Much Ado Over Coffee

Indian Coffee House
Then And Now

Bhaswati Bhattacharya
‘Coffee House was then the common room of Presidency College in the afternoons. The college was by that time already a co-educational institution... It was around this time that one group of boys regularly used to take part in an adda in Coffee House centring one such girl. We, members of adda sans women, felt a little jealous. We called this girl “queen bee.” One day I caught her in a sketch I made.
– Debabrata Mukhopadhyay
For my parents,
Renuka and Raghumani Bhattacharya
'Like many European intellectuals visiting Calcutta, Bernard Verlhac (Tignous), the graphic artist of the French weekly Charlie Hebdo too visited the ICH on College Street. The person with long nose on this sketch he made was perhaps a reference to Satyajit Ray, and 'Gosh' refers to the graphic novelist Biswadeep Ghosh accompanying Tignous to the ICH. The text says: 'No. 1 ‘Toupee’, the head-dress, is a symbol of Indian servitude. 2. Toque de Nehru, the Nehru cap, is a symbol of revolt against the English. Is their co-habitation a coincidence?'
Contents

Acknowledgements xi
Introduction xvii

1. Adda and Public Spaces of Sociability before the ICH 1
   Adda: A Universal Social Practice? 6
   Adda in the Current Context 15
   Delhi 23
   Allahabad 35
   Calcutta 50
   Conclusion 59

2. India Coffee House: A New Space in the City 61
   The Birth of the India Coffee House 64
   Everyday Practices in the New Urban Space 86
   Democracy in ICH and the Bhadralok 110
   Adda: Space of Dominion and Invisible Hierarchy 117
   Semiotics of the Coffee House 127
   The Coffee House and Imagination 133
   Conclusion 136

3. The Workers and the Coffee House: From ‘India’ to ‘Indian’ 138
   The Coffee Board, the Internal Market and the Coffee House 139
   The Formation of the Coffee Board Labour Union 146
   From India to Indian: The Struggle for Survival 150
   The ICWCSL and the ICH 157
   Functioning 165
Challenges to Overcome 173
Conclusion 180

4. The Indian Coffee House and the World of Literature 183
Calcutta: All Roads Led to the Coffee House? 186
Hungry Generation Movement 195
Shruti and Shastrabirodhi Movement 199
Shotojol Jhorna Dhwhoni 200
Moheener Ghoraguli 203
Allahabad: The Place of Literary Pilgrimage 206
The Crowd at the Coffee House 215
What Was All That Ado About? 222
Delhi: The Capital of Hindi Literature 224
The Performers of the Coffee-Tea House Act 225
And the Act Stimulated by Coffee 229
Conclusion 236

5. Brewing Discontent Instead of Coffee? 239
Politics and the Indian Coffee House
The PRRM 247
The Naxalbari Movement in Calcutta and ICH 257
The Liberation War of Bangladesh 271
The Emergency 274
Conclusion 292

6. How Public is the Public Space of the Indian Coffee House? 296
The Coffee House and its Environs 299
Women and the Public Space of the Coffee House 310
The Pioneers in Calcutta 313
Delhi 326
Allahabad 330
Accommodating the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Communities (LGBT) 336
Conclusion 337
7. The Middle Class and Coffee Houses: Old and New
   The New Coffee Cafés 343
   The Middle Class: New versus Old 348
   The Old Connoisseurs of the Coffee House 351
   Is the Tradition of Adda Finally Dead? 371
   The Current Visitors of the Coffee House 374
   The Political Economy and the Cooperative 387
   Conclusion 393

Glossary 396

Indian Coffee House through Photographs 400
Posters put up by the Coffee Consumers’ Forum, India Coffee House in Connaught Place, Delhi, in 2009 against the possible hand-over of the place in view of the non-payment of rent by the coffee workers’ cooperative. (Source: BBC News, ‘In Pictures: Indian Coffee House’, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8106639.stm)
Acknowledgements

This book has acquired many debts. I am grateful to my colleagues at the Centre for Modern Indian Studies (CeMIS) at Göttingen, especially Ravi Ahuja, for taking interest in this research and supporting it in all its phases. Aditya Sarkar gave valuable comments on the research proposal. The grant of a generous subsidy from CeMIS facilitated the production of the monograph. Members of the administrative staff, especially Ms Iris Karakus have provided all the technical support the project needed.

The grant of a fellowship by Fritz Thyssen Foundation, Cologne made it possible to take up this research. Much of the fieldwork could be carried out due to a parallel grant from the Indian Council of Historical Research (ICHR) in Delhi. The research in Shimla was funded by the Indian Institute of Advanced Studies and I am grateful to Gangeya Mukherji and Ronald Peter D’Souza for making that possible.

In Amsterdam, my former colleagues of the research department of the International Institute of Social History helped developing my interest in coffee as a commodity. Marcel van Linden introduced me to the German historical world. Dick Plukker of the India Institute in Amsterdam, and Theo Damsteegt, formerly of Leiden University gave useful suggestions with regard to Hindi literature.

I have benefitted from communications with Steven Topik and William Gervase Clarence Smith, pioneer researchers on coffee. Both of them have commented on earlier versions of parts of the current monograph.

In Delhi Roma Chatterjee helped my research at the coffee house in Delhi School of Economics. At ICHR Ishrat Alam was of great help bringing me in contact former patrons of the India(n) Coffee House
in Delhi. S.P. Dutt, formerly of Air India, took it upon himself to help me find the direction as to the long-extinct Coffee House on Janpath and the precise developments between 1958 and 1964 leading to the PRRM. Krishna Sobti, Uma Vasudev, Neelabh, Pankaj Bisht, Girdhar Rathi and Chander Mahadev have responded to my queries on numerous occasions. Archana Verma and Mangalesh Dabral have helped in clarifying issues related to the Hindi literary world.

The research in Calcutta has benefitted from a constant interaction with my mentor Gautam Bhadra. He not only drew my attention to literature on coffee and coffee house but also took care to make them available for my research. The discussion in the following pages is a testimony to how indispensable his advice to this research was. Ashim Mukhopadhyay of the National Library enriched the research through conversations and by locating rare books. Poet Gautam Chaudhury and Samir Bhattacharya of the Bengali webzine Parabaas were ever ready in helping finding missing links. Rajarshi Ghosh sent useful information on literature on cooperatives.

Manas Mukul Das introduced me to the world of Allahabad and its Coffee House. Much of the information about ICH Allahabad was collected through exchange of e-mails with Neelabh, who grew up almost next door and was a keen observer of the happenings in and around the Coffee House. He also made his published and unpublished work available for my consultation, and put me in touch with sources in Allahabad.

Whoever goes to Allahabad has to visit the ‘madhushala’, grapevine of Dinesh Chandra Grover, only hinted at in this work. Dinesh ji offered me the rare photographs of the literary meets in Allahabad. Arindam Ghosh of Indian Press has responded to my thousands of queries, always taking care to send additional information. Among those who assisted the research in Allahabad—Amrita Chatterjee and Neelum Saran Gour became friends.

At Bangalore the officials of the Coffee Board of India, especially Finance Officer Mrs Roop Rashi, and Mr Ramesh Rajah, President of Coffee Exporters’ Association of India, have afforded all the help I required. V. G. Siddhartha of Coffee Day Global Limited gave an
important interview. Sunalini Menon of the CoffeeLab and Aparna Dutta, communications consultant of IIMC, Bangalore kindly allowed me a glimpse into the world of coffee marketing.

I thank all workers of the ICWCSL in Allahabad, Bangalore, Calcutta, Delhi, Simla and Trichur for their cooperation. At Trichur the family of N. Parameswaran Pillai, especially Maya Murali and N.P. Gireesan, were helpful. Debasish Deb of ABP and The Telegraph has sketched the cover illustration specially for this book for which I am very grateful, and I am grateful to Anindya Banerjee and Rani Ray for putting us in touch with him. Ajit Rao and Pablo Bartholomew allowed me to use the sketch of the Irani Café and the photograph of the members of Subterranean Sun respectively. The cartoon of Indian Coffee House on College Street by Bernard Verlhac (Tignous) of Charlie Hebdo was published on website of The Telegraph. The photo of Amarnatha Jha and others at Allahabad was provided by Tejakar Jha. Amitabh Sengupta kindly gave permission to use the rare photograph of Amartya Sen, Sibnarayan Ray and others in the College Street Coffee House.

Librarians/staff of the following institutions have extended all assistance in making relevant material available: at Göttingen the university library; the library of the International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam; the library of the University of Leiden; the Royal Library in The Hague; British Library and the Library of School of Oriental and African Studies in London; the National Archives of India, the ICHR library, Nehru Memorial Museum and Research Library, Sapru House Library, Central Secretariat Library, and Delhi Public Library; in Calcutta the Bangiya Sahitya Parishat Library, the archives of Ananda Bazar Patrika, the National Library including its newspaper section, and the Centre for Social Science Studies; at Trivandrum the CSDS Library, AK Gopalan Library, the University of Trivandrum Library.

I have received wonderful help from Akeel Ahmad and Paridhi Massey, and Rajatkanti Sur and Manab Mitra, Malini Bhattacharya and Rukmini Chakraborty (Calcutta). In Allahabad Vaibhab Maini, Vaidurya Pratap Sahi and Akshat Lal Srivastava
have helped with invaluable information and source material. V.S. Lincy of the National Library translated the Malayalam memoir of N.S. Parameswaran Pillai into English.

The findings of this research have been discussed at different forums: the India International Coffee Festival organized in Delhi in 2012, seminars and history research group meetings at CeMIS, research group meeting at the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam, the University of Konstanz, University of Hamburg, and at French Institute, Chandernagore, India. The peer reviewer of Social Science Press gave valuable comments on the first draft. Douglas Haynes took keen interest in the work, and made time for going through the manuscript which has enormously benefitted from his suggestions. Frank Perlin read the entire manuscript within a very short time. It was he who advised me to put my observations on adda at one place; and the title also owes to him.

My publisher, Esha Beteille of Social Science Press has patiently borne with this book with great enthusiasm. Special thanks are due to Radha Beteille, the commissioning editor, and the young editor Ankita Sharma who deserve all the credit for bringing the large unwieldy manuscript in shape.

Didibhai, Akhil-da and Mohor in Calcutta have been great sources of support. It is a pity that Dada and Boudi the late Pralaykanto and Jayanti Bhattacharya could not live to see this monograph. Tinni has always been attentive to all my whims. Tripti Bhattacharya (Chhordi) and Pinaki Bhattacharya have provided me the comfort of home during the stay in Delhi.

I could not have done without the encouragement received from my friends. Upinder Kaur and Rupalee Verma have put me in touch with important sources. Poet and translator Ruma Chakrabarty has translated the Manna Dey song. ‘Coffee-houser shei dingulo’ particularly for this book the link for this song is given in a footnote on page 340 of this book. Joyce Yarrow has read parts of the manuscript and has enriched me with her views. Sharmistha Chakrabarty provided details on the band ‘Moheen’s Stallions’. I received encouragement and help from Nandini Dutta, Chilka Ghosh and Shevanti Narayan in different ways.
It needs the patience of Victor van Bijlert to put up with all my idiosyncrasies. Many of the ideas, concepts were clarified through conversations with him. He went through the manuscript and gave his views. In his defiance of humanities, and especially history, my son Pasha has provided many a jolly moment of intriguing discussions at home. During periods of my long absence, both Victor and Pasha have taken on themselves the responsibility to keep up the ambience at home alive. This research would be impossible without the understanding and cooperation on their part. This book is a tribute long overdue to my parents for the inspiration, encouragement, strength and affection I have received from them all along.
The idea of this book originated when I was working on a project on global commodities at the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam during 2007–09. The main project did not focus on coffee, but allowed me the space to find out about the coffee production and consumption in India. I discovered that there was very little historical literature on coffee in India. Outside India, the country was usually associated with tea, and an inquiry in the market showed that apart from a niche market for specialty coffee, roasters in the West imported coffee from India used in the numerous blends consumed by masses unaware of the origin of this coffee. Let alone supermarkets, even specialty coffee and tea-shops in Amsterdam did not sell Indian coffee. This scenario has changed during the last few years, and Monsooned Malabar and Robusta India share the pride of place side by side with Sidamo and Yirgacheffe from Ethiopia and Blue Mountain coffee from Jamaica on the shelves of cafés and tea/coffee stores.

When I began this work, the idea was to look into the public consumption of coffee with focus on the India Coffee House (after 1958 Indian Coffee House, both referred here as ICH or Coffee House), probably the oldest surviving café chain in the world created in urban India in the late 1930s. Yet, apart from a Sarai (CSDS) paper by two students on the Coffee House in Connaught Place (CP, Delhi), no academic work had studied this institution. Inquiry at the Coffee Board (1942) in Bangalore revealed that original records pertaining to the outlets had not been preserved. The different series of publications of the Board, used in this research, were mechanical and did not answer many relevant questions. How did the Coffee Cess Committee (1935) that had no previous experience
of marketing, chance upon the strategy of setting up coffee houses the year after? What guided the choice of the urban places where the outlets were begun? Why did the Board go on to set up 40+ outlets before it dawned upon them that the concept was not profitable? What qualified officials in the marketing department to be entrusted with the responsibility of bringing coffee to the people? Without answers to such questions the research would become a mere reproduction of the statistical reports of number of propaganda units, production of coffee and a sum indicating the Board’s total annual profit from all the units. Interestingly, these reports counted the number of cups of coffee sold annually. But how much coffee did go into the making of a cup? Was there perhaps a variation among different regional establishments regarding the amount of coffee, liquid and powder, used and sold?

As there was no way to resolve these problems, I decided to explore a living archive—patrons of the space since it was launched. Indian Coffee House is an institution in public memory associated with many individuals and events of national history. Once I began conversing with former and current customers of ICH soon it became clear that there was more than coffee that attracted them to the space; the practice of drinking coffee in this new urban space became synonymous with sociability.

The title indicates that the consumption of coffee in the Coffee House had multiple points of entry discussed here in chapters as described in the content. The said informal gatherings have been referred to throughout this work as adda, a much celebrated practice in twentieth century Bengal as discussed in Chapter One.

Both in Bengali and Hindi, adda is a noun and its meaning as a meeting place is one of the many. In Bengal, however, since the very beginning of the twentieth century the word has been used mainly to denote a place where friends meet and converse informally. However, the impassioned eagerness expressed by my interlocutors outside Bengal while talking about the ICH inspired the question if the practice was limited to Bengal alone. What could possibly happen when several Malayali friends met at a Chaya Kada, implying conversations in a tea shop, or a few writers and
poets in Allahabad gathered at a friend’s home? Even when coffee was available at different indigenous and globalized cafés, why did my interlocutors in Trivandrum regret the loss of the old ICH? Did something comparable to adda exist outside Bengal?

