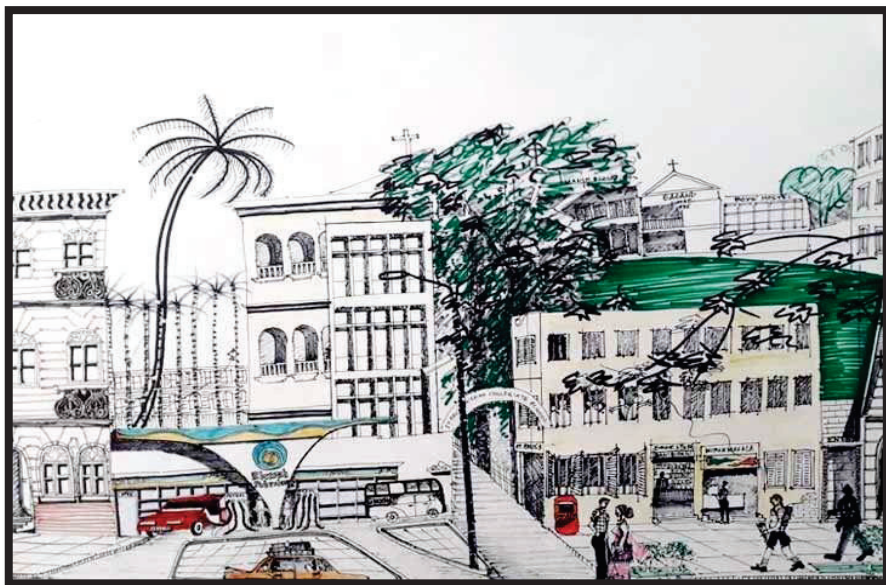


## Fast changing life

An overhead metro rail alignment completely changes the texture of the township overnight. Not in the initial planning of the township fifty years ago, the MRTS corridor forcibly enters on pillars and piers, and rapidly becomes inmate, a household name and everybody's pet baby. It helps us to travel with ease, satisfies the communication drawback, increases the number of trips and hikes up the adjoining land price.

I quick stepped to reach my destination in time. Tea stall has already taken much of my allotted time. I decided to take a metro ride to offset the lost time. Through the thick float glass, Kolkata's this side looks like full foreign. So, fast the city skyline has engulfed the blue sky and the loftiness generating highspeed lifestyle, making a rising choice between vehicular and metro mode.

Beehive of prosperous trade and commerce and business economics proliferate the ground level. The elevated metro corridor, bypass the town area on heavy circular pillars, segregating road in both directions for keeping smooth and free flow. Their rapid and vibrating service all day, transform the locality, cutting through the peaceful neighborhood, adding misery to silence and privacy.



## Down memory lane

The school stands by the eastern side of the down memory lane. A very old Christian school with a huge campus in Kolkata donates part of its land to a petrol filling station to facilitate the school buses to be serviced there with other vehicles. On the other side stands the church for its Sunday service. Playgrounds and classrooms are airy and well lighted. Hearing the Facebook posting of news of death of one of our school friends, I went to his house one day to condole his family and son. His house, crossing the school compound, little more on left side of the road.

On the way, I passed the school gate after many years. I noticed the school has got a facelift in blue and white official color. A red post box has been installed at the side of the gate to facilitate efficient clearing of the mail in that area. The blue-yellow petrol pump from long time ago, now gives filling, garage and parking service of the school bus. The church building has led in incurring maximum expanses for facelift. Glazed wall tiles, syntax matte floor tiles, the polished brass church bell, covered seating in open terrace, varnished church benches, carpeted aisle, cutglass podium, newly installed-grave sounding-piped organ, green wide louvred gothic doors opening towards the field, stainless-steel crucifix, renovated wooden honor board, displaying chronological list of outgoing cardinals are few of the long list of specifications made to reality.

I scrutinized the details, going closer to the school notice board, and then suddenly my eyes fell on a small obituary pasted there in black and white print, written in Times New Roman font “Lt Parimal Anthony Biswas, born 1955, an ex-school teacher of St. Nicholas, Ghatshila, Bihar has returned to his heavenly abode on 23rd March, 2023”.

Then it read again “He was a true believer of God and an ever-friendly young man of wisdom, courage and perseverance. May his soul rest in peace. Amen”. There was a picture of Parimal, but not very decipherable.

My memory traversed backward almost fifty years and the face of Parimal came to my immediate mind. We were at a gathering for a pre-Christmas party in the cathedral compound. Our school participated in that year in a bash there. Other schools were also there. Since Parimal is no more, I couldn't ask him about the rest of the get-together details.



## Christmas night

This memory is without Parimal. It has other friends as company.

No visible life on the street at the mid-night hours of the Christmas eve. Daytime was hot and sunny, many folks were around in the park and the bench tirelessly was busy accommodating visitors. At mid-winter night, when they all gone, it waits empty and silent for the daybreak.

Our school church has very fond memory in us. Specially in winter three months, when carnival, fete, X-mas, NewYear, School Foundation Day, Netaji Birthday, Republic Day all celebrated with dignity and poise. Folks used to congregate first for prayer, few devotional songs were sung in chorus and afterwards fun, frolic swept the field and tasty gourmet orchestrated.



The English style and European culture inundated the church foyer, first floor chapel at Ealand House and adjoining school ground. Colorful crowds of students, friends, guardians, relatives and honored guests were milling round, their sounds of laughter and flatter frightened the birds in the tall fencing trees. Merrymaking, fanfare, carnival time, at their best stretched up to the evening.

The evening started with the drama by the Montessori kids on the joy of birth of baby Jesus and his life history. Most popular Christmas carols practiced by the students and children, directed by reverend M. Biswas, Principal of St. Mary School, followed by a musical soiree received loud applause, so loud that last few names of the participants could not be heard. After the dinner most of the guests left, only the organizers and residents of the area stayed up to midnight. The bicycle parking lot full with no free space, the youngsters, who parked their bikes here and there, some resting it against tree, some standing it against vacant bench, drove them in chill of the night to their homes to be ready for next morning's curricula.



## Changing mid-town

Winter in New Market area had a special flavor. Cakes, pastries, patties, bread, names of famous bakeries inundated the household. We were all ready to visit the New Market area with the same joy and flamboyance as in Durga Pujo.

The New Market and adjoining area, from nineteenth century to twenty first century, has undergone many changes.

New landmarks have been erected and demolished. A cable suspension bridge and a 70 storied high building are the two new entrants. Their old ancestors, few gothic buildings and few art Deco offices are still standing, through which the everyday sunset takes place, but there is no guarantee of permanency, like the unpredictable rainbow. Nobody can say, when which building is to be razed and, in its place, new skyscraper will officiate.



I decided to visit this downtown area one day, for my personal work. After the week-long X-mas jubilation, winter in its middle was increasing in harshness. The new year arrived and the posh, midtown of Kolkata, where Englishmen lived, were open for all to shop, roam, eat and drink. The shop fronts were decorated with chains of light, Xmas tree, Santa Claus, bells and mistletoes. Beautiful sound of carols emanated from the inside of houses and restaurants. The yearlong, mundane office look was thoroughly washed away by the decoration and crowd queued up before the eateries and food stalls, waiting patiently for their sitting turns.

New landmarks, erected side by side their century old neighbors in Gothic, Victorian and Renaissance styles bade farewell to the outgoing year. The last sunset, taking place over the western horizon, at Howrah side. Ushering new year and new hope will again witness so many changes, not only in downtown property market, but all over the world and same time nationally, in our family and your too.



## Statue controlling the town center

A short-cut is there between our area and the central part of Kolkata. The five-point road junction of the town under the lone care of a statue, showing a cavalier, looking towards the green patch and his back towards the tram goomty, is the spot discussion of the short-cut mentioned.

At five, I reached the spot. Five-point Road intersection is famous for its occasional outburst to handle traffic. Then long snarl-up and out of gear control irritate the heavy load of office goers and daily passengers. They prefer to walk, vacating the stationary buses. But normally, this is the best route for the vehicles to divert to their destinations, saving maximum time. Other city bypass routes are longer and not so well landscaped and tree lined.

At day time, the green pastures at its side with sloped roof, stone and brick buildings look indispensable amidst office and bank high-rises, parks and tram lines. Dotted with moving pedestrians in all directions,

men, women, children of all ages. At night time, gorgeous street lights, light up the black top of the road, and the crossing takes a vacant look since evening hours, when last of the working person leaves the place.

There is a majestic statue of the cavalier, looking towards East, at the central circle of the five-point crossing. The cavalier, in his time, had travelled a lot on his favorite horse back and now in the pages of history book. He looks like still in guard and control of this important traffic intersection, but in statue form made, of costly granite.



## **Sunrise and Sunset on Kolkata skyline**

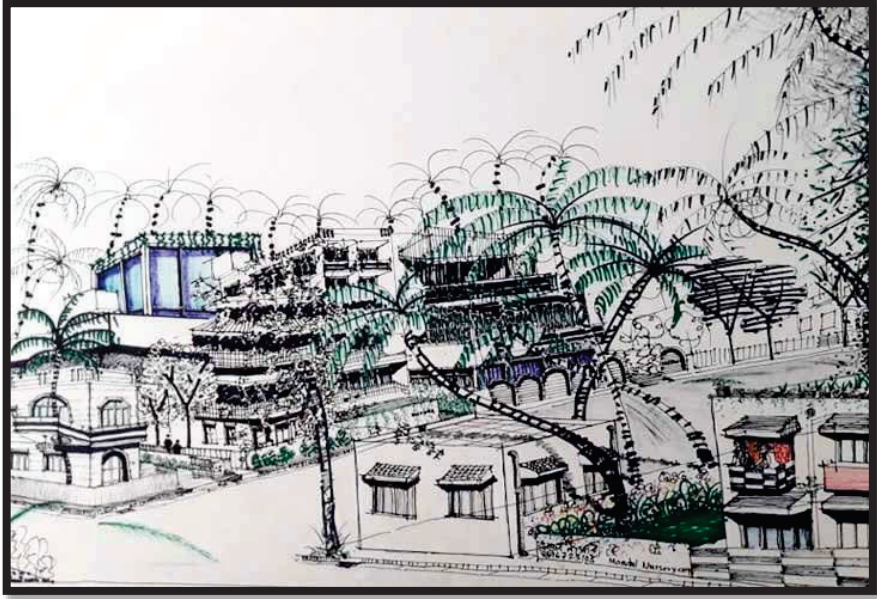
Sunrise on the eastern sky. Chowringhee Road, readying to receive the everyday onslaught of working population. Art loving street encasing their best old and new mansions along the mile long stretch, has a cross view from the balcony height of the road. Avoiding road traffic and showing the first corner in north to the Theatre Road at south. Preservation is called for this archaeological stretch of roadside. Beautiful and elegant old buildings line up to intensify the aristocracy

and prestige of the street. Modern outstanding skyscrapers came running to give their signature presence.

Sunset on its western sky. The road, now busy reflecting the daily work force back home. Art loving street is lighted-up now along the mile long stretch, sweeping out the accumulating darkness abutting the street.

The Road has more than fifty versatile, noticeable buildings and prime properties. Few date back close to 200 years and were designed as Hotel, Office, club, YMCA, market and so on. Now they have changed hands and the new owners have changed the uses too. Few buildings are as tall as 500 feet high, modern lifts up to top floor give the panoramic and encompassing view of the maidan area, river and the metropolitan hinterland. Thousand square miles of urban area with road congestion, stalled traffic, building tops, open spaces, stadia, maidan area, green parks, treetops, water bodies, bend of the Ganges, river traffic leave a stunning impression and vertigo on the viewer.

Best time to see the classical top view of the Marble domes, pitched roofs, concrete tower, long car porch, projecting balcony, open terrace, stupendous cable suspension bridge, long spanned Howrah Bridge, dotlike moving vehicles over these, crisscross of roads, is from morning 4 to evening 7 in summer. The long hours of sunshine falls drastically down in winter, reducing the working time.



## New Township

Township built on landfill and allows only low-rise buildings, because of weak soil condition, has wide roads and two side greenery and sparsely populated, invites workers each morning. Our house is third from the corner. I am going to receive my uncle from the airport. He is coming from abroad after a long while and will be on his way to his in-laws' house.





## Airport

When I reached at the airport around morning 10, busy hours there around the terminal building at airport. Air hostesses are joining duty, DHL, FedEx and other courier companies' mail delivery men are running here and there, drivers are helping the heavy luggage, suitcases to be placed in safe recluse of the taxi carriers, day time peak hour vehicular traffic leaving and entering the ramp of the airport, outside slow-going city life going on without ripples of fastidious fastness of the rest of the world, oblivious of the activities inside the airport. Opposite side of the road leading to Bangladesh border, there stand the uninvolved sweetshops, hotels, restaurants, tea stalls, roll corners and fast-food centers. amidst the bustling city called Kolkata.

The only single ingress and egress point in the northern part of the city, took three hours to reach that day for a resident of Baruipur, as was heard by me, while standing waiting for my guest. I was all ear and listening to each and every conversation with high alertness and

specific concentration to detect the origin and destination of the passengers. The international departure lounge had two foreign lovebirds in tight shorts and skinny T-shirts, ready to take their flight back home.

The runway area inside could not be seen from outside. The peripheral, heavily traffic prone, congested highway, divide the airport area with opposite residential zones. The Holiday Inn hotel demarcates the airport complex from the local budget hotels across the street. With such constraint of congestion and paucity of land, the airport operates day and night, meeting the delivery deadlines and serving the fliers. My uncle's scheduled flight is late by one hour was announced in PAS. I went to visit the surrounding.



## Folk dance

Tribal women in an exhilarating dance mood at the drum beats of their male counterparts. This group of tribal women, in the advent of

Spring, dance merrily with their men companions in a rhythm showing their joy in welcoming spring in their locality and habitat.

Chhow-Naach with mask and tribal dance in systematic rhythms are two very important attractions in tribal areas of Eastern India. It's promoted heavily by state tourism and Jharkhand government to bring tourists.

A poster at the airport gate, speaks of it showing a folk-dance sequence of tribal men and women singing and dancing in unison. It is meant for the ensuing Spring festival.



## Signaling a stormy night

A threatening, culminating weather change indicating storm before the sunset and alerting everyone in sea at night.



Another poster on the airport compound wall, showed the onset of a heavy cyclone targeting India's eastern coast with all its grandeur and magnum. It's a rare and one of the precious spectacles to be viewed in monsoon in coastal areas. Specially meant for those who love maritime adventures and sea sports, gallant at outdoor sports and can face challenges at water.

There are so many posters, notifications, notice, advertising gimmick, sales tricks, information pasted in the dashboard of the airport entry to catch attractions of the passengers. But I had to make my uncle reached safely at the hands of his in-laws was the only worrying thought, so I stopped seeing more.



## Ladies' street

Neatly dressed ladies in group line up and gather at the streets in evening peak hours.

