



‘It does not permit itself to be read’: Re-reading Calcutta through the select 18th century English literary representations

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Abstract

The city has been defined as ‘a really distinctive order of settlement, implying a whole different way of life’ by Raymond Williams, which as an entity did not see its modern development until the 19th Century, though the idea of the modern city is germinated from the ideas of the European Renaissance and its focus on the rationality of man. From the rural community, the growth of the urban has been a well-documented phenomenon in various academic disciplines. The growth of the city has also seen its coterminous growth in its relationship with literary texts and it is through the intertextual relationship between the ‘city’ and literature that the transformation of space is perhaps best recorded. The genealogy of the modern urban space has found different manifestations under various socio-political spectrums, and with the period of 18th and 19th centuries being that of vast colonial expansions, the reading of colonial cities opens up interesting propositions.

Under these assumptions, this paper seeks to explore 18th century Calcutta, as an urban formation and attempt a re-reading of the temporality and spatiality of the city as a colonial space through the study of the literary texts that represent it in the earliest part of its urban history. Looking into the history of this essentially colonial city, we can locate that, as the foundations of the Empire in India were set firmly in place through events during the 18th century, economic considerations brought the Englishman to the East. The necessity to build a foundational bridgehead to propagate the colonial enterprise saw the English transform this conquered space in the East to form a newly set urban space. The geo-political and sociological assessment of the contemporary time is perhaps best reminiscent in the texts of these colonial travellers, manifested in the forms of personal journals, memoirs, diaries and travelogues; which act not only as literary artefacts but also form part of the tangible heritage of the literary traditions of the city, an exploration of which is necessary to form an understanding of not only the earliest periods of the city’s urbanisation and the strategies of literary representation, but also variations of the colonial gaze.

Keywords

city, Calcutta, heritage, colonial, representations

‘the city that we have built by narrating, the one that lies in words-for I do not think it exists anywhere on earth.’-- Plato, *Republic* (ca. 380 BCE)¹

Though the concept of the city, in actuality was present even in classical thought, and was brought through during the European and English Renaissance, it was not as Raymond Williams opines, ‘fully established, with its modern implications until eC19’ (Williams 56). He outlines that cities have existed in English since the thirteenth century, ‘but its distinctive modern use to indicate a large or very large town, and its consequent use to distinguish urban areas from rural areas or *country*, date from C16’ (Williams 55).

The relationship between the city and literature has been one of the most important spheres of assessment in contemporary academic circles, however, the transformation of the interrelationship between the ‘city’ and ‘literature’ has mostly been subjected to the Euro-American context in the twentieth century. The genealogy of the modern urban space has found different manifestations under various socio-political spectrums, and with the period of 18th and 19th centuries being that of vast colonial expansions, the reading of colonial cities within that temporal plane becomes necessary to understand and read the urban spaces in alternate socio-political geographies, in erstwhile colonial landscapes. However, assessment of the relationship between the ‘city’ and its ‘literature’ in a colonial context has been reduced mostly to the colonizer-colonized binary, the concern for which often superseding the reading of cultural encounter in the formation of space. The city of Calcutta in this context, offers an interesting spectrum. Though Calcutta carries the rudiments of most British colonial cities, during the earliest periods of its urbanisation, it also was a space which, culturally and psycho-geographically remained native and alien to ‘colonizer’ and ‘colonized’ alike. The result was the implementation of various perspectives of reading which offered multiple realities of the city. In the period after the battle of Plassey, though confined within the larger narrative reality and the ideological impetus of the colonial encounter, every text, formed of the period and the urban representation it entails carries with it its own mark, a different picture, unique to itself. The city and its literature formed the crux of an interactive space each influencing the other. ‘Thus, as literature gave imaginative reality to the city, urban changes in turn helped transform the literary text’ (Lehan xv), was particularly true in the context of Calcutta. Under these assumptions, this paper seeks to explore the 18th century city, as an urban formation and attempt a re-reading of the temporality and spatiality of the city as a colonial space through the study of the literary texts that represent it in the earliest part of its urban history, where I would argue that the 18th century English readings of Calcutta move beyond the ‘oriental’ gaze and essentially try to make sense of the space and record the interaction on various levels which were facilitated mostly on account of the Company’s economic considerations.

