SOCIAL CHANGES

This study of social change avoids theoretical formulations but seeks to state facts and generalizations along some of the lines suggested by the more theoretical social sciences. It is based on certain assumptions but they are of an elementary nature and are not, therefore, open to much controversy.

One basic assumption in this study is the one relating to urbanism as a crucial factor in social change. The phenomenon of social change cannot certainly be reduced to urbanization. But within the historical setting of the late 18th century, the starting point of this study, and the nineteenth century, urbanism, or more precisely, the possibilities of urbanism, acquire a particular historical significance. The other basic assumption in this paper is that relating to the idea of traditional society. The absence of any basic economic change, especially the lack of social impact of industrialism, has been taken for granted, and not much attention has been paid to the economic implications of traditional society.

This paper is mainly a study of Bengali society as it was open to external pressures of change. The capability of even a deeply traditional society to have some spontaneous pressures of change within itself is admitted, but they have not been systematically treated here. This is not again a basically structural study. The purpose is to present certain aspects of a historical situation which appear to be particularly significant. The accent has been on the interaction of external pressures and the force of continuity within society and an overall rural pull on urban life has been stressed.

A certain unity has been sought to be preserved in presentation. But the unequal availability of data has resulted in a somewhat forced limitation of discussion on certain crucial points. According to a somewhat loosely constructed scheme, this study would first focus on the growth of a new urban society in Bengal that can be described as the metropolitan society.

A significant question that cannot be adequately answered for lack of data and previous analysis relates to the extent to which the metropolitan society represented a historical departure from traditional urbanism. The mediaeval Indian city does not represent a single type. The variations on a regional basis between commercial towns, administrative towns, military or religious centres, have not been adequately worked out. The dominant type, however, was the market towns with occasional overlapping with administrative centres. In the case of Bengal, two typical cases of such overlapping up to mid-19th century were Dacca and Murshidabad. These two urban centres had many of the ingredients of western urbanism in respect of density of population or volume of trade. But if this can be called the primary stage of urbanization, the impulse for change into
the second stage, the meeting of the frontiers of commerce and society, 
the latter with its inner organization and values, never occurred. The 
amalgamation of the Portuguese, Dutch, Moors, English, French, Arme-
nians, Central Asians, Marwaris, North Indians and Bengalis in a typical 
commercial city in Bengal obviously failed to produce that element of 
fluidity in respect of kinship and familial traditions, which is the essence 
of western urbanism as a historical phenomenon. It might have been the 
ubiquity of the market in a traditional Indian city, an overdose of primary 
requisites, which frustrated the secondary form of urbanization. This failure 
of traditional urbanism to transform itself into a social force is, perhaps, 
best represented by the traditional bania castes of India — the Marwaris 
and Subarnabaniks, so far as Bengal was concerned — who had been 
intensely loyal to kinship and caste traditions. The great urban banking 
house of the Jagat Seths left no impact on society and culture, except 
so far as it accomplished some religious deeds confined to the Marwari 
community.

In its physical character and in most of its attributes, Calcutta, even 
up to the late 18th century, appears to have been a traditional type of city 
outside the English town. The 'native' and the English town were two separate 
entities which met only on the line of business. The 'native' town, for the 
greater part of the 18th century, was a collection of markets. The only point 
of difference, and a point that became increasingly significant, from the 
traditional type of city, lay very probably in the growing concentration of 
high caste people, who initially profited from commerce but who were, 
nevertheless, strangers to the commercial tradition. The inter-action of 
tradition and change in the history of Calcutta is the implicit guideline 
of the greater part of the following narrative.

In one of the earliest references to Calcutta in Wilson's Annals the 
names of a number of 'bazars' appear. Calcutta in the first decade of the 18th 
century was a collection of marts or 'native ganges', patches of raised lands 
or 'dehis' inhabited mainly by fishermen called Nikaris, Jelias and Pods, 
swamps, creeks, paddy fields and jungles varying from deep forest to 
scattered undergrowth. With the completion of the Fort in the first decade of 
the century, the Portuguese and the Armenian inhabitants together with a few 
Dutch and Danes, clustered round the 'factory' and the Fort. The Burrabazar 
(already called the Great Bazar) "supplied provisions to the British settle-
ment." The area of Burrabazar "had every available space within the bound-
aries taken up by the houses and shops of native traders". In 1706, only "248 
bighas of land were....... occupied with dwellings in Town Calcutta, and 364 
bighas were shortly to be utilised for houses. Although the Great Bazar to its 
immediate north was already most populous, having 400 bighas built out over 
of the entire area of 488 bighas". The small town with the Fort and its 
adjuncts was surrounded by 1,470 bighas of land in "Djabi Calcutta," partly 
cultivated and partly waste. On the north of this dihi was Sutanuti, already
containing 134 bighas of inhabited land, with 1,558 bighas under jungle and cultivation. To the south of Dihi Calcutta stood Govindapur, high on the river bank, with only 57 bighas out of a total area of 1,178 bighas, covered by human habitations, most of the rest being dense jungle. The 'town' of Sutanuti of which Burrabazar formed the nucleus made rapid progress, during the century, and, with the increase in the number and diversity of the opulent categories of Indian population, played a central role in the growth of metropolitan society. The following table gives a certain idea of the physical growth of Calcutta, mainly from a rural (perhaps, more accurately, paddy fields, jungles, swamps etc.) into an urban settlement.

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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>1706</td>
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<td>1,476</td>
<td>1,692</td>
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<td>1726</td>
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<td>1742</td>
<td>448</td>
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<td>1756</td>
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<td>1794</td>
<td>3,714</td>
<td>1,283</td>
<td>4,997</td>
<td>1,114</td>
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The figures have been prepared on the basis of a study of successive maps and plans of the city of Calcutta by the writer of A Short History of Calcutta (Census vol. 1901).

By the middle of the 18th century Calcutta had advanced quite a distance from a haphazard collection of hamlets towards a traditional type of Indian city. In that transitional stage of the growth of Calcutta the pattern of the Indian village came to be reflected in it. The English town was a 'fenced city' sharply distinguished from the 'native town'. The latter had become settled with a large number of castes and professionals. Holwell, the Zamindar (Magistrate Collector) of Calcutta, divided the town into a number of quarters, allotting each quarter to one professional group or caste. "Thus originated tolas and tulis ....: — Kumartuli for the Kumars (potters), Colootola for the Kalus (oil pressures), Jeliatola for the Jelias (fish catchers), Domtooly for the Doms or scavengers or basket-makers, Goalatolly for the Goalas (Holwell's 'palanquin bearers, milkmen'), Ahirtola for the ahirs (Behari goalas as distinguished from the Bengali goalas), Cossaitola for the Cossais (butchers), Patuatola for the Patuas (painters), Sankharitola for the sankharis (conchshell workers), Beparitola for the Beparis (petty traders)....." There were also Haripara (for sweepers), Musalmanpara, Ooryapara, Darzipara (for tailors), Dhopapara (for washermen), Telipara (for oil pressurers) and many other localities. This caste-wise or profession-wise division of the town reflected the strong traditional pull that operated on the process of urbanization in the metropolis and left its stamp on the later stages of its growth. A mid-18th century Calcutta was yet to develop the consolidated society
dominated by opulent and largely high caste groups of the Bengali community. The Maratha scare of the forties had just infused a large dose of high caste and opulent elements from the surrounding districts. But 'when Calcutta was but sparsely peopled, and the respectable classes kept away from it, on account of its deadly malaria and unsavoury surroundings, people who had given their names to the following lanes of Calcutta 'were then above their fellow residents from a worldly point of view.'

Chidam Mudee's Lane (named after a grocer) Panchu D hobany Gully (named after a laundress) Shama Bai's Gully (named after a dancing girl) Okhil Mistri's Lane (named after a mechanic) Ramhurry Mistri's Lane (named after a carpenter) Ramkanto Mistri's Lane (Ditto). Some other lanes bore the names of Khansamas, tailors, etc.

With the political changes in mid-18th century, Calcutta became a metropolis and immediately underwent a significant physical expansion with the incorporation of the suburbs of Panchannagram or 55 villages. By that time Calcutta had become a city composed of heterogeneous elements. Among the business community the North Indian elements were quite prominent as they had been in Dacca and also in Murshidabad. The Jagat Seths had 'Kuthi' in Burrabazar, so had Bolaky Das and the Dugars. Omichand had made his fortune as the Company's broker. Huzoorimall, a relative of Omichand, was one of the richest men in the city. From the scattered data, mainly available about the first half of the 19th century, it would appear that the North Indian merchants had already established themselves at mid-century in the sectors of indigenous banking, money changing, and inland trade connections with North India. This was nothing unusual because they had command of these sectors in Dacca and Murshidabad. Their rapid rise to prominence in the 19th century was the result of a fairly entrenched position in some vital sectors and their command over a vast North Indian hinterland, which the traditional mercantile castes of Bengal had failed to develop because of their non-migratory habits. The judicial records reveal this complex network of business connections, though Marwari business was generally, for understandable reasons, very ill-represented in institutional records. The judicial records, however, leave no doubt about the significant position of the Armenians in the commercial world of Calcutta.

Yet, Calcutta, in the second half of the 18th century, was essentially a banian city — rather, a city of banians and dawans, the business intermediaries of the Company and superior Indian officials. In these fields the predominance of Bengali Hindus is an unmistakable feature of the history of this period.

The social evolution of the metropolis derived its chief motive force from the elite groups of Bengali Hindu population in the metropolis. In the pre-metropolitan stage of Calcutta society, the role of the Setts and Basaks of the weaver caste, as a clan or group, must have been significant. The
prominence of the Setts and Basaks in the field of the Company's investment gave them a unique position with the English. The virtual monopolistic control of the Setts over the Company's investment is demonstrated by their refusal in 1748 to do any business with the Company for employing some persons not belonging to their caste in their own line of business. The Company had to yield to the challenge of the Setts. A particularly redoubtable figure in the Calcutta of eighteen thirties was Baisnabdas Sett, who was the Company's broker from 1724 to 1732. The crucial trade in cotton and yarn in Calcutta had been dominated by the Sett Brothers, Janardan and Baranashi, who were brokers from 1706-1724 (with a gap of four years from 1715-1719) before Baisnabdas succeeded to the position. The wealthy Omichand was a protege of Baisnabdas. He died in 1752 in tragic circumstances of declining fortune but he left a legend behind him. Baisnabdas must have commanded great social prestige for many stories about him are part of the traditional history of Calcutta. He perhaps made a very effective contribution to the norms of social behaviour among opulent Bengalis in the growing society of Calcutta.

The fortune of the Setts began to decline rapidly after the switchover of the Company's investment from the 
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established opulence in the earliest stage of Calcutta's growth. They appear to have prospered both as independent businessmen and as associates of the East India Company. The last and the most conspicuous representative of this family in the mercantile line was Madan Mohan Datta, a late 18th century ship-owner and merchant, who fostered the ability of Ramdulal De, the Bengali millionaire of the early 19th century. A Supreme Court document of the early 19th century shows one branch of the family as an established landowner and also a proprietor of an indigo factory.

Gobindaram Mitra, who belonged to the same Kayastha community, wielded unique power by virtue of his office as Black Zamindar, a kind of deputy to the European Collector of Calcutta, at a stage of English administration of the city when an able Indian assistant could hold his English employers, ignorant of Indian modes, almost completely under his control. Gobindaram held such a position from the inception of the office of the Black Zamindar in 1720 down to 1756. Stories about his power and prestige are part of the traditional history of early Calcutta. 'He spent vast sums of money during his lifetime in the erection of temples and the performance of poojahs and religious ceremonies on a scale of pomp and magnificence to which Calcutta has been a stranger ... .... He is said to have built in 1730 a magnificent noboruttna (or nine jewel) temple on the Chitpore Road, the highest pinnacle of which was higher than the Ochterlony Monument (i.e. over 165 feet in height), and the smallest cupola of which still exists, the main building having been overthrown in the terrible cyclone and earthquake which devastated Calcutta in 1737.' He also heads the list of Commissioners for the distribution of restitution money after the sack of Calcutta and obtained compensation equal to that of Sobaram. His was perhaps the earliest individual influence in shaping the pattern of social behaviour for the elite groups of the Bengali metropolitan community.