Nearby the airport, a place is heard to be there where evening Bon-Jovi and night life are fathomless. The women, in garish colorful dresses, stand in line on the street, talk to the persons and greet the visitors. The hotel, restaurants, and drinking bars are overflowing with joyous customers and smokers. The youth, spirit, energy and enthusiasm knows no bounds in that area after darkness. Foreigners are welcome was also heard in the din of the airport lounge. It sounded like Dubai or Seoul Airport, where in transit you have a scope to visit such areas in lieu of few dollars and return to take your designated flight.



## Puppet show

The other day the Inox ticket was not available, when five minutes before, we reached the foyer of the cinema hall. We tossed for a theatre show, currently running in a close-by auditorium. The court scene resembling carelessness at every sector of the authority, was the theme of the play and it made a very heavy box-office success for last three months. Audience at the front row spellbound by the progress of the act showing helplessness of the common people rejected from every side of life by autocracy.



Live theatrical shows go on in Kolkata in countless stages day and night all thought the year. You can buy tickets online or from the counter to spend a happy evening sitting in a soft cushioned seat in an air-conditioned and acoustically powered theatre with other art lovers. This stage show plays an act of bravery, atrocities, stories of prison inmates and verdict.



## Parashurama Street

Mid-day unnoticed and unconscious medley of human, traffic and pets on Parashurama Street is an old and accustomed affair. Stray passersby and casual onlookers are unaware of it. This busy traffic artery, lovingly known by all pedestrians as Parashurama Street, because of its very nature of amicably accommodating all types of vehicles and pedestrians from all directions, to channelize in one guided direction. The Town corporation has renamed it “Parashuraman Street” fifty years ago for its manly characteristics and mile-long commercial activity. Renovated and impoverished shopfronts and old buildings have queer residents at night, when the street lies completely barren and dormant.

The street is leading from east to west, where the Ganges flow southward. The pedestrians prefer to walk along, because of the safe

and intimate nature of the direction of street. Free flowing trade and commerce, swelling business and lucrative buy-and-sell on the entire street has some virtue. Residents and tenants in upper floors of the old-fashioned buildings, depict versatile historical past and characters of the street.

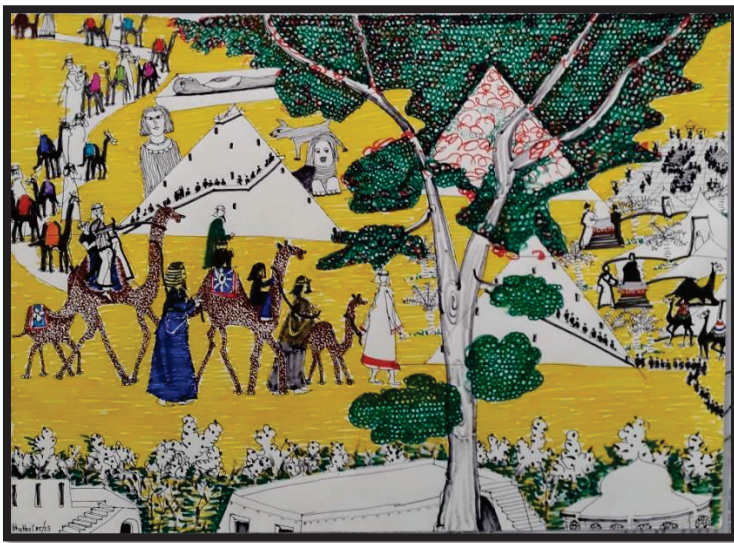


## Swimming pool

A pool full of swimmers and divers in the heart of Kolkata. Acres of fenced filtrated water for the swimmers in such congested city area in evening is a lavish scene. The homeless, pavement dwellers, job seekers, new comers in the city all spend some time to watch the spectacle, like the old boxing rink at Wellington Square. The swimmers' agile pose in the water to keep afloat is an envy to the onlookers' eyes, standing outside the fenced railings, tightly holding it. Few divers dare to spring board their bodies in air, to a whirlpool movement to reach and touch the safe water of the pool. After an hour all light will vanish and the water will be standstill. The swimmers will be on their way back home with sling bag and costumes.

On my way back via Parashuraman Street, I take a left turn at Wellington. I keep on walking northward and relish the evening view of the city. On the way where the tramline separates, I cross the road to have a closer look at the big pond, where hundreds of swimmers are having a gala time in warm water. The trainers on top of the spring-board roof are instructing a future Olympian a deep-sea diving technic and the tact to win a gold medal. Other swimmers in competition with each other to touch the rope in pool water and turn back again. At one corner, group of swimmers practicing and preparing for water polo match.

Many onlookers are watching this floating gymnasium and balancing trick in water with intense curiosity and pleasure. At winter this pond is pumped out of water and remain dry under maintenance spell to be ready and effective again for the next summer. The novelty coaching on floating and swimming technics is purported by this big pond, is praiseworthy in all corners of the city.



## Goldrush

Desert people coming in flocks to the border area for food, shelter and job. But who can guaranty their urge? With a title like this a phenomenal TV program was made by BBC and History Channel, few years back.

Pyramid is the oldest remnants of Egyptian civilization, almost 5000 years old. This is our school history book taught. Going near it for survival, I don't believe, has any ground. That shows that Pyramid has been transplanted in the direction of migration, coming out of desert habitation to broader oasis zones. Or the migrating nomads are targeting the valuables and gems-jewelry hidden in the Pyramids.

Pareshnath temple of the Jains, Jews Synagogue, few very old churches are agog with visitors, nowadays. New Township has more available land to showcase miniature sized Tajmahal, Eiffel Tower, Pyramid and other Seven Wonders of the World in its recreational and entertainment park. This Eco-Park is nowadays has more per day ticket sale than city Zoo, VMH, or riverside Millennium Park.

Pyramid in desert, attracting millions of nomads for a better life, food, shelter and work is little absurd. One reason may be, when the gold rush by poor and shelterless migrant refugees, in search of job, food and shelter, and they don't mind to proceed towards the zone, exclusively demarcated and barricaded for dead and their burial. That shows those men and women in hordes and hastes are frustrated enough, very close to their destiny and almost reached their life's end.

Frustratingly, the BBC serial on Gold Rush, I had to skip for some other prior engagements, but another famous namesake Hollywood film "Mackenna's Gold" by Gregory Peck-Omar Sharif duo is immortal in our memory.



High optimism, sustainability and survival for the fittest attitude everywhere with the long rush and terrific longing is seen everywhere today. Not to be bowed down by 5000 years old backdated time.



## Forest road at morning sunlight

Morning sunrays filtering through the dense trees and casting a play of light and shade on the road, forming changing and interesting patterns.

Few localities of Kolkata, even today, have the same appeal and attraction to be called as the gold rush paradise. Its green, natural and beautifully landscaped courts and gardens, open land and low population base, are blessed by governing morning sunrays, filtered through the tree branches and their foliage, casting slant on the road surface, creating a labyrinth of light and shade. An envy to many residents, living in older and darker parts of the city.



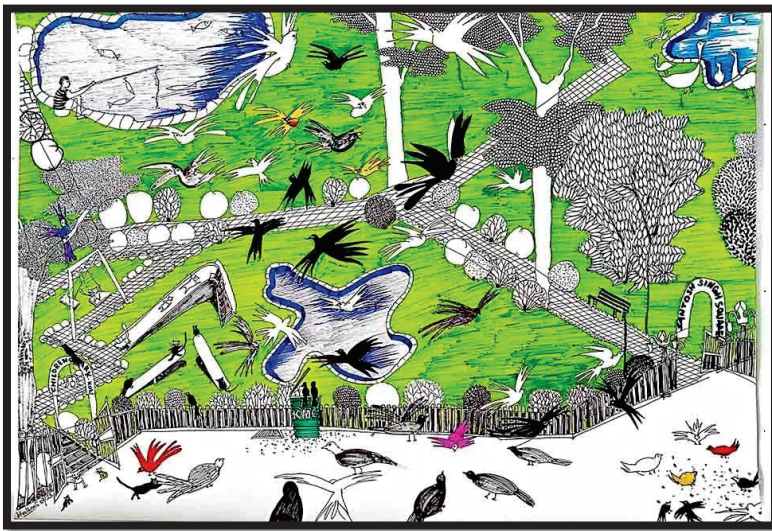


## Utopian woods

Other such green and posh areas in our city have high quality natural assets, than manmade Eco-Park style miniature monuments. Rare varieties of botanical species in green, virgin forest in these localities and in their trained nurseries are marvel in our eyes. A deep vision into the forested stretch with hundreds and thousands of types of natural wonders throng the secret garden. Lost in day light, the shades, hues, and color of the vegetation hold a spectrum of contrasting, overlapping spectroscopic shades from red to orange to yellow to green. At far away the clear blue sky can be seen across a heavy dense hill full of barricading wood.

The acres of such land, powerhouse and arsenal of natural beauty and greenhouse of purposeful flora and fauna are very sad to watch, when encroached and acquisition takes place for progressive wheel of civilization to tread. Juggernaut effect on such valuable land gives way to transport corridor, high rises, stockyards, industry and what not. Parks, playgrounds, green verge, lakes, water bodies, lily pools all vanish overnight by land sharks and Moghuls of development.

The varieties of plants and creepers, flora and fauna, birds and pets, butterflies and caterpillars inundate the area in early morning dawn hours. This colorful, utopian wood has marvelous fragrance up to the distant blue sky and at forefront flowering plants sway in gentle breeze for an eye-pleasing view. These are natural assets and like choral islands, need to be retained in right earnest. The emergent need of traffic corridor or pressure for new settlement or an unfeasible industry site can be thought with more patience and reasonable brain. The utopian woods are still now untouched, unpalpable and imaginative.

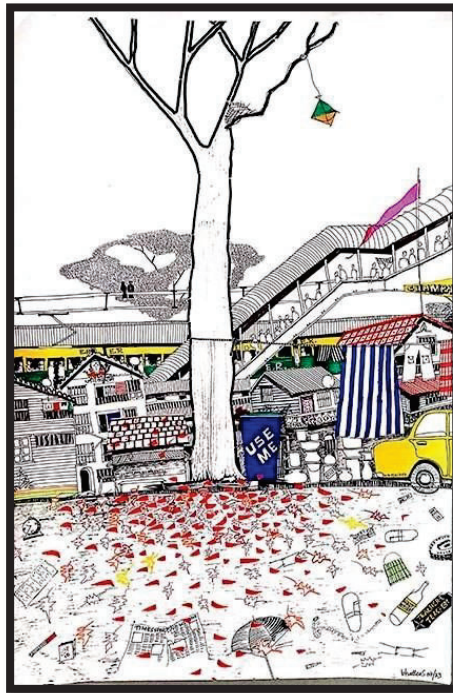


## Early morning at a city park

Little better than being completely an utopian wood, like no man's land, the entry is prohibited and barred, a municipal park is the first morning SOS for the local residents. Bright daylight of the dawn brought all locals to the park. Animals and birds are early risers to assemble and be engaged in pecking food and fodder at the gate. Joggers, health seekers and morning walkers circle the park. Ducks,

swans and fishes float on the water surface. Gentle wind blows. The day starts.

The city administration opens the lock of the park gate at 6 in the morning for the residents to practice jogging, running, physical exercise, yoga and meditation, walking, fishing. Health seekers, old timers and youngsters spend few hours there till the noise on the road becomes over limit. The birds swoop down for grains, fodders, and food thrown to them by the morning users of the park, later they fly off to trees. The road is cleared for the day to progress and us to go to work.



## A Suburban railway station

Migrants' colony outside the railway station. Train on the platform, passenger load on the over-bridge. At a Saturday afternoon, a lonely

leafless tree stands outside the station compound littering the road with its falling leaves and dry petals, with red springtime offerings mixed and mingled with public wastes, debris, throwaways, derelict items, garbage and sewerage deposited by the migrant communities, living in shanties and squalors. At the background flows the station life, trains come and go and the heap loads of passenger tread their unknown destinations.

The city is encircled in all sides by umpteen numbers of suburban railway stations like this. The trains arrive and leave it within few seconds, for the commuters to board and alight it. Vendors have special compartment for their head loads. Outside the railway station area, migrants, destitute, beggars, all huddle together for a livelihood.

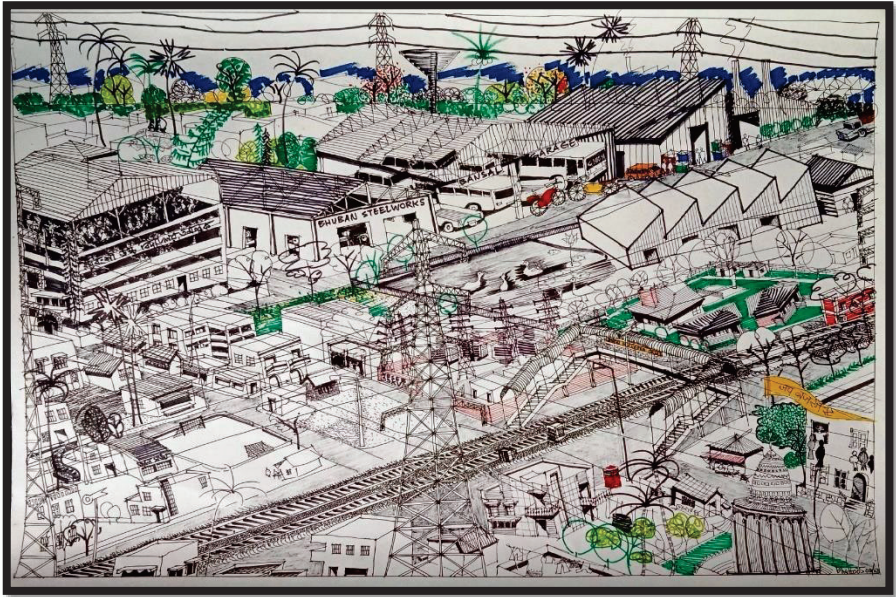
My dribbling feet now taking me to another destination.



## Birds' days rest

Birds returning at day's end to their nests and at pillars and posts of the telegraph company. Flocks of bird, thousands in count, not lost in the fading twilight. A suburb, quite away from the hustle and bustle of the city, is their recluse. The suburban railway has a station here for the daily passengers to help frequent the city area.





## Far from the madding crowd

Another suburban railway station in another line. Daily office-goers, returning home leaving behind a hectic day and the magnetism of city, cross the rail track to reach their home as a routine.

The outward-ho passengers, who depart from home for the city in early hours of the morning and return at night, are a typical breed of urban commuters. These daily passengers work in the city all day, but return home at night. The furthest distance of the station may stretch up to 100 kilometers from Kolkata. The suburban land use changes with distance, population falls down, open space increases, occasional factory shed or a smoking chimney signifies their economic pursuit, under construction building shows new development in that area, agricultural tract of land exhibits wavy produce, a big gathering in a field under a tent cover ascertains a fair going on.