The growth of the modern city in English thought ideally can be traced back to the rise of modern London to Christopher Wren’s plan after the fire of 1666. Richard Lehan in his text, *The City in Literature* (1998) points out to Wren’s placing of the Royal Exchange as the official centre of the city. Although the plan never came to fruition, he perhaps rightly points out the ideological shift that this plan entailed, the formation of a city built on its commercial endeavours centred on the Royal Stock Exchange, East India House and the Bank of England among others. This shift entailed that the city be formed and built on its

commercial endeavours built around the ideas of a capitalist space through a burgeoning mercantile class. Defoe documents this shift in *The Complete English Tradesman* (1726), where he focuses on the architectural splendour of the new city, which was the contribution of the accruing wealth of the new commercial class, which is correlated with the declining wealth of the landed aristocracy.

These architectural marks dominated the landscape of London signifying the mercantilist growth of the city. The urban turn explored in English writings finds its root during the renaissance with its focus on the presence of 'Man' as the centre of the epoch. The representational practices of space and indeed the city was modelled to celebrate human rationality and human consciousness, which in turn laid the foundation for the ethos of the Enlightenment and the representative practices of space², which found its currency in Defoe's depiction of 18th century London, where the urban growth was manifested as a growth towards reason, where the power of reason was harnessed in an understanding of Nature and hence adapting it for progress of the urban through commercial and industrial ventures, with space being organized to motivate and facilitate the growth of production with the consideration of maximisation of profit. The city in the European literary landscape over the past three centuries has seen its depiction range from the possibilities of the new commercial urbanity to the decadent city and with Baudelaire and the image of nineteenth century Paris, foreshadowing perhaps Modernist literature's two most important metaphors, the city and the artist.

The modern urban space which was born as an Enlightenment ideal, based upon the idealisations of scientific order as opposed to chaos, was being questioned during the Romantic period. In the colonial context, this Enlightenment ideal was transfixed or mutated to absorb into newer realities. While in Europe, the Romantic ideal specifically questioned the city, the colonial city was earmarked as an idealisation fundamentally acting as the embodiment of colonial mercantile economy. As Europe was moving towards the ideal of the 'individual' through the Romantic, the colonial city was an idealised space of structure, order and scientific regimentation. It was basically the emblem of the colonial triumph of taming an alien land, the white Prospero taming the unknown land of Caliban.

The emblem of scientific rationality characterised the early depictions of the city are manifest not only in the European geo-political context, but also in a colonial landscape. Characterised by the needs of the imperialist ethos and scientific legacy of the enlightenment, the early eighteenth century imaging of Calcutta by the English is demonstrative of the effort to 'serve the needs of colonial ethnography by producing vivid and exact portraits of social types and customs' ('The Bengali Novel' 104). Ketaki Kushari Dyson in her study notes,

A relative lack of arrogance went with the political insecurity of the British in India in the latter part of the eighteenth century. Philosophically the eighteenth-century British attitude to India was shaped primarily by the Enlightenment, the consolidation of post-Renaissance tendencies in European thought (Dyson 19).

Though the Enlightenment concerns characterised the European representation of India, it would be unwise to lend 'mono-causal, deterministic interpretations' (Kopf 6) of their representation of Calcutta. The 18th century accounts reading Calcutta are symptomatic of

the fact that such a reductionist approach would be unwise as 'British attitudes toward India were...never a monolithic orthodoxy' (Hutchins xi-xii). The transformation of Calcutta's urban space in the 18th century, though bore the mark of the colonial ethos, the urban structural changes bearing the mark of the planners who's 'totalizing eye' (Certeau 92) is reminiscent of the 'voyeur-god' (Certeau 93) whose vision is totalizing and often transfigures the variegated urban space 'into the clear text of the planned and readable city' (Ibid.). Yet within that ideological premise, the city's narrative representation in literature can be termed as an exercise of reading the everyday, offering the gaze of the 'the ordinary practitioners of the city' who 'live "down below, " below the thresholds at which visibility begins' (Ibid.).

According to most contemporary understanding, Calcutta was born on 24th August 1690³, the day, Charnock arrived in Calcutta for the third and final time. Though this origin story of Calcutta and C.R. Wilson's claim that 'the real history of Calcutta begins with the coming of the Europeans' (*The Early Annals* I: 131) has been challenged, arguing that there already existed a pre-existing economic structure laid by the 'riverside humanity which had the potentiality for urban uplift and growth' (*Birth of a Colonial City* 58), we cannot but ignore his assessment that,

it is under their (colonial English) commercial supremacy that the place which we now know by the name of Calcutta first began to have any importance, and it is to them that we are chiefly indebted for our first reliable information about the Hugli and its markets' (*The Early Annals* I: 132).