The type of traditional expenditure of which Gobindaram and some of his contemporaries set an example was part of an overall patronage of tradition, which, in the metropolitan environment created an atmosphere conducive to the growth of a metropolitan community with certain significant point of contact for some of its diverse elements. These diverse elements stood for different castes, sub-castes and professional groups within the Bengali Hindu community. Even through the later stages of social evolution, the essentially partial character of metropolitan development tended to persist and twist the logic of urban social growth.

Yet, within the historical setting of the late 18th century the intensity of the aspirations of the dominant families or elite groups to a social position fulfilled a purpose, however limited, by the forces of tradition. The English victory released into the population of the de facto metropolis a very sizable element which went by the general appellation of 'banian' or 'dewan' but which was, in fact, a highly complex amalgam of diverse and overlapping categories.
In a very broad general sense, the 'banians' and 'dewans' were the intermediaries of the English in the field of trade and administration. The judicial records of the 18th century bear testimony to the far-flung character of private trade of the Company's servants. The banians were mainly associated with that kind of trade. An interesting description of the banian at the height of his power in the late 18th century occurs in an article on old Calcutta in which the following passage is quoted:—

"Banyan is a person either acting for himself or as the substitute of some great black merchant by whom the English gentlemen, in general, transact all their business. He is the interpreter, head book-keeper, head secretary, head broker, the supplier of cash and cash keeper, and in general also secret keeper. He puts in the under-clerks, the porter or door-keeper, stewards, bearers of the silver, slaves, running footmen, torch and branch light-carriers, palanquin bearers, and all the long tribe of under-servants, for whose honesty he is deemed answerable and he conducts all the trade of his master, to whom, unless pretty well acquainted with the country languages, it is difficult for any of the natives to obtain access.... (He) further serves very conveniently sometimes in public discussion to farther such acts and proceedings as his master durst not avow. There is a powerful string of connections among the Banyans who serve the English in all the settlements of Bengal, as well in all public offices as in their private offices. Since the great influence acquired there by the English, many persons of the best Gentoo families take upon them this trust of servitude, and even pay a sum of money for serving gentlemen in certain posts; but principally for the influence they acquire thereby, and the advantage of carrying on trade, which they could not otherwise do, duty-free under cover of their masters' dustucks. There have been few instances of any European acquiring such a knowledge in speaking and writing the Bengali language which is absolutely necessary for a real merchant as to be able to do without such a Head Banyan."

The most powerful banian in the late 18th century was undoubtedly Gokul Ghosal (died 1779). He was the banian of Governor Verelst and was "concerned largely with inland and foreign trade." In the Mayor's court case between the Executors of Daniel Hoissard and Gokul Ghosal in 1773, it is found that there was a joint trade concern between Hoissard, who was a church warden and Gokul Ghosal. All appointments were made on his recommendation. "In Exhibit No. 15 we have a Bengali account abstracted from the final aurung invoices of gomastas of goods received by the agents and servants of Gokul Ghosal" who collected all goods for the Company. "We also find in an exhibit in a case of Charles Child that he (Child) bought the whole share of the purchase made by Modun Dutt in partnership with Gokul Ghosal of the opium exported
in 1769 from Patna. Charles Child was possibly a free merchant."

In the case of James Archdekin vs. Joynarain Ghosal (1781), the former Commissary to the Third Brigade, states that he entered into a partnership in 1769 with Gokul Ghosal. "He could borrow of Gokul Ghosal for trade up the country to the extent of 30,000 rupees. Gokul Ghosal was to have 1/4 of the net profits and he was also to take 1/4 share of all losses. In consideration of the Europeans being prohibited to trade in salt, betelnut and tobacco, Gokul Ghosal was to have one half of the profits for all and every concern that might be entered into by the parties in those three prohibited articles of inland trade, it being understood that ....... Gokul Ghosal would bear one half of the losses. Monhur Mukherjee, a relative of Gokul Ghosal, accompanied James Archdekin. At Monghyr they began trade in cloth, rice, opium, wax, tobacco and other articles as also saul timber. Gokul Ghosal's established reputation for business integrity, fair dealing and the status he filled as head banian to the Governor were helpful factors." In another judicial document, dated 1784, Gokul Ghosal is described as a partner along with Thomas Rumbold, Chief at Patna and later Member of the Board and of the Committee of Works, Governor Verelst, Walter Wilkins, Chief of Chittagong factory and Moden (Madan) Dutta, an outstanding banian and trader of the time. The partnership concern 'purchased a ship on a scheme of trade to send opium to the eastward.'

Gokul Ghosal thus appears not only as a banian but as an equal partner of Europeans. The typical banian was no doubt a kind of broker or agent, but some men of ability could rise above the level of intermediaries, though they maintained, for its advantage, a link with powerful Englishmen as agents. Some of the Malliks and Dattas held a position similar to that of Ghosal. Another outstanding example of a banian rising to the position of partnership is Ramdulal De, who, however, belonged to a later period.

It appears from the family history of the Tagores that in early 18th century they lived on the swamps of Calcutta as neighbours of the traditional denizens of the marshes of Bengal — the fishermen castes of Pods and Jelias. They probably acted as suppliers of goods and provisions to the captains of ships and free merchants. They were Pirali (tainted) Brahmins and got their title Tagore from Thakur by which name they were probably called by their humble neighbours. A traditional Bengali couplet describes the Piralis, Kayets (Kyasthas), Tantis (weavers) and Sonarbenes (Subarnabaniks, the traditional mercantile caste of Bengal) as the founders of Calcutta. The reference is clearly to the Setts and Basaks, the Tagores, the Dattas and the Malliks.

The structure of the opulent community in the second half of the 18th century can be reconstructed from a list prepared by a member of a leading Calcutta family between 1822 and 1829, supplemented by family history
and judicial records. The data are presented below in a synoptic form:

1. Nemaicharan Mallik or Nemychurn Mullik of English sources — Banyan and merchant (founder of the Mallik family of Burrabazar — Subarnabanik.)

2. Raghu Mitra and Abhoycharan Mitra, son and grandson respectively of Gobindaram Mitra, Deputy Zamindar in pre-metropolitan Calcutta — Kayastha.


5. Lakshmikanta Dhar or Naku Dhar — 'banker' to Clive and other Governors — founder of the prosperity of the Posta Raj family — Subarnabanik.


7. Ramlochan Ghosh — Sircar (dewan or banyan) to Mrs. Hastings — had also connections with Mr. Hastings — founder of the Ghosh family of Pathuriaghata — Kayastha.

8. Gokul Ghosal — banian to Governor Verelst and independent merchant — died 1779 — Brahmin.

9. Darpanarain Tagore (died 1793) — merchant and banian — founder of the Senior Branch of the Tagore family — son of Joyram Tagore, Amin to the East India Company. Nilmony Tagore — also Amin to the Company — son of Joyram (Pirali Brahmin.)

10. Gangagobinda Singh — Dewan to the Committee of Revenue, one of the founders of the Paikpara Raj family — Kayastha.

11. Santiram Singh — Dewan or Banian to the Chief of Patna — Kayastha.


The above list is selective but broadly representative and shows the unusual prominence of the Kayasthas. The leadership of the growing metropolitan society had passed into their hands. The Subarnabaniks, for some time, were keen contestants. Besides the three families mentioned in the list, there were other Subarnabanik families of opulence. But their position in caste hierarchy stood in the way. Within the Kayastha community itself, there was severe contest out of which emerged Raja Nabakrishna as the leading figure of the metropolitan community. Nabakrishna had to contend against older families represented by Churamani Datta and the Dattas of Hathkhola. The story of this struggle for social leadership is part of the traditional history of Calcutta.
It is at this stage that tradition played a vital role in the evolution of the metropolitan community. The new elite groups, unable to rise above tradition, worked within the traditional framework with an intensity that was itself a force of no mean significance. The metropolis became a centre of hectic social activity on traditional lines, marking a clear shifting of social forces from older centres like Krishnanagar where the death of Maharaja Krishnachandra in 1782 may be said to have terminated an epoch in the patronage of tradition.

Raja Nabakrishna, the prefixed title, a Mughal award, signifying a change in the society of a basically commercial city, represents better than anybody else the social trends in the incipient metropolis. The period was one of tremendous social rivalry, of competitive performance of pujas, sradhs, marriages and perhaps even of the pre-funeral Ganga-yatra (ceremonial visit to the Ganges at the imminence of death). Rivalry for the acquisition of old and famous deities was also a feature of the era.

The crowning social achievement in Nabakrishna's career was the ekjai he held. This was an assembly of Kulins and Ghataks which elected him Goshtipati or head of the Dakshin Rarhi section of the Kayastha community. By virtue of this command over the most powerful caste in Calcutta, Nabakrishna came to control a substantial section of the Brahmin community, too. There is one element in Nabakrishna's social leadership which indicates a departure from tradition. He became the social leader even of Kulin Kayasthas and Brahmins in spite of his second grade position in Kayastha hierarchy.

The fact that he was only one among a large number of aspirants to social position, though the most successful of them, indicates the volume of social activity in traditional Calcutta. A steady migration of high caste people, among them Sanskrit scholars or adhyapakas, was one of the direct results of Calcutta's emergence as a centre of traditional social activity.

In all this activity there was a certain deviation from the norm, a hectic imbalance due largely to the unusual concentration of opulent people in a limited area. The performance of sradhs may be regarded as the most typical expression of traditional activity. In a Supreme Court document of the early 19th century, the following deposition occurs:—

[It seeks to give an idea of the expenditure at the Sradh of Nemychurn Mullik].

"I am about 60 or 61 years of age. I was 15 years of age when I came to Calcutta. I knew Nemychurn Mullik........ I made the dan: by guess I distributed about 14 or 15 thousand rupees. Danotsarga consisted of gold, silver, woollen clothes, palanquin, horses .... Kangalis numbered about 2 lakhs, coming mainly from outside Calcutta and filled houses from Jaunbazar to Baghbazar. Kangalis got Re. 1 each,? got Rs. 2 each. Beggars were let into empty Thakurbaris of the houses........ I knew Raja Nubkissen. I was at his mother's Sradh. There were great
numbers of Kangalis .... I remember three famous sradhs in Bengal — Raja Nubkissen's mother's, Gangagobinda Singh's mother's and Nemychurn Mullik's Sradh .... A man performs according to the property he possesses....... Upon the performance of Gangagobinda's mother's sradh some say 18 lakhs, some say 20 lakhs were spent. People came from 12 to 15 days' journey. I do not know the expenses of Sradh of Nubkissen’s mother — some say 4 lakhs, some 5 lakhs." [dan means offerings and gifts, danotsarga has similar meaning, Kangali means beggar; Thakurbari means temple attached to residential houses].

The performance of the sradh of Nabakrishna's mother is part of the traditional history of Calcutta. The early 19th century which was, in many respects, a continuation of the late 18th century is well served by newspaper material in which events that figure most prominently are the sradhs. The phenomenon of sati, which was basically an urban or suburban phenomenon, becomes more comprehensible against the background of an upsurge of traditional activity. The early 19th century reaction against these excesses took the most characteristic form in Brahmoism which above all stressed the virtues of balance and sobriety against the turmoil of traditional social practices. A vivid description of the sradh ceremony of Raja Nabakrishna's mother occurs in the pages of a 19th century journal. The description is based on current traditions about the event, and, even if this is exaggerated, its overall significance is enhanced by much circumstantial evidence :

"There were full thirty days between the death and the sradh day and Nubkissen's countrymen made good this advantage. At first the beggars, Bhats and Pariahs undertook the journey. Next there were those whose condition oscillated between decency and beggary. Lastly, men even in competent circumstances, tempted by large expectations and urged by greedy wives, complied with the small chance of being distinguished in the crowd, followed .... As presents were given per head the very babies were brought and when many of them died of suffocation, the parents preserved them for the occasion and exhibited them as if they were alive, added to their incomes........