As we shall see below, what took place in ICH Allahabad and Delhi was not much different from the classic addas of the Coffee House in Calcutta. There has been a close connection between the literary worlds of Allahabad and Calcutta exemplified by the lives and works of Suryakant Tripathi Nirdula (1896-1961) to Alka Saraogi (b. 1960) on the one hand, to Chintamani Ghosh (1854-1928) and Ramananda Chatterjee (1865-1943) on the other. As a part of the anti-colonial movement, the other north Indian counterpart of the Bengali nationalist elite shared the same political space, often creating common civil society platforms. It is possible that the practice of sociability among Bengalis spread through this circulatory, communicatory interaction. However, if Bengali had gained the status of the vernacular in Bengal in the 1830s, the post-1860 period saw the discourse over the status of the official vernacular in north India that have been talked about at length in Chapter One and succeeding chapters of the book. The mobilization of political support for Hindi and Urdu gave a boost to the print culture in both Hindustani and Nagari.1 But there was a rich culture of public orality in north India and although not as institutionalized as in Bengal, the practice of adda in the Hindi-Urdu literary worlds too drew inspiration from the prevailing practices arising from real-life situations. Like in Calcutta, many of the preexisting adda groups in Allahabad and Delhi moved to ICH where we see them in a crystallized form as well. As a glimpse of this sociability can be found in Chapters One and Four.

The reference to the middle class in this book is in the singular as an ideological construct. There is a vast literature on the Indian middle class. Beginning with what constituted this class, attempts have been made in recent times at understanding how the members of the class constructed their identity. In Bengal the bhadralok customers

1 Christopher R. King, One Language, Two Scripts: The Hindi Movement in Nineteenth Century North India, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, Chapter 3.
of ICH were a broad category including members from landholding families to temporarily or permanently unemployed individuals discussed especially in Chapters Two and Seven of the book.

The focus on the chain, a new phenomenon across the country, required that I compared the practices at different outlets in order to understand their import to urban north India as I have done throughout the book.

Originally my intention was to study the outlets of ICH in Bangalore, Delhi, Calcutta and Trivandrum. After the field work in 2011 and 2012, I decided to leave Bangalore out. Between Koshy’s (1940) on St Marks Road at the one end of Mahatma Gandhi Road and Nilgiri’s (1905) on Brigade Road at the other, there were many places of varying sizes offering coffee to people across the social hierarchy with different ranges of budget. Still the ICH was popular with journalists working with The Deccan Herald next door, and also with personnel of banks and other offices, as with visitors of neighbourhood bookshops.

The field research suggested that in contrast with the outlets in the south, the Coffee House in Calcutta and Delhi—in spite of the local differences—can be put into one category because coffee in north India was not a commonly available beverage. It was at this stage that the decision to include a third city in north India was made. As the ICH in Allahabad was well-known and still operating in the same building since the 1950s, I decided to focus on the three cities in the mainly Bengali, and Hindi-Urdu language zones. While the monograph focuses on these three cities, insights from the field trips to Bangalore, Trivandrum and Trichur have been added when necessary, especially in Chapter Three while discussing the formation of the cooperative, and for the rest, for the sake of comparison.

There was a time when it was common for many artists, writers, journalists, political activists, college and university teachers and students to go to ICH on a regular basis. It has not been possible to name everyone or interview all concerned, but those cited here will suffice to give some idea of both the structure and the agency at ICH.
Since I began my research, one book on ICH has been published. This is a magnificent coffee-table book by the award-winning photographer Stuart Freedman. A collection of more than a hundred photographs, the book is a token of Freedman’s attachment to the chain he discovered on his first trip to Delhi in the 1990s. Photographs of coffee-stained mica-topped tables, plastic chairs, faded, torn sofas revealing their spring guts, bare walls with distemper flaking off at places, stand in stark contrast with the overall changes in the cities, and underline the shabby state the outlets are now in.

The current monograph shows that the ICH was far from shabby at the time of its inception. Adherents of Gandhi, Lohia, Nehru and others thronged there precisely because, judged by contemporary standards of the middle class, the ‘comfortably’ and ‘tastefully’ furnished outlets offered an experience unknown before, and were considered ‘modern’ as mentioned in Chapters One and Two. Another work is the Ph. D. research undertaken by Kristin Plys at the Yale University. Plys highlights the nature of the authoritarian state in post-colonial India under Nehru and argues that this inherent authoritarianism manifested itself under Indira Gandhi. These issues are discussed respectively in Chapter 3 and Chapter 5.

The current work follows the many narratives—autobiographies, essays, fiction, interviews, media reports, poetry, reminiscences, and satire—inspired by the place, official publications of the Coffee Board of India, and field research among patrons and workers of the ICH. It focuses on how space was produced and nurtured in the urban settings in late pre-colonial and post-colonial India. Launched in the interest of coffee-capitalists seeking a destination for the export surplus, the outlets of the ICH were soon appropriated by the urban middle class who used the space for leisure as studied in Chapters One, Two and Four. This association came in good stead of the workers when their economic security was threatened following the announcement by the Coffee Board to close down the outlets in 1955 as discussed at length in Chapter Three and subsequently

throughout the book. A consensus between workers and customers, as we shall see in the chapters that follow, has made the space unique and is essential for ICH to survive.

Most customers first went to the Coffee House as students. Instead of providing the age of persons interviewed, I have indicated the period when a person went to the Coffee House and what s/he was studying at that time. I often interviewed students in large groups of twenty and above. Given that the average school leaving age in India is 18+, a high school student would be in the mid or late teens, a Bachelor student in the late teens and early twenties, a Post-Graduate student in the early twenties, and a Ph.D. scholar usually in between 25 and 35 years.

The Coffee House on College Street replaced a heritage institution and has always remained in the same building. In collective memory, the space is synonymous with cultural and intellectual adda of the highest order. I am aware that what is cited here is just a snapshot. However, it sufficiently corroborates the claims made in the book.

All translations from Bengali and Hindi, unless mentioned otherwise, are by me. I have retained the old place names because during most of the period covered here, the places were known by those names.

The currency used in this monograph is the Indian Rupee (INR/Re/Rs) which in 1947 was tied to the GBP at Re 1 = 1 s, 6 d, rate of 28 October 1945. In 1971 INR was pegged to gold and dollar. Over the decades, the ratio between INR and USD has been 1=4.77 (1960), 1=7.56 (1970), 1=7.89 (1780), 1=17.49 (1990), 1=45 (2000), and 1=45.75 (2010). The enthusiasm of (ex-) connoisseurs of the place provided an enormous stimulus to this work. It happened more than once that elderly ex-patrons wanted to narrate their experience, but their memory failed them. A silence usually followed, but the expression on their face conveyed that they were back in that lost world. The interviews also convinced me that everyone had his/her own image of the Coffee House. The narrative in the following pages may not conform to any of those; but at least it will demonstrate how not to approach the Coffee House.
Adda and Public Spaces of Sociability
before the ICH

To enjoy something properly, one has to surround it with a fence of leisure; it has to be unfolded at great length and spread out on all sides. Only then is it possible to grasp it in its totality.1

Beginning with the public baths of Mohenjodaro and much later the Greek and Roman baths, sociability in the public sphere has a long history. The elaborate structure of the Roman bathhouses included perfume-booths, books, gymnasiaums, libraries and reading rooms. The corporeal activity of bathing promoted some kind of sociability transforming the functional public baths into meeting places for social interaction.2 Turkish bath or hammer that spread to different parts of the Middle East during the Ottoman Empire was a Roman legacy and was much sought after for the convivial atmosphere encouraging sociability. For men in Cairo going to a hammer is as important as going to meet his friends in a café.3 The first coffee houses that came up in Mecca and Cairo in the early sixteenth century were tavern like places where in addition to swallowing of

the ‘intoxicant’ coffee, ‘a variety of forbidden things’ took place.\textsuperscript{4} It is from there that the institution later spread throughout the Ottoman Empire, and from Turkey to Western Europe. Coffee houses were the most important place for public socialization in Ottoman Istanbul, and in order to understand what was happening in society in general, one could focus on the coffee houses.\textsuperscript{5} Similarly, in other societies, the need for the public to interact socially has seen the emergence of other, similar places where the public came together. In China for example, the tea house formed the microcosm of the larger urban history.\textsuperscript{6}

The emergence of coffee houses in the seventeenth and eighteenth century Europe, especially England was, however noted as having considerably transformed the structure of the public sphere.\textsuperscript{7} Coffee houses provided a neutral social space between the public and the private realms, where discussions on new socio-political issues of ‘common concern’ were taken out of the domains of the elite to create the emerging ‘bourgeois public sphere’. It was coffee, or rather its most active ingredient caffeine that stimulated the intellectual discourse during the Age of Enlightenment causing fear among the authorities that coffee houses were potential hotbeds for political agitation. The presence of a literary, informed public was a


pre-condition for the formation of public opinion in the public sphere Habermas described.\(^8\)

Turning our attention to the India, it is known that there was a strong tradition of association of individuals engaged in critical debate over public matters encompassing the elite and popular political culture, although not always on equal terms, comparable to the public sphere in Europe described by Habermas. With corporate institutions, it was a vibrant, contested domain in which both the elite and the subordinate groups functioning within a shared framework of norms and values jostled over space.\(^9\) In a large part of North India and Pakistan the institution of *chaupal*, functioning somewhat like an informal club, formed the centre of the village in rural India. It was an exclusively male domain and a good part of the lives of the male whether at the level of individual, small group or the total community, was spent at, and revolved around the *chaupal*. Also used for community purposes, the building was constructed separately and distinguished from private houses, usually under a banyan or *pipal* tree at the intersection of the two main streets. The *chaupal* was where the *panchayat* was held, marriages of village girls took place, wandering religious groups and other visitors to the village

---

\(^8\) Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, tr. T. Burger with the assistance of F. Lawrence, Cambridge, MS: MIT Press, 1991 (henceforth, Habermas, *Structural Transformation*); also his ‘The public sphere’, in Chandra Mukherji and Michael Schudson (eds.), *Rethinking Popular Culture: Contemporary Perspectives in Cultural Studies*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991, 398–404 according to Habermas popular individual opinions did not have the potential of ‘rational discussion’ and were to be considered as ‘a kind of sediment of history’. See Chapter Five for more on this question.

were received, and village politics was delineated. This was where the men also gathered, smoked, played cards, and did all kinds of things. ‘Gossip goes on endlessly at the chaupal and all sorts of discussions take place here.’

The public orality of chaupals had its counterpart in the chandimandap in Bengal that went far beyond what the name suggests, a space for the worship of the goddess Chandi or Durga. Usually constructed by the village landlord, chandimandaps were where the elders in the village met, smoked, problems of the village were discussed and cultural programmes like jatra, open air folk theatre and kathakata, devotional story-telling took place.

A public discourse based on impersonal principles of justice also made its beginning in the colonial period through the mediation of liberal thinkers, albeit in a limited sense. Literary and political activism coupled with institution building marked the late colonial phase of Indian history when communication through associational practice had become the order of the day. Yet, scholars have focused on the differences between the Habermasian public sphere and the one emerging in colonial India. Sudipta Kaviraj has argued that the public sphere in colonial Bengal for example was not equally accessible to all as the public were divided according to caste, education, religion and the like. Access to public spaces were strictly restricted and granted to

---

10 There were two types of chaupals in jat villages—one serving as dormitory for bachelors and for people visiting the village, the other serving the purpose of a meeting point for the males, S.K. Chandhoke, Nature and Structure of Rural Habitations, New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, 206–16, and passim. Kuan or the well, formed the community centre for women; since the 1970s women were seen at the chaupal, 212–13.


a select few on special occasions. While the *bhadralok* embraced the Western concept of public and private, upper caste dictums considered the public sphere impure enough to be neglected.\(^{14}\) Writing on the nationalist discourse in Bengal, Partha Chatterjee noted that sovereignty in the cultural domain of language, speech and religion empowered the Bengali elite to demarcate the public or ‘material’ domain of the state comprising administration, economy, law, and statecraft in which the colonized demanded equality with the colonizer.\(^{15}\) The spread of English education with an emphasis on English literature accompanied by the increasing number of printing presses and the growth of a genre of Bengali plays in the late nineteenth century saw the emergence of an autonomous public sphere outside European domain. Left outside the political domain controlled by the colonial power, and inspired by European theatre, the Bengali educated literati created the modern Bengali drama. The direct dialogues in this new genre for example between the colonizer and the colonized in pidgin English and ‘foul-mouth denunciations’ of the former in common Bengali derived their strength from the rhetorical power of speech. Bengali public theatre, while augmenting the power of eloquence and performance, was immensely successful in drawing a popular audience.\(^{16}\)

While the *chaupal* or the *chandimandap* was often the centre of community interaction in rural India, the chain of the India Coffee House (ICH) was created in the late 1930s with the idea to introduce the urban population to coffee, a beverage that was new to a large section of the population in north India. Soon after their creation, the outlets of the chain were seen however, as facilitating the practice of orality in a convivial ambience with the effect, that this public space soon became a part of urban experience and a landmark in the city where it was located. In order to understand the context in which

---


\(^{16}\) Ibid., 55–58.
the Coffee House functioned, we shall briefly examine the tradition of *adda*, or informal, agendaless social gathering.

**ADDA: A UNIVERSAL SOCIAL PRACTICE?**

Although *adda*, as we shall see below, is a familiar form of socialization, it is mostly seen as an indispensable part of Bengali culture. *Adda* has been described as a ‘long talking session, commonly of a recurrent sort among friends or co-activists. It is not simply conversation, or discussion, or debate, or gossip; and yet it is all these’. In the words of the littérateur Buddhadev Basu, who ‘could not live without *adda*’, the practice was pan-Indian. He could not find its equivalent in English clubs and French salons, but the ‘moisture in the air of Bengal was the reason why it attained its full blossom’ there. The soft climate, the seasons in Bengal, were favourable to creative poetic emotions, to the density of...trees...and of *adda*. Its ‘clothing is clean, but not too clean, much more than fitting, rather loose, soft-to-touch, not starch-hardened, allows stretching, and if one so wishes, even lying down. Yet, it is not dirty, does not bear any stain of fish curry or betel-juice...is comfortable, but does not bear the mark of carelessness; for comfort does not mean rhythmlessness’.18 *Adda* is, according to him, like home, an escape from work, a space where everyone irrespective of differences in practical life, receives an equal treatment. In spite of this difference, there has to be an inner similarity among the members. The membership should be limited to those who like each other, and feel attracted to each other by a feeling of kinship.