It is the influence of colonial mercantilism that facilitated the birth of the city's modernity beginning in the 18th century. The reading of the literature of the time, studying the representative practices of the city hence opens up the avenue to a fuller understanding of the contemporary geo-political scenario that formed the space of Calcutta, which was later to be defined as the first capital city of the English colonial empire in India.

Charnock's arrival and later the acquiring of the zamindari rights to the three villages of 'Sutanuti, Kalikatah and Govindpur' (*Calcutta in the 17th Century* 348) on 10th November 1698 by Charles Eyre laid the foundation of the city that was to be built during the following centuries. The commissioning of the fort on the back of the revolt by Sobha Singh was perhaps one the first architectural developments undertaken during the early 18th century. The fort took more than ten years to be completed, the delay being attributed mostly to the apprehension of the 'Company's Court of Directors to the reaction of the nawab and his principal officers' (*A City in the Making* 52), and the fact that the English were developing a military infrastructure along with fulfilling their trade requirements. The beginning of the 18th century saw, the English's concern with Calcutta was to transform the newly acquired villages into a settlement which was 'livable' primarily from the point of view of the newly arrived sahibs' (*A City in the Making* 16). To alleviate the insalubrious nature of the settlement which was still then in all fairness a garrison town, was one of the prime motivations of the colonial administrators, along with the civic improvement and security, the cost of which was recovered from the inhabitants themselves⁴.

The population increase during the early part of the 18th century had been steady, following the Maratha scare of 1742, as inhabitants from the countryside journeyed to the city influenced by the security of the fort. Though the cyclone in 1737 which obliterated

most of the urban infrastructure of Calcutta, which had been thatched roofed houses, and there was the threat of the Maratha insurgency in 1742, the trade in the city had been mostly constant and unobstructed for the Company till 1756, when Siraj-ud-Dowlah attacked the city and which led to a sequence of events which would mark a watershed moment not only in the history of Calcutta but also the geo-political scenario of the Indian subcontinent. The English retaliation in 1757 at Plassey on June 23 and their subsequent victory marked the beginning of Calcutta as the seat of English power. In 1765, the *farman* granting the *diwani* of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa to the English was delivered and by 1772, most of the important offices were transferred to Calcutta making it the official centre of the Empire. In 1773:

The British Parliament passed the Regulating Act that overhauled the East India Company administration, elevating the Governor of Bengal (at that time, Warren Hastings) to the position of Governor General and placed the presidencies of Madras and Bombay under the control of Bengal. This made Calcutta the principal political centre of British India (*Space, Utopia and Indian Decolonization* 54).

The Regulating Act confirmed Calcutta's position as the *de jure* capital of the British Empire in the subcontinent. The Supreme Court was created in 1774 and the Asiatic Society was formed in 1784 which acted as important social and cultural institutions of the late eighteenth century city. *Hickey's Bengal Gazette or the Calcutta General Advertiser* published from 1780, was the first newspaper printed in India. The development of the city-space not only from the perspective of urban infrastructure, but also from the perspective of social and cultural life was facilitated by the economic progress of the company's business; which in turn prompted further migration into Calcutta, not only from the Bengal countryside but also from the English shores. The arrival of the English into the city as company servants, officers and colonial tourists and travellers was essential as many of them have left important accounts which mark the first proliferous period of Calcutta representation in English texts, both literary and the visual. Kate Teltscher notes:

At its most flourishing, Calcutta became a symbol to travel writers of the immense profits of British rule. But while celebrating the city's grandeur and wealth, travel texts also manifest the anxieties of the coloniser: fear of the people, the place, the possibility of contamination, and disease (Teltscher 195).

These accounts, which remain important sources in understanding the 18th century Calcutta society also acted as the foundation for the interactive flourish we witness in the nineteenth century.