All the pundits of Bengal and many even of Benares were invited and came. Nubkissen with all his wealth could ill afford accommodation for the host. But in all cases where he failed, the Hindoo inhabitants of the city and the surrounding village opened their hospitable doors. The beggars slept in the fields, under trees and on the roadside. The dietic resources and the confectionary skill of the whole country were invoked to feed the motley mass of humanity .... A nation besieging Nubkissen was too much for him. Some who had travelled a fortnight or twenty days received nothing at all. But the amlahs literally made fortunes .... Popular estimation reckons that sum [ the sum spent at the Sradh] at nine lacs of rupees."

It is against this background of traditional activity that the new elite groups were consolidated on a traditional basis. The banian motif in society
was rapidly merging into the Raja motif. When the nineteenth century opened this was still the most vital force in society.

The challenge of Rammohun to the traditional system as it had established itself in Calcutta struck the first authentic metropolitan chord. The initial doubts of Rammohun could well arise out of a traditional Sanskrit-Persian education and they did. Such doubts, because of their essentially intellectual character, distinguishing them from the Bhakti line of dissent, would have very definitely remained at a personal level. In a traditional rural environment, a defiance of social authority would have brought the whole machinery of excommunication into action. Rammohun's dissent acquired the character of challenge in an environment where non-traditional forces were showing evidence of some action. An area of social freedom, still very narrow and quite unformed, was emerging, or perhaps had already emerged. Rammohun's challenge to idolatry at that historical stage had more than religious implications. The form of its expression was not of the traditionally mystic kind but a systematic criticism under a new urge. On a public level, the dissent indicated a new organization in the form of association of diverse types of people, representing urban variety up to a certain extent, namely zamindars, scholars both of traditional and new learning, middle class men and aristocrats. On a domestic level, this dissent indicated a concept of individual comfort. In his preface to *Kena Upanishad* (1817) Rammohun expresses his desire to correct the "exceptionable practices which not only deprive Hindus, in general, of the common comforts of society, but also lead them frequently to self destruction ... A Hindu of caste can eat only once between sunrise and sunset, cannot eat victuals in a boat or ship ... nor any food that has been touched by a person of different caste, nor if interrupted while eating can he resume his meal."

The dissent of Rammohun and early Brahmoism anticipates many social developments inevitable under the influence of urbanism and new education; yet, Brahmoism, throughout the nineteenth century, retained the distinct stamp of its origin in a more than usual emphasis on the principles of balance and sobriety, representing a distinct recoil from some of the features of practical Hinduism.

The hostility aroused by Rammohun was intense and bitter. The orthodox bloc had acquired remarkable cohesion from the middle of the 18th century. The traditional values had not only been established but had acquired a new vigour. Rammohun's monotheism was in itself a challenge. It became more so where some new factors combined with it. The *Atmiya Sabha* founded in 1815, represented a new mode of organization which gave an unusual prominence to the anti-idolatrous views of Rammohun and his followers. Added to this were the new dialectical weapons furnished by the press — pamphlets, tracts and newspapers. The movement against Sati furnished another new factor — that of systematic campaign. The orthodox counterblast was impressive. The petition against the abolition of Sati derived wide support from the most powerful elements in
society. The foundation of the *Dharma Sabha* in 1830 was an impressive testimony to the power and grandeur of traditional forces.

During the period of Rammohun's dissent, or roughly from the first to the third decade of the 19th century, the structure of metropolitan society had been undergoing some modification. New accession to the opulent stratum was getting restricted as the old categories of banians and dewans were losing some of their grip on trade and administration under the combined influence of Cornwallsian system and Agency Houses. Monetary transactions with Europeans were still very profitable. Rammohun established the base of his opulence through money lending business in Calcutta from 1797 to 1815 and purchased zamindaris yielding an annual income of Rs. 10,000. But the Europeans had generally outgrown the need for absolute dependence on Indian agency. Profits from such positions as those of banians and dewans were thus modest by 18th century standards. A striking exception was Ramdulal Dey, who, however, build the foundation of his fortune in the late 18th century and did much independent business, besides being banian to the redoubtable Fairlie Ferguson & Co. The general trend in this period was towards the growth of a class of moderate opulence below the established 18th century elite. Ganganarain Sircar was Sircar to the Palmer & Co and amassed considerable wealth. Ramkamal Sen (1783-1844), founder of the famous Sen family of Kalutola, was treasure to the Bank of Bengal. Radha Madhab Banerjee made his fortune by holding the post of dewan under Government in the opium factory at Patna.

While a second layer of opulent community was forming in the early 19th century, a diversification of personality types, representing a distinct shift from the eighteenth century monolith of tradition, was becoming increasingly perceptible. Rammohun's forceful opponent, Radha Kanta Deb (1784-1867), the acknowledged leader of traditionalism, tended to interpret tradition not in terms of hectic religious or social activity but through emphasis on a kind of balance and propriety. Ramkamal Sen was rigidly orthodox in religious and social observances but he combined this with a remarkable zeal for education and public service in the western sense.

Radhakanta Deb took a leading part in the foundation of the Hindu College and was an active member of its Managing Committee. "On the foundation of the School Book Society, the Hindus feared to purchase books published under its patronage list they should contain anything inimical to religion; he became one of its leading members ... and paved the way for the introduction of its books into native schools and society". He himself was educated at Mr. Cumming's Academy, a private English school. He stressed the importance of female education, though not in public schools, and considered it to be quite in agreement with the Hindu Shastra. He edited the great Sanskrit lexicon, *Sadbakaalpadruma*, and was the Vice-President of the Agricultural and Horticultural Society. In his will he strictly limited the expenditure on his obsequies to ten thousand rupees.
Ram Kamal Sen began as a compositor in Dr. Hunter’s Hindustani Press on eight rupees a month. He attracted the attention of Dr. Wilson, who later became Professor of Sanskrit in the University of Oxford. He was first promoted to some 'subordinate situation' in the establishment of the Arabic Society, which introduced him to the notice of some of the most distinguished members of the European society. He had by that time acquired considerable fluency in English. A colloquial knowledge of English was rare at that time. He became member of the Committee of the Calcutta School Book Society and helped in the compilation and translation of several useful works. The organization of the Hindu College (1817) owes much to his ability to manage the complicated details of business. He was placed at the head of the Native Establishment of the Mint by Dr. Wilson, the Assay Master. This was a highly responsible and lucrative position which raised him to a great distinction. He later on accepted the office of Treasurer to the Bank of Bengal. He was on the committee of the Asiatic Society, a Vice-President of the Agricultural Society. He was yet 'a bigoted Hindu' for he was 'never in advance of his creed'.

‘For all their rigid attachment to tradition, both Radhakanta Deb and Ramkamal Sen were products of a distinct change in metropolitan environment. Among Rammohun’s close associates and collaborators, Dwarkanath Tagore and Prasannakumar Tagore represented a combination of the influence of western education, financial ability and family tradition. From the point of view of family origin, they emerged out of the 18th century elite; but in their personalities can be found, in a highly forceful form, clear symptoms of the growth of new structural elements in metropolitan society.

It was not till the late twenties and early thirties that the emergence of a distinct element in society, opposed to the old dominant group, affords clear indication of a rival system of values. What had been emerging was an intelligentsia in the western sense of the term. The stratum of society from which the new force was making itself felt may be placed somewhere below the opulent layers of the metropolitan community. A contemporary journal described, in 1830, the scholars of Hindu College as "sons of dewans, brothers of clerks, nephews of cashiers (Khajanchis) or grandsons of Sarkars dealing with the disposal, auction and sale of goods". A contemporary literary work appears to refer to this element as 'bhadrolok' or gentry in both comfortable and straitened circumstances.

The thirties and forties of the 19th century afford opportunity for a study of contradictory trends, social potentialities and frustrated possibilities. Though lacking in the firmness of the later era, it has greater breadth and wider, though uncertain, vision. Economically, Bengali society was still subject to the possibilities represented by commerce and capital. Socially and intellectually it had been abruptly opened to new forces.
The death of Ramdulal De, the Bengali millionaire, in 1825, did, indeed, mark the end of an epoch in Bengali commercial activity. But the old commercial tradition with its strong speculative bias still produced merchants like Motilal Seal and Biswanath Motilal, both of whom attained great prominence in the thirties and forties. Motilal Seal is described as a successor of Ramdulal De to the dictatorship of the Calcutta money market. The other facet of commercial activity is represented in a highly sophisticated form by Dwarkanath Tagore. The High Court Records and contemporary journals, both English and Bengali, are full of references to his activity. The wide scope of his business interests was unusual even by European standards in India and represents an entrepreneurial outlook which was a singular phenomenon in Bengali society. The whole complex of Dwarkanath's business interests included Calcutta house properties, zamindaris, indigo factories, silk filatures, banks, insurance and commercial houses, and finally, coal mines. A kindred individual in the Indian business world in Calcutta was the Parsee merchant, Rustomjee Cowasjee, mainly interested in the shipment of opium and organization of insurance companies. The High Court Records indicate that a number of Bengali families were involved in opium transactions and some possessed indigo factories. A work on family history describes one Ram Sanyal of Calcutta as the proprietor of 24 (?) indigo factories. Bengali interest, during this period, in banking and European mode of business was fairly present. Yet the character of Dwarkanath's enterprise was very different from the prevailing norms in Bengali commercial community. The unusual character of Dwarkanath's endeavour does not, however, obscure the fact that he was the product of an environment still very much subject to the pull of commercialism.

The operation of a distinct non-commercial pull on society at this stage is represented by Prasannakumar Tagore, who belonged to the senior branch of the Tagore family as Dwarkanath belonged to the junior. They had a remarkable kinship of ideas, attitudes and enterprise. Prasannakumar's branch of the Tagore family had a strong commercial background. But the family received a severe shock in opium transactions. With his remarkable knowledge of English and law, Prasannakumar was finally attached to the lucrative profession of law. His choice of a profession of a purely western type was the beginning of a significant development in the occupational structure of Bengal society. Prasannakumar combined his legal practice with personal management of the zamindaris. He first started by pleading his own zamindari cases at the law court. This combination of activities on two different lines was also practised by Dwarkanath. Such a combination, however, became highly unusual from the point of view of later developments and is the evidence of a striking intensity of initiative in the early stage of westernization in Bengal. Dwarkanath's departure from the line of traditional commercial activity and Prasannakumar's choice of a non-traditional profession are, however, significant in quite different ways. Dwarkanath's
enterprise was quite an individual phenomenon in Bengal society. Prasannakumar's choice is directly linked with the phenomenon of western education and with the somewhat narrow channel along which it was to bring changes in Bengali society.

On the same plane as Prasannakumar, another person had been attracting much prominence in Calcutta in the twenties and thirties. Son of a rich banian, Nilmony Datta, founder of the fame of a highly anglicised family with a pronounced literary bent, Rasomoy Dutta (1799-1854) rose to be a judge in Calcutta Small Causes Court. In his personality, too, there is a combination of a high degree of knowledge of English and law. He started as a Book Keeper to the firm of Messrs. Davidson & Co. on a salary of Rs. 16 and later worked in several commercial houses before his judicial appointment. He left a property of six lakhs of rupees and a family that produced both literary and administrative talent. Rasomoy Dutta was a linguist who knew English, Bengali, Arabic and Persian.

Both Prasannakumar and Rasomoy acquired English education on a private level. The Hindu College, founded in 1817, had started releasing, by the late twenties, groups of young men who had received English education on an organised public level. The Young Bengal, the category by which the new groups were described, were still a highly mixed phenomenon but the dominant element in it becomes unmistakable from its final social orientation. Among the prominent members of these groups were Tarachand Chakrabarti, Chandrasekhar Deb, Ramgopal Ghosh, Rasik Krishna Mallik, Ramtanu Lahiri, Krishnomohan Banerjee, Harimohan Sen, Hur Chandra Ghosh, Dakshina Ranjan Mukherjee, Nilmony Basak, Peary Chand Mitra and Shibchandra Deb. Tarachand and Chandrasekhar belonged to families of little distinction. Tarachand was educated in a free school. Ramgopal’s father was a clothier in China Bazar. Ramtanu Lahiri came from Krishnanagar where his family was in the employ of Nadia Raj. Krishnomohan belonged to a very poor Brahman family. Harimohan’s family had earned distinction through the qualities of his self-made father, Ramkamal Sen. Harimohon Ghosh belonged to an affluent family of some distinction in the city. Pyarichand Mitra belonged to a family of banians but not of a quite opulent type. Shibchandra Deb came from an established family in Connogore, a large suburban village. Rasik Krishna came of an established commercial family. So did Nilmani who belonged to the declining commercial clan of the Basaks. Dakshinaranjan was connected with the senior branch of the Tagore family.