As mentioned above, Dipesh Chakrabarty has dwelt at length upon the claim of many twentieth century Bengali intellectuals that with its agendaless, free-flowing conversations, *adda*—often reflecting the participants’ sense of humour, stock of information and wit, is a quintessentially Bengali form of recreation, representing the ‘creative’ side of Bengali patriarchy. Indulging in *adda* in Chakrabarty’s view


provided the Bengali elite with a ‘comfort zone to cope with the ever-changing forces of capitalist modernity’. Detailing on an array of spaces including bookshops, high schools, *baithak-khana* or parlours of rich persons, hostels, messes (boarding houses), literary clubs and parks that facilitated the practice of *adda* among the Bengali male elite, he states that it is not his aim to ‘defend the Bengali metaphysical claim that the practice of *adda* is anything peculiarly Bengali’ but concludes the essay with the statement that in spite of the problems of domination and exclusion characterizing the structure of *adda*, ‘the institution played enough of a role in Bengali modernity for it to be tagged ‘Bengali’.

Writing about late nineteenth century Calcutta, Swati Chattopadhyay has recently argued that *adda* was a critique of a more rational form of getting together, for example in associations and committees (*sabba* and *samiti*). Further, she claims that in the instance of *adda*, the home and the state—both colonial and post-colonial—‘are not in opposition but connected….in a world where home and colonial service lie in a continuum of bondage [responsibilities, obligations at home, and the pursuit of a salaried job, and consequently] *adda* is a space that seeks to escape both home and salaried service’… From the late nineteenth century to the early twentieth century, women/and women’s question surfaced in the public space/sphere on numerous occasions and in multifarious ways, but the world of *adda* remained male-centred throughout.

The current research, like that of Chakrabarty and Chatterjee, deals with a context that is urban, and coffee-tea house socialization is often associated only with the educated middle class. But the reference to the *chandimandap* and *chaupal* that also served as the location of informal gatherings of the village male, indicates that *adda* is a practice not limited to the urban, or the Western educated middle class alone.

---

Paan or betel leaf shops and barbershops in rural and urban India are also places where men get together and socialize. As a major form of recreation and pursuit of leisure, adda is equally popular among the haves and havenots, irrespective of locale, age and sex. Even the nineteenth century baithak-khana gatherings associated with the bhadralok may not have been limited to indoors. I shall discuss the public-private relationship in detail later. Here it is suffice to say that by the late 1940s onwards women would gradually assert themselves in the addas of the Coffee House.

Although Chattopadhyay rightly critiques the apologetic nature of Chakrabarty’s presentation of male-centred adda, her delineation of the site of adda—as providing an escape route from home and salaried employment—is not far from that offered by Chakrabarty. The condition she describes resulted necessarily from the capitalist modernity to what the latter refers, but does not go into details. Moreover, adda was never a preserve of the salaried middle-class; for those getting together for an adda in a park, on the ro’ak, or in the hostel mess, mess were often students. Even if not unemployed, connoisseurs of adda are required to have an abundance of time to be spent as leisure. Additionally, the informal does not necessarily have to be seen as a critique of the formal. Apart from the fact that the participants of the two kinds of meetings were often the same persons, the idea of a formal meeting could originate in and end with an informal adda.

Based on information on adda from accounts, memoirs and from personal interviews, the concept of adda in this book has been developed

---

Tulika Majumdar, ‘Gramin Mahilader Adda’, ibid., 216–29, is about women’s adda in Bengal villages where feudal relationships still hold sway.


23 See Chapter Six for a detailed discussion on the relationship between the public and the private in the ICH.

24 For example the four admirers crowding around the famous fictional, middle aged, tall tale teller Ghana-da alias Ghanashyambabu in the room of his mess—Gaur, Shibu, Shishir and Sudhir, creations of the fiction writer Premendra Mitra—are all young.
by using the perspectives of social practice. These perspectives, although much used in sociology, are not a unified theory. Pierre Bourdieu, Anthony Giddens and Michel Foucault among others have used this concept as an analytical tool in their understanding of society.

Adda, a major form of recreation in South Asia is the most common form of social connection between two or more unrelated humans and is very much an integrated social practice. The epitaph to this chapter suggests that in order to enjoy something, it has to be given some space, to be stretched on all sides, to be unfolded to be appreciated properly. For the connoisseurs, the practice of adda gives them the space to cherish the leisure time to its fullest, to extract the maximum pleasure out of it. Although there may be a disagreement as to what it may contain, adda conveys an intelligible meaning in that it is a spatially dispersed social practice involving two or more individuals getting together and conversing in an informal setting. As the act of conversation, involving more than one agent, is the sine qua non of an adda, participation in an adda requires a certain time of day to be reserved for this action when other participating agents are likely to have some time to spare. Consequently, adda is time-bound. This is a site where practices of sociability, conversation and public orality, practices of the production and reproduction of culture may come together.

The concept of adda is not fixed and is based on personal experience/opinion. The practice is of course connected with a site. According to Basu, whose house had an adda of its own, wrote in the mid 1940s that adda’s success depended on the choice of its site. One most favourable place, to be replaced from time to time by a

---


26 Adda is not an institution like marriage governed by the rule of law. Nor is it a custom. Further, just as no one is obliged to take part in an adda, not everyone is able to appreciate this form of sociability.
couple of subsidiary places, could be ideal for *adda*. That he did not have any public place in mind becomes clear, when we read that in addition to comfortable furniture, drinking water and ‘golden and fragrant’ tea, some edibles in clean crockery, ‘served preferably by the mistress of the house herself’ were important indicators of the quality of an *adda*. Further, the numbers of members of a perfect *adda* group varied between three and twelve. Less than three made the conversation private; and more than twelve ‘transformed the *adda* into Albert Hall’. Even when Basu was penning these lines, ‘Albert Hall’ *addas* had become the new social site in the city. What is also important here is to note that the practice of combining consumption of food with that of *adda* seemed normal to him. This combination of the intake of food during *adda* has been looked down upon by later generations. Also, *adda* groups could be large, but all members need not be present all the time. As an informal practice, *adda* does not have fixed guidelines, rules or procedures. But each *adda* may be governed by its own norms and implicit understandings. Moreover, as an almost routinized practice, *adda* affects the schedule of everyday life.

It was not easy to practise *adda*, and even more difficult to keep the practice alive. Basu noted that a silent creativity of one person was essential for an *adda* to come to life. In the words of Nripendrakrishna Chattopadhyay, an eminent Bengali in the early 1960s:

> Most *addas* have a central figure, the *addadhari*, nurturing it... Not everyone is suitable for this role. In addition to orality, many other ingredients are essential for keeping an *adda* alive. One person has to sacrifice a lot silently for the survival of an *adda*...

> Planting a crop alone does not yield the harvest. Each crop has a special enemy, and it is necessary to be ever alert in order to save the crop from its grip. *Adda* too has enemies of various kinds. They are the white ants of *adda*; once they enter it, they will leave only holes behind.

> For this reason, participating in an *adda* is not as easy as it appears to be...  

27 Basu, ‘*Adda*’.

That it was not easy to participate in any *adda*, we shall see in the succeeding pages.\(^2^9\) As it is a social practice, it is governed by the hierarchical rules embedded in social relations. Moreover, any *adda* has to stick to the conditions and norms associated with the space where it occurs. *Adda* in the average tea-shops predating the ICH was a homo-social world of the urban male. Similarly, women visiting the ICH in Allahabad continue to sit in the isolated section meant for women and families. Once these practices, embedded in the social are accepted as the norm, they become part of the practice and influence its structure. For a group of adolescent/young adult school students the purpose behind the practice of *adda* in the neighbouring Coffee House was to experience the thrill of being in a world of adults where they could smoke. But when a few members of one particular profession practice orality in a group or in parallel groups sharing the same space, it may have some utilitarian purpose in the long run, in addition to the immediate recreational purpose of the engagement. The rewards from the practice may also vary. While for a large group it may denote only an ephemeral pleasure, a break from the everyday, for a section of the participating agents, the effects of the practice of *adda* may be several, with larger consequences for the connected practices concerned. Although the event of *adda* is without a *telos*, when an aspiring poet goes to the ICH in order to gain access to the literary world and reads out his poetry to his peer group that consequently discusses it, *adda* becomes instructive. Similarly, when an editor of a magazine participates in an *adda* with poets and others in the social space, s/he might be considering the publication of their work. *Telos* can be injected by an individual in the course of a conversation.\(^3^0\)

The diverse interests of the members of the group also result in that the *adda* wanders from subject to subject. A specific unit of film-makers seriously discussing the script or technique of a film or of revolutionaries discussing ‘the next phase of struggle’ would not be *adda*, but simply a classic meeting. Students adhering to different

\(^{2^9}\) See especially Chapter Two, Four and Five.

\(^{3^0}\) This aspect of *adda* can be best understood in the context of its relationship with literary practices covered in Chapter Four.
political ideologies came together in a public place for an *adda* to discuss and debate the different positions on an issue. But when members of one particular party wanted to chalk out a plan of action, that would not be in a public place, the event would be more formal, with an agenda including a list of speakers.\(^{31}\)

That *adda* as a loose and flowing flood of undirected talk functions as a social cement is why, although it is not a club with a fixed membership, it is difficult for an ‘outsider’ to join or to take part in it. And also why invitation, or some kind of bonding was essential: a recognition by the circle that the person concerned matched the standard of the existing group. Serious subject matters were, as we shall see, very much a part of an *adda* as long as the ambience did not replicate that of a formal lecture hall.

The intimate sphere of *adda* is however not entirely free from competition which results in a tension often visible in the tendency to be abreast of the latest in the field of art, film, literature etc. However, members of a group may very well discuss Dostoyevski in the course of their conversation, but coming to a public place with a novel of Dostoyevski must not invoke the impression that it is an attempt to show off. Any pretension, intellectual or otherwise had to be presented in such a manner that was accepted and impressed upon the rest of the members; otherwise it might run amok.

How then does one enter such an intimate sphere where there is no fixed rule or requirement?

The consequence is that adoption into an *adda* circle of a ‘stranger’ (even a relative or a colleague), is difficult; because one does not know in advance about the person’s suitability for such intimacy. Fore-knowledge is essential in order to ensure that he or she would be apt for imbibing the liquid of such intimate conversation, often lacking a pre-defined subject matter.\(^{32}\)

As indicated in the essay by Chakrabarty, Bengalis have a metaphysical claim to *adda* and from Satyajit Ray, the literatteurs

\(^{31}\) See the response of the Naxalite student leaders of the 1960s in Chapter Five.

\(^{32}\) Narratives of *adda* at the ICH are testimony to this tension. See spatial practices in the place in Chapter Two.
Syed Mujtaba Ali and Buddhadev Basu—all great connoisseurs of *adda*—to bloggers, *adda* is a favourite subject with Bengalis. Any attempt at disparaging this tradition, so dear to Bengalis, specially by a non-Bengali was sure to receive severe disapproval. However, it became evident during the field research carried out in connection with the current book that not only are people from different linguistic groups and distant locations from Delhi and Simla to Bangalore and Trivandrum familiar with the concept of *adda* as it is understood in Bengal, but the practice is also common in many other places. In Gujarat for example, the state where alcohol is banned, the *kitli* (literally kettle), the roadside tea shop, open from early hours of the day till very late at night, is the place for the male to socialize for long hours over milky tea, cigarettes and local snacks. *Kitlis* are extremely popular among students and those with a shoestring budget for tea, snacks at a cheap price, and also for having a good time with the peer group; they are the ‘perfect place to catch up and brainstorm’. Using a few of the existing spaces of public socialization as a lens, the rest of this chapter will expand the focus outside Bengal to include the north Indian cities of Allahabad and Delhi where the Coffee House had its outlets.

Although *adda* is synonymous with Bengali culture, as a social practice it is equally enjoyed in other parts of India and in countries outside too. Writing about the past-time of the people in Turkey, it is noted that:

> The prime ingredients of the Turks’ idea of fun and amusement seem to be relaxation, imagination, sociability and humor. Sitting is almost,

---

33 Andrew Robinson, *Satyajit Ray: The Inner Eye: The Biography of a Master Film-Maker*, London: I.B. Tauris, 2004, 62–64. At least two of Ray’s films touched upon the theme of *adda*. While *Mahapurush* (The Great Man, 1965) held the tea and coffee house *addas* of Calcutta to be educative, the *adda* in a Calcutta middle class drawing room in his last film *Agantuk* (The Stranger, 1991) attached greater importance to the normative discourses in the gymnasia of ancient Greece. We shall return to Ray and *adda* in Chapter Seven.

if not quite, the most popular recreation of all. Turks sit at windows, in gardens, at coffee houses...anywhere and everywhere they can see a pleasing view and relax in conversation.

As a spatially dispersed practice, *adda*, as we have seen above, can take place anywhere as long as the location allows conversation in a relaxed mood. A slightly different description of the same social practice could be found in the tea houses in Chengdu, China.\(^{35}\)

Most conversations were spontaneous and without purpose; as a saying put it, ‘conversation in the teahouse flows wherever it wishes.’ One teahouse near West gate was simply called *geshuo ge* (random talks). Joining the conversation required no preparation or qualifications. Men could express any opinion without being held responsible as long as they did not offend anyone and nobody took what they said seriously. In a teahouse people could join conversations with strangers or simply listen if they preferred.

Syed Mujtaba Ali, the erudite linguist and essayist known for his humour and satire who penned some of the best travel literature in Bengali, was also a great connoisseur of *adda*. In his colourful account of the life of the men in Cairo that revolved round coffee houses, he found their devotion to *adda* to be superior to that of the Bengali male. Save for the six hours from midnight to early morning they reluctantly spent at home, and the time they had to work, men in Cairo happily whiled away their time in social gatherings in cafés. In no time after the author had expressed his desire to have a suit tailored, the locals appointed a Greek tailor and in what followed, the coffee house became the venue for selecting and purchasing the dress material, taking measuremens, and trial for a custom-made suit tailored for the author within a few hours.\(^{36}\) In *Street Corner Society*, his classic ethnographic study of the Italian-American inhabitants of ‘Cornerville’, the fictitious name of a slum in North End, Boston, William Foote Whyte left a vivid account of the socialization as the

---

\(^{35}\) Wang, *Teahouse*, 121.

inhabitants gathered, gossiped, gambled and flirted. Barbershop socializing is common in the poor neighbourhoods of New York like Bronx, Harlem and Brooklyn, and in other US cities like Los Angeles, as places where friends run into one another, spend time together and exchange news and gossips, offering stability to a seemingly chaotic and disorderly life.