The Calcutta accounts from English and other European writers discernible in the period express an attitude of distancing with the British outlook in India' and in Calcutta, being 'essentially one of conservation and non-interference',⁵ The city administration too during the time was, 'in a way that was not only inefficient but which encouraged neither the participation of its inhabitants, nor any sense of common identity' (Marshall 92). The mutual exclusivity of the English and natives created what is called a 'fractured public space'⁶ (Chattopadhyay 92). It is this space which gets recorded in the accounts of the English travellers exploring the social relations that form it within the temporal plane of reference. Following Stephen Greenblatt's reading that 'Representations are not only products but also producers, capable of decisively altering the very forces that brought them

into being' (Greenblatt 6), we can claim that these texts were produced by the socio-political forces of the time and Calcutta's urban realism and its multifaceted nature was being forged through these literary and visual texts. 'These writers' writes Ketaki Kushari Dyson,

...were not canonical authors, but that, precisely was part of their charm: they were intelligent witnesses to a very interesting period of Indian history, and they were participants in an absorbing cultural encounter. They made the most of their experience and left their accounts in printed books, which in turn shaped the opinion of others (Dyson xi).

Capt. Alexander Hamilton, 'the first 'interloper' or free merchant to reside in Calcutta for some years owning a house for himself' (*Calcutta in the 18th Century* 1). He comments amongst other things, on the squalid nature of the settlement in general:

Mr. *Job Channock* being then the Company's Agent in *Bengal*, he had Liberty to settle an Emporium in any part on the River's Side below Hughly, and for the sake of a large shady Tree chose that Place, tho' he could not have chosen a more unhealthful Place on all the River; for three Miles to the North-eastward, is a Salt-water Lake that overflows in *September* and *October*, and then prodigious Numbers of Fish resort thither, but in *November* and *December* when the Floods are dissipated, those Fishes are left dry, and with their Putrefaction affect the Air with thick stinking Vapours, which the North-east Winds bring with them to *Fort William*, that they cause a yearly Mortality (*A New Account of the East Indies II: 7*).

Hamilton speaks about the Sati and the personal life of Charnock, about whom he expresses little regard. Hamilton records pagan religious practices of the Hindus and the degenerative custom of 'Sati'. However as regards to Calcutta, he limits himself mostly to the English quarters. Hamilton's records forming the earliest readings of Calcutta is reminiscent of the fact that the city, and especially the English quarter, despite the general apathy towards the weather drew positive remarks. Hamilton's accounts remain largely 'unaffected anecdotes' (*Calcutta in the 18th Century* viii) yet, the attitude is an important reminder of the growth of Calcutta as a centre of mercantile economy of the Empire. Historically, Hamilton's records formed the basis for chroniclers and historians for many years after, and the general positive remarks highlight the early inherent sense of efficacious consciousness prevalent in the white part of the town.

James Mitchell's account of Calcutta recorded in his *Journal of a Voyage to the East Indies in His Majesty's Ship Harwich of 50 Guns and 350 Men* presents a vivid record of the Native customs and records their everyday life.

The poorer Natives live in mud houses thatched with straw, the whole Furniture consisting of a mat on which they sleep wrap'd in their Turban unfolded (which with the rag that comes thro' the Thighs fastened to a string round their middle is all their cloaths) and some earthenpots to boil their rice & currie and a Goblet to hold Water (their only beverage) is their whole Furniture (*Calcutta in the 18th Century* 96).

Mitchell's account of the food habit of the natives, though on the surface are part of the larger ethnographic recording of the native population, cannot merely be relegated to that

idea only. Mitchell, one can say goes beyond the boundaries of the white town and the architectural records the rice eating habits of the natives that he encounters.

...some may have a brass Bowl from which they pour the Water into their mouth, never put it to the Lip; and the Rice put on a mud frame, fitted with a few minutes to the earthen pot that is to boil it, with a small hole in one side to introduce a few dry twigs which they soon kindle, and with the most frugal attention make the whole heat act on the bottom of the pot, and when sufficiently boiled pour off the water and put the rice on a large broad leaf heaped, and having uttered a short Prayer and set apart a small portion as an offering, and washed their mouth and hands; with the Thumb and two fore Fingers of their right hand (their left being appropriate to unclean purposes) they mix the rice with very small quantity of prepared Currie and throw as much as will lay on these fingers into their mouth without touching their Lips, and a large quantity they devour, having only two meals a day (Ibid.).

His recording of the caste practices in the city are not only examples of anecdotes but also perhaps one of the earliest reading of the caste practices in the city space by an Englishman. Mitchells' records open up truly the space of interaction between the observer and the observed practices. The experiences of which altered the perspectives of not only the observed but also the observer.