The professional orientation of these groups was mainly in the direction of subordinate judicial and executive service. Two other lines were represented by Ramgopal and Ramtanu. Ramtanu became a teacher and Ramgopal a businessman. The Society for the Acquisition of General Knowledge, mainly active in the forties, had a fair number of medical
students. The case of Ramgopal was exceptional. He had, however, wound up his business towards the end of his career.

For a certain period of time after the introduction of English education, the future of English scholars was somewhat uncertain. This was especially so in the thirties. The material value of new education had not yet been quite established; nor were the social bearings of the new force growing out of the middle layers of metropolitan society. The element of uncertainty in the position of the new social force represented by Young Bengal, created, for a time, an emphatic confrontation between tradition and change in which both can be observed in a scene of graphic exaggeration. This confrontation was not over any particular issue, such as that of Sati in an earlier decade or widow remarriage of a later decade. It represented differences in the attitudes of two generations, abruptly brought into focus by an unorthodox education. But it was not simply a conflict between generations. The attachment of the rising groups to new ideas derived its peculiar strength mainly from the freshness of these ideas in a traditional society. The social scene of the thirties, and to some extent also of the forties, acquires a particular liveliness from a continued effervescence of traditional activity, on the one hand, and hectic intellectual activity, with a pronounced tinge of dissent, on the other.

The challenge of Rammohun had given the orthodox forces an opportunity for organization. Dharma Sabha, established in 1830, received support from the old opulent families of Calcutta. In the thirties, the Sabha represented an organized effort, on something of a western model, to reinforce traditional practices through, among other things, the instrument of excommunication. The effectiveness of the Sabha, for some time, was striking. But then a certain note of unreality crept into it, indicating the weakness of traditional leadership in metropolitan society.

On a traditional plane, the metropolis continued to be the centre of grand sradh's, a typical expression of traditional activity, magnificent marriages and entertainments like panchalis and half-akhrais. Contemporary journals are full of references to them. The occurrence of the death of a rich and socially celebrated person's parent tended to create a stir not only in the city but also in the districts around. In 1830, the death of Ramgopal Mullick's mother (Ramgopal was the eldest son of Nemicharan Mullick, one of the most opulent Indians in the late 18th century Calcutta) drew a tremendous number of mendicants towards the city. A journal reports that Ramgopal had spent seven lakhs of rupees on his father's sradh. At his mother's sradh he gave away four Dan Sagars (Oceans of gifts) of which many articles were in gold; "he also gave sixteen brises (bulls?), and to the Gosaes (Vaisnava priests) and Brahmins, shawls and embroidery and goldrings. .... But he was disgraced because of his inability to cope with the immense crowd of beggars who created chaos." The paper comments on the impoverishment and disgrace of opulent persons overwhelmed under the pressure of suppliants on such occasions. But the tradition continued. In 1838, at the sradh of Asutosh Dey's mother
(Asutosh Dey was a son of the rich banian Ramdulal), there was the same combination of lavishness and confusion. In 1846, the Englishman reports a grand  _sradh_ on which two lakhs of rupees had been spent. "The Babu presented to the Brahmins a large elephant, a beautiful horse, a nice looking Palankeen in addition to several gold and silver articles and valuable Cashmere shawls".

At marriages in rich families large number of pundits, ghataks, and Kulins continued to be invited. On festive or religious occasions, the traditional _yatras_ and rhyme combats were held.

A certain change had, however, been coming over the pattern of entertainments and festivals. The Durga Puja, essentially a domestic festival, had even before the thirties, taken an Anglo-Bengali character with _nautches_ and parties attended by Europeans. The Kabi songs and combats of the late 18th century growth had been declining as a genre of entertainment. Experiments in the theatre were receiving public approval. The steady urban orientation of entertainments was a noticeable feature of this period.

The slow and often subterranean processes of change worked in various ways. An instance of the encroachment of change on orthodoxy is furnished by popular acceptance of wheat grinding mill in 1829. The introduction of artificial dissection passed off almost peacefully in 1833. The orthodox forces themselves had taken a leading part in the growth of English education. The _Dharma Sabha_ itself had brought together castes widely separated in traditional hierarchy —Kayasthas, Subarnabaniks, Brahmins and Pirali Brahmins.

The cumulative effect of these changes on the defence and patronage of tradition was far from being immediately felt. The challenge of Rammohon had strengthened the defence mechanism of traditional society and the failure of the movement for the revocation of anti- _Sati_ legislation had accentuated defensive reaction. The new Brahmo Samaj was in the doldrums after Rammohan's departure and that had added to the confidence of the orthodox group. In such a situation the Young Bengal felt a sense of isolation that for some time exaggerated their reaction. The ardour of Young Bengal for the ideological implications of English education, though often of an adolescent character, acquired a striking seriousness in the society of the thirties in view of a sharp differentiation of groups. The basic concern of Young Bengal was with some abstract ideas, chiefly the right of independent thinking. The family priest, the family deity, the large mass of traditionalists led by old opulent families and guided sometimes by uneducated Brahmins, constituted a force, whose impact on society was constantly felt, especially by the young students and graduates of the Hindu College. It was a galling sensation to obey the dictates of a family priest in the matter of personal beliefs and convictions. The strength of this sensation led them into attacks on traditional Hinduism. Rasik Krishna Mullick's open denial of sanctity of the Ganges, Radhanath Sikdar's insistence on beef eating ('Beef eaters are never bullied'), Ramgopal
Ghose's refusal to undergo *prayashchitta* or penance, the saucy school boy's cavalier treatment of a Hindu Goddess (Good Morning, Madam) become comprehensible in the context of the period. It is quite fitting that this period was dominated by the personality of Derozio, whose death in 1831 did not diminish his influence. His radicalism was essentially one of ideas, and belonging as he did outside the Hindu society, —he was a Eurasian —retained a kind of detachment from the institutions and values of that society.

The conflicts of the thirties were too strong to last in a society that was not exposed to any basic change in the fundamental social institutions. Even during the height of the Young Bengal revolt, the rebels faced the dilemma between family and freedom. Attachment to family was even then a strong force, loyalty to which was abandoned only in extreme circumstances. The new education was affecting almost exclusively the traditionally literate castes. It did not involve any serious challenge to the caste structure.

A basic factor in the Young Bengal revolt must have been a strong sense of isolation in a society still dominated by old entrenched families like those of 18th century origin. The increasing number of English educated people in the forties was dispelling the former sense of isolation. The combination of orthodox and rich people, represented specially by the *Dharma Sabha*, was declining in influence. The recognition by the Government of the pre-eminence of English in official and judicial matters made English education respectable from the late thirties. With the growing respectability of English education, the educated community started settling down into a secure position in society and tended to form what may be described as a 'middle class' society.

At a later stage, a social analyst describes this process of transition as a progress towards compromise and homogeneity. Writing about the effects of English education, he comments: — "Literature cannot disorganize society. If the one factitious thing called literature had any tendency to disorganize society, the many necessities of existence are so inimical to disorder that the tendency cannot but be extremely short lived. . .". He describes the change from old orthodoxy to educated heterodoxy as a 'change in Idea and Taste'. "And as a change in Idea", continues the observer, "unaccompanied by a contrariety of practice, is a change confined exclusively to the mind of the individual, in whom it has been accomplished, it cannot be a case of social discord or disorganization. At any rate it cannot be a change of a very offensive character". A change in tastes, too, he remarks, is seldom a case of social discord. In the opinion of the social analyst, "certain circumstances were wanting which have a tendency to counteract, in a material degree, the disorganizing influence of the study of English. As time is rolling on, the other generation of Hindus is declining in number and, what amounts to the same thing, is declining in social activity and thus homogeneity in ideas and tastes is becoming wider and wider."
The idea of homogeneity and compromise may be, however, misleading, if it is interpreted to mean a uniformity of pattern and a complete stabilization in society. In Young Bengal days, social change had not been extensive or deep enough to lead to a uniformly stabilized situation. The period following the Young Bengal days saw several phases of the growth of the Brahmo movement, causing fresh tensions in certain areas of metropolitan society. The widow remarriage movement caused a brief but powerful stir. Later still, the question of Kulin polygamy provoked a tremor of social conscience. One feature of the new social movements was their comparatively extensive character. The Brahmo movement penetrated into certain interior regions, especially the growing 'mufussil' towns. The agitation of public mind over the widow remarriage question was also not a mere metropolitan phenomenon and was reflected even in popular songs in the interior. But the vast traditional society was at the same time exerting its powerful pull, the metropolis being increasingly subjected to it with the growing formalization of English education and the narrowing lines of the growth of the Bengali metropolitan community.

The equation of heterodoxy and new education had ceased to be valid even by the late forties of the 19th century. In 1846 quite a stir was created in Calcutta by Debendranath Tagore's refusal to worship Salgram silica (the stone symbolising Narayan) at the obsequies of his father Dwarkanath. The application of the monotheistic principle to social rites was resisted by Radhakanta Deb and Prasannakumar Tagore. The latter had been a follower of Rammohun Roy and benevolent observer of Young Bengal movement in the late twenties and thirties.

A distinction was made between intellectual or spiritual principles and social conventions. Debendranath was advised not to deviate from the traditional practice in social observances. Debendranath himself was not rejecting the social character of the Hindu obsequies. He distributed gifts among the Brahmins. But he insisted on performing the sacraments according to the monotheistic principles of the Upanishads. His keen awareness of Hindu traditions and a spirited defence of these traditions against the challenge of Christianity at a critical moment obscured the significance of this controversy. Later on (1861), the step taken by Debendranath led to revision of Hindu sacraments for Brahmo usage.

In the mid-19th century, Brahmoism was still a very fluid concept. It stood basically for an intellectual and spiritual attitude. Debendranath himself was intrinsically attached to such an approach to Brahmoism, because of the natural reserve and caution of his character. But to hold on to some principle with a certain degree of consistency demands some approximation in practice. Even in the conservative stage of its evolution, roughly in the fifties, the inner core of the Brahmo Samaj, because of changed attitude towards the sacraments and to the status and education of women, was slowly drifting towards the position of a social group somewhere on the fringe of Hindu society. It was a position of some isolation, which was sought to be minimised by what came to be called the Adi (old)
Brahmo Samaj but was accentuated by the 'progressive' wing of the Samaj. This position resulted in a certain deficiency in the fibre of the Brahmo Samaj after the rebellious force of Keshab Sen's movement had subsided by the end of the third quarter of the 19th century.

In a basically traditional society where there had been little structural change, Brahmoism represented essentially the force of ideas — ideas born mainly of new education and to some extent, also of the new urban set-up. Both ideas and urbanism suffered from some incongruity with the deeply laid traditional forces. From the point of view of a non-Brahmo, Brahmoism represented a measure of unreality, a feeling not unoften, expressed in the strengthening media of traditionalist forces late in the 19th century. The isolation of the Brahmos, virtually as an endogamous social group, helped the forces of tradition to consolidate themselves in the great bulk of the growing urban Hindu educated community. The social observer in the Hindoo Patriot, described the dominant spirit as one of 'healthy conservatism'. The observer did not deny that Hinduism had received a shock from English education. But, in his opinion, it was equally true that Hinduism, in its larger sense, embraced a variety of customs and usages which would survive on the strength of the 'sympathy they had been able to evoke from the heart and intellect'.