**ADDA IN THE CURRENT CONTEXT**

To understand the *addda* in the ICH, I propose to build on the concept of capitalist modernity by looking deeper into what the urbanites thought about their life in the city they inhabited. Reflecting on their life in the city, thinking persons in places like Allahabad, Calcutta and Delhi, through the 1930s to the 1950s, often referred to it as an alienation. I argue here that the social practice of *addda* was an attempt by the individual to provide a ‘critique’ of their experience, to rise beyond all the mundane of which the everyday consisted.

Modernization of society is a continuous process leaving its imprint on social life. Prospects of higher education and employment are only two of the factors drawing people from the rural areas in India to the cities. On the one hand young adult males leaving home for the city gradually led to the disintegration of the structure of the family and society in the village, while on the other, the same citizens tried to obtain a foothold in a new place. In Calcutta, for example, most of these men stayed in messes; many celebrities like Nirad C. Chaudhuri began their career in such messes scattered over central and north Calcutta.38

38 Nirad C. Chaudhuri stayed in a mess near Surya Sen Street. When he was teaching in Ripon (Surendranath) College during 1936–46. Pramatha Nath Bishi, another well-known littérateur, used to stay in a mess on Sitaram Ghosh Street. As a lecturer of Bengali he used to earn 75 rupees a month (lecturers of other subjects earned 100 rupees a month). He would meet his own costs and send money to his family in Rajshahi (now in Bangladesh), Sabitendranath Roy, *College Street-e Sottor Bochhor* (Seventy Years in College Street), Kolkata: Mitra o Ghosh, 4 vols, 2006–08, vol. 3, 149–50; linguist Suniti Kumar Chatterjee too lived in a hostel.
In cities like Calcutta and Delhi most of the people had left their rural homes for the city either for study or for work. In an attempt to explain what the *adda* in the Coffee House meant to the public in Calcutta, Pabitra Kumar Ghosh, a regular customer of the ICH in the 1950s, tried to understand life in the city from the perspectives of the process of urbanization in Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Familiar with the works of Karl Marx, historian of political thought Peter Laslett, Marxist socialist William Morris, philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Russian anti-communist academic-activist Pitirim Sorokin and essayist Henry David Thoreau among others, Ghosh noted that the same anti-humanist civilization that had given birth to new cities in the West, created modern cities in India. It was the fragmented, disfigured humanity that took shelter in the cupboard-like residences in the new urban complexes. There were layers in the city where it was possible to feel the warmth of the earth washed by sunlight; but beneath that thin surface was an extensive layer covered by deep darkness, where people lived in distress, where the difference between life and death was very little.39

It is interesting to observe that at a time when Henri Lefebvre was configuring the adverse impact of post-World War II Fordist economy on the development of the human being in Paris,40 his contemporaries were reflecting on their life in a post-colonial Third World country following a socialist mixed-economy model of governance through license-raj, along strikingly similar lines. For Ghosh, chaos and disaster were metaphors for the modern urban space. Calcutta in his view had reached the point where it subordinated life to organized destruction, and it was necessary therefore to regiment, limit and constrict all exhibitions of real life and culture. Those born, raised or settling in such cold and dark parts of Calcutta soon felt that they had lost the essence of their life. Prevailing over the entertainment and the fun, longings and prospects in the city, was the naked truth that it allotted on an average 30 square feet living

space per inhabitant.\footnote{Ghosh, \textit{Coffee-house}. In a popular song composed by Kabir Suman in the early 1990s this was reduced to 10 square feet.} ‘The result is manifest in the paralysis of all the higher activities of the society: truth shorn or debased to fit the propaganda: the organs of cooperation stiffened into a reflex system of obedience...it is deeply...antagonistic to every valuable manifestation of life.’

Pabitra Kumar was not the only person troubled about the travails of life in the city. Another thinking person bearing the same family name informs us:

One-third of the population in Calcutta lives in slums \textit{none} of which is fit for human dwelling....And mind you, the families since recently living at railway stations along the vast stretch spanning from Sealdah to Ranaghat, live much more comfortably than us, tenants. I would advise them never to opt for a rented place or slum. Any railway station is heaven compared to the rented house of that friend of mine, and compared to a slum, his rented house is again a royal palace! Therefore, it is much better to live on the concrete footpath under the balcony of huge mansions, or in the wide, open quarters of the railway station. Then you will not be required to pay an irregular, extra fee (\textit{selami}) to landlord, pay a rent four times higher than it should be, and live under a leaking roof (\textit{gamla, balti pete cbbati mathay diye}). With regard to the question of the privacy of your family, you do not have that anyway at the ‘collective’ tubewell or water-tap [of a rented place].\footnote{Binay Ghosh, \textit{Kalpanchar Naksha} (A Satire), Calcutta: Pathabhavan, 1967/1953, 72–73. The first edition was published in 1951.}

Thus the alienation in a modern urban situation theorists in the West were writing about, was indeed felt by urbanites in post-colonial Calcutta. It should be noted that those living in the narrow space of a rented house with a leaking ceiling were not necessarily the poor or the downtrodden who lived in the slum or in the wide open space of the railway station; it was a reality for many middle class families in pre and post-Partition Calcutta.\footnote{Till 1950 most of the migrants from East Bengal were \textit{bhadralok} with financial}
of the customers of the Coffee House in College Street lived in such dwellings.\textsuperscript{44}

Although Ghosh’s description of the city was confined to the urban, the imagination of the first-generation urbanites in Calcutta, especially those who had been forced to leave their ancestral houses without the prospect of going back, was often guided by a comparison of the idyllic village they had left (or had been forced to leave) behind. Ashis Nandy wrote that the urbanites were in the city ‘by default and under duress. Home has to have a touch of the pastoral, even when a poisoned village has caused the homelessness’.\textsuperscript{45} The poet Sankha Ghosh, whose family left their ancentral home in East Bengal when he was fifteen, missed the place where he grew up from a young boy to a young adolescent, reflected however, in a number of his works differently:\textsuperscript{46}

\textsuperscript{44} Scholars from different disciplines have profusely written on this most tragic event in Indian history. Individual memory and pain however has best been preserved in post-Partition literary fiction. In Bengali see for example Manik Bandyopadhyay, \textit{Sarbojonin} (Public), Kolkata: Universal, 1952; and Jyotirindra Nandi, \textit{Baro Ghar Ek Uthon} (Twelve Homes, Common Courtyard), Kolkata, 1955; Sunil Gangopadhyay, \textit{Ardhek Jiban} (Half a Life—Autobiographical), Kolkata: Ananda, 2002; among Gangopadhyay’s other works \textit{Purva-Paschim} (East and West), Kolkata: Ananda, 2012, depicts the situation resulting from forceful occupation of deserted buildings by refugees and the antagonism this influx created among the Calcuttans of West Bengal origin, while his \textit{Arjun} is about the effort of a group of refugees to establish a colony in Dum Dum and then to defend it against the lanlord’s goondas. Also see Mukul Guha, ‘Adda kono din o bandho hobar noy’, in Samarendra Das (ed.), \textit{Kolkatar Adda}; Tarun Majumdar, ‘Adda! Adda’, ibid.

\textsuperscript{45} Ashis Nandy, \textit{An Ambiguous Journey to the City}, New Delhi: OUP, 2001, 31; see Chakrabarty, \textit{Provincializing Europe}, for a discussion of the city vs. country in nationalist imagination.

\textsuperscript{46} Excerpt from ‘Punarbasan’ (Rehabilitation), \textit{Sankha Ghosher Kabita Sangraba} (Collected Poetry), vol. 1, Kolkata: Dey’s, 1981, 115–16. Tr. by Bhaswati Bhattacharya and Victor van Bijlert.
Once I was surrounded by
grass and stones
snakes and lizards
a temple in ruins
I was surrounded by
banishment
strings of tales
sunset in solitude
I was surrounded by
destruction
arrows and spears
ancestral home
all at once in a stampede facing westward
memories like jostling crowds on a long journey
broken box left in the shadow of a mango-tree
suddenly, with a new step, everyone’s a refugee.
Now I am surrounded by
Sealdah
long afternoons
graffiti
I am surrounded by
blind alleys
slogans
the Monument
I am surrounded by
beds with piercing arrows
lampposts
the red Ganges
all of this envelops me in the darkness of the bone-marrow

Rehabilitation in the long run implies reconciliation with the present, as the rest of the poem shows. Similarly, the difference between the native southern and the northern or European part of Allahabad was such that it made the writer-poet Harivansh Rai Bachchan (1907–2003) feel nostalgic about the ambience of the southern part missing in the newer part of the city. Bachchan was born and grew up as a young man at Chowk Mohalla in the southern part of the city. His family had lived there for seven generations. And family ties among the brothers of his father were close until
Harivansh antagonized his relatives and other members of the Kayasth caste by eating at an ostracized woman’s place, resulting in the ostracization of his own family. Chowk was like ‘a part of a village in the process of turning into a town, or rather a part of a town thrust forcibly into the midst of a village, fields and barns’, and was a mixed neighbourhood. The wrestler-cum-market gardener and his low-caste wife, a woman of the Kacchi caste, the Arya Samaji Babu Mukta Prasad, the Shia steward, shared the neighbourhood together with Gujarati, Bengali and Kayasth professionals. On the north, the Chowk bounded by Mohatsimganj or Mosimganj, while west of the property of the market-gardener were small mud-brick huts of Muslim artisans: barbers, butchers, hookah-makers, kite makers, locksmiths, tin-smiths etc. Hindu males in that neighbourhood would join in the ceremonial mournings of Muslims during Muharram. This property was confiscated by the state at the time of the construction of Zero Road when they moved to Katghar, where the much-acclaimed poetical works of Bachchan, Madhusaala, Madhubala, Madhukalash and Nisha nimantran had seen the light of the day. It was at Katghar that he lost his first wife and his father. Since he commuted back and forth between his home and the university, four kilometres apart, everyday, till he obtained a bicycle, he knew the area like the back of his hand, and was very familiar with the life of the people around his house.47

Reflecting on the period he later spent in Naya Katra near the university in the northern part of the city, Bachchan attributed the quality of those earlier poems to the human contacts he had experienced in Chowk and Katghar, the traditional part of the city. The newly-settled area of Naya Katra in contrast was ‘like a lodging-house where no complete connection with other migrants could really be achieved’.48 In Civil Lines, the area where he moved to in the mid-1940s, he felt himself like a ‘newly transplanted tree’:49

48 Ibid., 267.
49 Ibid., 323–24; emphasis added.
Civil Lines brought a chance to enjoy privacy and freedom from interference, and for a person like me who had turned away from the conventional path in favour of a life of study and writing, this atmosphere was rather favourable; but it exacted a price for these advantages, for one had to accept self-dependent, self-sufficient and solitude….such a life could neither make Teji [his second wife] happy nor provide Amit [his elder son Amitabh] with a healthy environment in which to grow up.

The city brings freedom from rural bondage; but it is also impersonal. There was a new kind of sociality in Civil Lines that offered a ‘formal, politely detached’ contact distinct from the informal bond existing in the traditional part of the town, and although his family would gradually assimilate into that world, the difference between the two worlds had made an impact deep enough on the imagination for Bachchan to recount it decades later.50

Although brief, the distinction the poet Bachchan makes between the traditional and modern parts of the city in which he had lived almost echoes the sentiment about a modern city the two urbanites from Calcutta expressed. The familiarity, interdependence and ties that were part of the old town with its traditional life is missed in the newly settled modern part where a formal, polite and detached contact stands in the way of having an in-depth relationship.

Considering that Bachchan had moved only from the traditional to the modern part of the same town, it can be assumed that the nostalgia would be much stronger among those migrating from the village or small town reflected in the works of Mangalesh Dabral, Neelabh among many others. Reminiscing about the time when he was a newcomer to Delhi in the mid-1950s, Ajit Kumar writes that like many others, he too took the road from the village to the city via the market town, or kasba. He often dreamt of going back to his village, and although he never went back, he vividly remembered the ghats, mangroves and ponds of the village associated with his childhood. Losing his way confused among the radial roads and circular spaces in the Connaught Circus, he penned:

50 Ibid.; emphasis added.
There was a city called Delhi
hell for some, heaven for none:
we all came here in search of our own world!
what is this attachment?
keep even the wilted flower
close to your bosom, are you crazy?
as the custom of this country goes—
pierce it, scratch it, smell it, crush it and cast it away
why don’t you try it as well!
Nayeempur your village
why chant the name like a rosary?51

Work took him to the capital, but the village he left behind, did
not leave him. As the memory faded with the passage of time, the
nostalgia for the village close to the heart became stronger. The busy,
chaotic life in the city meant that he needed a space in which to relax,
and reflect. The Coffee House provided such a space, helping to come
to terms with the chaotic, confusing life in the city. The same idea is
evoked by the associations made by the customers of the Tea-cum-
Coffee House in Delhi:

It will not be wrong if I say that the Tea House saved the animal
called writer from the chaos and boredom of life in the capital.52

The introspective analysis of the modern Indian city by Pabitra
Kumar is remarkably similar to the urban experience of his
counterparts in Allahabad and Delhi, and sheds new light on the
adda those urbanites participated in.