Edward Ives, who accompanied Admiral Watson during the Battle of Plassey in 1757 expresses his concern about the health and mortality in Calcutta, in his journal *A Voyage from England to India in the Year MDCCLIV* (1773). He offers statistical records of the hospitals and the morbid conditions prevailing in the city. His records often reminiscences the 'scientific gaze' (Edney 54) that was the prevalent register of so many of the accounts of the contemporary period. The mercantile prosperity of Calcutta, that was essential in drawing the 'griffins' from England, and their experiences were recorded by John Henry Grose, in his account, *A Voyage to the East Indies with Observations on Various Parts there* (1757):

At this time Calcutta was a very flourishing place, and the presidency of the English company in Bengal...The fort was strong, and had a garrison of Europeans and sepoy. The plan of it was an irregular tetragon, built with brick, and mortar (Grose 236-37).

Grose also comments on the religious activities of the inhabitants

All religions were tolerated here: the Pagans carried their idols in procession; the Mahommedans were not discountenanced and the Roman Catholics had a church. About fifty yards from the fort was the English Church, built by the contributions of the merchants and seamen who came to trade there...it was the worst place he (Job Charnock) could have marked out; for three miles to the north-east there is a salt-lake, which overflows in September; and when the flood retires in December, there is such a prodigious quantity of fish left behind, that they putrefy and infect the air. Besides the Gentoos worship the Ganges, and bring their sick people to its banks, to die near it: they entirely burn the bodies of the rich; but only disfigure those of the poor with the flames, and

throw them into the river where they float in great numbers, and are preyed on by the crows. (Grose 237-38)

The ‘absolutely putrid’ (*Calcutta in the 18th Century* 133) conditions of the atmosphere and the general disagreeable condition of the climate. However, there are references to English life in the city, clothing habits of the ‘inhabitants of Bengal’ (*Calcutta in the 18th Century* 134). The ‘Gentoo’ is looked at from a distance:

Should any European enter their houses they imagine them to be then polluted; neither will they eat or drink anything that has been touched by Europeans, or even Moors, who they hate—and not without reason, for they are a lazy, haughty people, oppressing without mercy where they have any power (*Calcutta in the 18th Century* 135).

Jemima Kindersley, the first English woman to visit Calcutta ‘was the wife of Lieutenant Colonel Nathaniel Kindersley of the Bengal Artillery’ (Dyson 124) Her accounts express an understanding and keen reading of the ‘social, political, and religious realities’ (ibid.) of the spaces she explores. Her two visits to Calcutta in 1765 and 1768 resulted in accounts of the city which perhaps it would be fair to say was more nuanced than any of her contemporaries, in reading the space that she was inhabiting. Her *Letters from the Island of Teneriffe, Brazil, the Cape of Good Hope, and the East Indies* (1777), references her scrutiny of various aspects of the city, from the religious ceremonies of the Hindus, to the topic of the weather. We witness however, her responsiveness ‘to the peculiar beauties of tropical nature’ (Dyson 125) from her entry on Calcutta,

...everything but cold is in extremes here, the heat is intense, the rains floods, the winds hurricanes and the hailstones I dare not tell you how large, lest you should think I have the license of a traveller’ (*Calcutta in the 18th Century* 140).

The growth of English economy and society in Calcutta was under the influence of the native merchants, on whom they were heavily dependent. The city of Calcutta was definitely a product of the space formed by the interpersonal relation between the English and the Natives, where beyond the colonial binary, it was actually the English who were prone to the follies of the native *banians*. Mrs. Kindersley elaborates vividly on the subject, ‘nothing can be bought or sold without them’ (*Calcutta in the 18th Century* 142) she says. She gives a scathing remark of their character and their importance to the English social order in the city.

They are exceedingly indolent; crafty and artful to an astonishing degree; and shew in all their dealings the most despicable low cunning, which makes them not to be depended upon for any thing: they have not only a secret premium out of whatever they pay to servants, tradespeople, &c. but keep them out of their money long after the master supposes they have been paid (*Calcutta in the 18th Century* 143).

The economic influence the native merchants wielded is also commented upon.

Those who are concerned with us usually speak pretty tolerable English; they are many of them worth large sums of money, and frequently lend a great deal to their masters, mostly at the interest of nine or ten per cent (Ibid.).