The attachment to customs and usages of the traditional society underlay the growth of a kind of neo-conservatism — a force that gathered increasing strength with the progress of the 19th century. The logical implications of an unorthodox English education were largely offset by existing social realities. The defence of tradition in this situation was not merely an abstract intellectual stance but proceeded from the objective core of society, represented, in the final analysis, by the family. The dualism in the pattern of behaviour, within and outside the family circle, of impetuous Young Bengal in the heady days of early English education was noticed and commented upon in a leading Bengali journal in the thirties. It may be maintained that English education and the other new forces in urban environment were eating away some of the traditional defences of society and had demonstrated, even in the early 19th century, the virtual ineffectiveness of the traditional machinery of excommunication and were clear signs of the weakening of the coercive power of caste as an organization.

The continuity of tradition and its hold on the broad mass of educated town-dwelling Bengalis in the late 19th century often found expression in a conscious assessment of traditional domestic values. The tensions within the traditional family system and the forces of cleavage might have been sharpened but the joint family adapted itself to the situation. In the course of being transplanted from rural to urban Bengal, the traditional family system lost some of its complexities of blood relationship. Joint responsibility for the land, need for sharing the family home and the force of rural public opinion imparted a compulsive character to the joint family system in rural Bengal. The element of option and choice in living together, an
element whose presence might not have been consciously felt by most people, was a new urban phenomenon. The general tendency in urban Bengal was towards the formation of smaller joint families. At an advanced stage of its development, the process was thus described by a correspondent to the Sadler Commission:

"The majority of students who flock to the schools and colleges belong to the orthodox middle classes. Most of these families still live in the villages. Since the introduction of English education, however, there has been a regular influx of Bhadrolok classes towards the metropolis or to one or other of the 'mafassal' towns. They have been attracted thither by the new openings created by the British administrative machinery, so that people who were in the past content to live and die within the surroundings of their own village, have, in order to share the life of the metropolis, transformed themselves into an urban society which is composed of lawyers, doctors, engineers, school masters, clerks and officials. Many of these, however, have not yet cut off ties with the original village homes. The temporary house in town is called 'basha', the word 'bari' (home) being confined to the ancestral home in the village. It is in the latter (unless economic considerations stand on the way) that marriages, sradhs (ceremonial offerings to the dead) and other family rites are preferably celebrated; it is there that the holidays are spent; it is there that family gods are enshrined and worshipped throughout the year. Economic considerations and the difficulties of communication are, however, effecting a change here also. There is an increasing tendency to cut off all ties with the village and to convert the town residence, into a new home. Even in these cases, however, there persists a sentimental tie with the old village".

A typical Hindu home, the correspondent remarked, was a composite structure. At the head there was often the old grand-father or grand-mother. Then there were the sons of the house, who were the earning members of the family. The grand-father continued to be the head of the family, although he might have ceased to earn. Neither marriage nor settling down in life raised the question of a son's leaving his parental home. Even where he had to spend the best part of the year away from the central home, he regarded himself as belonging to it and contributed to the joint income of the family. The grand parents represented the orthodox tradition. Their indulgence to grand-children never went so far as to conflict violently with their most cherished ideas.

The father of the family belonged in most cases to one of the learned professions or to the machinery of administration. He had had his education in English schools and colleges. Perhaps, in his youth the intoxication of the new culture threw him off his balance and drew him into the ranks of social and religious revolutionaries. But, since those days, he had married and settled down in life. He had had children and his real experience of life. This experience and the suitable income derived from his occupation had sobered him down. If he had really come into close
contact with western ideas, he led a two-fold life, his intellectual life that was fed by the memories of Byron and Shelley, of Mill, Macaulay and Bentham, and his family life fed by domestic affections and protected from external shocks by an indulgent and amused compliance with the forms and rigours of old social order.

The process may be described as a kind of adjustment within the traditional family system. It is thus significant that beside the polemics over the social reform movements, a steady trend of thinking about domestic values is clearly discernible in 19th century social thought. In the middle of the 19th century, the two most vocal representatives of political and social thought in Bengal, Harish Mukherjee and Grish Ghosh, made an emphatic defence of the basic values of the traditional domestic system. Both of them stood for new heterodoxy against old orthodoxy and in this respect, were clearly linked with the rationalist traditions of Young Bengal. But they leave no doubt about their attachment to what they considered to have been the ideals underlying the joint family system.

Harish Mukherjee refers specifically to the state of family property which ensures maintenance to all members of a family, born and unborn. Grish Ghosh had an unfortunate personal experience with his co-perceners in an old Calcutta joint family. But, for all his antipathy to the joint family system as a mere living together of co-parceners, he showed a deep appreciation of "the domestic feelings and affection of the Hindu, his pure benevolent love of kith and kin, the result doubtless of caste and the isolated condition of family life" (he wrote in 1866).

The powerful hold of positivism on late 19th century Bengali thought was clearly in favour of the traditional family system. The most representative thinker of this group, Jogendra Chandra Ghosh, makes a characteristic defence of the traditional family system. He points out that the joint family system deserves serious study as a Hindu experiment in the solution of the poverty problem. The peculiarity of the joint family system, the writer continues, is that the members are actuated not so much by a regard for personal and material advantages as by a natural and disciplined attachment to the blood tie and the mutual bond of affection. The writer admits certain drawbacks of the joint family system, particularly so far as they affect the relations between the husband and his wife. He takes advice of individualist ideas that are affecting filial or fraternal relations. "We should", he suggests, "devote attention to the subject in order to point out how the ends of communism, so long established, may be satisfied consistently with relieving the existing strain upon the conjugal relations of the Hindus".

A particularly interesting appraisal of the traditional domestic values occurs in Bhudeb Mukhopadhyay's *Paribarik Prabandha*, (1888) or *Essays on Family Matters*. Bhudeb was one of those unusual personalities who sought to mould his way of life according to some clearly understood principles. He was concerned primarily with the value of
traditional ideals for family happiness. His definition of a joint family did not imply 'jointness' of property. Rather he was in favour of a clear division of parental property between brothers to forestall future bitterness. This would preserve the bonds of affection and love, enshrined, in his view, in the 'ancestral ideal' which is represented by the 'image of parents in the hearts of children'. Bhudeb advised that the traditional bonds of consanguinity should be respected for their contribution to social happiness. For Bhudeb, Hindu society had passed the purely clan stage of social development but it had not widened to the extent western society had. Relations with kinsmen had a special utility in Hindu society.

In his approach to conjugal relationship, he was essentially in favour of mutual understanding and respect. But Bhudeb was almost uncomromisingly in favour of child marriage, which, in his view, was the best insurance of conjugal happiness. He expressed his deep admiration for the traditional ideal of chastity, which, in his view, impelled voluntary self-immolation in the past (satidaha). The essence of womanhood consisted for him in sweet flowerlike qualities. In his mind the child bride represented the embodiment of these qualities. The standards Bhudeb endeavoured to set demanded a degree of sensibility far from common in society. Yet they had clear links with the pragmatic concept of 'desachar' or prevailing social norms, which, purged of its grossest elements represented, for Bhudeb, the standard of social conduct. Child marriage was the prevailing social custom; it was believed to have contributed to family stability and, therefore, to happiness. So child marriage was necessary. But a purely utilitarian view of child marriage is not enough. Society needed and did have an ideal in the concept of the flowerlike qualities of womanhood, which were believed to have been embodied in the child bride. In the growing metropolitan society of orthodox middle classes, open no doubt to slow and often imperceptible processes of change, the institution of Hindu marriage, so far as it represented a kind of social idealism, appears to have caught the imagination of the great majority of educated men.

The great controversy over the Age of Consent Bill of 1891, which proposed to raise the age of consent of girls from ten to twelve, demonstrated the remarkable grip of tradition on the great bulk of the educated community in the metropolis. The progressive Brahmos supported the Bill and the Brahmo journal Indian Mirror tried to rally the educated community in defence of the measure. The progressive Brahmos, however, made little impression on the educated community outside the pale of Brahmosim. The Indian Mirror recognized the strength of opposition and faithfully reported all protest meetings against the Bill. A particularly striking protest meeting was that organised by the graduates of Calcutta and at the Star Theatre, which was 'packed to its utter capacity'. Similar meetings of educated people were held in different parts of the city and the attendance of medical and law graduates was particularly noticeable.
The attitude of the Hindoo Patriot, still fairly representative of educated opinion, reflects deep convictions in certain matters of tradition and custom. In the opinion of the Patriot Hindu marriage law imposes an obligation on guardians to marry their female wards and a corresponding disability on girls in exercising their right to marry on their own initiative. Sampradan is fundamental in Hindu marriage. The Hindu religious law of marriage would be overturned the moment it was made to hinge on the girl's consent, ignoring the disability referred to. Raising the marriageable age of girls will have serious repercussions on the Hindu joint family. "Hindu society is so constituted", remarks an influential leader of the traditional school, "that early marriage is a necessary institution for the preservation of our social order. Its abolition would destroy the system of joint family and caste".

The defence of child marriage in the leading Bengali journals, the Education Gazette (a Bengali journal with an English name) and the Dainik O Samachar Chandrika, is at times highly interesting for the manner in which it clarifies a vital aspect of social history; that is, what the average educated people tended to think about their social milieu. "It is the object of the Hindu Sastras," asserts the Dainik O Samachar Chandrika, "that a girl should, after her marriage, merge herself completely in her husband's family and begin to look upon that family as being nearer and dearer to her than her father's family. The Hindu girl must, after her marriage, become merged in her husband and become one with him .... How can this fusion be possible without early mutual association."

In the context of the prevalent state of mind, the failure of the widow remarriage movement was a normal development. A contemporary journal thus describes it :

"The movement about the remarriage of widows has been a failure. Vidyasagar lived to see that failure. We can never forget the shock he gave to society in Bengal by his first book in support of the legality of remarriage ...... The task ...... that Vidyasagar proposed to himself, to prove the legality of such marriages from the ancient Dharma Shastras, could be productive of no practical results".

The defence of the Hindu institution of marriage, though it rose from the core of society, was yet somewhat magnified in pitch. In its encounter with the West, the educated Bengali community felt deep admiration for western achievements in the material and intellectual spheres. But the other side of his mind resented this western superiority and sought for some compensatory phenomenon in Indian tradition that could, to some extent, match western superiority and encourage self-respect. The institution of child marriage was being slowly undermined by the compulsion of the economic position of the middle classes or 'bhadrolok' who were dependent finally on professions and services. The limited opportunities of good employment, and especially the fear of unemployment, in the face of expanding education system, tended to create some misgivings about
early marriage. The Report on the Census of Bengal for 1901 refers to a noticeable rise in the age at marriage among the 'Bhadrolok' class in Bengal. The 'Bhadrolok' families were making the utmost effort towards educating their sons to the highest degree and to help them face the deepening problems of life.

The educated Bengali, for all his genuinely conservative attitude, was still a product of more than half a century of change, however limited in character. The background of social movements and tensions over social questions from Rammohan to Vidyasagar, did contribute significant, though not always tangible, elements to the educated Bengali’s mental make-up and also to his way of life. The process had been making itself felt also in the interior of Bengal. The Young Bengal had challenged and had virtually destroyed priestly influence on educated mind and processes of thinking. The progressive Brahmos had defied some of the basic traditions. The universally respected man in late 19th century society in Bengal was Iswarchandra Vidyasagar, the Great Dissenter of the era.

But exposure to change of the kind that followed mainly from new education, which created qualifications for professional services and only very partially from the new urban set-up was hardly enough to neutralise the process which may be said to have been leading the middle class society to a kind of impasse. A general awareness of the problems of middle class existence pervades the journals of the late 19th century. The general tone is strikingly different from the robust optimism of the Bengal Spectator and Gyananneshan the Young Bengal journals, and the hopeful economic outlook represented by Samachardarpan, the leading Bengali journal of the thirties and forties.