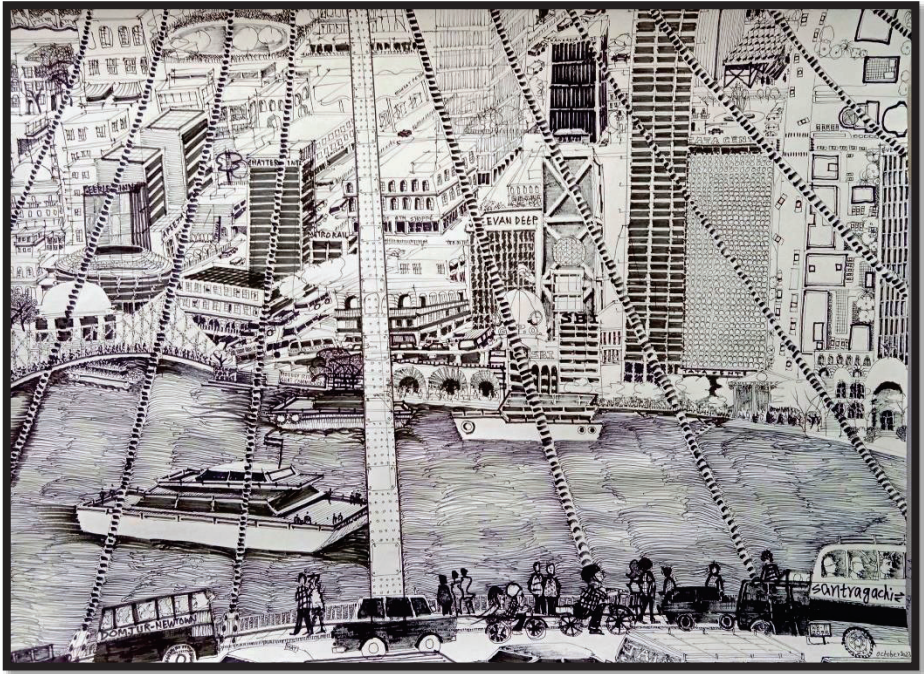
From the top of the railway over bridge, fresh smell of village air, houses surrounded by coconut trees, the red signal on the tracks, verify the departure of the last train.



## High alter

Final hour rush before the closing of the temple gate. There are many worshipping houses and temples for different religious communities in Kolkata. Since the Hindus are majority, they have maximum share of such prayer rooms.

Every day the rush hour at evening peak before the temple gate, is scattered with countless shoes, slippers, chappals, footgear on each step of the temple. Today the same evening time, just before the closing hour, a splash of extra rush of the visitors hurrying to meet the god, leave the steps strewn and dishevel with their shoes and slippers, not caring for their safety, protection and security.



## Kolkata through a speeding eye

Peak hour traffic jam on the cable suspension bridge competing to reach the destination in time. Twin city, Howrah and Kolkata form a metropolitan area of almost twenty million people, chasing after and fighting for bread every day.

These two urban frontrunners are connected by three prominent river bridges, across the Ganges about half a mile wide. Millions of traffic of varied sizes, tonnage and speed limit crisscross these three partnering viaducts countless number of times in weekdays. In Sundays and holidays, most of the ins and outbound traffic consists of tour parties, sightseers and holiday makers.

The southernmost and newest suspension bridge The Second Hooghly Setu, at office peak hour, is jam-packed by traffic to reach the oasis side of Kolkata. Howrah and Santragachhi stations receive

long distant trains all day-night. To reach Kolkata faster from far suburb, I chose to get down at Santragachhi and entered through the Princep Ghat side.



## Off the route

An uncommon corner, a non-descript lane, a sharp bend and a rare view of idol preparation. The autumn sky advocates the advent of the Goddess. Reaching Kolkata from Howrah side little late, I hurry to keep an appointment with the art curator of an upcoming exhibition. He stays at Dum Dum area and I had to divert and bulldoze myself via meandering lanes and bi-lanes of northern outskirts, after getting down from metro.

In the mellow months of July, at a remote lane corner, my eyes got fixed on a rare and astonishing sight of a well maintained zamindar house with courtyard and high corridor, gearing up for the



forthcoming autumn festival. The nat-mandir, housing a straw and mud structure of Devi Durga and her full team is like embryo under the artist's fertilization spree in his studio, temporarily transshipped to the zamindari nat-mandir. The artisan's skill, workload and sense of aesthetics looks very impressive through the closed collapsible gate.

Two months to go before the Pujas, the air is light and refreshing with the end of monsoon. The lane looks festive, serene and spirited. I told the matter to the curator that "So very close to your house, such magnificent zamindari property worshipping Durga Puja on annual basis, is beyond thinking Biswas Da. Specially at a turning point like this".

The curator retorted "This was said to me by my grandfather too. In our childhood, that collapsible gate was nowhere. On our way to school, even we could touch the feet of the under-preparation Durga pratima and on puja days, we frequented the courtyard with balloons, toys, firecrackers and paper planes and rockets. But never had disclosed the day-by-day progress of the beautiful Goddess to my aunts and grandma who came from Patna in holidays."



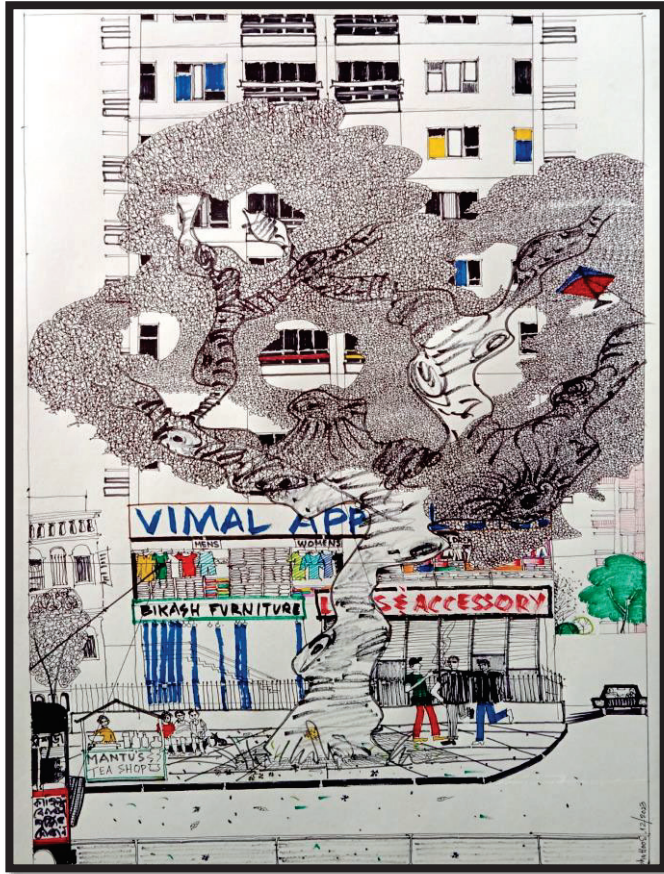
## Yuletide

Christmas night at a remote place in the earth, jingle bells at the midnight hours. The pujo is over by few months.

That night, I lay awake in the midnight reasoning the spectacle observed in daytime, and getting up midway I, from balcony, faced again the same marvelous and holy spectral vision outside, over the parks and playgrounds, buildings and roads, trees and gardens, that silence of the night falling on earth, the cold starry sky over the distant forest and pine trees are alit with gifts of heaven and showering selflessly.

Few lighted chambers in some remote houses at midnight are awake and signaling the advent of Yuletide, preparing for the Sun to kickstart a festive day. “Joy to the world...” song was overheard somewhere distantly.



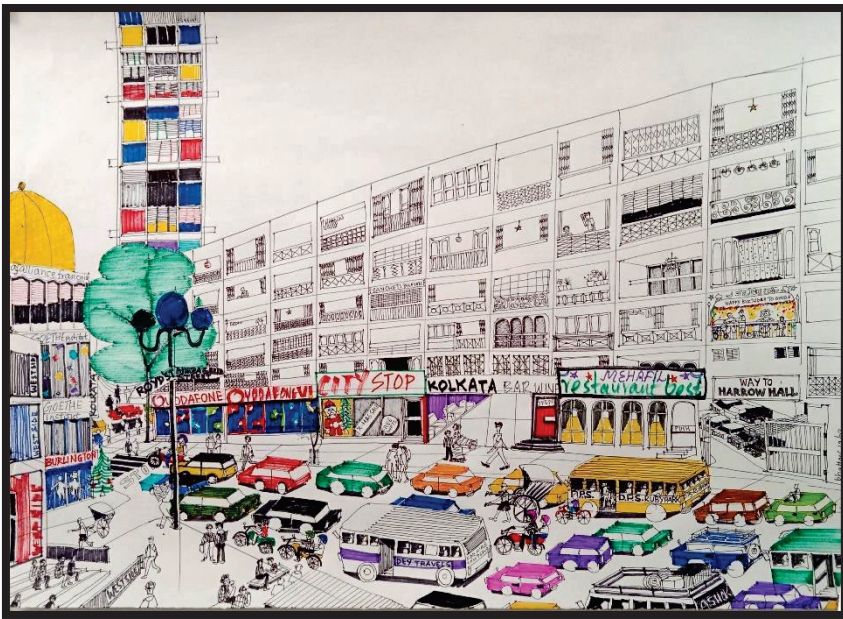


## A Monstrous tree

A voluminous tree, undaunted by the presence of a concrete high-rise close by, grows every year in height and width, obscuring the mansion behind. A fancy expensive high-rise apartment building on the northern side of a busy city artery with A-class shopping mall at its lower floors are hidden by the position of this grand, magnimonious, mega sized tree that obstructs the vision.

Underground metro corridor in Kolkata has all its stations fitted with four exit gates in all cardinal points. It is altogether a different mental experience high-speed travelling underground. Coming out of 100 feet

depth of earth, the outside world looks so lively, sparkling, and special that I turned my head at full circle to behold the surrounding. The straight opposite side of the road at ninety degrees caught me by surprise with a versatile view of this monster sized tree with branches, voluminous and extraordinary bends and twists of its trunk from bottom to top and ship loads of green foliage standing in front of the good looking modern high-rise apartment block. The tree, undoubtedly is much older in age, restricts the viewer's gaze from front and hides the color, balustrades, cornices, balconies and detailed workmanship of the designer. The appalling monstrosity of this tree is remarkable and its tenacity and environmental hide-and-seek existence is limitless, I nurtured in my mind.



## Park Lane at night

Posh & fashionable Kolkata Street in the growing darkness of the evening emulates the NYC style. Multi-lane traffic standstill at a busy

crossing giving way to a high-speed home bound vehicular convoy in opposite direction.

The road crossing has safety tips for impulsive pedestrians and risk takers. Fashionable mansions with glittering exteriors and shop fronts have brisk business. Night illumination has rolled in at every corner of the streets and adjoining buildings. Frolicking onlookers, pedestrians and vehicles abound the locality without any contempt and remorse for the space crunch.

Next morning my duty fell in this part. I prepared for it and dressed myself to face the daylong fashion parade. After finishing the day's work, I walked towards Park Lane to have some coffee at Starbucks. Reaching there in evening rush hour, when lights were gradually turning on in shops, offices, streets and upper floors of the buildings, I conjured in my mind, it was very contrasting from daytime starkness. Electricity, coupled with neon, and other gases, emitting strings of colorful ray on roadside advertisements, shop signs and building names, interiors and exteriors of the glassy showrooms, high-rise staircases and windows throwing lights from above. At street level all these created a riot of light and mutiny of extravaganza in illumination, leaving a crescendo of traffic, pedestrian and vertical blocks.

Unknowingly and unaware of the artistic pattern created at Central Kolkata at this hour, a stream of fast-moving vehicles from other parts of the city, crosses the area probably in a hurry to reach their distant destination; the other rows of vehicle wait for their clearance. Standing crosswise, I look at the baffling velocity of life and this havoc moment at Park Lane corner. I envied the moment because tomorrow my duty will take me to another part of this mindboggling city, where opulence in such variety may not be available.



## End of the road

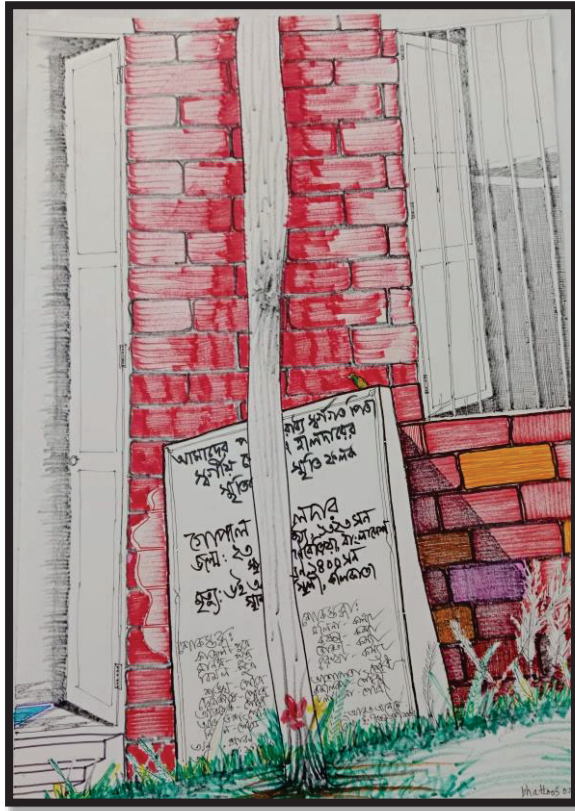
Procession of trucks carrying the gods and the goddesses reach the immersion bank very late, when almost all done.

Then gradually days mingled into days and monsoon is almost over. Days were counted by distance from the forthcoming Durga Puja, the greatest festival of the Bengalis and eastern India. Then during one week of hectic and busiest time, the pujo came and went. The pandals were pulled down, dismantling its structure and decoration overnight. The Durga left for her heavenly abode in trucks and vans.

Late night Kolkata, during autumn month is very different from summertime. Colder in temperature and deeper in silence. Close by is the Ganges, and this idol is very late to reach the spot, where now it is hard to find labors and helping hands to undertake a weighty immersion process. Most of the porters have finished their work and left for home. This arrival was out of their imagination.

The gritty I, kept awake to see more of the night till the birds' tweet in the morning.





## Epitaph

A broken, old memorial plaque standing before the house of a deceased owner, oblivious and unknown to the world, is itself ruining under the attacking growth of weeds, creepers and unwanted bushes. The road facing the ground floor house has a direct view of the inside of the house. Its room interior is shabby, the walls are paintless and a mosquito net is hung 24\*7.

Doors and the doormats have no caretaker, nor security and are always open. At right hand side, little obscured and almost derelict, stands the stone epitaph, camouflaged under the unrestricted growth of creepers and bushes.