The section below will cast a cursory glance at the existing spaces
of public consumption facilitating sociability in the three cities
studied in this book. Not only that the words ‘addebaaj’, ‘guppbaaj’
(connoisseur of adda) are similar to addabaaj and galpobaaj in
Bengali, ‘adda jamana’ (to gather at some place regularly) is a
usage common in Hindi. A recent collection of memoirs of poets
and writers in Hindi connected with various literary movements in
post-Independence India is in fact a testimony to the various literary

ADDA AND PUBLIC SPACES OF SOCIABILITY BEFORE THE ICH

addas in Delhi, the main centre being the Tea-cum-Coffee House in Connaught Place.53 Was this a mid-twentieth century phenomenon, or is there a history of informal public association in Delhi and Allahabad too? Is there a link between the public culture of the *mushairas* where poets recited their own work, or the cosmopolitan heritage of *majlish* of Hindustani classical music, where gossip with juicy anecdotes was intertwined with the flow of music creating a bond between performers and narrators transcending barriers of language, and comparing with the sociability in the Coffee House?54 What did the ICH replace, if it replaced anything at all?55

DELHI

It has been stated that public spaces in Mughal Delhi were dominated by royalty and religion and that it was the British Government formed in the post-1857 period that created a ‘civic’ realm. With the rise of Indian nationalism, the newly created ‘civic’ square provided a space for political meetings and public protests.56 However, the Perso-Islamic civilization of Mughal India that connected the subcontinent with central and west Asia nurtured a public culture beyond these two domains. The fact that both Hindu and Muslim functionaries of the Mughals used Urdu resulted in Urdu becoming commonly accepted

---

55 Hotels serving meals have been left out of this survey as they belong to a different category. For an account of eating out in Bombay during the mid-twentieth century, see Frank Conlon, ‘Dining Out in Bombay’, in Carol Appadurai Breckenridge (ed.), *Consuming Modernity: Public Culture in a South Asian World*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995, 90–130.
by both the communities.\textsuperscript{57} Mirza Ghalib’s famous quote in the face of an inquiry by an English official in the days following the capture of Delhi by the colonial forces that only the half of him that did not consume pork was Muslim, but the other half that drank wine, was in fact a testimony to the secular ideology nurtured by the Mughals, and Bahadur Shah Zafar in particular.\textsuperscript{58} Consumption of alcohol and merry-making on festive occasions in defiance of religious prohibition had long been a part of the elite culture in urban Mughal India.\textsuperscript{59} The bourgeoisie in the European sense was absent in Delhi, but in the public sphere the nobility, the rich and the poor were equal in the literary public sphere of the \textit{mushairas}.\textsuperscript{60} Chandni Chowk, the ‘most beautiful and profusely decorated passage’ in the city, attracted the high and low as a centre of recreation.\textsuperscript{61} The eateries, and the shops selling objets d’art, rare and exotic commodities like spices, birds, camels, firearms, horses, jewelleries, and textiles drew the attention of the locals and foreigners alike. Oral transmission through public performances drew the semi-literate and illiterate rural population to the public sphere.\textsuperscript{62} It was at Chandni Chowk that people passed time under the shade of the trees, along the canal in the middle, and where \textit{dastangos} (story tellers) held their sessions,\textsuperscript{63} courtesans’ salons


\textsuperscript{58} Ghalib, who would drink wine even in Mecca, refers to ‘salon’ owned by his beloved, Russell, \textit{Ghalib}.


\textsuperscript{63} Ibid.; Pavankumar Varma, ‘Shahjahanabad: The City that Once Was’, in
offered an escape from the insecurities of everyday life, while flying kites was an entertainment revelled in by the high and low.\textsuperscript{64}

That in addition to becoming a part of hospitality in private and official meetings, coffee was available in public spaces like qahwakhanas or coffee houses in Mughal Delhi where the coffee house culture had become popular. This is evident from references to the pastime of visiting qahwakhanas scattered here and there in the Chowk, where poets assembled daily in the evening to listen to the recitation of each other’s verses, and scholars and others from different strata of the society debated on different public issues outside the realm of religion and state. Mehfils of music, dance, poetry and repartee were organized at different venues in the market.\textsuperscript{65} In whatever was left of the walled city of Shahjahanabad after 1857, some of this public culture persisted even in the high noon of the colonial empire as the pressure of business and trade ensured that Chandni Chowk would thrive again soon. Though the dastangos resumed their trade, the mushairas seem to have stopped.\textsuperscript{66} Common people gathered at milk and sweet shops where both private and public happenings were discussed.\textsuperscript{67}

The secular setting of public life in Mughal cities in the doab like Agra, Allahabad, Awadh and Lucknow nourished a composite culture, also a characteristic of Delhi and Lahore. Known in the


\textsuperscript{65} Shama Mitra Chenoy, \textit{Shahjahanabad: A City of Delhi, 1638–1857}, Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1998, 128; all evening story-telling sessions were held on the steps of the \textit{Jama Masjid} too, Dalrymple, \textit{The Last Mughal}, 107.

\textsuperscript{66} See Gupta, \textit{Delhi}, for post mutiny Chandni Chowk, 50–54.

\textsuperscript{67} Ahmed Ali, \textit{Twilight in Delhi}, Bombay: OUP, 1966 (1940); a kabab seller, a barber, a carpenter and a merchant gathering at Mirza’s—the milk and sweet seller—shop where they discuss the fate of the last Mughal Emperor and debate on the positive and negative aspects of the British rule, 139–41; again during WWI the discussion by the same characters draw on the inflation in Delhi, the misery caused by the rule of King ‘Jaraj’ (George) and the latest they have gathered about German war techniques, 218–21; for politics being discussed in the gents section of private house, ibid., 145–46.
parlance of northern India as *Ganga-Jamuni tehzeeb*, it was the joint handiwork of Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs. In this tradition of a shared cultural history that resulted in endless fusion of Hindu and Muslim forms of art, architecture, cookery, literature and music among other things. Hindus patronized poets composing in Persian and Urdu, wrote poems and took part in *mushairas*, owned Urdu press and financed Urdu literary journals. Bookshops owned by Hindus became intellectual marts where prominent figures of all religions met.68 Just as Hindu and Muslim feudal lords had united hands with Begum Hazrat Mahal of Awadh in her fight against the Company’s army in 1857, early twentieth century Hindu elite engaged in writing learned articles on Urdu poetry and organized or attended *mushairas*.69

In all cities studied here, as will be evident from the description below, there were enough places where people could meet informally. Even so, a large section of the middle class was unfamiliar with both coffee and the coffee house. The post-Mutiny period saw the gradual development of modern Delhi when many western educated natives left their abode in old Delhi for the modern environment in Civil Lines. There were clubs like Chelmsford Club and Windsor Club and coffee-shops serving the British, and surviving account suggests that the latter were modelled on the classic coffee houses of England.70 The first South Indian eatery that introduced the common public of Delhi to coffee and South Indian food was Madras Hotel in the outer ring of CP where the entire block is commonly known after the hotel.71 The first Coffee House opened by the Coffee Board in Delhi, the

---


69 Qurratulain Hyder, *River of Fire*, New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1998, 131, 157–64, 218; Mrs Sarojini Naidu, the poet governor of U.P. in independent India was holding daily mushairas at Raj Bhavan in Lucknow, 273.


71 Arjun Dev, retired professor of History, University of Delhi, interview, 6 January 2012.
capital of the British-India since 1912, was in Chandni Chowk that had revived much of the commercial activity since the foundation of the East Indian Railway line\textsuperscript{72} and again became the commercial hub in the city in the late 1930s.\textsuperscript{73} There were of course many eateries and tea shops in this neighbourhood and the one favoured by a section of the literati was Monica Restaurant. In Old Delhi there was a gathering of new generation Hindi writers like Soumitra Mohan, Yogesh Gupta, Bhushan Banamali, Shaktipal Kewal who used to work as proof-readers in Chawri Bazar and Nayi Sadak, or take dictation of established writers like Jainendra.\textsuperscript{74} With its stock of pastries and sandwiches, Carlton Café in Kashmiri Gate was favourite with many university students. In the late 1940s, a high school student with a daily allowance of 50 paise could buy two \textit{puris} and a glass of \textit{lassi} at that place. Daryaganj nurtured another hub of writers and publishers as the Central Directorate of Hindi and several vernacular magazines and publishing houses were located here. The restaurant Moti Mahal in this area was known for its quality tandoori dishes where one could enjoy elaborate dinner in open air over programmes of \textit{qawaali}, \textit{ghazal} and other colourful activities organized by the restaurant. Married into the owner’s family, Surendra Prakash used to organize lunch-cum story-reading sessions at this place.\textsuperscript{75} Close to Moti Mahal there was a \textit{dhaba} bearing the same name and writers unable to afford the pricey restaurant, would usually take guests from other cities to the \textit{dhaba}.\textsuperscript{76}

Connaught Place (CP) was the upcoming business centre and shopping mall for the elite of the capital. A green \textit{maidan} covered the

\textsuperscript{72} Gupta, \textit{Delhi}, 233.


\textsuperscript{74} Ravindra Kalia, \textit{Ghalib Chhuti Sharaab} (Ghalib Giving Up Alcohol; henceforth \textit{Ghalib}), Nayi Dilli: Bhartiya Jnanpith, 2013, 99.

\textsuperscript{75} Ibid., 105–9; Inder Sharma (83 ) of Select Groups, interview, 21 October 2012.

\textsuperscript{76} Kalia, \textit{Ghalib}, 105–6.
area between the Queensway (Janpath) and the Parliament (Sansad) Street. During World War II barracks were built in the area for housing American soldiers. Three Indian contractors played a prominent role in the construction of the mall in CP built in phases: Sir Sobha Singh, Sardar Dharam Singh and Rai Bahadur Narain Singh. Block A of CP and the Regal Theatre (currently cinema) Hall were constructed by Sir Sobha Singh, Regal being completed in 1928. Those days the Nirula Brothers, running a photography shop in CP, would have to travel to Chandni Chowk or Kashmiri Gate for a proper meal, which inspired them to open a restaurant, Hotel India, on the first floor of a building in D Block (1934), followed by Nirula’s bar and restaurant serving Indian and Continental food in the L Block at the heart of the newly developing city. Spencer’s, the famous Swiss confectionary of Kashmiri Gate (1926) had moved to A Block in the early 1930s as had Wenger’s, where pastries, tarts, mousses and homemade Swiss chocolates are still sold. With a carpeted staircase leading to the bar and restaurant on the first floor, a spacious dance floor and a live band, Nirula’s was a large establishment where meetings and parties were held. In addition, there was Davico’s, also European-owned, refurbished and renamed Standard in 1957. The presence of British officers and of a large number of Americans during World War II had paved the way for opening of restaurants with art deco interior, a live band with crooners and a dance floor, serving continental menus where the elite would go for dinner and to dance. Alps on Janpath was an air-conditioned cozy restaurant where those seeking privacy would and spend hours over cups of tea. At places like Alps,

77 Sir Sobha Singh, a prominent builder in Lutyen’s Delhi and the father of the eminent journalist and writer Khushwant Singh was also known for betraying the revolutionaries Bhagat Singh and Batukeswar Dutt.


79 Couples usually preferred Alps, Gaylord or Standard. Habib Tanvir and Monica Mishra used to visit Alps where their romance developed, Anjum Katyal, *Habib Tanvir: Towards an Inclusive Theatre*, New Delhi: Sage, 2012, 53; also see Sengupta, *Delhi Metropolitan*, for Alps and its connection with the literati. Sengupta however confuses the movement of the workers of ICH (see Chapter Three) as that of the workers of Alps, 223–24.
Laguna, Volga and York, the culture of live music and dance would be inherited by the socialites in post-colonial Delhi. Equally plush was the ambience in Gaylord in the Regal Building, a symbol of wealth and aristocracy, where the menu included Chinese food as well as Western delicacies like chocolate, ice cream, and soufflé. Coffee was served here too.\(^{80}\) Hemchandra Jain of Ferozepur, Punjab, opened Shanghai Bar in 1935 targetting the American and British soldiers in the cantonment. After 1947, Jain turned it into Respo Milk Bar and a pure vegetarian eatery that changed its *avatar* once again in the early 1950s to become Madras Coffee House.\(^{81}\) Next to Wenger’s, Keventer’s Milk Bar was another early establishment here. Madan Lamba, who had left his restaurant Volga behind in Lahore, launched Volga and Kwality in CP.\(^{82}\) With a doorman opening the door, Volga with its lush carpet, stylish furniture, starched white linens, milk white shades mellowing the light and smart bearers greeted the customer.\(^{83}\) G.K. Ghai and N. Malhotra, who used to run a restaurant business in pre-Partition Karachi, started Embassy in summer 1948, serving Indian and Continental food to an elite clientele including the political high brass and film stars like Manmohan Desai, Raj Kapoor, Jay Parvesh Chandra, the ex-chief executive councillor of Delhi, Rajiv Gandhi, L.K. Advani, Arun Jaitley and Madan Lal Khurana, government and business houses and embassies. Nirula’s replaced the earlier restaurant in 1950 with a large cafeteria, a brasserie and the Chinese Room, introducing espresso coffee in India. As live bands became more and more expensive and gradually faded out, Nirula’s closed the cafeteria and the brasserie and opened two specialty restaurants without live music in 1960, the Gufa serving Indian food and the trendy La Bohéme, an Austro-Hungarian specialty restaurant

---

\(^{80}\) Krishna Sobti, ‘Marfat Dilli’ (C/O Delhi), in *DTH*, 98–119; for regular coffee-meetings at Gaylord see *Outlook*, vol. 43, nos. 26–29, 30.

\(^{81}\) Jain, who hailed from a family of zamindars and cotton merchants going bankrupt, passed away in 1977 and the place, in its last legs, is now run by his son-in-law Gauri Shankar Nanda. See Shreya Roy Chowdhury, ‘75 Years Behind It: Madras Coffee House Guards Legacy Fiercely’, TNN, 14 March 2014.

\(^{82}\) Sengupta, *Delhi Metropolitan*, 88. Volga closed down in 2010.

\(^{83}\) Sobti, ‘Marfat Dilli’, 100.
serving continental food.\(^{84}\) Although these places initially catered only to the Western and indigenous elite, by the mid-1930s one could buy a cup of tea for two annas in the CP area.

As Delhi’s administrative and commercial importance grew, since the transfer of the capital, so did the city’s population. Once it became the national capital in 1947, Delhi saw the influx of refugees resulting in a ninety per cent growth in its population between 1941 and 1951.\(^ {85}\) New Delhi was new, but in the pre-Partition days it was a cultural desert. Many of the migrants were from the culturally rich Lahore—‘Paris of the Punjab’—a city where the ‘high society’ had been ‘higher’ than that in Allahabad or Lucknow, and was much larger than Delhi.\(^ {86}\) There were also Bengalis from East Pakistan, including government employees, fleeing to Delhi.\(^ {87}\) The establishments of the new Central Government and parliamentary and judiciary institutions needed professionals and a supporting bureaucracy that attracted fortune seekers from far and wide to the metropolis. The University of Delhi

\(^{84}\) This ‘espresso’, as we shall see later, was different from the variety known as such. Volga and La Bohéme were the most sought after places for coffee and snacks in CP in the 1950s and 1960s, see Amitabh Bachchan’s official blog, [http://srbachchan.tumblr.com/post/32472706591], 28 September 2012.