In an article captioned 'The Problems of Life in Bengal', the Hindoo Patriot refers to several factors responsible for the deterioration in middle class economic position. The Patriot considered that the rising prices of agricultural produce had immensely increased the cost of food and curtailed the resources of a single bread winner of a family for the support of numerous hangers-on, who have been consequently thrown adrift. It observed that English education and contact with Englishmen had created certain 'artificial' wants, which those who had imbibed English notions and feelings, had not the means to meet. "Education, medication and social intercourse had become far more expensive than before....... The future, we must confess, is gloomy. The number of educated men is annually increasing by thousands, and how are they to live ? The sort of education given to them chiefly qualifies them for government employ or employments analogous to it and that field is already overcrowded. Agriculture and trade are the only hope of the people, but unfortunately the men who come out of the schools and colleges, have no experience in agriculture while they have not the necessary capital for trade".
In another article, entitled 'The Middle Classes,' the *Hindoo Patriot* discusses the same question. The *Patriot* again refers to the increasing cost of food, due among other things 'to the cultivation of cash crops like jute, to the stimulation of the export of food from one part of the country to another, and to the fall in the price of silver.' The *Partiot* observed that it was the middle classes which had been chiefly suffering from the enhancement of prices and the absence of suitable employment. The weakening ties of the joint family which almost systematically 'maintained the idle with the earnings of the active', the progressive diminution of the 'ancestral acres' with steady numerical expansion of people dependent on them, were undermining the base of the middle classes, traditionally dependent on them. Great anxiety is felt in settling the children. Marriage had become expensive and if a man had to marry three or four daughters he was not infrequently ruined. The settlement of sons was still more difficult.

The *Hindoo Patriot*, as the organ of an association of the more affluent section of Bengali society, could only partially represent the intensity of this trend in middle class thinking. In journals like the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* and *Sadharani*, the files of which are easily available, and intense awareness of the middle class dilemma in the 19th century, speaks, more than any figures can do, for the growth of a pattern of society that was almost peculiarly Bengali. No other concept applies to it better than the indigenous concept of 'Bhadrolok'. The substitution of the term 'middle class' is permissible only because the term itself is highly elastic; but, outside the western context, an indigenous term is always a better approximation to reality.

The 'Bhadrolok' was in no sense an exclusive product of the 19th century. But the 19th century may be said to have done almost the same thing to him that the Victorian age did to the English middle class. In the peculiar social evolution of Bengal, 'bhadrolok' meant primarily the high caste Hindu gentry of Bengal and was applied to other sections of society, or rather to individuals and persons belonging to those sections, only by analogy. Here there is a broad qualitative difference from the western concept of middle class. The second point of difference is more quantitative. The great bulk of the Bengali 'bhadrolok' partook of the character of rural gentry. The nineteenth century had been adding some new dimensions to the phenomenon of 'bhadrolok', a new middle class dimension being represented by professional men like lawyers and doctors. Pressure on land or ancestral acres might have been creating a kind of 'agrarian crisis' for the Bengali gentry, strengthening the process of migration to the towns or the metropolis. But the major component element of the 'bhadrolok' community still remained rural.

In the metropolis, the Bengali middle class had no real working class or even labouring class base, spontaneously developing from Bengali society. The pattern of migration of workers or labourers to Bengal's
metropolis shows the essentially weak trend of migration of working population from Bengal districts. The metropolis or rather the metropolitan complex of Bengal, did not become an area where any significant degree of communication could develop between the component parts of its population. The absence of a large and substantial Bengali working class, which could indeed develop, given the requisite degree of migration from rural Bengal, even within the limited industrial complex of the late 19th century, appears to have had a certain etiolating effect on the Bengali middle class. This was particularly evident in the great bulk of the ‘bhadrolok’ community which had become indigenous to Calcutta and its neighbourhood.

The labouring class base of the metropolitan society had from the inception of the metropolis been influenced by the peculiar nature of migration to the city. Even as early as the late 18th century the palanquin bearers of Calcutta were almost all natives of Orissa. In the large domestic service base of the metropolitan society (110,000 or nearly 1/8th of the inhabitants in 1901) the migration of ‘Chasi Kaibartas’ (cultivators) from Bengal districts constituted a significant element, but that did not counter the striking disparity in the industrial sector created by the singular weakness of the trend of migration from Bengal districts to the growing industrial areas in and around Calcutta. The growth of the industrial town of Howrah from a congeries of villages in mid-19th century was due almost entirely to migration from Bihar and U.P. Nearly half the inhabitants of Howrah in 1911 were born in the U.P. or the Province of Bihar and Orissa and only 45% spoke Bengali, while 47% spoke Hindi and 3% Oriya. The growth of mill towns in the 24-Parganas similarly owed little to migration from Bengal districts. In Bhatpara (1911) four persons spoke Hindi to each person speaking Bengali, in Titagarh 75% spoke Hindi while 11% spoke Bengali. On a rough calculation ‘in most mills two-thirds of the hands were composed of up-countrymen’. In Titagarh, a significant proportion of mill labourers came from the Telegu speaking region.

The pattern of migration from suburban districts to the metropolis proper does not show any marked tendency on the part of artisans and labouring classes towards migration. The largest single unit of migrants from the suburban districts was composed of high caste people who may be said to have belonged to the class of ‘bhadrolok’ or gentry. From Bihar and U.P. the migration was almost wholly of labouring castes. The most important element was represented by the Chamars. Almost all the shoemakers and cobblers as also a very large proportion of mill labour were men of this caste. Some of the professional and artisan castes of Bengal similarly failed to supply the metropolitan demand as also the demand in the interior of Bengal, mostly in the cases of washermen and milkmen.

One reasonable explanation of this peculiar nature of migration, especially in the field of industrial labour, may be found in the two
repeatedly emphasised features of Bengal's agricultural economy, namely the comparative smallness of the class of landless agricultural labourers in Bengal and the higher rates of wages of labour in rural Bengal, the comparison being made between Bihar, U.P. and Orissa, on the one hand, and Bengal, on the other. The Statistical Account of Bengal which profusely quotes from the reports of district collectors makes frequent reference to the scarcity of labour in Bengal districts, especially those of North and East Bengal. The Account describes the situation in the seventies. The census reports of the later period also refer to the scarcity in some detail. The report of 1911 seeks to quantify the phenomenon, though it admits the drawbacks of such quantification.

"Another point which calls for notice is the difference between returns for Bengal, [on the one hand], and Bihar and Orissa, [on the other]. Those dependent on agricultural labour in the latter province are more than twice as numerous as in Bengal, the actual excess being nearly four millions. Some part of the difference may be attributable to the higher standard of census work in Bihar and Orissa: a quarter of a million more persons were entered simply as labourers than in Bengal. [But] the real explanation is that the number of landless field labourers is far greater in Bihar and Orissa than in the richer province of Bengal. The well-to-do Bengali cultivators depend largely on the annual influx of labourers from Bihar and Orissa for reaping their crops, and complaints are frequent of the inadequacy of the supply of local labour. At other seasons of the year, they have a system of mutual exchange of labour and cooperate to work in one another's field in turn …..

"In no part of Bihar and Orissa is the percentage of field labourers to the general population less than one-tenth, the minimum being reached in Orissa, which, in this, as in other respects, resembles Bengal. The maximum is reached in Bihar, where over one-fifth of the total population subsists by field labour. In Bengal, on the other hand, the proportion falls to 5 percent in North Bengal, and to three per cent in East Bengal, where the population consists [chiefly] of Musalmans who till their own fields. It rises above 10% only in West and Central Bengal, where the relatively high figure is probably due to some extent to a higher standard of accuracy …."
Rates of monthly wages — in rupees

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In the Report of the Famine Commission the evidence of one of the witnesses (B. C. Basu, Assistant to Director of Land Records and Agriculture, Bengal from 1884 to 1887) points out differences in the wages of agricultural labour in East Bengal and the Bihar districts.

Q. What wages are paid in East Bengal?

Ans. Nowhere less than four annas and sometimes five to six annas..... About double the wages in Bihar — more than double. And about double what they are in Nadia. The southern part of Nadia is very poor and the wages are very low there." [Reference is to daily wages]

While the lack of sufficient economic incentive to migration was undoubtedly important, and explanation based on purely economic data leaves certain gaps. In the evidence before the Famine Commission quoted above, the following statement regarding the sub-metropolitan district of Nadia deserves notice: "There are more landless labourers in Nadia than in other parts of Bengal. Muchis (cobbyers) are an important cast in Nadia. Many are day-labourers. There are large numbers of Nadia labourers in Jessore." And again, "The southern part of Nadia is very poor and the wages are very low there".

It appears from the evidence that the poor of Nadia tended to migrate generally to the Sunderbans, where work was particularly hazardous, rather than to the metropolis, despite its contiguity.

Local labour supply in the suburban region around the metropolis might have also been affected by the ravages of Burdwan fever. The devitalization consequent upon the malarial epidemic of the sixties and seventies, might have made the local labouring population largely unfit for heavy factory work. But this explanation is applicable to a limited region.

One of the forces that created the heterogenous urban "proletariat" of the metropolis and the suburban region was the village kinship system. The labourers from Bihar, Orissa and U.P., who were mainly Hindu, had greater caste and religious scruples than the Bengali villagers. That should have acted as a damper on migration. But this was most probably prevented by a stronger village kinship system than what obtained in Bengal. The
greater rigour and organization of caste in rural Bihar and Uttar Pradesh might have contributed to the strength of the kinship system. The Bengali village was much less compact than the Bihar or U.P. village; in some districts there was a striking absence of the gregarious spirit and village sites, as in East Bengal. The kinship system remained important in Bengal. But it lacked much of the vigour, strength and organization of areas with powerful traditions of the village community.

The employment of Bengali labour also depended to a certain extent on the attitude of European employers in mills around Calcutta. There was a general impression among them that the Bengali worker lacked the staying power of the Bihari or U.P. worker. This was attributed by some to a deficiency in Bengali character — the Bengali's tendency to avoid heavy physical work for a continuous period of time, sometimes described as 'the habit of shirking'. The conditions of industrial living around Calcutta did not, however, justify the tone of the employers. Yet the Bengali could not perhaps overcome the traditional pattern of work and leisure in rural and agricultural Bengal. A large number of East Bengal peasants went to Arakan and Assam, and peasants from some parts of Central and West Bengal went to the Sunderbans. But the labour was entirely seasonal. Throughout India in the nineteenth century industrial labour retained many of the features of agricultural background. Such features were also present to a marked degree in the Bihari and U.P. workmen in Calcutta, who could never answer the description of 'depeasantized urban proletariat'. For various reasons, some of them discussed here, the agricultural pull worked with a particular intensity on Bengali villagers.

The kinship system and also the system of caste in Bengal appear to have been weaker on a purely economic level than the prevalent systems in more northerly regions. The hypothesis is especially applicable in the mercantile sector of activity in Bengal. The importance of kinship groups and more broadly, of caste groups, in Indian mercantile tradition is obvious. The Indian merchant, except, of course, the unusual Parsee— tended to remain a highly orthodox and conservative element in society. The tradition is noticeable in the case of the Bengali merchant groups in early Calcutta. These groups had a heterogenous character, unlike the professional commercial groups from outside Bengal—the Oswals, the Agarwals, the Khetris. Kinship, to the opulent elements in Bengal with high caste and somewhat individualistic background, became more a matter of social observance—marriages, family rites, maintenance of poor relatives, etc— than of pure economic activity. The indigenous mercantile groups in Bengal—the Sahas of East Bengal or the Tilis, for example— retained some of the traditions of kinship peculiar to Indian mercantile groups. But in and around the metropolis, they too, were affected by the 'bhadrolok' tradition steadily filtering downwards from the high caste elements in metropolitan society. Part of this tradition was a degree of individualism but not of a character that could give rise to the genuine individual capitalist, except in the unusual case of Dwarkanath Tagore.
If the foregoing analysis is broadly accepted, the 'bhadrolok' community that had grown in the metropolitan region in 19th century Bengal lacked some of the essential features of an urban middle class. It had failed to develop a working-class base; its original mercantile promise had not been fulfilled.

The census figures for 1881 indicate that a large number of small private industrial concerns were owned by Brahmins and Kayasthas in Calcutta. The castes from which the private owners were mainly drawn were the Kayasthas (65) and Brahmins (61), the Telis and Tilis (28), Sadgops (26) and Marwaris (19). But this can produce a wrong impression. Of the one hundred and five registered companies in Calcutta only seven had Indians as directors, the number of Bengalis in those seven is not specified.