The epitaph is in the memory of the landlord of this house, who got deceased longtime ago, leaving his family, whose size has overgrown and extended over time. In his remembrance, the extended family, comprising of his sons and daughters, grandchildren and other relatives erected this memorial plaque to immortalize the sole of late Mr. Halдар, erstwhile backbone of the house.



## Steep gradient

A strenuous steep bridge under vehicular pressure permits traffic to crisscross it. The bustling metro, full of canals, is beautified by the local municipality and maintained by the trained gardeners for a

marvelous landscape along the canal banks. It has to be crossed to reach the other side. But the bridge built long ago, has a very steep gradient, construing the increasing traffic, ferrying passengers and goods across it.

Our Kolkata, very old since last three full centuries, has a colossal colonial history of British Raj for half the length. The older part of the city has many similar old buildings, monuments and road bridges. This road bridge is famous for the steepness in gradient and both drivers and pedestrians try to avoid coming this side. Few drivers to touch the western tip urgently use it from older northern part to newer side across the rivulet. This is very critical and tactical for the drivers and cargo trucks to ascend and at descending time. The wheels screech in painful rotation to a sudden jerking halt, copying and following the front running vehicles. The peak of the bridge has been overcome.



# CHAPTER-6

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I, as a seafarer's role, sometimes at Sundarbans, nextly at Andamans, then again at South 24 Parganas and Midnapore, the two coastal districts.



## The Sundarbans

Last few mangroves bidding farewell to the departing cargo vessels to the ensuing sea. Last few groups of islands in the famous delta belt, covered with dense forest, riverine and canals bidding adieu to the passing vessels for the forthcoming nightfall. Birds are flying back to their nests for the night rest. Grains are ripe in the cultivated fields, boats in the ground are under maintenance spell, and those in the ocean are, under the heavy load of freight, returning. An orange sunset and diminishing light signaling another dark night.

In winter, I paid for an overnight trip to the Sundarbans, along with my two other friends from Asansol. About thirty of us in the whole group, gathered one fine winter morning before the Tourist office. Their bus took us via E. M. Bypass, turning leftwards to Bantala,



Bhangar, Ghatakpukur, crossing Malancha and along the Basanti Highway, we reached Gadkhali after two full hours of driving.

The deluxe steamer in our wait, had a slant wooden plank placed between the weak bamboo jetty and the steamer railing. The Canning shore, gateway to the Sundarbans, at noon time was considerably hot and devoid of any zoological or botanical surprise in the beginning. The steamer sounded its engine, throwing jets of bubbles and foams from the back exhaust and made a frontal journey. From deck, we observed lots of bird of different varieties flying with us and happily circling over our heads. After sunset, these birds will settle in the deep jungle, raising high decibel quarrelling sound till late night.

Till evening on the first day, we did get up and down quite a number of times from steamer and into the soil of the Sundarbans to check the lucky presence of some rare varieties of animals, birds or species of trees. But the lucky sight of crocodiles could not be noticed in the first day. Maybe the amphibian King was not communicated well of our arrival in their habitat in advance. The tiger reserve was also nonchalant, denying our enthusiasm and high expectation. The exotic flora-fauna of the mangrove was so thrilling and exciting, that the pages of Captain Cook diary rose up to our minds. There were other tour parties conducting picnic, holidaying and frolicking in the river water, few in steamer, few in launch, few in catamaran, few hiring country boats and paid fishing trawlers for one day quick sightseeing of the Sundarbans.

At teatime, hot tea with snacks were served in the deck and menu and timing for dinner announced. Western sun, in a winter afternoon, was gradually casting fading glow and the river water was swelling in evening hightide. Good food, always energizes laughter, gossip, singing and socializing. The replay of the videos taken in daytime

were discussed, exchanged between the parties and sent to those unfortunates not present in the flagship trip. Five-star ambience and quality food were really commanding.

Few of us consumed enormous quantity of chicken and mutton, the other few crash-landed on sweet dishes.

The gluttonous paradox was to compensate the very uncommon night stay over river water. The warm two-tier cabins had comfortable beds and blanket. The steamer was moored in the midstream of the river, long away from the shore, swaying in the cross-current. Few remained on the deck to enjoy more of the Sundarbans at pitch dark night, alert to hear a single bark from the forest, detecting the animal or nocturnal bird at the source point.

Next morning, when we got up from our sleep, the boat had travelled one hour already towards the sea mouth. The bird sanctuary, the crocodile park, the breeding and egg fertilization ground, wildlife preservation center, R&D wing of the scientists and the great tiger habitat were few of the notable spots in the mangrove islands.

The dried-up roots, raw trunks and branches are the mainstay of the mangrove and a botanical wonder and a spellbinding exercise for us at the shore for more than an hour. The scientific cultivation of mangrove was so encompassing that big chunks of low-lying land, under threatening salty advance of the seawater is eroding rapidly and this cultivation is to stop such natural erosion. Foreign assistance in research, technology and funding is available to keep the delta from decaying. Many test centers and laboratories are after it, working day and night for data collection, processing it and reaching analytical findings of such natural phenomena.

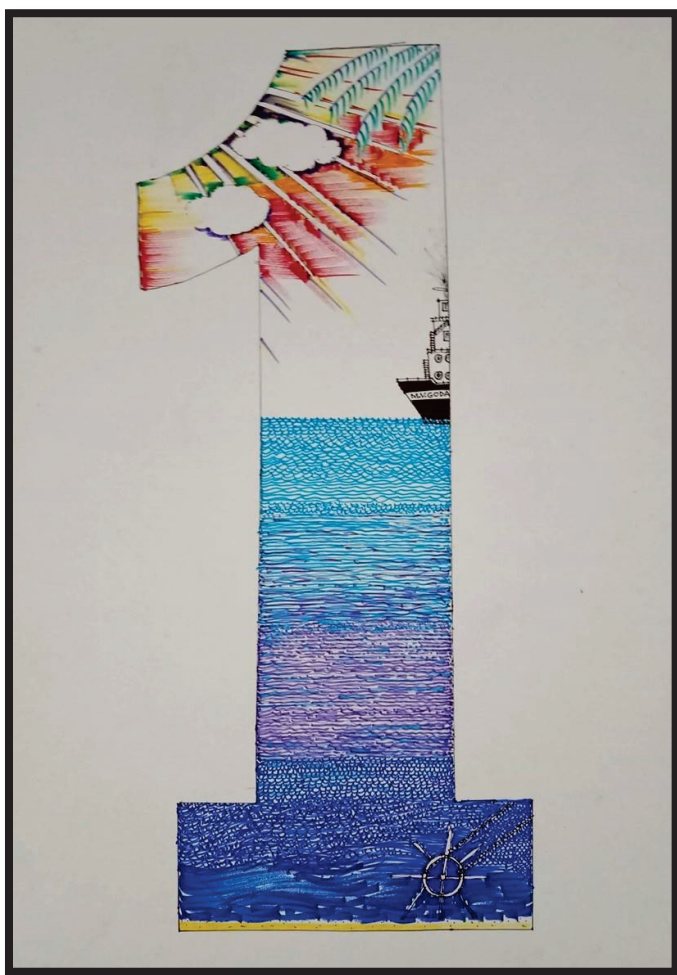
Our search for rare view of famous Royal Bengal Tiger or basking crocodiles or other members of amphibious group were half met, when a handful of crocodiles basking on the shore or half submerged in river, attracted our eyes, but the yellow and black striped big cat was always eluding. The sailors said, “Their season is in summer and monsoon time, when for hunting these tigers come near the shore.”

But we quenched our thirst by photographing hundreds of deer and horned stags, in different poses and moods, and as many birds on tree tops. “They are grown in the preservation center for research purposes of testing any behavioral change in them, outside their natural setting” was the concluding remarks of the sailors.

With the progress of the day, the captain took us to the outer reach of the Sundarbans, and into the infinite expanse of the Bay of Bengal. The bay water sprang up with silvery, glittering waves reflecting high noon sun.

The high tide was said to be expected in a short while. Captain turned the front towards the long coastline of the green Sundarbans and from a distance, we visualized the dense, forested land with hundreds of rivulets parceling and cutting it into small small islands, world famous for its unique characteristics and culture as mangrove and botanical excellence. The local cultivators, fishermen, boat people, the cargo handlers and natives impacted the local economy by welcoming the tourists in peak season and in monsoon turned to cultivation, fish trade, carrying goods on their gunny boats and country vessels for supporting their families on the muddy soil.

By afternoon, we were due to return to Kolkata.



## Numero Uno

A ship's tail-end bypass the setting sun to sail faster, ready to vanish in the expanse of the dark starry night.

The sea exploration addiction gripped me afterwards my Sundarbans trip and slowly grew so high, that I Googled on Marcopolo, Columbus, Cook and other stalwart sea explorers to read on them and their adventurous trajectories. Next four months were spent to gather in-depth knowledge of sea voyages and getting equipped with the

costumes and gadgetries. Most of the programs of Discovery and NatGeo channels on TV and Shipping Corporation booklets and literature offered me requisite knowledge and kept me busy all day. The 7000 plus kilometer Indian coastline had number of ports, under the control of Shipping Corporation and operating periodic vessels to The Andaman & Nicobar Islands.

The very idea to take such voyage, conducted by them, was given by the desk clerk after due counselling by him on their offered services, costs and expert comments. I booked my ticket for a journey to start after a month. Now in May, 2024 when the ship left the shore and hit the deep water of the sea and gathered momentum to sign off the two sides of the river Ganges, leaving Diamond Harbor, the Sagar Island and Sundarbans on left and on right Haldia, Digha and tip of Midnapore. We first felt the taste of salt water of the sea in a daytime bash, when the Ganges washed away in the lofty waves of windy sea. Now there is no coastline visible through the circular bay window. As patiently waiting for afternoon tea, we heard a loud sound from the deck.

On hearing it, we looked through our bay windows. The rear portion of a heavily loaded cargo liner, its deck full with containers in rows and stacks, piling up to three stories and making a huge splash and removing and spraying fathomless quantity of water like a big whale in fight, was gleefully passing by our ship, inattentive and unnoticed by our presence. Through the bay window, it was not enough, so I ran to the deck to have a more satisfying view of this foreign bound ship.





## Sea view

From opposite bank, the endless sea has only infinite gaze. Idle noon time, no footfall at the long shore. A lone fisherman anchors his boat at a grassy patch. Long grass, weeds, sand dunes nestle in a cove of tall trees. A swing hanging between two trees look at the distant piece of land amidst deep blue ocean water.

The inviting Andamans, so deep and blue from the overnight ship, that gazing at it even a whole lifetime is not tiring.



## Nightfall at Maya Bunder

Resting vehicles at mid-night in a small port town, has only few bars and night clubs open for serving the sailors and seamen. Two roads bifurcate in two directions coming from the seaside, which is called Maya Bunder, but closed for big ships to moor since long ago. A bar serving the daytime laborers only awake and agog amidst the midnight silence. A motel in opposite has closed its shutters for the night. Parked cars are resting for the morning to break. Nearby traders and markets are lifeless now. Only the splutter of sea water can be heard occasionally kissing the shore.

At around 10 in night, the bus from Port Blair left me at Maya Bunder, before departing for garage. The entire Sunday from morning 8 upto night this time was an untold episode in totality at the transport company's hand. When I had left the hotel for the bus stand in the morning, I had a plan to straight head for Diglipur, North of Andaman, three hundred so kilometer from Port Blair at south. But

the first early morning bus to there already departed half-an-hour before my reaching the depot and the next one at night 9. Since daytime window seat is the most lucrative choice for a long drive in a new place, I cajoled in front of the ticket counter for some suitable settlement. Accordingly, the transport authority issued me a ticket upto Maya Bunder, two-third of Diglipur distance, via Rangat and Bartang, two mostly heard big settlements on the way. The uniformed clerk at the counter pressed few keys of his computer keyboard and gave me a printed ticket tearing from a paper roll. By 10A.M., the bus came to the bus-bay and the gate opened. The passengers in queue and carrying sizable luggage with them, trickled in the bus one by one.

The seat numbers mattered and the weather god in our favor was generously blessing today, little uncommon for island weather, a solid mixture of rotational rain and sunshine for twenty-four hours. Neat one hour to cross the known town area of mixed shops, buildings and offices. We took strenuous sixty minutes to leave behind the extensive congested commercial area of Port Blair. The extended outskirts show that the island is not solely dependent on mainland. Gradually the intensity of the urban area started to fall and here and there vacant sites intruded between two habitations. Village boys playing in fields on Sunday morning was a popular scene, even in India. Multistoried buildings with ground floor entirely devoted to trade and commerce, now came down to small small two storied independent villas and bungalows with spacious gardens and car porch, cultivating lands, low-rise middleclass hutments, stray cattle, poultry and livestock, then again occasional stationery shop, light posts, telegraph line, Jio store, and a sparkle of blue sea at any surprising bend.

Speeding scene of hillocks, forests, a remote house again, few cars parked in the compound, Sunday crowd before roadside churches, temple tops with flowing yellow or red flags of huge length, local gathering at an unusual teashop, the bus kept on honking the horn to chase out forward obstructions on the road while passing a densely populated village or market area.

The narrow highway had two side lined up with big neem, teak, mahogany, mango, jack fruit, fig, palash and krishnachura trees, forming green roof over the road mile after mile and now the traffic count fell drastically after few hours of driving, very small number of vehicles from opposite side whizzed past at a double speed. Two times on our way, we had to get down from our bus to be ferried across the tributaries on floating iron jetty. Our bus along with another dozens of buses and car and half dozen medium sized goods vehicles were parked on it. The approach road to the creek was lined up with umpteen number of shops and eating houses. Coke and Pepsi had the highest sale, preceded only by mineral water bottles. Chocolates and biscuits ranked next, dictated by so many brands, packs, types and individual choices. Then crossing on board, the floating jetty touched the other side, we again embarked into our bus after it was driven to the ground with the help of a temporary ramp between the ferry and the road. The whole process took more than an hour to cross the stream of 100 meters in width. Forest area, this time too dense, notified us with a green board: "The forest department area of the Andaman and Nicobar Administration starts. Area: so, and so. Estimated time to exit: so, and so hours. Wish you a safe and happy driving. By order A&N".

After driving for three hours, cutting through the dense jungle, we came out again and the bus driver handed over a slip of paper, given

by the forest authority at the time of entry, at the small square kiosk, registering his vehicle number. The afternoon sun was casting its last glow and darkness anticipated in an hour. It was a memorable drive through the forest and we thanked the weather god for favoring us one very beautiful day. Dawn to dusk bioscopy of the Andaman now at its last half. It took an exquisite newness in the approaching darkness. Lighting up of homes and lodges as the bus moves. Speedy advances of night engulfed the road, leaving us dependent on the two burning headlights, two rays piercing the night darkness and casting ravishing circular patch on the road to detect any holes or miscreants.