\(^{87}\) These refugees were housed in two-storied barrack-like buildings built during WWII called ‘chummeries’ housing families sharing a common kitchen and bathroom on each floor. For a brief sketch of the life of a young girl of such a displaced family, see Rekha Karmakar, ‘Memories of Delhi’, 7 August 2012, [http://www.finelychopped.net/2012/08/memories-of-delhi-by-rekha-karmakar.html].
became a centre for the cultivation of Hindi literature. The foundation of the Sahitya Akademi in 1954, launching of *Vividh Bharati* (a variety programme in Hindi) in 1956, and the creation of the *Kendriya Hindi Sansthan* in 1962 drew the Hindi and Urdu literati scattered from Lahore, Jullunder (especially after Partition), Jaipur, Indore, to Lucknow, Benares, Patna, Kolkata and other places to Delhi.88

Initially cars were the only mode of transport for access to the centre, and before local bus service was begun by DTC (1948) the place was not easily accessible by public transport; most people visiting CP were commuting by cycle, *tonga*, a horse-drawn carriage, or on foot. After Independence the old Harley-Davidsons and Indian motorbikes were used to build an ingenious vehicle which could seat two people facing the front and two people facing the back. This was a new mode of transportation, called *phutphut* or *phatphatiya* because of the sound it produced, was cheaper than a taxi and faster than a *tonga*. To start with, it linked Odeon Cinema in CP with Ajmeri Gate in Old Delhi, but later on they were plying all over the city.89

It took quite some time before all shops in the CP began operating. Interspersed with these more expensive eateries, there were affordable tea-shops and *dhabas* where the ordinary middle class could go for a quick sip and bite.90 After Partition, CP like the rest of Delhi gave refuge to many fleeing erstwhile West Punjab, and more and more kiosks and shops cropped up in the area. Refugees initially opening stalls (*khokhenuma dukanon*) near the Hanuman Temple in CP


89 Presumably this refers to the Indian Motorcycle Company of the US. I owe this information to Inder Sharma, e-mail, 16 July 2013; the writer Jainendra Kumar would take a *phutphut* to reach CP and then walk to Tea House of ICH, also see Jesse Kochar, ‘Promoting Phut-phutys’, *The Hindu*, 10 September 2011, http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/open-page/promoting-phutphutys/article2442482.ece.

90 Many of the Tea House goers would also go to have meals in the *dhaba* in the lane next to Regal, where one would have to take tea standing, *DTH*, 152; there was another shop in the lane across the street from Rivoli selling North Indian food and tea, ibid., 429.
would later shift to Mohan Singh Place and Shankar Market.\(^{91}\) The dhaba began as a shack serving customers sitting on benches on the pavement. It became very popular in the 1950s as Kake da Hotel in the municipal market, CP by Amolak Ram Chopra migrating from Lahore where he used to run an eatery since 1931.

Among many private gatherings, Yusuf Dehlvi, the editor and publisher of the Urdu literary and film magazine Shama, used to host mushairas, qawwalis, dance, and music mehfilis at Shama Kothi, his residence in the Diplomatic Enclave in New Delhi.\(^{92}\) Similarly, most Punjabi writers, since the Partition mainly Delhi-based, used to meet at Pritam Singh’s (of Navyug) residence where actors, artists, bureaucrats, journalists, novelists, poets and politicians among others used to meet.\(^{93}\)

Thus when the Coffee Board decided to shift the location of ICH to Queensway (Janpath), in the heart of the capital in 1940, it did so in order to benefit from the increasing footfall in this still growing business hub. And also because it had to compete with the existing spaces of consumption. The property at 66 Janpath belonged to Jamunadas Puri who had purchased it in the 1930s.\(^{94}\) In keeping with the other structures then coming up in CP, this building with high ceiling and thick walls was built for office purpose and fitted with modern amenities but had to be transformed in order to turn it into a space of consumption. The menu of the ICH initially did not differ much from that of Alps, Standard or Wenger’s. In addition to hot and cold coffee, also served with cream, the menu included coffee ice-cream, omelette, scrambled egg on toast, cucumber/egg/chicken/mutton sandwich, apple/plum/tea-cake, fruit salad and soup.

\(^{91}\) Baldev Vanshi, ‘Sahityik Halchal Dilli Ki’, \textit{DTH}, 208–27 (220), 2009; Mohan Singh Place was opened in 1968.


\(^{94}\) Rajeev Puri (grandson of Jamunadas) and his wife Nita Puri, interview, 21 October 2012.
If you purchased a cup of coffee here, you were served a plate of cashewnuts on the house.

The India Coffee House had several branches in Delhi: two in the Delhi University (DU) campus,95 one in Kamla Nagar behind Kirori Mal College and three in Badarpur.96 The outlets on the campus were extremely popular among students across departments, but if the one near the Dean’s office discussed ‘Bob Dylan, Bishan Bedi and Jayapraakash Narayan’, The Delhi School of Economics (DSE) outlet seems to have concentrated on more serious subjects like the Nobel Prize winning economists Robert Solow and Simon Kuznets and French social scientists like Levi Strauss and Pierre Bourdieu.97 The DSE outlet continued even after the other outlet near the Dean’s Office in the campus and the one in Kamla Nagar closed down, the former in 1973. Arjun Dev recalled that both students and teachers used to go to the outlets, and in the entire campus, the Coffee House was the only place where male and female students could meet and sit at leisure till this too shut down in 1996.98 In and around the DU campus were (and still are) a variety of places where one could have tea and snacks. Jai Prakash (popularly known as JP) continues to run his tea stall just outside the DSE coffee house with its masala tea, lemon tea, half tea still in high demand among the students. Both ICH and JP’s used to attract a lot of students from other colleges on the campus and outside. Residents of that neighbourhood not connected with the university also used to come to ICH through this gate. That flow is now restricted since the gate at the back was closed a few years ago for the sake of security.99 The teachers now have

95 The first outlet in DU campus was opened soon after the one at CP. The outlet in DSE, announced in 1964, was opened sometime in 1965; ‘Janpath Price Resisters Remain Divided’, The Statesman, 10 November 1964.
96 The Badarpur outlets were canteen run on franchise basis.
98 There was one outlet in the Jawaharlal Nehru University campus during 1975–78. In 2015 the Coffee Board opened an outlet in Aravalli International Guest House in the campus. Since 1996 the DSE outlet runs as a privately owned coffee house. For more on this Coffee House see Chapter Six.
99 Sujit Thomas, P.G. student sociology, DU, interview, 28 February 2012.
air-conditioned rooms, so they do not go to ICH as often, instead get beverages and snacks delivered to their office. There is also ‘Nandu ki chai’, a stall bearing the name of its founder, now owned by Bunni Lal outside the Law Faculty. These places successfully compete with ‘Dada’s coffee house’.

After the Coffee Board decided to close down most of the outlets of ICH in 1955, the establishment on Janpath was sold to the descendants of Jamunadas who had passed away a couple of years prior to that. From 1957 till at least 1964 ICH Janpath was run privately by Karviska, a partnership formed by the four daughters-in-law of Jamunadas. In its checkered life in a fast-developing Delhi, ICH had to change its location several times. Moving from place to place each time, it lost groups of customers who, cherished the memory of their time at the previous location and unable to adapt to the new situation moved away to alternate, smaller places. The outlet at CP lost many of its clients after a movement that saw a new branch of the ICH opening in CP.

Beginning with the dastangos, mehfils, mushairas Delhi in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century had a rich culture of public sociability. The first three were performance-oriented where the public were the audience. There were an array of eateries and restaurants where consumption of food was compulsory. Qahwakhanas were replaced by roadside tea-shops and by the time the ICH was set up, the memory of the Mughal coffee houses had faded. The tremendous popularity of coffee and ICH can be gauged from the fact that many public and private enterprises soon hurried to imitate the concept. The cona (filter) coffee-tea-snack shop begun by Hansraj Kalra in the E Block of the CP in 1942 came to be known as the United Coffee House which only developed into a full-fledged restaurant-cum-dining

100 Ambarnath Gupta, interview, 28 February 2012.
101 Hemani Bhandari, ‘Delhi University: Few Seats but Food Aplenty’, TOI, 1 July 2012.
102 This movement is analysed in Chapter Five. Many of the people who used to visit this place found refuge in the Tea House, Ramkishor Dwivedi, ‘Ek Tha Tea House,’ in DTH, 359.
place in the 1950s. Some time in the early 1950s, Daljit Singh, the younger brother of Khushwant Singh, a regular at ICH Janpath, opened a Tea House at the CP end of the Sansad Marg near the Regal Building. While ICH was a favourite with journalists, businessmen, lawyers, politicians, writers, insurance agents and small traders, the Tea House provided the space for *adda* to the Hindi, Punjabi and Urdu literati during the 1950s through to the 1970s, although, many of them were regulars at ICH too. This Tea House, more often referred to as coffee house, forms part of the current attempt at understanding the coffee-scenario in Delhi.

We shall turn to the role of coffee in this public sociability in Delhi in the following chapter.

**ALLAHABAD**

From the time that Akbar built his fort at the confluence of the Ganga and Yamuna, Prayag, as Illahabas or Allahabad, nourished a cosmopolitan culture sustaining both Hindus and Muslims among other ethnic groups. Prayag is also synonymous with the Kumbh Mela, the largest religious fair in the world and a place of pilgrimage for Hindus from ancient times. As a centre for distribution of trade between upper India and eastern India, and then as the capital of the Agra Province (1836–38), of the North Western Provinces (1858–77) and the United Provinces (1877–1920), the city of Allahabad continued to draw families of Bengalis, Gujarati Nagars, Kashmiri Pandits, Parsi and Punjabi Khatri entrepreneurs migrating from different parts of the country. The process was accelerated since, after the ruthless suppression of the local uprisings as part of the Rebellion of 1857, Allahabad became the capital. The northern part of the city, built on the razed ground once housing native villages got a total

---

103 Initially it was a place to have coffee and the price difference between ICH and UCH was not much, and for many visitors to ICH, the question was, ‘will it be ICH or UCH?’ Keshav Malik, art critic and poet; editor of the now defunct weekly literary magazine *Thought* and of *Indian Literature*, a bi-monthly magazine published by the Sahitya Akademi, interview, 23 November 2012; Reginald Massey, e-mail, 16 July 2013.
makeover. Since the 1860s the city grew exponentially as a service centre. It attracted building contractors, hoteliers, house agents, general merchants and printers settling down and large numbers of Europeans and Eurasians occupying lower ranks in post and telegraph, press, railway and other departments of the government services. The construction of the railway bridge over the Yamuna opened in 1865, connecting Allahabad to the right bank of the Hoogly in Calcutta with the left bank of the Yamuna to Delhi.

The railroad running horizontally through the city divided it into two parts: the old traditional southern part and the new central and northern parts. The Grand Trunk Road which ran through the older traditional part of the city consisted of the middle class residential quarters of Lukarganj, Mirganj, Shahganj, Muthiganj and Kydganj with only a smattering of roadside shops. The newer parts of city including Civil Lines (Canning Town or Cannington), Cantonment, Police Lines, Colonelganj, Allenganj, Mumfordganj were the seats of the British Government and the modern institutions accompanying it. The imposing buildings of the High Court (1866), Muir Central College (1872), Allahabad University (the Muir Central College and Kayastha Pathshala merged with it, 1887), All Saints Cathedral and other government and service buildings fixed the colonial seal on the face of the city. The difference between the two parts of the

---


city has been described as the different colours of the Ganga and the Yamuna. There was a concentration of the labouring classes in the southern part of the city while the professional classes began settling down north of the railway lines.\textsuperscript{108} Since the early 1880s, the ward structure of the till then predominantly White Civil Lines was gradually changing, matched by an increase in the Indian electorate side by side with the inclusion of Indian professionals in the municipal electorate.\textsuperscript{109} The first quarter of the twentieth century represented a change in the structure of power holding at the local level: professional men and publicists replaced old influential wealthy families as local leaders and intermediaries during communal tensions. While the first decade merchants and owners of real estate dominated the municipal board, during 1912–17 professional classes outnumbered them.\textsuperscript{110} Till the 1950s, many Anglo-Indians serving the railways lived in the city and those who could prove their British ancestry could reside at the Bundhwa Club Trust property on Thornhill Road, and in the Railway Colony in the western part of the city.\textsuperscript{111} If the university symbolized one pillar of modernization, the other pillars supporting the cause were the High Court and the English and vernacular publishing industry. Just like the European university teachers, Indian professionals in these sectors, often instructed in the West, were harbingers of modern European lifestyle in the town. University teachers and lawyers, Indian in increasing number, and migrating indigenous entrepreneurs began inhabiting the Civil Lines from the early twentieth century.\textsuperscript{112} With important English language

\textsuperscript{108} The unique comparison is provided by Gyanranjan in ‘Taramandal’; for the distribution of the population see C.A. Bayly, \textit{The Local Roots of Indian Politics: The Chris Bayly Omnibus}, New Delhi: OUP, 2011, esp., 39–43.

\textsuperscript{109} Bayly, \textit{The Local Roots}, 305.


\textsuperscript{112} It was in the Civil Lines that in 1900 Motilal Nehru built his residence Anand Bhavan. Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru and other lawyers practicing before the High Court began
dailies like *The Leader* and *The Pioneer* and publishing houses, like the Indian Press, the print media had a firm footing in the city.113

To what extent did the increasing popularity of the city among the indigenous elite using these institutions as stepping stones to a glamorous career in the civil service or law affect public culture? According to Bayly, the secular and the inclusive culture of Allahabad owed to the shared Indo-Persian cultural traditions of the old provincial communities settling in the town.114 As we have seen above, this composite culture was prevalent in other cities of northern India and had been fostered by the coexisting multiple ethnic and religious groups. The tradition of Persian and Urdu poetry writing in Allahabad can be traced back at least to the eighteenth century. By the 1830s, the place boasted one hundred full-time poets; Urdu poets from other places attended *mushairas* organized by poets residing here.115 In the early twentieth century there were at least seven Urdu newspapers which, together with existing and upcoming literary magazines, promoted new writing. The opening of the Urdu department at the University and the setting up of the Hindustani Academy, both in the 1920s, were aimed at furthering the cause of Urdu.116 The Muslim Boarding House used to organize an annual *mushaira* drawing poets

living in this part of the city. Anand Bhavan became the locus of many important political meetings, see Bachchan, *Afternoon* 323; Neelam Saran Gour, e-mail, 24 May 2013. Publishers like Chintamani Ghosh of Indian Press and A.K. Banerjee of Wheelers & Co., Shiv Buksh Raye of B.N. Rama fame are just a few names having their establishment in Civil Lines. Bengali migrant professionals set up colonies in Allenganj, Georgetown, Mumfordganj and Tagore Town, Arindam Roy, interview, 14 September 2013. Many Bengali families were to be found in Lukerganj as well, see Ballabh Dobhal, ‘Ekhane Shesh: Ekhane Ontim’, in *Kaise Kaise Log*, New Delhi: Maneesha Prakashan, 2009, 10–13; Sanjay Joshi, documentary maker, interview, 2 October 2013.