The educated 'Bhadrolok' community in the metropolis did produce men interested in technology and industry. But that interest was not backed by capital and remained largely academic. The small industrial concerns in general could not be as remunerative as inland trade and indigenous banking, of which the great centre was in Burrabazar where the Marwari community had acquired complete hold from the mid-19th century. Among the indigenous bankers in Calcutta in 1906 almost all were Marwaris. The Marwari control over inland trade in two most vital commodities, jute (especially in North Bengal) and cotton piece-goods, had been established by the seventies of the century. The industrial and commercial efforts of the Bengalis during the ensuring Swadeshi period were somewhat quixotic, an interesting description of which occurs in the memoirs of Rabindranath Tagore.

The metropolitan 'middle class' in Bengal furnished the most remarkable example of the operation of education as a force in the formation of a community. The force underlies both the triumph and failure of the Bengali in the 19th century. The radiation of this force from the metropolis outwards into the interior of Bengal created a striking homogeneity of outlook.

The peculiar strength of the force of education in 19th century Bengal finds expression in some of the testamentary documents of early 19th century. Rajmohan Sein of the famous banker family of Seins (the banking house of Mathuramohan Sein) in early Calcutta writes in his will not about the revival of the great banking tradition of the family (the house fell a victim to a speculative crisis in early 19th century) but of the future education of his children.

"Further, when eldest son begins to attend the English college to study, he will get sicca twenty seven rupees for the expenses of his studies including the hire for his palankeen. Further, when my second son begins to study English, he will get at the rate of Sicca ten rupees per month for the expenses of his studies. The palankeen that is retained for my eldest son he will use that palankeen and
when my third son that attend to study English, then setting aside the arrangements mentioned above, for the purpose of these three going together to their studies, my executors will purchase and provide them with a palankeen carriage and a horse for the sum of three or four hundred rupees, and paying at the rate of sicca twenty-two rupees per month for the said vehicle—as long as my sons attain not severally the age of sixteen years, paying for the expenses of their education at the rate of sicca ten rupees per month, they will get my sons educated."

In another testament dated 1833 Brojonath Mitra instructs his sons:

"You will defray the annual expenses of the Issore Sarodeea Poojah, etcetra, and charges for food and clothing of everybody and the monthly wages of the persian Tutor, the School Master and the Gooroo Mahashoya and provide the requisites for writing and pay the expenses of my residence in Benares. .... My mercantile business that is carried on in Dhurmotollah you two persons will carry on that, if any loss occurs, you will see the result for two or three years and then give it up." (A detailed schedule of lands and houses bought by Brojonath, the wine merchant, around Calcutta is attached to the testamentary document.)

History often fails to find adequate documentary material to illustrate even a pervasive social attitude. Such an attitude is taken for granted by the generation under its influence and later generations are deprived of concrete facts for illustration of many of the unspoken but basic beliefs of the past. The two will cited above are thus of special value. The singular attachment of the Bengali Bhadrolok to education stood for an attitude that tended to infiltrate downwards, notably into some higher artisan castes and the well-to-do peasants. This probably tended to create gaps in the Bengali artisan community, notably in Calcutta. An employer speaks of Bengali carpenters with sons educated upto the matriculation or F.A. level, looking for 'decent' employment. While this concentration on education on the part of a whole community or class produced some spectacular results it had, on the whole, a narrowing effect. Education became a kind of ritual and the original dynamic content tended to become progressively circumscribed.

The metropolitan society as a centre of social change thus had some fundamental drawbacks, derived mainly from the character of the Bengali middle class. Yet the logic of urbanism had worked on certain levels to modify the original rural tradition. A noticeable change had occurred so far as commensality was concerned. Commensality played a peculiarly central role in traditional rural society. A Hindu village or rather the Hindu portion of a village, was generally a collection of 'samajes' or local communities. The 'samaj' has been described, with reasonable accuracy, as 'the circle within which the members of a caste or sub-caste usually dine
together on festive or religious occasions". It is pointed out that "every Hindu is under an obligation to feed castemen on certain occasions and those who attend on such occasions constitute the samaj .......

A nineteenth century positivist defines commensality as a "right to mess with one's peers." In the internal organization of villages, this was synonymous with village franchise. The right to mess was, however, subject to rules of inter-marriage, which consequently connected franchise with caste. "So long, however, as a man or his wife is not permitted to mess with the rest of the community at his own place, or that of any of them, the family remains outside the communal circle as it is now constituted. A man may become a fellow resident of the same village part of which he may have purchased at auction ...... and continue to be almost an excrescence in the society."

The mess franchise, according to the writer, consists of two grades having reference to the class of food taken. They may be called first and second class franchise. "Those who held the former, eat of bhat (rice) and roti (unleavened bread) with suitable accompaniments, cooked or touched by each other, whereas, second class franchise is confined to partaking only of puri (fried preparation from wheat flour) chira (dried preparation of rice), dahi (curd) etc. A third grade may be mentioned and this refers only to drinking water."

"The closest relation exists between gnamis, or blood relations, and this seems to point to some historical connection between the messing relations of village communities and the commensality of family communities.... Among Kutumwas, however, the relation is less intimate. One of the most important formalities of a marriage is the admission of the bride to the first class franchise, the ceremony observed (pakasparsa) being her touching the food served to her husband's gnamis. The bride-groom, is, of course, admitted to first class franchise in the father-in-law's family, both by marriage and by the dinner which immediately follows. But the relation may be easily broken off. And the messing relation between the bride's father and the father of the bridegroom are not always necessarily of the first class type." Loss of the first and second class franchise amounts to excommunication and, in its extreme form, carries with it the prohibition of intermarriage. The prohibition cannot, for obvious reasons, extend beyond the samaj, but it is unusual for one samaj to accept the casteaways of another.

The traditional rules of commensality appear to have been first broken by Young Bengal. Dwarkanath Tagore, in the early stage of his association with the English, refrained from dining with them at dinner parties in his own house. Later, when he changed this practice, he had to live in a certain degree of isolation from his family, and his touch was considered to have been ritually impure. In the later decades of the nineteenth century ritualistic and caste restrictions on commensality had almost spontaneously disappeared among educated Bengalis of the metropolis. Digambar Mitra, a highly educated leader of metropolitan
society, freely dined with Muhamadans, Christians and Hindus, who had returned from England. Justice Dwaraknath Mitra dined with the Governor-General and European officials. An interesting description of student messes in the seventies of the nineteenth century shows the extent of change in the matter of commensality even among young men from interior Bengal, who had been pursuing their studies in Calcutta. They had organized their own district messes, like the Tippera mess, the Barisal mess and the Bikrampur mess. "We were a rather mixed lot," comments the writer in describing the Sylhet mess. "Some were orthodox Hindus, though their orthodoxy did not go so far as to prohibit association or interdining, provided the food was cooked by a Brahmin, with those who did not observe the rules of caste. Others were absolutely heterodox and openly violated all the rules of Hinduism in regard to eating and drinking." In a book published by the Standing Committee on the Sea-voyage Question (1894), the promoters refer to the general practice among educated Bengalis to ignore caste restrictions on food, drink and interdining.

In rural Bengal restrictions regarding commensality appear to have held ground. The same individual perhaps followed two different lines of behaviour in respect of food and interdining — a heterodox line in the city or town was not perhaps very difficult to reconcile with the acceptance of orthodox norms in one's native village. A tremendous controversy raged through the rural district of Dacca over the question of excommunicating a group of high caste young men who had taken food from the hands of Muhamadans while travelling on a steamer. Surendranath Banerji's family was excommunicated in his native village after his return from England, mainly under a general assumption that Surendranath had not maintained orthodox caste rules regarding food and interdining. Both these cases, occurring in early seventies, might have been somewhat extreme. Yet they serve to show that even in the seventies rural Bengal still attached great importance to these matters while in urban Bengal the attitude was generally one of connivance. Excommunication, the most effective sanction of traditional society against recalcitrants, tended to lose much of its rigour in metropolitan society.

Yet even in the matter of commensality, urban Bengal was subject to the dichotomy between the male and the female world, which perhaps underlies the whole social development of the nineteenth century. While a considerable degree of freedom had come to characterise urban male behaviour, the inner apartments of the Bengali household continued to maintain firm links with rural tradition. The Brahma families could overcome this dualism in varying degrees but only in a very limited sphere of society. The social freedom of women appears to have been greater in western and southern India than in Bengal. Bipin Pal, a keen observer of 19th century social scene, writes about this in his Memories: "Female education and the freedom of social intercourse and movement of Mahratta ladies was a new and inspiring experience which I had in Bombay. Both the Parsis and the Mahrattas did not observe the zenana
seclusion or the purdah which is universal among higher class Hindus and Muslims in Bengal and Upper India." This was due to an indigenous tradition which Bipin Pal deeply appreciated. In Bengal, however, the spectacle of leading reformers or public men taking prayschitta or penance for offence against caste orthodoxy was unthinkable; not so in Maharashtra where Gopal Hari Deshmukh, for all his avowed antipathy to priestly influence, had to submit to a penance for attending the marriage ceremony of a widow, and Ranade was forced to do the same thing for attending in 1891, a tea party given by Christian missionaries.

The metropolitan society may thus be said to have responded to some new pressures and forces of urbanization, which tended to acquire many peculiarities following mainly from rural or traditional pull on urban society. So far as the physical growth of Calcutta is concerned the city had made rapid strides in area and population. The early population estimates are not quite reliable but they are of interest in indicating a trend towards growth. The writer of A Short History of Calcutta comments, after a comparative study of figures, that the actual population of the settlement in 1710 was not more than 10,000 to 12,000 souls. He describes this figure as an 'approximate guess'. A reasonably acceptable figure from a later date is the figure of population arrived at the Police Census of 1837. The figure was 229,714. At the official census in 1876, the figure was 409,036. In 1901, the official census estimate was at 562,686. During the late 19th century the growth of town area and houses took to the following pattern:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Town area in acreage</th>
<th>Houses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>Rural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1876</td>
<td>3,754</td>
<td>1,283</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1881</td>
<td>3,754</td>
<td>1,283</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1891</td>
<td>11,850</td>
<td>1,283</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>11,954</td>
<td>1,283</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thus even the Town Proper, as distinguished from the Suburbs, had a quite identifiable rural acreage. The rural character was naturally more pronounced in the suburbs. As regards the sub-metropolitan districts of the 24-Parganas, Howrah, Hugli and Nadia, they had been exposed to the process of physical change in certain pockets, though the intensely agrarian character of the hinterland neutralized the social impact of industrialism to a point where it loses much of its significance for contemporary Bengali society. The pattern of migration to these industrial centres, among other things, shows the weakness of Bengal's response to this force.

Outside the limits of the metropolitan and sub-metropolitan region, the force of urbanism generally tended to create 'rural towns' which were mainly
centres of country trade and regional administration. In the census report of 1911 the difficulty in distinguishing between an overgrown village and a small town is pointed out. "The main point of difference", it is remarked in the report, "lies in the occupations of the people, for a town is a centre of trade or at least has shops catering for the wants of the inhabitants and of the surrounding villages or it is a place where the majority of the residents are engaged in non-agricultural pursuits. In the villages, however, the majority are devoted to agriculture...... As a rule the village is purely residential and shops are few and far between." It is not, however, clear why the census report does not mention the administrative centres — the district or subdivisional towns — which, socially speaking, had certain qualities lacking in the basically market towns.

The inland market towns were also a feature of the economy of 17th-18th century Bengal. Among such towns were Malda, Dacca and Rajmahal. By the end of the 18th century these centres had undergone a period of rapid decline from which Dacca recovered in the second half of the 19th century through the growth of jute trade. The city of Dacca in the early 19th century perhaps bore a very close resemblance to the traditional type of market town in Bengal. The following description is, therefore, of some interest.

"The town itself is built on the bank of the river (Buriganga); along with its streets, bazars and lanes it extends to a distance of four miles in length, and about a mile and a quarter in breadth. It is intersected in its interior by a branch of the Dolai Creek. The Chauk or market place lies at the west end of the town and near the river bank. It is a square of pretty large dimensions, surrounded by mosques and shops. The open space in which the bazar is held is confined within a low wall, with a carriage road round it. The numerous streets which intersect the town are extremely narrow and crooked and only a few are wide enough for wheeled carriages ..... The houses facing the streets ..... are from one to four stories in height".