At around 10, in the guise of the last and sleeping passenger, I got down from the bus and on instructions, hit the reception counter of the Sea View Hotel, a budget dungeon. The sailors, navy men, dock workers and porters were enjoying a perfect Sunday, left to be over in two hours. Since I was redirected by them to opposite more exclusive Blue Bird Hotel on the pretext of no availability of room at Sea View. That is the first time I met Amit, the manager of Blue Bird Hotel, Maya Bunder. He amicably handed over me the airconditioned room key at second floor.

Opening it, the carpeted floor and fat jet of water in the bathroom tap refreshed me from the whole day's wear and tear. Sony TV's Hindi channel was airing filmy music. The melodious song filled the room and propped me to order a sumptuous dinner over room service. Half an hour later, the calling bell rang and a tray full of fried rice bowl, chicken curry, mixed salad, one chilled Coke, mineral water with stainless-steel spoon, fork and knife wrapped in paper napkins was placed on the table by the boy, who smilingly wished "Good Night" after enquiring of breakfast if any.

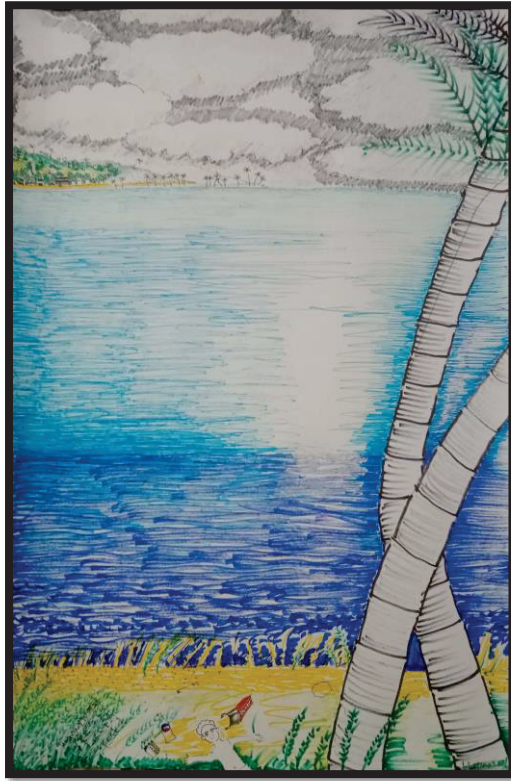


On his leaving the room, the sound of the sea was again heard and I switched off the TV. Two steps away is the daunting presence of the Bay of Bengal. Moving up the window curtain, I could see a part of the sea angularly.

Calm and quiet outside is awashed by the gentle waves. Nearby one or two parked vehicles, opposite the hotel were waiting for the light of dawn. The market place, I discovered in next morning, is a very big regional wholesale supplier and at daytime is as busy as the Bunder area. The solitude and tranquility at night are as deep as the somber and dormant market place, the depth of the ocean is only comparable with it.

The Burmese friends in the tea-stall, next morning, helped me a lot to collect important information on the local bus timing and frequency to Diglipur. On their info, I came back to hotel and packed my belongings to catch the 7 o'clock first bus to northern most destination of the island. I gave a last look at the rear cantilevered balcony of the hotel which gives backside view of the creek, with sandpipers, mudpipers and white cranes and birds of other varieties drill in the morning in the shallow backwaters in search of food. Eastside becomes reddish and gentle breeze from over the sea blows in the direction of the land.

The bus with handful of passengers in right time took a speedy left turn, crossed our hotel and keeping to left diverted and swung to its right again circling the traffic island to gain speed and hit the highway to Diglipur. In two hours, Diglipur bazar area, full with hotels, caught me in its lap.



## Monsoon at the island

Arrival of shipload of thick monsoon cloud over the island to darken the day and stop the working life is the ticket to rainy season. Another rainy spell over the island demoralizing the spirit and mood, littered beaches with spoils of the tourists of yesterdays, no new influx of them, no sunshine. Drizzles have paralyzed the mind and the whole island today is indoor and idle minded. Monsoon cloud from the ocean gathering over the island.

All over the island, rain clouds gather throughout the year. In monsoon, the intensity of rain and heaviness of weather is little irritating for an outsider. This fluctuating weather is difficult to cope and love-hate feeling for the island crops up. In better weather, the

island takes a look unparalleled in beauty and shine. And at times of rain, its beauty comes from the backdrop of darkness, light and shade contrasted and construed by overcast sky and turbulence in sea. High waves in sea take a frightening appearance and the trees snoop and sway in high wind. With the strikes of lightning, the night silence is pierced and uprooted trees and telegraphic poles with their torn lines and cables shut the inland traffic movement next day. The whole area comes to a standstill.



## **Nankauri an island view**

Tourist prone island "Nankauri" catering to boundless visitors and merrymakers on a Sunday morning. Sunshine in everyone's eyes. Speed boats, catamarans, yachts and vessels are propelled in the bay for tourism and water sports. The private beaches are agog and dotted with colorful umbrellas. The weather is amiable for a hitch hike in the sea. Islands call each other to be spotted and caught.

Parcels of land around the main island, group of small, small islands scattered over the sea symbolically resemble archipelagos. These

geological phenomena are marvel of natural science. The marine world under sea has tremendous potential in coral reefs, porous earth, pisciculture and marine life. Nankauri, Little Andaman, Nicobar and many more small sized islands follow the main longest Andaman island. These islands have less population base and limited trade and commerce activity, for business and offices, they are dependent on the main island. Ferry and inland launch service are common for transportation need from here to there, followed by more expansive air and water taxis. In a fine, sunshine morning, when fair weather prevailing, the Nankauri looks like heaven. Many tourists, well dressed and neatly arrived, abound the island and a very lively and lovely atmosphere initiates a holiday atmosphere.



## Seaside sunset boulevard

All along seaside a meandering myriad seaside trunk route transport men and automobiles from one place to other for work, pleasure and

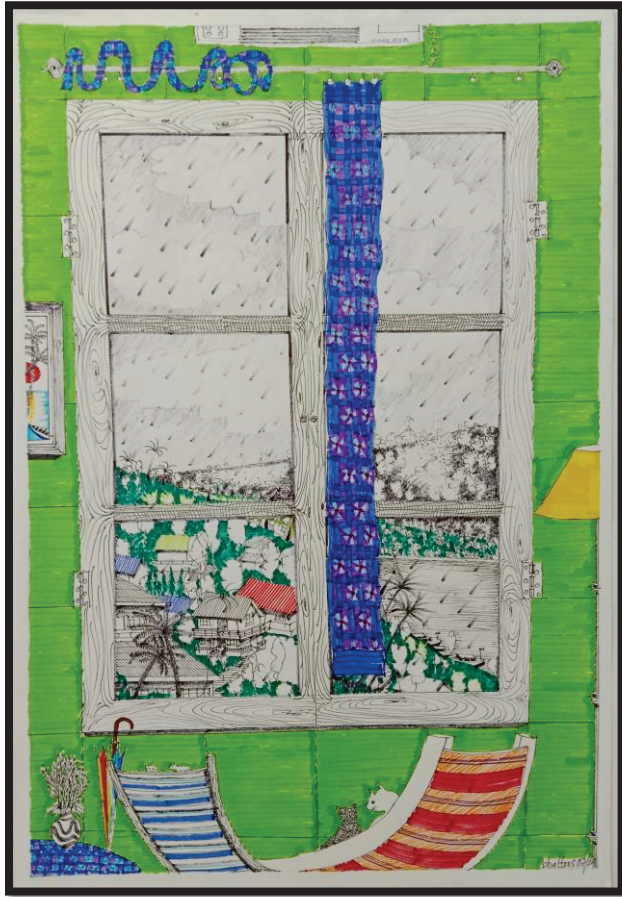
sight-seeing of sea view. In a sunny day, at the sunset the road beckons the vessels in the sea for a return smile. Cityscape vanishes into deep forested villages in an hour's drive.

In and around Port Blair, there are many tourist spots. Not only the historical ones, but some natural scenic beauties, hilltop wonder, coastal panorama and so on, which can be covered in a single day. One such is Chiriatappu.

The bus every hour, leaves for this place and the route is spiraling all along the coast, in many twists and bends and curves for nearly two hours, before it takes a straight right dodge to the hilltop, wherefrom the view of the sea far below is just fantastic. An aero plane is not as fit to give you a top view of the ocean like this. A wholehearted 360-degree rotation of head will benefit the eyes with a full view of the sea all around the island. This vantage and strategic point is very much liked by the seahawks, seagulls, white cranes and other birds, other than the tourists themselves. That is why it is called in local jargons, "Chiriatappu", meaning 'Birds' top'.

One hour stay there is good enough to fill your heart with as much fun as you can gather from the quiet spot, full with greenery, interspersed by buildings at intervals. The stone embankment at the sloped side of the road is a barrier against from rolling down. Now on return trip, at the end of the day, the west facing road is lit up with a charming twilight. It is called the Seaside Sunset Boulevard. The hillside buildings and houses and cross roads, directly facing this solar excellence seem to have the most prestigious position on earth. Driving at the two-lane seaside road is like a musical unmatched and unrecorded in any parlance.





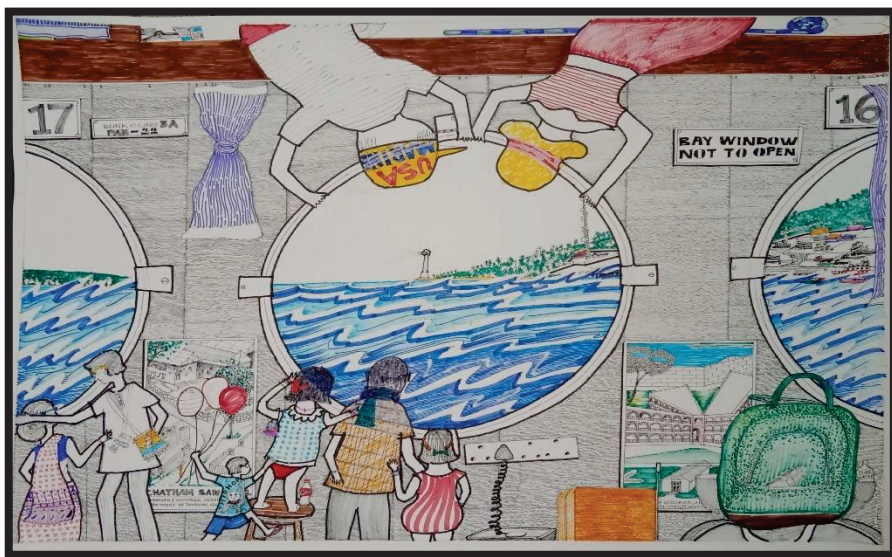
## Holiday mood

Cloudy, rainy day from the window of the hotel room looks at the barren roads, closed dock area and idle town life outdoor.

One full day was wasted sitting in hotel room. Early morning, I had gone for breakfast and came back to hotel drenched and soaking like coming out of the bathroom shower. The overcast sky at the time of exiting hotel, ignored in the urgency of food, suddenly exploded over the head at returning time. A booming and heavy rain drops turned

incessant in minutes. The uphill hotel took longer to reach, marring my dress, body and mood.

It lasted for hours, before the public announcement came that the island is officially closed for a rainy day. So there was no better way to close the door than calling the room service for a hot coffee, I rolled up the window curtain, and kept fixed gaze through the glass window on the harbor downhill. Its masts, mastoids, portion of the anchoring ships, building lights, roads under torrent rain looked hazy and misty. The striking rain outside had no sound inside the room.



## Baywatch

Bunk class passengers hover around bay windows to have the last glimpse of the turmoiled sea. Last few days of relentless voyage in the deep sea, now closing in a short while. Hour-long view of the green approaching coastline, is now just few yards away. Passengers and crews who slept, dined and rose together for so many days, will split in the hilly track and engulfing, undulating landmass. Surprise, joy and

excitement knows no bounds for the mooring process. Shallow sea water tormenting and threatening the heavy vessel for an anchor. Passengers ready with their luggage, bag and baggage hold their breath not to waddle to the coast, only to watch it through the shielded bay window. The deck is empty now.

The arrival time, we experienced first time sense of camaraderie, fellow feeling and brotherly relationship between the passengers. The last five days on the ship, the passengers, with whom we dined together, slept and spent long hours in deck, common room, corridors and stairways, are gradually leaving the ship at their destined ports. Diglipur at noon, and Maya Bunder in the evening saw an exodus of nearly all passengers from Kolkata.

At morning after breakfast, a roar rose from the lower deck “Land, Land”. But later realized to be a big hoax and the shore line was a color change in the sea water from deep blue to greenish. Hearing the noise, we ran to the open area to inspect the source of the call. A very faint line could be imagined by few, the rest disbelieve it as the cloud formation. The old-timers were pestered many times to identify any known milestone or landmark to ascertain how far from the main islands, but in vain in the infinite expanse of the sea. Practically the ship was running late and everybody was anxious to touch the shore.



## Pandemonium at sea

Tourists, bathers, skaters, merrymakers meddle with seawater infested with ferry service, sea sports and inland voyages and mar the atmosphere of tranquility and serenity. Few frolickers suspect and are in the search of the reason of this chaotic phenomenon.

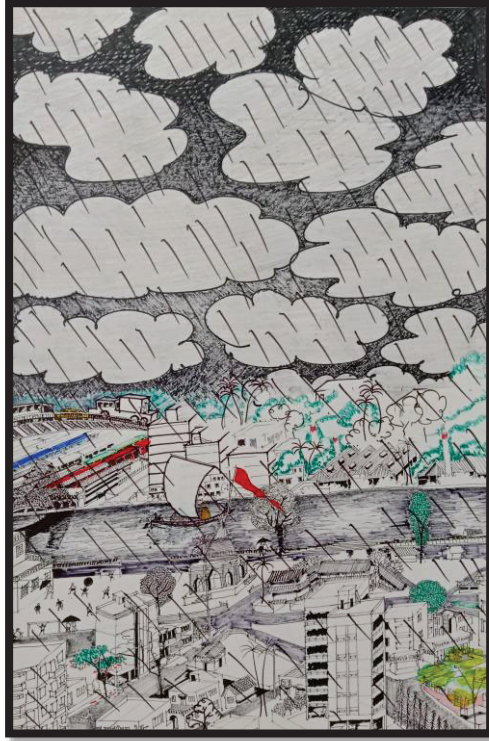
If you take an inland waterways service, in lieu of road transport or an air taxi, then you will feel the heat of the local, daily travelling between islands for work purpose. The trips, generally have their demarcated areas in water to operate from. If a big ship destined for a big port, lost or misled wrongly, it creates pandemonium in the nearby areas, where small operators operate their boats and yachts. The chances of heavy collision are to be avoided on a rudimentary basis, by alarming all and sundry in the vicinity.