113 See Chapter Four for more on the publishing industry in Allahabad but note that working for *The Pioneer*, Rudyard Kipling lived in Allahabad during 1887–89.

114 C. A. Bayly, *The Local Roots*, 119.


116 The purpose behind creating the Academy was to bridge the gulf between Hindi and Urdu. *Hindustani*, journal published by the Hindustani Academy was in Urdu script, Mehr Afshan Farooqi, (n.d.) ‘Glimpses of Literary Allahabad’ (unpublished paper).
The heritage of Urdu writing in the town was carried forward through the writings of Akbar Ilahabadi, Munshi Premchand, Ahmed Ali, Muhammad Hasan Askari, Raghupati Sahay (1896–1982) writing under his nom de plume Firaq Gorakhpuri and Upendranath Ashk among others.

The diversified population of the city had various spaces for leisurely interaction. The Allahabad Club, Cosmopolitan Club, Gymkhana Club and the likes, initially a monopoly of Europeans, later allowed access to a select few natives, while the United Club opened its doors to Anglo-Indians. By the middle of the twentieth century, the Railway Coral Club and Thornhill Club were popular joints for the latter community. In the early 1930s, Tej Pratap Singh, landholder of Kothi, began the Adelphi Club for the indigenous elite including members of the princely families and landowners. With its tennis courts, rooms for rummy and bridge, bar and residential accommodation for well-to-do visitors, the club was a hive of activity for some time.

Adda was part of Allahabad’s culture. There were places at diverse locations in the city from at least the colonial times for informal gatherings. One of such old-time hangouts was at Lokenath Market in Chowk, a place known for traditional food and drinks like *ramdane ki laddu, lassi, aphim ke laddu, dahi kachori*, etc. The entire stretch of Lokenath Gali, the erstwhile Sarai Meer Khan, was dotted with shops selling varieties of *chaat, dahi-jalebi, kulfi-falooda*, and for the connoisseur *bhang-kulfi, bhang lassi* and *bhang-thandai*. It was here that Mitthulal, a bankrupt money-lender from Agra, familiar with Motilal Nehru, set up in the early years of the twentieth century his *Hari ki namkeen*, a shop famous for its *masala samosas* in which the usual potato-stuffing was replaced by a mixture of spices. This

---

117 Ibid.
119 The club however was not a commercial success and was temporarily transformed into a students’ hostel; see Bachchan, *Afternoon*, 328–30.
120 Gyanranjan seems to have preferred this bhang lassi to alcohol, see Kalia, *Ghalib*, 153.
lane with its attractions was a gathering point for high and low in the town including administrators, Congress leaders, luminaries of Hindi and Urdu literature like Raghupati Sahay, lawyers and others. There was a very popular *adda* at this market especially for the artisan and working class, connected, for example, with boat-making. Khatris (mostly Arya Samajis) from the Punjab who had settled down in the quarters near Lokenath Market, patronized these outlets.\(^{121}\) The sweet shops in this locality were popular with song writers and performers who gathered there. From the 1940s through to the 1970s there was an *adda* there attracting literati like Gopi Krishna Gopesh.\(^{122}\) The office of the magazine *Chand* at Lokenath crossing was known for its revolutionary connection. Not only did the magazine publish news on nationalist activities, but writers and distributors of nationalist pamphlets also used to visit this place and other Daraganj shops like Qadir ka Restaurant.\(^{123}\) Daraganj was an area in pre-colonial Allahabad with a literary public sphere. Alongside the tradition of story-telling in small gatherings, the area also had small printing presses. Qadir ka Restaurant attracted large crowds for its milk, *bhang-lassi*, *kachori* and sweets. Sumitranandan Pant had a huge following at this restaurant where he used to consume on credit.\(^{124}\)

In another literary circle the *Rasik Mandal*, Ramaprasad Tripathi, Ramshankar Shukla ‘Rasal’ who worked for *The Pioneer*, and Ramnarayan Chaturvedi used to meet near the Chowk where they discussed *Braja Bhasha* poetry.\(^{125}\) Writing in the late 1930s, Srivastava noted that while the Hindi Lekhak Sangh had been launched in 1935 for the progress of contemporary Hindi literature, *mushairas* had often been held during the preceding one and half decades and *kavi*

\(^{121}\) Lalit Joshi, professor, Department of History, Allahabad University, interview, 23 October 2012.
\(^{122}\) Sriprakash Mishra, retired police officer and writer in Hindi, interview, 26 October 2012.
\(^{123}\) Ibid.
\(^{124}\) Gyanranjan, ‘Taramandal’.
\(^{125}\) Saligram Srivastava, *Prayag Pradeep*, Allahabad: Hindustani Academy, 1937, 168; I am grateful to Lalit Joshi, for drawing my attention to this publication; Orsini, *Hindi Public Sphere*. 
sammelans or poets’ conferences were also organized regularly there since the middle of that decade.126

With the sprouting of places of informal congregation like Jagati’s and the India Coffee House in the northern part of the city where the literati met, the geographical division of Allahabad seems to have blurred to some extent. Most of the writers in Hindi visiting the ICH lived in Lukerganj. Civil Lines, where India Coffee House was launched, was part of the colonial town planned along the usual checkerboard or grid pattern with radial roads punctuated by squares and circles common to urban planning in the West. This part had mainly bungalows or single storeyed, buildings with red tile roofs occupying the central area on spacious plots, demarcated by hedges or boundary walls separating them from the sidewalks of the wide avenues.127 The University became a residential educational institution in 1922. During his long tenure at the university, Pandit Amarnatha Jha, the reputed scholar of English, both as professor of English at Muir Central College and as the vice chancellor of the University (for three terms during 1938–46), patronized the cause of the intellectual and literary environment of the town. With polyglot members like Jha, P. Dastoor, Harivansh Rai Bachchan and Raghupati Sahay who wrote under the pen mane Firaq Gorakhpuri, Jha invited Sahay, a Persian and Urdu poet, to join the university in Allahabad.128 The University’s English department went a long way to nurture the multi-lingual literary milieu of Allahabad. Like the elitaire Friday Club launched by Amarnatha Jha for those interested in English literature,129 its vernacular counterpart Thursday Club set up by Ajaz Husain, the Hindi Parishad, Oriental Society and the Urdu

126 Srivastava, Prayag, 168.
129 The actor Saeed Jaffrey had been a member of this club, Jaffrey, Saeed, 39; however although Pandit Jha patronized Bachchan in his career, the latter never made part of this august gathering, and had no clue to the essence of this exclusivity, Bachchan, Afternoon, 351–52.
Association with their office inside the University campus, and the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan that had its office in Allahabad since 1911, nourished the atmosphere for creative writing in Hindi and Urdu by encouraging interaction among teachers and students.\textsuperscript{130}

Jagati’s Restaurant, a tea shop near the university campus on the University Road, was a popular space for informal interaction in the northern part of the town. Jagati was an entrepreneur from Kumaon (currently in Uttarakhand) who went to Allahabad at the end of the nineteenth century in search of fortune. In course of time, he became the city’s busiest caterer serving all the important families there.\textsuperscript{131} Jagati’s illustrious clientele comprised literary figures and university teachers, including Harivansh Rai Bachchan, Dr Dustoor, Vijaydev Narayan Sahi, Firaq Gorakhpuri from the Department of English and writers like Sumitranandan Pant, Dharamvir Bharti (1926–97), Bhagwati Charan Verma who were regular customers of the tea shop.\textsuperscript{132} Bhagwati Charan was familiar with the place as a student of the University in the early 1920s,\textsuperscript{133} and the presence of Verma and other writers attracted later day students to the place where tea was served in a pot containing about two cups of tea.\textsuperscript{134} This shop, active till about 1975 was at the height of its popularity when the Coffee Board opened an outlet of the ICH in Allahabad. Although the geographical and social divide between the University and Civil Lines

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item He was the caterer at the wedding of Motilal Nehru; interview, Lalit Joshi, 23 October 2012. For a nice anecdote involving the place see, V.S. Datta, ‘Allahabad University Completes 125 Years: A Big Salute to our Masters’, 24 September 2012, http://activeindiatv.com/editorials/476-allahabad-university-completes-125-years--a-big-salute-to-our-masters?tmpl=component&type=raw.
\item As a student Bhagwati Charan Verma used to go there with his friends, Naresh Mehta, \textit{Pradakshina: Apne Samay Ki} (Circumumbulations of My Times), Illahabad: Illahabad Sangrahalya, 2001, 155.
\item Bhagwati Charan Verma’s novel \textit{Teen Varsh} was dedicated to Manohar Lal Sah Jagati, the proprietor of the shop. The novel begins with the description of the place seen through the eyes of a student coming from Jhansi, to study at the University.
\item A gratis refill of hot water would ensure the supply of two more cups of tea, albeit weaker; Hemendra Shankar Saxena, ‘In Eastmancolor’, in \textit{Allahabad}, 107–13.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
on one side and the Town and Daraganj on the other described by Orsini in the high noon of the Empire was further smudged especially in the post-Independence period, the accompanying division in the literary sphere between English and Hindi was kept alive.

The question becomes more complicated around the issue who is a proper Allahabadi. An example would help us understand the nature of this divide. In the course of my field research in Allahabad I heard one of my interlocutors dismissing *The Last Bungalow* edited by A.K. Mehrotra on the ground that none of the contributors to the volume was from Allahabad. A week later, another person considering himself an authority on, and insider of the town, communicated to me dismissing the book in the same vein. When I began reading the book later, I was reminded of the comments, and dismayed, I asked the latter if he had seen the said book before commenting on it. He replied in the negative. While Mehrotra writes profusely on Allahabad and the world outside associates him with the place, his disenchantment with post-colonial Allahabad and its vernacular littérateurs has earned him the status of non-Allahabadi. The divide between the two literary spheres has a long history according to one teacher of English at St Mary’s College; another teacher of English at the University suggested that some writers in Hindi ‘carry a chip on their shoulder’, (conversations 11 and 12 September 2013 respectively). I have record of all the communications; but since this is a sensitive issue, shall not disclose the identity of the persons. Consider that Upendranath Ashk who migrated to the city from Julunder in the late 1940s felt the hostility of the local writers towards him, a Punjabi writer writing in Hindi. (Daisy Rockwell, *Upendranath Ashk: A Critical Biography*, New Delhi: Katha, 2004, 5 and chapter 2). Allahabadi writers used to call Ravindra Kalia and Satish Jamali as ‘disease from outside’ (*agantuk vyadhian*), Neelabh, *Gyanranjan ke bahane* (A Memoir), Nayi Dilli: Nayi Kitab, 2012.

Launched in 1937 by Kishori Mohan De from Krishnagar in West Bengal, Lucky Sweet Mart known especially for its varieties of Bengali sweets was another place that attracted a medley of personalities from a cross-section of society. It was a favourite haunt of H.N. Bahuguna,
the Allahabadi Congress leader, who became the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh. Their *samosa* and *pakora* with chutney at 1 anna a piece and 2 annas a plate respectively, made the place affordable for the students flocking here. Presently it is visited by members of all the state’s political parties, families and students, however *adda* is no longer allowed here.135

In addition to these public spaces of sociability, there were private gatherings.

Amarnatha Jha, a connoisseur of Hindi and Urdu poetry, used to organize tea parties and *mushairas* or literary gatherings in Sanskrit, Persian and Maithili, at his home. Sarojini Naidu, Harivansh Rai Bachchan, Pant, Gangaprasad Pande, Samsher, Narendra Sharma, Ramkumar Varma, Bhagwaticharan Verma and others formed an integral part of these gatherings due to their appreciation for such critical literary discussions (image *mushaira* organized by Jha).

Sridhar Pathak, Sumitranandan Pant and others used to meet on a regular basis at Pant’s residence. It is said that Pathak, who lived in Lukerganj, would send his horse-driven carriage to fetch Pant from his residence. They would spend a couple of hours conversing before Pant went back on the same carriage.136 After he joined the university, Bachchan used to organize a poetry reading event called ‘Nishant’, or ‘night’s ending’, at his place on the last Saturday of every month.137 During the 1950s and 1960s colourful and ‘doctrinal (*matwali*) literary disputes’ and ‘unconventional liaisons’ took place at the ‘camp’ (*morcha*) of Upendranath Ashk.138 This tradition of private gatherings of poets and writers in and outside Allahabad continued

---

135 S. K. Garg, advocate Allahabad High Court, who went to the university in the late 1960s never went to ICH, but went to Lucky Sweet Mart, interview, 22 October 2012; Md. Naseem (Cong-I) used to go to both India Coffee House and Lucky Sweet Mart, interview, 22 October 2012. The place is now run by the third generation siblings Debashis and Abhishek Dey, interview, 12 September 2013.


137 The group comprising mostly Bachchan’s (ex-) students recited poetry and discussed literary topics till the day-break. This group kept on meeting when he was away in England for two years during 1952–54, Bachchan, *Afternoon*, 340–41.

138 Gyanranjan, ‘Taramandal’.
in the late 1960s and 1970s, often patronized by government officials with a keen interest in literature, like Vibhuti Narain Rai, an IPS officer of the 1975 batch. When Faiz Ahmed Faiz visited Allahabad in 1981, a gathering was organized by poets and writers at Rai’s residence in his honour.

The literary movements like Progressive Writers’ Association (PWA) and *Parimal* too had their own gatherings and such get-togethers were organized by rotation in the house of one of the members of the core group. Lakshmikant Varma, a member of *Parimal* was the initiator of another circle of Kayasth socialists and small writers in a *dhaba* (close to Tara Hotel) near Rambagh railway station where they would meet almost daily to discuss literary, political and other issues; this gathering was active from 1962 up to the Emergency. Another such gathering in the later period was that of *Vaichariki* (1980) initiated by Amar Goswami of Maya Press. Other members of the group included Sriprakash Mishra, Sinheswar Singh, Deviprasad Mishra, Rajendra Kumar and a few others who met fortnightly to discuss new writings including those of its own members. The group still meets, but is not so creative or powerful any more.