Mrs. Kindersley was one of the earliest writers on Calcutta, who perhaps due to her authorial position as a woman colonial being at the periphery of the grand design of the

Empire and its mercantile concerns, that her accounts express with immaculate detail many aspects of the daily relationships and facets of the English life in the city which make up their ‘everyday’.

‘Asiaticus’ which was the *nom de plume* of Philip Dormer Stanhope was the name under which we see the account titled *Genuine Memoirs of Asiaticus* whose subject was the English experience of the city. His stay in the city occurred during the period between September and December 1774 and later between March and April 1775, during the time of Warren Hastings. It is perhaps from Stanhope that we get the germination of the idea of ‘chance directed’ origin of Calcutta’s urban geography:

About a mile further is the town of Calcutta, which is near three leagues in circumference, and is so irregularly built, that it looks as if the houses had been placed wherever chance directed; here the lofty mansions of an English Chief, and there the thatched hovel of an Indian cooly. The Bezars, or markets, which stand in the middle of the town are streets of miserable huts and every Indian who occupies one of these is called a merchant. There is a noble playhouse—but no church (Stanhope 41).

The Englishman’s disillusionment after arriving in 18th century Calcutta in the hope of financial gain and oriental riches, is visualised vividly by the author in a letter dated April 1775.

The same untoward destiny, which has hitherto blasted all my prospects, has still pursued me, and I have within the short space of a few revolving months experienced all the variegated misery of sickness, shipwreck, captivity and hunger. Finding my views in Bengal so cruelly disappointed, and hoping that the recommendations of the Governor General would procure me a permanent establishment at Madras (Stanhope 55).

In the large spectrum of colonial records, the gaze of the ‘voyeur-god’ as Certeau claims, proposes the essential success story of Calcutta. Witnessing the colonial city from the high vantage point of colonial ideology, the city is made to appear as an economic success story of colonial urban infrastructure and social building. In Stanhope’s recording of the hardships and the disillusionment of the colonial employees, the alternate fact is explored, the vision of which is obfuscated under the overarching gaze of the colonial enterprise.

Mrs. Eliza Fay, wife of Anthony Fay, was in Calcutta from May 1780 to April 9 1782 (*Calcutta in the 18th Century* 188). Her views of the city are recorded in *Original Letters from India; containing a narrative of a journey through Egypt and the author’s imprisonment at Calicut by Hyder Ally, to which is added an Abstract of three subsequent voyages to India* (1817). Fay’s accounts provide a vivid account of the British society in Calcutta during her visit, and it is ‘the triumphant flow of her vivacious colloquial style that captivates us today’ (Dyson 126-27). In the accounts of authors like Kindersley and Fay, the general predisposition of nostalgia for the homeland and an apathetic attitude towards the climate are subdued and instead we find through a general colloquial narration, a reading of the space with ‘greater measure of commonsense’ (Dyson 133). Her recording of the religious and caste practices of the native Hindoo community is an example of not just a practical outlook motivated by the Enlightenment zeitgeist, but also an attempt to

read the built landscape of Calcutta going beyond the staple narrative of ‘dominance and submission’ (McNamara 3) that is said to mark the colonial city.

Cities are ‘product of continuous social interactions, of persistent encounters’ (Mann 5) which often recedes in to the dusty corners of history. The resultant popular discourse of a Manichean city hence gets the impetus to germinate and gathers a life of its own. These accounts appear one of the earliest in a tradition of not only recording of the city in general but an expression of an interplay of various thought processes, at time conflicting which defined the English attitude to India as well as their interaction in Calcutta. ‘Social spaces interpenetrate one another’ (Lefebvre 86) says Lefebvre and these accounts apart from recording the introduction of an ideology alien to the land they were inhabiting they also document how the demarcation of spaces gets blurred with respect to the colonial binary. Space, particularly psycho-geographically becomes interpenetrative and the strict regimentations which perhaps existed in the social-space, at the beginning of the 18th century start to become permeable, of which these accounts are testament. The accounts from this century also brings a curious study of the colonial gaze, in the English reading of Calcutta, one which is a combination of ‘familiarity and distance’ (Said xxi). However, these texts go beyond the simple colonial grand-narrative or the exoticisation of the orient.