The water cruise participated by so many parties, some on yachts, some on speed boats, few queuing up for ferry service, some preferring launch, the surfing duos, the fishing trawlers, the bathers and swimmers in warm water, throw ruckus, seeing a close quarter presence of a high tonnage ship, trying to make an entry to their territorial water. Apprehensive of staging a near pandemonium, each and every vessel bifurcated and turned opposite to thwart the impact.

The shock was enormous on the folks on the shore. Shrill sound and shriek voices could be heard in fear of the debacle. Sudden high waves, splash of seawater and oversized breakers unexpectedly raised panic, alarm and SOS among the frequenters in the beach. Running helter-skelter by tourists for safety, made reactionary effect on seagulls and seabirds. Watching chaos, they flew away in the safe air.

The million-ton cruise ship understood its mistake in compass reading and navigational error. Seeing the highly populated beach and apprehension among local water transport, the luxury cruise vessel nosedived to return to deep water and far from the madding portfolio.



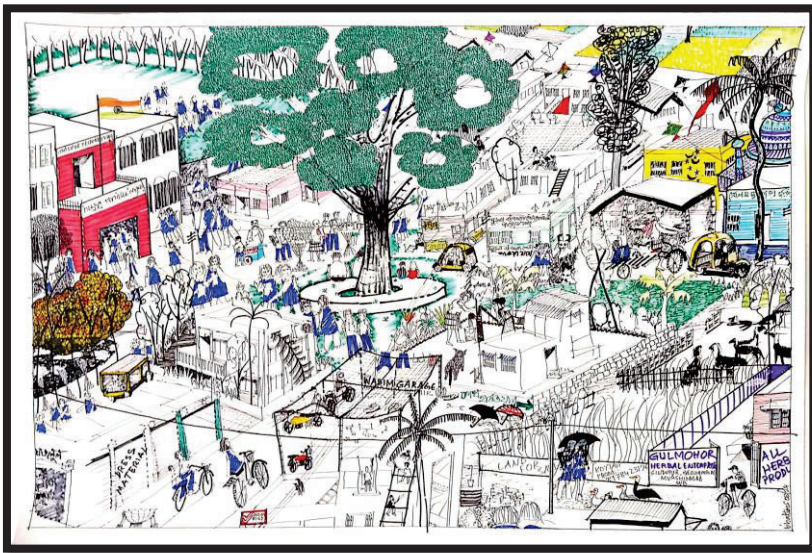


## A rainy day

Cloud burst over the grey sky of two cities, divided by a river, water level swollen by monsoon downpour. Sitting tight on the balcony of Port Blair hotel and having nowhere to go for last two days, due to incessant rain, made me remember the same monsoon now in the mainland.

The two sides of the Ganges in our locality, have lines of century old buildings of mediaeval design and style, interspersed by few relatively modern mansions, narrow lanes and cowsheds. Opposite side is industrial Howrah. On left a slice of the station can be seen and on right, long stretch of factory sheds, smoking chimneys, manufacturing activities, heavyweight good mobilization and material handling.

Under the overcast, dark, drizzling sky, the city is under threat of a daytime breakdown, paralyzing the normal life to a halt for an uncertain length. The Andaman Islands, unknown of the mainland character, is suffering from its share of natural calamity, hiking stoppage of work and hindrance in movement.

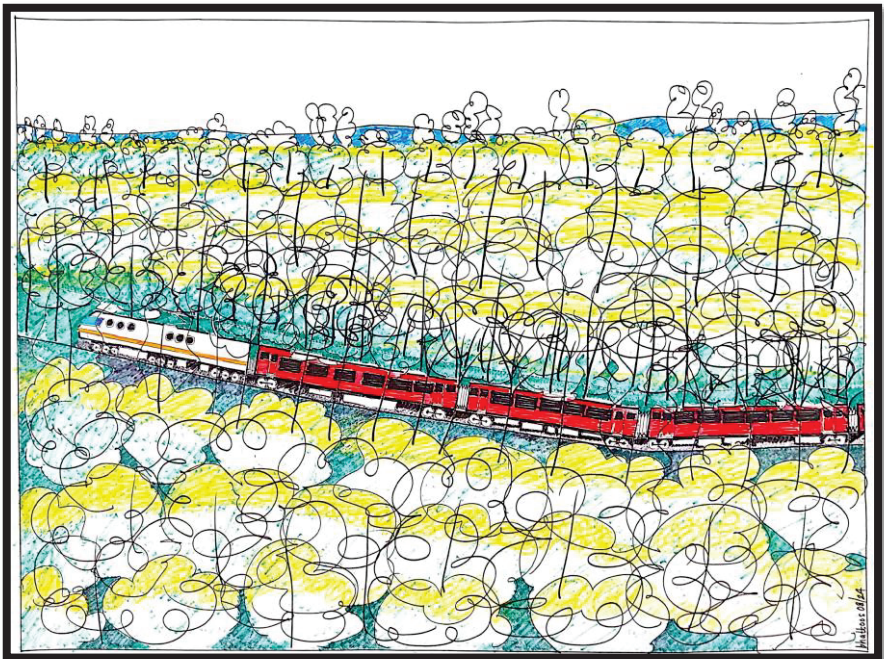


## Sindupur area

A primary school at Sindupur, thousand kilometers from the mainland, in the lap of Andaman Islands, rings the end of the school hours and the students spill on the outside streets in the afternoon time.

A little away from Shippy-ghat, on the way to deeper length of the island northward, the villages are closely knit, grown amidst forest belt at the laps of a slopping valley, outskirts bounded by agricultural tracts. The livelihoods of the people in this undulating terrain are petty businesses, operated mostly from their homes. Sea is far away and nobody speaks of it to keep the sea god in peace at night.

The villages are typically characterized by the settlers and migrants from different states of the mainland, with motley of religion, language and occupation. Every day is spent in the midst of a faraway island, thousands of miles away from their original native land. The day dawns with the sound of the sea and mitigates in the night darkness, neither achieving any significance in day, nor making any remarkable progress in life. The school education is primary need of these village clusters to strengthen the economic condition and viability.



## A Train ride in day and moonlight

Train ride under daylight in a forested land and train ride under moonlight in the same dense, forested land has semantic effect on our perception.

Andaman lacks the prestigious and coveted rail service like the mainland. The high-powered electric engine, overhead traction line,

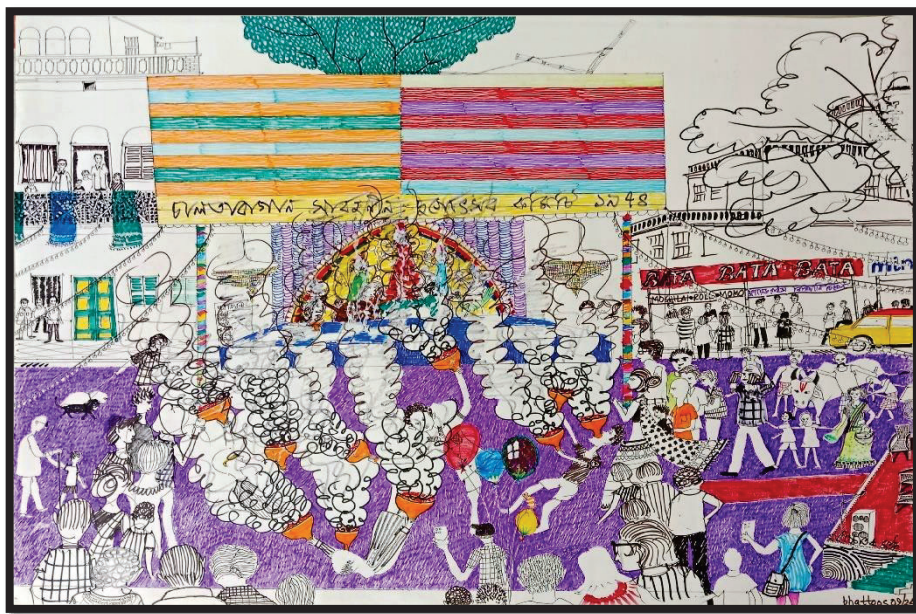
well laid rails, electronic signaling system, station platforms, that completes a railway transport system is only in the memory of the islanders and retained in their photo albums. The absorbing forward drive of a moving train in mainland, cutting through forest, valley and mountains, in stark daylight as well as moonlit forest is reciprocated by bus service and inland ferry in the island.

# CHAPTER-7

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Anil Babu drawn to Kolkata again and injected with nostalgia parasites





## Dhunuchi Naach

A group dance with lighted torch before the prime Hindu Goddess Durga at peak worshipping time of Navami Sandhi Puja night.

Anil Babu, reaching his house, went to his first-floor room to trace some valuable land deeds, court papers and documents. On the way from station, he encountered no less than ten big puja pandals readying for the final show. It reminded him of his childhood. He, at early thirties of his prime time was new in the Lords Industries. North Indian owner of the company interviewed him twice before handing over the job. The group company had machines run in both electricity and fuel. His job was to look after these machines, only maintenance of these. For operation, other persons were assigned. Under his scope ten such important machines were to be cleaned, oiled, dusted off every day and functioning of nut, bolt, screw and other gadgets to be inspected. Other than this, weekly routine inspection of transformer,

generator and components of other electrical installations was rudimentary.

The first Puja bonus went for buying new dresses, shoes, books and stationeries for most of the members in his large ancestral family. In those days, that old mansion was full of visitors, agog with laughter, dazzling under light, and at the helm was senior and somber presence of Anil Babu's grandfather.

Dhunuchi Naach was one such scene, that he could never forget. Lighted torch in two hands, some more courageous to have one more in his mouth, about a dozen local boys and the members of the Puja organizers danced for hours, circling the square court before the stage. The air became thicker and thicker and denser with the suffocating smell of incense, myrrh, cardamom, ghee and charcoal.

These tranced and hypnotic dancers used to dance with the rhythms of drum beat of another half-a-dozen boys, forgetting their own world and like hallucination, they used to come forward and move backward and circle away with their feet taping and smoking torches in hand forming many patterns and designs. The dancers pleased the devotees, but never collided with each other. At the end, hardly anybody could see the face of Devi Durga and coughing spectators used to applaud by clapping their hands and sounding "Next year, encore. Next year, encore."



## Lone late-night immersion

Late night journey of Goddess Durga and her troupe to the immersion bank paved in the seclusion of night and sans observer. Two days after the Dhunuchi Naach, followed by cultural function till midnight, ultimately the sad immersion hour came. The mind was in pain to lose the continuous joy of last one week and bid farewell to the Goddess. Another one-year wait will be a long road to tread.

Anil Babu was awake in the night and reminiscent of all that happened over one week of Puja vacation. Hearing a jerking sound outside, he came to the balcony and looked out. A truck came and stood for half-an-hour before the pandal. Handful of gallant club members carried the Goddess carefully to lift it in the truck. In the process, chairs, standing fans, sofas and couches were tilted, toppled and thrown on the ground. In the haste of such operation, the midnight silence was fractured and two birds, making a fearful

screeching sound dashed their wings in air abruptly to fly away from their nest.

Two bright headlights of the truck, carrying Durga, followed by another two vans carrying the siblings, accompanied by the club members tucked away fast to exit the lane, cross the street and reach the other side. The moon at its tenth crescent to reach the full, was the only silent bystander at midnight immersion in the close by Ganges.



## Ashtami night

Peak hour pandal hoppers, merry makers, frolickers flood the road on Durga Puja night. In groups and troupes, they block the traffic and bring the city to a standstill and virtual lockdown.

That morning, when the immersion is over by hours, pandal completely topsy-turvy and disarranged, waiting for demolition by the decorator and contractor's men. Anil Babu had a beautiful early morning dream of the just concluding Puja.

The dream is he was walking in the well-lit illuminated avenue with thousands of pandal hopper, in a stream of light and sound. Crowds outnumbered cars on the main road and police had a difficult time to keep the slow pace of the otherwise standstill traffic on move. This is Ashtami night, the peak of the Durga Puja celebration.

The whole city came down to the road and was on foot from north to south, east to west. The colorful balloons in the hands of the kids touched the roadside first floor balconies. lollypops hanging from wet mouth, their sounding whistles reached the opposite side of the wide road, the jets of air bubbles blown by these kids travelled with the crowd, the scanned violet QR codes of the food stalls flashed with every fat PhonePe crypto payments, the exact amount inaudible in the high-pitched hit songs in the chains of overhead microphones, company advertising became a competitive game on two sides of the road, at the same time choking the building front view, vehicular and pedestrian segregation enforced by erecting bamboo tripod structure, volunteers and club members maintained their best face in effort to keep a regulated and disciplined human flow, new dresses and footwear of the young and old produced waves of fashion on the street.

By 7, Anil Babu woke up from his sleep and yawned before starting the working day after a long holiday. He was elusive in the beginning, then remembered that at 3 P.M., Mr. Bansal, the chief promoter of the travel and tourism company has called a meeting of all six investors and conjured in mind well-dressed presence is a must to please the management.



He examined the growth of beard in the mirror and took out his shaving kit. He is not a committed investor. His ancestral property in prime Kolkata land, “the old mansion”, is under their prerogative and negotiation, but Anil Babu is not interested at all. He already suggested them some big land at his district town, but they rejected it on the reverse ground of preferring coastal and sea-facing plot.



# CHAPTER-8

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My post-Andaman outlook and triangular perspective on life, real estate power game and closer association with Anil Babu for a life changing turn as a progressive proprietor and businessman.



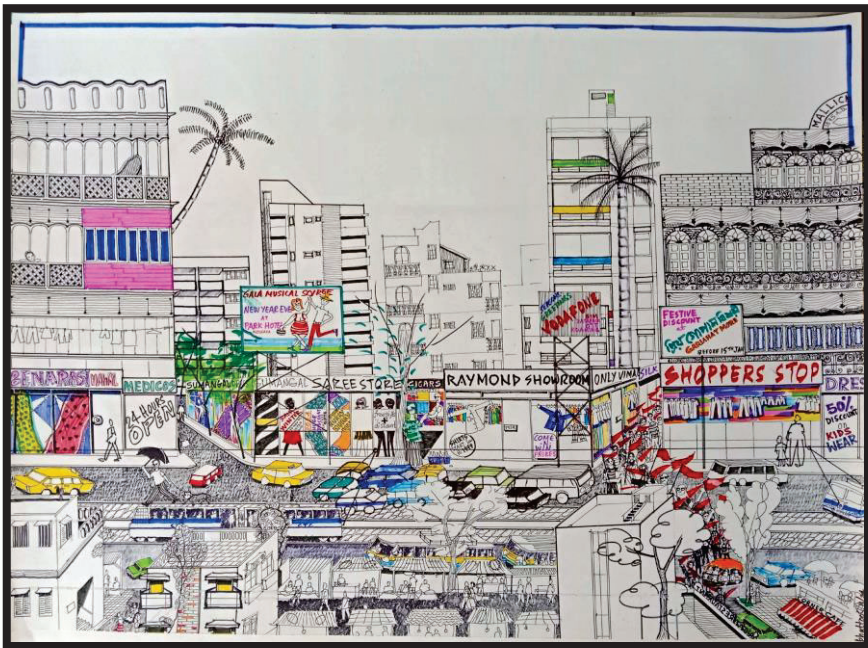
## Fishing Trawlers

Noon time bioscope in the sea, dotted with returning trawlers after overnight catches of fish, was last one month's companion. My luxurious stay at Andaman is now coming to a close and return ticket of ship to India is in my possession.