An interesting feature of Dacca till even the first decade of this century was a compact community organization among the Muslims of non-ashraf category which dealt with problems of social discipline and up to a point, even civil justice among them. Such an organization might have also characterised the artisan castes like the Sankharis who have left a tradition of compact living in Dacca. From the topographical data of the old city of Dacca, it may appear that as an established commercial city of the traditional type, Dacca represented a highly advanced stage of the growth of cellular organizations on the basis of caste, community and professional groups.

The chief incentive to the growth of market towns in nineteenth century Bengal was the jute trade and, to some extent, also the larger
ramification of trade in Bengal rice. The general impression given by the new market towns was their comparatively floating character, as distinguished particularly from Dacca.

From the point of view of social history, the district or sub-divisional towns had certain distinctive qualities. The physical character of a normal specimen of this century is described in the memoirs of his childhood years by an autobiographer. "Kishorganj", he writes, "was only a normal specimen of its class — one among a score of collections of tin-and-mat huts or sheds, comprising courts, offices, schools, shops and residential buildings, which British administration had raised up in the green and brown spaces of Eastern Bengal..... " The municipal towns of interior Bengal— Kishorganj was a municipal town with a population of 16,000 in 1911 — generally had a nucleus of schools, courts, offices and markets surrounded by an absolutely rural region. The towns had a sprawling character and the figures of population tended to give a wrong impression of the real character of the towns. Such a description would apply almost equally to the newly growing towns in other regions of Bengal. In Burdwan, a district quite close to the metropolis, "eight large towns" were returned in the Census Report [of 1871] but "the towns can hardly be considered urban in the strict sense of the word, consisting as they do of blocks of villages grouped together for municipal purposes. The city of Burdwan itself is made up of 93 little villages, lying close to each other and surrounding the town proper — the whole group constitutes the Burdwan Municipality......"

A society, however, grew in these interior towns with certain distinctive features of its own. A large concentration of gentry from often widely separated regions tended to infuse an element of heterogeneity into the society of those towns. A field was created in which a wider extent of social freedom could develop. The influence emanating from the metropolis could find in these towns an opportunity for making itself felt. Some of the progressive metropolitan movements, for example, the movement started by the advanced wing of the Brahmos, had significant repercussions among the gentry of some of these towns.

A more detailed treatment of rural towns or the new market towns and administrative centres in interior Bengal would have served better to illustrate how rural Bengal was exposed to the pressure of urbanism and metropolitan influence in the 19th century and how this force was modified and partly neutralized in the vast agrarian and rural set-up. But apart from the influence of urbanism, rural society was exposed to pressures both from within and without, though here, too, as in the case of urban centres, and exaggerated emphasis on the forces of change, following from the presumption of a disruption of traditional set-up, will be very misleading indeed.

The agrarian society presents complexities of such a character that an attempt to locate the forces of change in it and their relation to the traditional set-up may be baffling on many points.
One very familiar effect of the revenue experiments of the 18th century and the sale law of the Permanent Settlement on the traditional set-up was the ruin of many old zamindars with consequent changes in the power structure in rural Bengal. A striking illustration of decline of old families is the case of the Chandraedvip Rajas of Bakhargonj, called the 'Basu dynasty', who had control of the greater part of the district of Bakhraganj. The estate was sold for arrears of revenue in 1799. The largest share went to the grocer (mudi) of the Raja. The other purchasers were two Armenians and one Dal Singh of Dacca. The Armenians, however, could not long retain control over the property.

The classic case of decline, however, was that of the Rajas of Natore and Nadia, who held a unique social position in eighteenth century society. The estates of the Natore Raj, according to tradition, were worth fifty-two lakhs in mid-eighteenth century. The estates were then in the hands of Rani Bhabani, the widow of Raja Ramkanta Roy. That pious lady was continually spending her money in endowment of idols and established in Benares alone three hundred and eighty temples, guest houses and other religious edifices. Her adopted son, Raja Ram Krishna Roy, was exceedingly pious and spent his whole time in performing religious duties. Unlike his mother, he forsook all worldly affairs and the zamindaris began to go to ruin. His servants began to plunder him on every side and then came the Permanent Settlement. Within a decade, the Raja of Natore had lost all his estates except only three which produced three lakhs instead of the original fifty-two lakhs.

In the district of Jessore where the Natore Raj had a large portion of their zamindari, the largest purchasers of the disintegrating estates was Kalisankar Roy, the ancestor of the Narail family of Jessore. He was a dewan of the Raja of Natore and it was partly, if not chiefly by unjust stewardship, that he managed to acquire the estates. Among the other purchasers were the Tagores of the Senior Branch, who had amassed a fortune mainly as banians. Another purchaser, Krishna Pal, originally a petty trader, acquired a large fortune almost by accident. He increased it by trading and almost monopolising the trade in salt, which at that time was sold by auction at the Board of Revenue and at last purchased a large zamindari in Jessore. The Gossains of Serampore, originally a priestly family who had made much money by trading with the Danes at Serampore in Hughly, also purchased a share. The Paikpara Raj family which acquired a portion of estates in Jessore was resident originally at Kandi in Murshidabad and then at Paikpara near Calcutta. The family had made its fortune through association with the British. The Ghoshal family of Bhookylas (near Calcutta), the founder of whose fortune had acquired great wealth in trade, also became zamindars in Jessore.

The decline of Nadia Raj can also be similarly illustrated. A very important factor in their decline must have been social and religious expenditure of fantastic proportions about which traditions are quite eloquent.
The estates of Dinajpur Raj in North Bengal fell a victim to external mechanism. In the first decade of the 19th century "the greater number of the landlords in Dinajpur were 'new men' who, formerly, were either merchants, manufacturers, agents of landlords or officers of government. The last category of people was 'not numerous,' People who were not afraid of them would call them "lotders or fellows who have purchased lots."

Buchanan in his account of Dinajepore considered the new zamindars to be more efficient managers of their estates than the old Raj family, whose estates were in a state of disintegration and decay. Yet, he remarks, the old Raj family 'is very much respected, for people submit with patience to many things from a power to which they are accustomed, that would grieve them to endure from a person of whom they know nothing, or whom they remember as their equals.'

One effect of the Permanent Settlement was the substitution of smaller zamindars for bigger ones in many areas. At the time of the Settlement there were only 122 estates in the whole district of Jessore held direct from Government. All of them fell into arrears in the decade following the Settlement and were sold to the highest bidders in small shares. By the turn of the century the 122 large estates were converted into 5,044 small zamindaris. "It has been described as a consequence of the Settlement that small Zamindars and small Zamindaris came to be substituted for great Zamindaris. It was, however, natural that of these small Zamindars some should increase substance above others, and by buying up Zamindari after Zamindari and tenure after tenure.... [develop] in the end into a very large estate. Such estates differ entirely in this nature from the old Zamindaris. They are not compact or single estates, extending over some tract of territory where their owner is present as the great Zamindar, but they are an accumulation of separate and separately held tenures, acquired in different ways and at different times, held under all sorts of different rights and scattered here and there over the country. Zamindari in fact has become more of a profession and less of a position."

Yet, while many of the old families lost a very large part of their estates, they ultimately retained control over some and exerted an influence quite out of proportion to their physical resources. The case of the Chandradvip Rajas is rather unusual. The impact of the new sale law was, moreover, far from uniform and in north and eastern Bengal, many old families of rank remained reasonably steady after being shaken for a while.

The intrusion of a somewhat harsh business-like spirit represented by the lotdars and nilamdars as contrasted with the old slow moving rajas and zamindars of old, brought about a change partly neutralized by the force of old traditions. The new absentee zamindars were often far removed from the social life of the villages. But not all of them were urban landlords. Among the purchasers of the Natore estates, the Narail family lived in the village of Narail in Jessore and played a definite role in the society of rural Jessore. The Dighapatia family, another beneficiary of the
disintegration of Natore estates in Rajshahi, was similarly resident in the village Digbapatia in Rajshahi. In the first half of the nineteenth century many newly rich families tended to reside in ancestral villages and had significant influence on the socio-economic structure of those villages. The old 'aristocratic' norms also tended to influence their social behaviour. It may be said that while forces in the shape of new revenue-judicial system and new landlordism were creating havoc in the traditional set-up, a process of continuity was maintained and both were like two parallel phenomena in rural Bengal.

A most significant change in the agrarian structure definitely followed from the wide ramification of the system of subinfeudation in the districts of Bengal. Here, too, the local variations in the working of this new pressure have been quite complex and can be worked out only after a detailed and specialized study of the problem. In some districts of Bengal like Rangpur and Mymensingh the pressure of sub-infeudation had been rather weak. In the traditionally settled districts of Bengal like Burdwan and Hughly the pressure worked with great intensity but did not attain the peculiar complexity of the East Bengal district of Bakharganj, where the process of settlement in newly formed and reclaimed regions introduced a peculiar factor in the agrarian situation. A very obvious social effect of the process of subinfeudation had been an unusual strengthening of the class of 'rural gentry', which, however, was a most complex category represented partly by the concept of Bhadrolok.

External influence on agrarian society also finds expression in many other ways. The indigo rebellion of the mid-18th century and the agrarian disturbances of the seventies followed, in part at least, from the introduction of new legal concepts in society. Next to the agrarian society, the institution of caste at the rural level demonstrated a quite noticeable response to external stimuli. A significant feature of the rural history of the 19th century is a certain intensification of a perennial trend in Hindu society, namely the attempt on the part of some castes to rise above their traditional position in caste hierarchy. Though it was apparently a sign of mobility, it was, in a more fundamental sense, a confirmation of the strength of the caste system.

The movements first of all accepted the principle of caste divisions. It also accepted the basic fact that Brahmans held the highest position in the hierarchy. The object of an individual caste or sub-caste was to find for itself a position next to the Brahmans and to relegate the other castes or even allied sub-castes to a lower position. There is no evidence, however, that Hindu society recognised any real change in the traditional position of these castes or sub-castes. But the movement had a marked effect on certain social customs. Two of the most important standards of caste respectability, prohibition of widow remarriage and seclusion of women, were sought to be followed. The first criterion was particularly effective since there was a general tendency on the part of the aspiring castes to prohibit or restrict the practice.
As an observer of trends in the caste system in the late 19th century, Risely remarks in his *Tribes and Castes of Bengal*:

"It is curious to observe that the operation of these tendencies have been quickened and the sphere of their action enlarged by the great extension of railways which has taken place in India during the last few years. Both Benares and Manchester have been brought nearer to their customers and have prospered by the increased demand for their characteristic wares. Siva and Krishna drive out the tribal gods as surely as grey shirtings displace the more durable hand-woven cloth. Pilgrimage has become more pleasant and more popular and the touts, who sally forth from great religions centres to promote these pious excursions, find their task easier and their clients more open to persuasion than was the case even twenty years ago. A trip to Jagannath or Gaya is no longer the formidable and costly undertaking that it was. The Hindu peasant who is to kiss the footprint of Vishnu, or to taste the hallowed rice that has been offered to the Lord of the World, may now reckon their journey by days instead of months. He need no longer sacrifice the savings of a life time to this pious object, and he has a reasonable prospect of returning home none the worse for a week’s indulgence of religious enthusiasm. Even the distant Mocca, has been brought nearer by means of Messrs. Cook’s steamers and return tickets within the reach of the faithful in India, and the influence of Muhammadan pilgrims has made itself felt in a quiet but steady revival of orthodox usage in Eastern Bengal."

The emergence of puritanical sects, notably the Ferazis among the Muhammadan community in the eastern districts, is a striking phenomenon of the rural history of 19th century Bengal. The extent of their influence on communal cleavage and also on peasant consciousness is yet to be systematically studied. This essay, however, has dealt only every partially with rural phenomenon except in their direct bearing on urban growth. Many other pressures on rural society did exist and, among them, the most prominent might have been the pressure on the artisan community. The interaction of tradition and change involves many other complex considerations and only some aspects of the problem, especially in their relation to the metropolitan society, have been treated here.

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