These 18th century accounts of Calcutta in their recording of the city, perhaps becomes the earliest of the canon of literary texts which read the city. It would perhaps be important to note that the first Bengali account of Calcutta does not arrive till the early nineteenth century. In a sense these texts form the inception of a canon which has been developed into the twentieth century, and hence are part of the literary heritage of that canon. Heritage entails a sense of nostalgia for a forgotten past. However, these texts must not be read just as a nostalgic yearning of history of a city gone by; but as important socio-cultural document. Influences can be traced definitely of the prevalent Augustan ideas of reason and control and moving away from ‘enthusiasm’ can be traced in the reading of a colonial space. Though most of these texts are personal readings, in a way that they also might foreshadow certain Romantic predilection, all of these authors express their primary preoccupation of recording the world that they see around them.

The 18th century readings of Calcutta in the accounts of colonial tourists opens up important insights into not only the evolution of Calcutta’s urban formation but also provide a foundation through which the representative practices of the following century make sense. Through their reading of the important changes in the ‘practices of space’⁷ these Journals and Memoirs express not only a variation of what Lefebvre outlines as the ‘representation of space’, as an embodiment of colonial ideology but also undercuts the overarching nature of that gaze. The authors themselves, as Edward Said comments are not ‘mechanically determined by ideology, class or economic history’ but they are also ‘very much in the history of their societies, shaping and shaped by that history and social experiences on different measures’ (Said xxii). The rendering and representation of Calcutta in the eighteenth century are records of experiences, which enable us to see the city of Calcutta from below. The position of these authors with respect to their socio-political spectrum of being colonial ruling race cannot be denied, and yet their experiences cannot be straightjacketed into the ideological prism of the colonial hierarchy. They form part of the tangible heritage of the literary canon of Calcutta and any reading of the city

through its temporal and spatial frame of reference would be incomplete without an assessment of the uniqueness of the cultural encounter recorded in these texts and the distinctiveness of how the colonial space of 18th century Calcutta gets dealt with.

Notes and References

1. The quote from Plato's *Republic* is cited in the essay 'Celestial Cities and Rationalist Utopias' by Antonis Balasopoulos. The essay can be located in *The Cambridge Companion to the City in Literature* (2014) ed. Kevin R. McNamara.
2. This is echoed by David Harvey who outlines, 'The Renaissance revolution in concepts of space and time laid the conceptual foundations in many respects for the Enlightenment project' (Harvey 249).
3. Charnock's arrival concluded a chain of historical events which shaped the spatial politics of the land. One such event being that Mughal Empire under Aurangzeb and the English East India Company were locked in a war between 1686 and 1690' (*Birth of a Colonial City* ix).
4. The fact is revealed in the letter from the Court of the Company to Bengal, dated London, 29th November, 1700.

The Jemindars late Rebellion is a pregnant Instance of the probability thereof But as we are willing to be at any Charge for your and our peoples Security within your bounds So we rely on you to turne every Stone to raise a Standing Revenue to bear it, and in due time to pay us Interest for Our Money which that the Inhabitants may be enabled the more cheerfully to contribute unto we would have you encourage all People especially handicrafts to Reside there and Employ them in whatever they can make fit for Europe although you give them rather more than others (*Old Fort William* I: 48).
5. 'The desire for strict boundaries was rooted in an eighteenth-century obsession with classification, division and separation, exaggerated in the colonial context' (Chattopadhyay 91) and segregation 'reflected in an intellectual separation' (Marshall 100).
6. P.J Marshall in his reading of the native quarters of Calcutta, comments, 'in spirit and often in physical layout 'native' Calcutta remained a fragmented city at the end of the eighteenth century' (Marshall 91-92).
7. The 'practices of space' found its vision also in the works of a group of European artists who were working in India during the time. Artists like William Hodges (1744-1797), the Daniells, Thomas (1749-1840) and William (1769-1837), found a lucrative market in Calcutta and they also satiated their thirst for an ethnographic exploration of the landscape of Calcutta. The Daniells' *Views of Calcutta* (1786-88) is a reading of the city from the distance, and perhaps lacked any artistic familiarity of the 19th century artists and were primarily focused with the 'scientific' gaze in their readings of the city. Both Hodges and the Daniells were pioneers in many ways and they offer the first real study of the urban landscape. Calcutta, during the time of Warren Hastings was an important market for portrait painters like John Zoffany (1773-1810) and Tilly Kettle (1740-1786) being two of the most important portrait painters plying their trade in the city and painting the English life in the city, capturing through their canvas the white town's 'nascent imperialist ethos' (Guha Thakurta 147)

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