On the departure day, radio broadcasts along with TV and newspaper coverage was finally received as final and authentic verification of the vessel sailing. I started from the guest house and took an hour to reach the crowded dock area. Heavy security check and long-gone process of declarations in so many forms and ways, made it evening hours. The ship was full with 500 strong and tiring faces and countenance of the returning passengers, most of them on their annual leave and with family. Few aristocrats and business class people were hastily cleared in the gate by showing their upper deck ticket of spacious cabin booking. Few last surviving wooden boats and fishing trawlers at the shore swung in the mild wave created by the

engine start of our heavy ship. The people from deck and through bay windows waved at each other for a final goodbye. The sun at the background was setting spreading last orange glow, few mounds of land in distance looked green to dark with the increasing speed of the departing ship and lastly vanished in the evening darkness.

Few boats with their crude lighting were still active in the sea, trying their luck for the last time for a catch of fish. The ripples in the sea looked gorgeous and gaining depth with a crescent moon faintly above. Waves striking those small boats, jerking them to sway and balance in the water. The coastline gradually diminished in the engulfing depth of the darkness and sea.



## Sounding streets of Kolkata

A busy traffic artery connecting lanes and bye-lanes on its both side with faces of happy and smiling life. High-end fashionable



departmental stores and roadside hawkers without stall shake hands, lineup and choke the important thoroughfare partly.

Returning to Kolkata, my duty was to distribute as many gifts and letters brought from the island, to the long list of my WhatsApp contacts. One such weekend evening, I got stuck allowing a very long procession to take over me. It transfused a huge traffic jam and choked the city to a near collapse. Coming out of the nearby underground metro station, I encountered the scene of thousands of processionists in two long rows, holding their manifestos and flags, uniformly moving along the road shouting slogans and singing melodiously.

The first impression, fresh from my return from the island after a monthlong stay, of the Kolkata Street was no match with Port Blair Junglee Ghat road, connecting the airport with town market. This road is downhill from uptown area and difficult to hold such rally of slow-moving people, in opposite direction of the slope. The flashy departmental stores and lofty shopping malls with escalators and huge, high ceilinged ground floor arena, sensor-controlled glass doors, were nowhere found in the island by my eyes. May be mainland has stores of treasures like such glitchy, glistening, glamoured city areas for leisure and pleasure, the reasons for multiple visits by the islanders.

The tall, well-built high-rise buildings and apartment blocks, punctuated by towering coconut trees are different from the long palm and coconut groves along the sandy beach, with straw hutments of dry leaves roof, catering to the needs of the tourists at the sea. Sprawling low-rise, expansive hotel compound is visible in the ambush of the trees, with a long driveway lost inside the main gate. The glossy showrooms, their classy interiors in the ground level, the billboards brandishing highest sold brand of world fashion are the hallmarks of urban living in mainland.

After the procession and its after effect cleared in an hourlong rhapsody and the last of the police jeeps slowly drove back the road to normalcy again, I safely crossed the road to take a short cut entry to a lane to reach my destination with an urge to handover fast the souvenir to my first contact at such late hours.



## Wall Street

A high walled deprecated compound in the vicinity of palaces and rich mansions, obstructing imagination of few jobless local boys. The walled compound, dangerously prone to wild growth of unwanted plants and bushes, very old and unstable, resisting dilapidation and none knows its ownership status. It is lying before eyes with many years of neglect and exposed to 365 days of sun and rain.

A poorly locked door and a piecemeal window, with broken grills, not meeting its security purpose gives an insight of the enclosed land.

Depending on the locational advantage and proximity to the millionaires' residences, the land value of the earmarked property is estimated to be enormous to astronomical. The best names in city's stock market and chamber of commerce have eye on this piece of land. The local Sundance boys loiter here, stand against the wall and enjoy a puff of smoke at noon, as if in the wait of arrival of some Prince of Wales to have a look at the God's land for a premium transaction.

I stepped quickly to pass the place to reach another friend's house to handover a small gift to him as a token of my just concluding island trip.

Manoj asked me, accepting my gift, "What propelled to change you so much and so fast? What business did you inherit from Andaman?"

I answered straight, "My intention was cleared in my Andaman trip. I have found and roped a resident partner there to sell my products at tourist spots. Huge market, high prospect of sale, easiest supply chain, low investment and good workforce."

Manoj offered me hot tea with biscuits and wished a good luck.



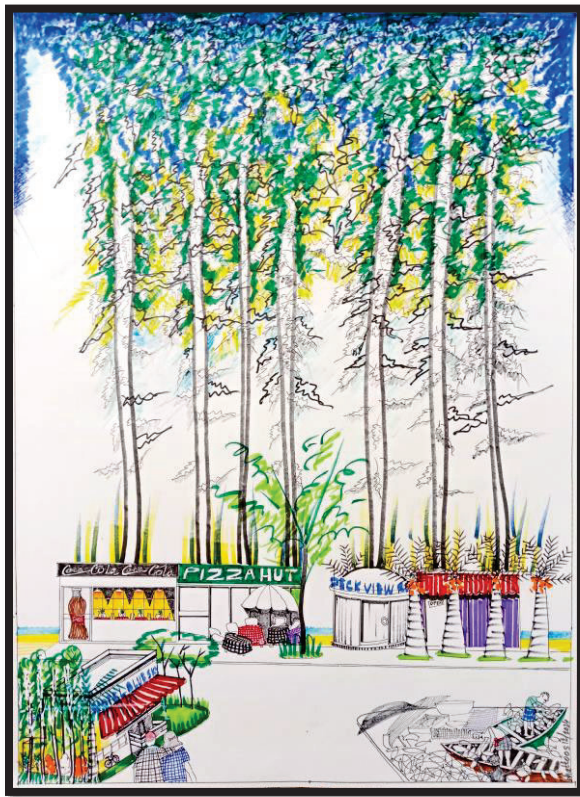
## Local

Two crows in a bushy tree branch watch the daylong activities below of an urban slum, full with shanty houses.

The other side of the colony area looks like a typical trap. This urban slum, ten kilometers down south from the city center, with five feet wide concrete road, colored tin and metal clad shanty houses, a common iron staircase for upper floor.

Some houses are relatively weaker in structure, made of only jute, plastic and bamboo mesh. A common courtyard is their assembly point and thanks God for being able to grow a big tree at the center posing like a Jehovah's witness to all matters of the slum from congregation to talks.

The daytime is devoid of any single young occupant at this place, all are busy in the city, leaving their guardians, seniors and elders in the hands of solitude and forlorn, at their tight chambers and waiting for the bread earners' return at night. The two crows in the top branches of the tree, oversee the day's proceedings with right earnest. I knocked the door twice and called the name thrice, before handing over an envelope to his old next-door neighbor, telling him, "This is an important letter from Ghoshal Babu's Nicobarian friend. Ask him to please reply or contact. May be a good job offer."



## Walking to the sea

Two young lovebirds walking to the local seaside for a mouthful of tasty food & drinks at McDonald's outlet.



A folklore untold, that in the island, a Coke bar, a Pepsi stall, a Starbucks Cafe, Pizza Hut and McDonald's outlet, juxtaposing the sea at a lonely isolated point, has more charismatic appeal and counter attraction than high-end tourist spots.

Diagonally across is plots allotted to the local fishing community for a weekly market to sell their catch of fishes at a very nominal price.



## Bridges over canal water

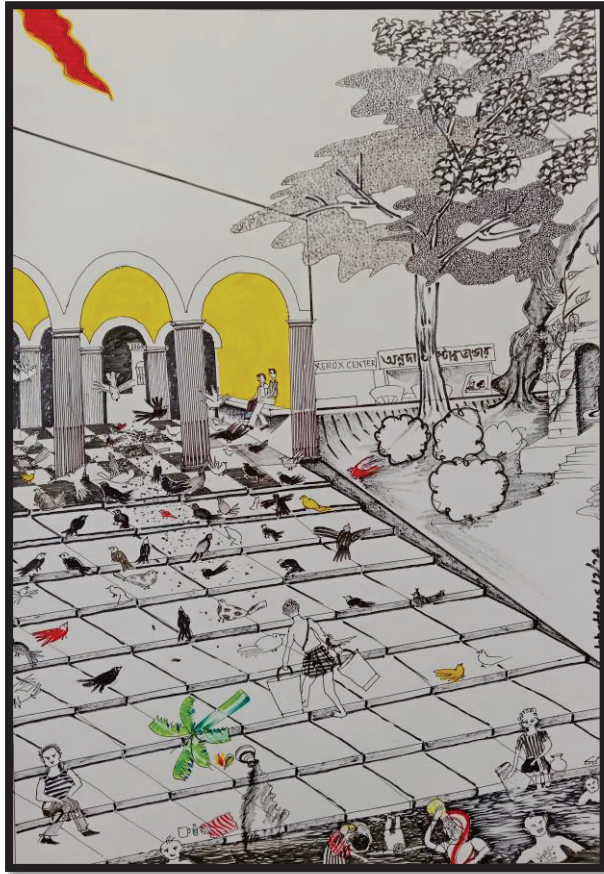
A long circling canal serving as city sewer, has too many culverts to bridge the two heavily congested sides. The dirtiest and hazardous canal, encircling North Kolkata, requires public attention and government's interference for clean-up, environmental revamp and beautification drive.

The modern city Kolkata has a dumping and storage ground on two sides of the filthy Eastern canal. This congested, unclean, polluted and environmentally poor canal area has its inflow as wastes from the

adjoining traditional factories and industrial belt. The illegal parking and encroachment of heavy trucks for loading and unloading of goods at odd hours leave the canal stretch out of bounds for any free movement.

Chinese eateries, local wineshop, dusty tea stalls, iron makers, sawmill owners, old carpentry works, weighing scales, dominated by polluting factories and sick industries, are identical on two sides. Every after few kilometers, road bridges connect the two sides. Some made of strong concrete arch beam, some made of riveted steel girders, built in those olden days of the Britishers, without any contemporary care or new development. Minorities are prominent in those areas and they form a special breed of urban living in an unhealthy, unhygienic situation. Their migrant roots may be more precarious than this urban slum. No susceptible development has taken place in their favor for ages and my long-lost friend couldn't bear the atmosphere and remained untraced there at his old Canal East Road address.

His gift with me by post also will remain undelivered. Thinking this in mind...



## Morning at river bank

Bathers and pigeons clash in the steps of the river bank in the morning peak bathing hours. At the background of the ghat, town roads wake up with the twits of the day. After battling for almost three years, it is sad to announce that my old, ailing aunt, whom I went to meet in a rainy evening, but postponed it due to being poorly equipped in torrential rain and diverted my direction to College Street for buying an umbrella, has expired in the meantime, last month.

She couldn't survive the winter cold and chest infection became critical for her hospitalization. Her remains, in absence of her near and dear

ones, were thrown in the river at one January morning. The doves and the pigeons, the crows and the sparrows, again gathered in ground, the bathers didn't stop their daily dips, the local tricycle rickshaws honked their rubber horns for passengers, the normal life prevailed on the main riverside road and the streets of the municipality looked quiet from morning 10. One more gift had no taker forever.



## Rajesh-the shoemaker

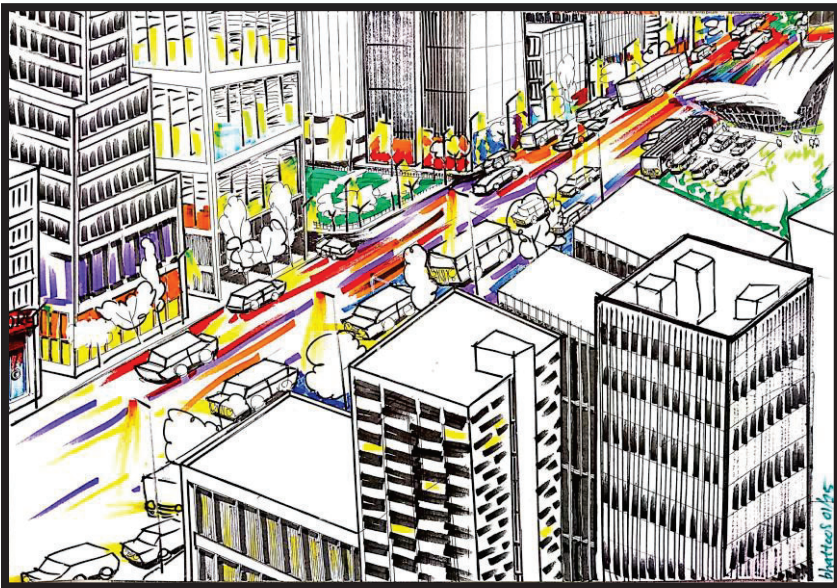
Rajesh, the local elderly person at the street corner assigned to repair shoes, pose for a photograph. Not included in the picture frame is his friends, namely vegetable vendors, hair-cutters, etc.

My story is nearing end. My students came to meet me the other day. On their way back, they took a snapshot of Rajesh, my shoemaker about whom I had spoken a lot to them.

Rajesh from Darbhanga, by birth not a cobbler, tried his luck in business in beginning of his life, but a merciless failure brought him in



this shoe polishing trade. He has built a temporary tenement of canvas, polythene, plastic and throwaways to showcase his product range, designed and made by him for the feet of young and old, men and women, kids and grown-ups to travel a great distance. The customers bargain for his footwear and lastly settle for a mutually fixed price and then Rajesh packs the stuff in old newspaper and let it go. His neighboring roadside vendors are equally meritorious and earning a decent livelihood like him, selling vegetables or hair-cutting from our locality.



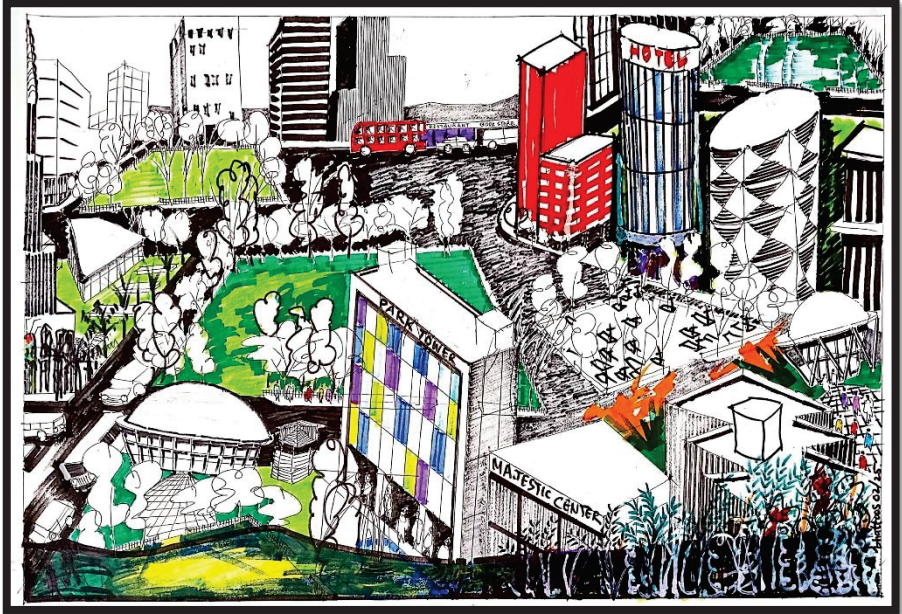
## An afternoon and evening in Paris

A fun filled afternoon awaits in the sunset hours, followed by a fun filled evening in progress to meet the midnight bash. A Hindi film in the nineteen sixties made a huge box office hit with the name “An evening in Paris”.



Today at the time of globalization, our nights and evenings are all of international standard and style. The multi-nationals and IT companies pay their employees more and spending are reflected in their lifestyles, buildings they live and roadshows they incur. Surrealistically, modern India is no less than its western counterparts. The high volume of fast-moving foreign vehicles on Indian roads, everyday new new automobile makers' entry into the rat race, road widening drive by the local government, fly overs and bypasses, fitted by modern electronics traffic control and signaling system, remote sensing and radar enabled monitoring are the name of the game in today's India.

High rise in every block, flashy shop front and their dazzling interiors, most sought after fashion brands in every city, haute couture are all akin to Paris culture and Parisian lifestyle. Sunsets and evenings are paradise best in India and "We are Indians, we are proud Desi" is common vocab everywhere, be it in India or abroad. But dress like Italians. The GenZ movement and patronizing it is predominantly paralyzing the older generation and senior citizens. Complex psychological analysis, SWOT and inferiority-superiority scale can't contain the general urban folks from changing, whatever is their score in the competition. Three kudos to the internet culture, laptop, mobile, 5G, OTT, and more vital weapons of seamless global connectivity and accessibility. However, the afternoon and evenings are exclusively Indian.



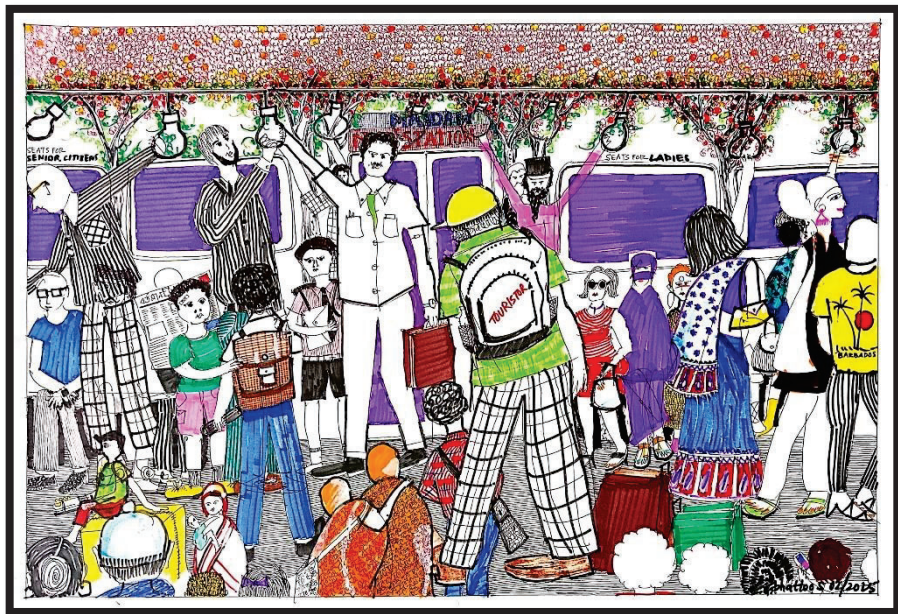
## Happy valley downtown

A hilltop shot of the downtown of the town spread over a lavish green valley. Another metaphorical and imaginative hilltop shot of an Indian city.

The buildings are of different shapes, sizes, forms and profile, leaving enormous chunks of open land as parks, playground and green space between them. These open areas work as oxygen mask for those who work in the skyscrapers and tall buildings and are dependent on mechanical mode most of the time, like central air conditioning and ventilation, high speed elevator system, firefighting and other extra precautionary measure.

Additionally, we beautify our gardens, nurseries and hold flower show, morning and evening walks lengthen our age, intensify our social commitments and exchanges and refresh ourselves from the

clutches of oppression and the artificial indoor living. Long live the Green Areas!



## Underground metro ride in Springtime

A crowded metro compartment commuting office goers, school students, daily passengers, working ladies worried of the excessive heat of the forthcoming summer. Most of the passengers are hard pressed under an artificially conditioned, mechanically ventilated, underground MRTS.

MRTS stands for Mass Rapid Transit System, meaning thousands of passengers to be evacuated from one end to other of a big city within hours without fail and with guarantee of safe and comfortable journey. This can be overhead, underground, underwater or a combination of both/all. This urban transport system is the lifeline and latest worldwide and Kolkata too has its share of freedom and style in travelling by MRTS.



My most of the intra-city trips are metro rail based and inter-cities by local trains. City bus and long-distance bus are preferred next. Uber and taxis are the least, only in cases of heavy luggage, furniture or weight.



A glimpse of the cordiality of an art exhibition inauguration. My show is over. This art gallery will close at 8, Saturday evening. The hardships of so many master artists for last so many days are hanging

from the heavy ceiling, resting under flash lights on the wall, sculptures on strong pedestals and tripods on floor. Oil on canvas, acrylic on board, charcoal on paper, water color and mixed media, pastel drawings versus pencil sketch, portraits vis-s-vis landscape views are all showcased in frames, laminations, prints, originals in a five thousand square feet area.

Artists' products of reputed international brands like Faber Castle, Staedtler, Winsor-Newton, hand in hand Indian Camlin, Cello, Flair make a riot of visuals. Extravaganza of color celebrated and a gala time spent in togetherness of artists, art lovers and visitors for last one month. The family, friends, parents, relatives of the artists visited the temple of art every day since the inauguration. Media persons and press, famous personalities of art and culture and critics highlighted the showpieces adding individual reference and publicity, at the same time publishing ravishing reviews on them. Spot sales at catastrophic figure and series of advance booking heaped up the curator's booty.

Only unlucky few were stored back in the museum archive for next time. The astronomical ambition and exorbitant mental power, overpowering talent, unique skill, personal technics were all exhibited, evaluated, certified and prized at the last and the personality, vision, idea and imagination of the big artists were discussed, praised and highly applauded to make the art show a signature event and completely worthwhile, successful and influencing from both participants and organizers' side.



# CHAPTER-9

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## **Conclusion.**

At the end, Anil Babu handed over me the key of his old mansion for opening the second branch of my new gift store. It seemed to be a mega and blockbuster success in souvenir world.

# Conclusion

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Now when the show is over, I think, sitting there, in my mind the springboard effect of propelling an artist, motivating him to world fame. The die-hard attitude, power-to-excel training, competitive edge, choosing a career as an artist for fame, big money, publicity, power and opulence are opportunities not to miss. I hear in my mind some whispers like “don’t let the moment slip away from your hand man. Hold tight. All that glitter is gold, all that you survey is gold, pure gold. The goldmine has opened up, goldrush has begun, light at the end of the tunnel artist....”

I have never exhibited in art show, nor I have any reputation as an art professional. Art education has its own parameters and sets of qualified persons. I am a plain spectator of many good art shows, fairs, workshops, but neither a gallerist, nor curator. Not by any means an art critic or art examiner. Not a juror or none to give my judgement on any framed image. The painter, who was sitting on roadside footpath near Chelsea and moving his brush on an unfinished painting on Manhattan buildings in 2019, has called me for an art show at Vancouver next year.

I have ample of time in hand now after retirement. Time is my resource. I was teaching in an art and draftsmanship college to their under-grad students. My subject was World history of Art & Craft, and as an art historian, I service my post-retirement days for some known and congenial business venture. Now when things are improving bit by bit and the year 2025 had a climax in my art comprehension, I have noticed there is a feeling of rejection from the

main stream of office-goers or working men. That preference has been given to the youngsters, school and college students, careerists and life-stylers. The job opportunity, employment news, recruitment for elderly, new vacancy has no interest to me. The ongoing current of life in city roads stun me with its vigor and vivre. I, with a huge ocean-going and vast seafaring experience, burn the midnight oil to chalk out a plan for future. At the end, I decide to jump on a business protocol and the idea of my gift shop takes wing in one year.

My story has all the ingredients of a first-class cinematic film, not a short film or a drab documentary. The story revolves around Dolby sound, Color Lab, romantic-thriller, containing a top-rated screen play of target chase, ambition driven rising curve, capital gain, high speed competition, winning goal, and lastly establishing a foundation for art.

At evening, you can find me in my shop, near my house and at our locality. This is the main shop. Already asked Thapa and Lama to look for some good lad from their hills. I will take a boy to work with me in the shop. Arun Babu and I had talk on the matter of using his ground floor space for my second gift store at more fashionable and stylish South Kolkata locality. He will come to Kolkata next year before the inauguration of the store. Moreover, huge repair, renovation, patchwork, cleaning and painting will delay its opening. Anil Babu's rare visits to Kolkata are not liked by his investor friends. They wanted him to invest in their seaside hotel business. In turn, Anil Babu has given them two-three references of Andaman properties and kept himself away from their interest.

His no objection to my business association by renting out the ground floor of his ancestral property is a sign of his preferring me, more than the company of hotel investors. His withdrawal nature from the serious and so-called important matters of the surroundings, total seclusion,

silence and long absence are the ignition key in the hands of his foes. All the important works, instructions and hearing routed through his paid caretaker Pawan Lama of the Sikkim regiment, and Pawan, not being a native of Kolkata, is not liked by the neighbors. A strong and timely upcoming of the new gift store is the ideal reply to their grudge, conflict, discomfort and complaining behavior. It is one more peg in their frustration.

To expedite the progress of setting up the show, Lama regularly calls Thapa to keep abreast and update their news and efforts to find a sincere, honest, intelligent boy to settle with them in Kolkata and join immediately in the main store. Their collective search of a suitable young man from hills, will hopefully conclude in few months. My second part of the story will be due to readers on the successful completion of the main store and after inauguration of the renovated Old Mansion second shop. Till then good bye and happy reading to you all.

# Acknowledgements

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My acknowledgments & gratitude to all those below;

Dr. Bhaskar Banik, my family friend for long and our house physician, who taught me to stay calm, quiet and disciplined during and post-COVID days and urged me to concentrate more on creative bends of life. Then my whole spectrum of friend circles in publishing trade from DTP operator to printer to hand cutter to binder, but one name out of them must not be forgotten is Kunal and his ever inspiring and smiling face. The photoshop expert and proof reader Soumen Roychowdhury also spent long sweating hours with me in his studio at Camac Street during hot noon in mid-summer of the passing years. My senior draftsman colleagues who trained me in fine drafting and fine arts, out of them few names must be shouted like Biswajit Paul, Chandan, Sayan, Subhashis Das and Chakraborty Photo Binders. Few publishing-world friends like Bhadra, Suman and Arindam whose motivational guidance kept me afloat in those frustrating time of early 2020s.

Later came my company website in 2022, when the idea got concrete that the hand drawn sketches are to be made known and publicized universally, our website developers starting from Anirban, Deb, Atanu, Sumanto deserve a praise for their untiring and selfless labor, skillful technique and whole hearted cooperation. My torch bearers and artist friends, curators and gallerists namely Subir Maity, Debojyoti, Dibyendu Bhuiyan, Subhas, Shubra Roy, Prabal Boral, et al... have been the main source of inspiration and driving force for last five years to realize this sketch book's first part. Three kudos to



the staff members of BSKK who planted in me the very idea of teaching drawing to the children and school students and propelled me in the business. The American library, Alliance Francaise and few bookstores have unlocked and shown me the array of books, journals and magazines containing present day explosives of western modern art. Roy, Dhar, Roni and others in the captivating library hours are just few unforgettable names for their helping and untiring assistance.

Siddharth Babu and his team by supplying all the important drawing materials from paper, pen to ink became a household name and burning spirit day and night in our workshop for last couple of years. The 24\*7 technical and maintenance cover by Deb and his HP team is last but not the least in the line of acknowledgements. The highly curious and interested neighbors and the flocks of well-wishers, physically meeting every day in our local adda and market place or over internets and mobiles, anxious to know the progress of work also deserve a special mention for their earnest and unselfish enthusiasm. Along with the supply of cooked food in time came not only from the home delivery boys of Swiggy or Zomato, but from our very tea stall owners namely Swapan, Ramprasad, Mangal Da, Uttam and more, who continued to struggle overtime and inclement weather to cater to snacks and tea in odd hours.

# About the author

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The man behind the creation of " bhattooS" has long understanding of world of art and architecture. Professor S. Bhattacharjee is a graduate in art & architecture and holds Master's in Urban Design & Planning, followed by MBA in Marketing. Prior to his retirement from academics, he has served in many distinguished companies and positions as designer and illustrator of cityscape, landscape, perspective and 3-D view of building for visualization before construction in site.

He has taught last 20 years at WBUT, Anna University, Miazn Tepi University and Fiji National University. He has travelled to North America, Europe and in Asian countries on work permit, study purpose and for promotion of his fledgling company "bhattoos". His love and commitment toward art and culture is notably reputed among his friends, colleagues and well-wishers. He has team of experienced artists, artisans, skilled workers and technicians, led by an advisory body.

Prof. Bhattacharya hails from poignant Bengali Hindu family of erstwhile Jessore, now in Bangladesh. Born in Calcutta, India, post-independence time he has childhood memory mostly centering Calcutta (now Kolkata). He witnessed sea change in Kolkata and the state from 1960 to present time, with so many milestones reached, policy changes, influx-outflux, win and loss, and historical mandates.

Very recently when the world faced a crisis called covid pandemic and the wheel of power came to a standstill and work from home became

the name of the game, the author had little choice, but to opt for writing, more than classroom teaching. His writing grew comical by capturing, molding and remolding the scenes, scenarios and acts taking place every day, everywhere and every corner of life around us and presenting this in serious as well as hilarious form in both drawing and writing.

**THE END**