Mahatma Gandhi (M.G.) Marg, running parallel to the railway track to its south, is still a major arterial road cutting through different intersections. Civil Lines, with its theatres, especially Palace Theatre and Plaza Talkies, and with shops selling from chewing gum, kites to automobiles, several large and small eateries, was the major area for shopping and social outing. Walking along the wide streets of Civil Lines must have been a pleasing experience till the late 1960s

139 Kalia, *Ghalib*, passim.
141 See Chapter Four for more on these two groups.
142 Interview, Doodhnath Singh and Sriprakash Mishra, 25 and 26 October 2012.
143 Lyons, *Bitter Sweet*, 98, 130; Saxena, ‘In Eastmancolour’. In its previous incarnation, Plaza Talkies was Regent theatre provided with a bar and a dance floor. A property of the descendants of Chintamani Ghosh, the building now houses Rajkiran theatre, interview, Arindam Ghosh, Indian Press, 23 January 2012.
when the number of cars plying the streets of Allahabad was limited to ten or fifteen, and, barring the ekkas and tongas, the main means of transport was bicycle.144 Launched in 1945, ICH in Allahabad was initially housed in a spacious bungalow behind the Mercury Range, near the crossing of Clive Road and Canning Road (B.M. Mehta Road and M.G. Marg respectively).145 With an opening towards M.G. Marg, the bungalow was visible from the road. There was a huge, shady tamarind tree on the sidewalk with a paan shop under it. It was a cosy cottage with several rooms and a separate section for family and women as well as a room near the kitchen for students who wanted to study there undisturbed by the brouhaha in the main hall.146 At least for some time, the ICH seems to have been housed in a building on the other side of the street opposite the Palace Building before it moved again to its current location at Darbari Building.147

Built in the late nineteenth century, Darbari Building in the heart of Civil Lines housed different offices and stores at different points of time. One of the few surviving bungalows in the area, is a longish structure with a light pink exterior consisting of two conjoined bungalows. The covered veranda supported by columns and a portico in front of the central part was originally a drive-in provision store styled by Clark & Hathways. This larger bungalow along with a smaller bungalow and precincts at the back, were acquired by Raibahadur R. N. Darbari, a medical doctor by profession, who

144 Venita Lyall Banerjee, on the forum Allahabad Civil Lines Nostalgic Memories (ACLNM), 9 May 2014; as a result of the encroachment of the side-walks and (where they exist) pavements by unauthorized semi-permanent structures, pedestrians have to share the road with cars, motor bikes, auto-rickshaws, rickshaws and cycles. Almost every middle class family I came across in Allahabad owns at least one car; however, lack of proper public transport within the city makes conveyance from one part of the city to the other cumbersome, see Rachna Singh, ‘Those Civil Line Girls’, weblog, 4 June 2014, http://rachnaunedited.wordpress.com/2014/06/04/those-civil-lines-girls/. In order to travel from Chatham Lines to Civil Lines, one would still have to take a rickshaw or shared auto rickshaw up to the Hanuman Temple (near the main bus stand). From there you could walk or take a rickshaw to your destination in Civil Lines.

145 Saxena, ‘In Eastmancolor.’

146 Ibid.

147 When Grover visited Allahabad in 1951, he went to the coffee house in this building, interview, Dinesh Chandra Grover, 22 October 2012.
changed the building from a store into premises for rent. For some time, an office of the Muir [Cotton] Mills of Kanpur and an agency of the Indian National Airways Co., were established here. The ICH finally moved to the building named after its owner in 1958. The year that ICH shifted to the left wing of this building, Dinesh Chandra Grover, who had joined Rajkamal Prakashan in 1951, set up its Allahabad branch in the hall of the building’s other wing. Om Prakash, the owner of Rajkamal also came to live in Allahabad around this time. In December 1960, when the decision was taken to close down the Allahabad branch of Rajkamal, Dinesh took it over and began Lokbharti in 1961, which is still at this location since that time. The portico had been partitioned to house offices including that of Remington Rand (the part currently occupied by Anand Rathi, a share-broking and finance company), and Central Excise and Customs (where now New India Assurance Company has its office). Sometime in 1967–68, the landlord divided the hall housing the insurance company vertically to create another room and a floor above, renting to Dinesh Chandra of Lokbharti, who used the space as godown till he sold the firm to Ashok Maheshwari of Rajkamal Prakashan. Ramesh Chandra Grover, the elder brother of Dinesh Grover, now looks after the branch of Rajkamal upstairs. Next to the insurance company is the office-cum-showroom of Neelabh

---

148 Raibahadur Dr RN Darbari who paid Rs 50,000 for the building, continued to practice in Johnstonganj. Neelabh, e-mail, 15 August 2012.

149 Officially, the transfer took place a year later, Diwakar Pandey, ‘Kaffee Ke Chuskiyon Mein Simte Hain Dheron Afsane’, Hindustan Times, 2007. I am grateful to Vaibhab Maini for drawing my attention to this article. On the day of the inauguration potato wafers were distributed among the visitors, input Sudhir Singhal on the forum ACLNM, 12 May 2014. The ICH pays Rs 22,000 for the wing it occupies and the premises in front to P.K. Darbari, the current owner, interview, P.K. Darbari, October 2012. In view of the pace of development in the area around, but for the aura and memory associated, the Coffee House in Allahabad would have shared the same fate as that of the ICH in Bangalore and the outlet in Anna’s Arcade, Trivandrum.

150 In partnership with Kadam Kumar Jain; interview, Dinesh Chandra Grover, 22 October 2012. The website of the Rajkamal Group of publications however cites 1954 as the year when Lokbharti started.

151 Ibid., Neelabh, e-mail, 15 August 2012.
Prakashan (1949) that was set up here in October 1959. Taking the bookshops, publishing houses, the Coffee House, eateries and other fancy shops and the theatres together, this area in those days seems to have been epicentre of the town with an ambience similar to Calcutta’s College Street and old New Market.

Darbari Building had a very different appearance in the middle of the twentieth century when India Coffee House moved its base there. Right in front across the space of the entire building was a large sprawling lawn with a hedge fencing separating it from the sidewalks of the street. According to Naresh Roy of El Chico, it was perhaps keeping the social norms of the city in view that the ‘family section’ of ICH was opened on the ground floor of the double-storeyed pink building, built in 1936. During its heyday in the following decades, the smaller lawn in the space between Darbari Building and the ‘family section’, where the foundation of a hotel was laid in 2012, had also been rented by ICH. And the evening gatherings of visitors—especially during the summer months—took place round the tables laid out in this twin-lawn. Currently, the large concrete building with shops and offices that replaced the open space in the 1990s not only blocks the view of most of the original bungalow in the background, but also affects the business of ICH.

Parallel to the India Coffee House, were private restaurants in Civil Lines retailing liquid coffee. In the 1940s and 1950s, Malani’s Café stood facing the Palace Building. Migrating to Allahabad in

---


153 Dinesh Chandra Grover, Lokbharti, interview, 23 October 2012. On my visit to the site in October 2012, I found construction work had begun at this site and during my visit in September 2013 the two-storeyed structure allegedly destined to be a hotel was ready.

154 The first ever literary meet organized by Parimal began at 7.00 am on an Autumn Sunday in the paddy-green interior of Malani’s Café, preceded by a collective breakfast with tea there, Keshav Chandra Varma, Parimal: Smritiyen aur Dastabez (Memories and Documents of Parimal), Allahabad: Pradeep Prakashan, 2003, 25.
the 1850s, Shiv Baksh Raye opened a general merchandise provisions shop styled B.N. Rama & Co. in the Chowk area in 1890. This shop moved to the Civil Lines in 1928 to reopen in a building leased from the Tandons aka Bachchajis. Within a couple of years after the construction of the Lucky Range here in 1940, Rama’s Bar and Restaurant was opened by the Roys (Raye) at the crossing of Albert Road and Canning Road. With a shady, triangular stretch of lawn in front, B.N. Rama’s Café, a space popular for its cold coffee and the juice of falsa or Grewia asiatica was often visited by littérateurs. While Malani’s served the usual coffee and tea, at Rama’s one could opt for alcoholic beverages too, and the juke box here added a special attraction. The success of this bar coupled with the popularity of the ICH must have inspired Ganpat and his son Ganesh Roy to launch El Chico (1964), a rather fancy coffee house in the market opposite the Palace Hall. With its ‘dimly lit interior, very comfortable sofas [...] and a picturesque [...] false ceiling’ El Chico was designed after the likes of La Bohéme in CP in New Delhi and offering varieties of coffee, tea, continental and Indian food, it attracted the Anglophile, status-conscious university students and the cream of the Allahabad society wishing to enjoy the comfort and exclusivity. On his visits to Allahabad, Jawaharlal Nehru could be seen at this place. Kwality

155 Lala Madhav Prasad and Manmohan Das Tandon, one of the most prominent and richest families of the time purchased this large property comprising a large bungalow and a sprawling garden. Different parts of the building were rented out to the Roy family, Dr R. N. Mullick, Tayeb & Sons, cloth merchants etc. As the business kept growing, in addition to general provisions the business of the Roys extended in scope and magnitude to include the agency for Godrej steel furniture ltd. and typewriters, and later the products of Nestlé, e-mail, Naresh Roy, 28 May 2014.

156 When he moved to Allahabad in the mid 1950s, Naresh Mehta used to go to BN Rama’s café to meet others and it was there that he met Dharamvir Bharti for the first time, Mehta, Pradakshina, 160.

157 Neelabh, Gyanranjan, 2.

158 The beautification drive prior to the Purna Kumbh in 2013 saw this market gone and a splinter new double storeyed classy restaurant added to the original café of El Chico is an indication of the popularity and reputation of the place now run by the four brothers Ganesh, Ramesh, Naresh and Rakesh Roy.

159 Foreign dignitaries as well as the Indian elite are at home at El Chico. Whenever Rahul Gandhi is in the town, he goes to El Chico. Amitabh Bachchan
Restaurant known for its classy atmosphere and upmarket quality food and ice-cream, Naug Bar, Peshawari, Nankin Bar and Restaurant were other places for family eat outs. Ravindra Kalia reminisced in his memoir that rising poets in the late fifties and early sixties used to meet at Murari’s Sweets on the ground floor of the building that housed Saraswati Press, with the office of the magazine *Kahani* above it at the crossing of Civil Lines.

In spite of the existence of various types of spaces for public sociability, the ICH became very popular in Allahabad as well. Naresh Roy recalled that after El Chico was launched, although it offered *cona* coffee at Rs 5 per head, it had to compete with the ICH by offering coffee at 23 paise a cup.\(^1\)\(^6\) El Chico’s posh, yet quiet ambience attracted the Anglicized elite quite unlike the ICH with its noisy clientele. Subaltern competitors such as roadside stalls were a more serious threat to the ICH than El Chico. Located en route to the ICH, Amber Coffee House (1971) and New South Indian Coffee House (1980) ‘misled’ tourists looking for the Indian Coffee House to stop for a cup of coffee there.\(^1\)\(^6\)\(^1\)

**CALCUTTA**

Compared to Delhi and Allahabad, Calcutta is younger and if the familiarity with coffee for places like Delhi and Lucknow can be dated back to the Mughals, Calcutta, will in all likelihood, associate it with the Europeans.\(^1\)\(^6\)\(^2\) As the seat of the East India Company’s government, and then as the second capital of the British Empire, and again as the most important port in British India, this ‘City of Palaces’ was at the height of its glory in the early twentieth century.

---

\(^1\)\(^6\) A.K. Mehrotra refers to this place without naming it in his poem on the owner’s family, ‘The Roys’, in his *The Last Bungalow*, 266–69.

\(^1\)\(^6\)\(^1\) See Chapter Six on this.

\(^1\)\(^6\)\(^2\) I am yet to find a reference to coffee in India prior to the advent of the East India Companies though.
For social get-togethers there were many clubs, but these typical institutions of the Raj were exclusively meant for Europeans. The Bengal Club opened its doors to Indians only after 1947. The constitution of the Saturday Club opened in 1875 barred the entry of ‘Orientals of Asiatic Origin’. The non-racial Calcutta Club was opened in 1907 to accommodate natives. Women were not allowed to be members of the Tollygunge Club (1895) till as late as 1970. Benjamin Cohen’s research on British Indian ladies’ clubs operating in India since the late nineteenth century began admitting men as guests only in the late 1930s. However, like the men’s clubs, the women’s clubs also drew women from distinguished and ‘more advanced’ families.

Serving the expatriates, were the upmarket restaurants like Federico Peliti’s Bakery and Confectionery (1870) Chung Wah (1881), Firpo’s (1925), Flury’s (1927), and Magnolia and hotels like Grand and Great Eastern. These clubs and hotels naturally offered their customers coffee. Besides, there were many tea shops selling ‘one cup of tea, 2 slices of toast and a “mamlet” of two eggs, all for 2 annas’ for people with a small purse.

With the Calcutta University, Medical College, Presidency College and Hindu School located on College Street, the entire area was an important hub in Central Calcutta in the late nineteenth century. Mahabodhi Society was located at the other end of College Square; not very far in Bidhan Sarani was the office of the Sadharan Brahma

163 Chanchal Sarkar recalled an anecdote related to this rule, ‘One day my friend whose father was a doctor and a friend of the German doctor (of Jewish origin, fleeing to India during World War II), found him sobbing uncontrollably in his father’s consulting room. Apparently the doctor had been called for an interview to the Club and then told he did not qualify because of his Asiatic origin. See ‘Why Meddle Around with History so Ham-Handedly?’, The Sunday Tribune, 17 June 2001, http://www.tribuneindia.com/2001/20010617/spectrum/speaking.htm.


165 Ibid.

Samaj. Albert Hall, on No. 15 Bankim Chatterjee Street, was at the first crossing on the left upon entering the street from the north. It had been a public hall since 1876 and since the late 1940s, the Radical Humanist Association had its office there on the second floor. In and around College Street were schools, and colleges affiliated to the university. A thriving publishing industry developed there catering to a large clientele including these institutions, which made College Street indispensable to university teachers, law-makers, medical practitioners, students, book-binders, writers and others professionally connected with the area.

Even in 1943, the year the notorious Famine crippled the economy of Bengal, Chowringhee, the heart of colonial Calcutta, was a ‘boom town’. While dying people lay in front of Firpo’s and the price of rice, the staple, sky-rocketed, the price of the three-course lunch at that elite place remained the same and spaces and opportunities were galore where soldiers of diverse ethnic origin could spend the liquid cash they earned during the War on prostitutes, food, alcohol, and merrymaking.

Although outside Bengal, Bengalis are synonymous with roshogolla, cottage cheese balls cooked in light syrup, the numerous varieties of savoury snacks—the non-vegetarian varieties often a combination of European and indigenous kitchen—speak a legion about their taste. Catering to the taste of the natives, many eateries and tea stalls sprang up in north and central Calcutta from the late nineteenth century onwards. As some of these places still exist, it is possible to compare the infrastructure of such places with that of the India Coffee House. The oldest surviving one close to College Street is Putiram’s Sweets on Mirzapur (Surya Sen) Street. Opened by Putiram Modak in 1889, the

169 Best examples are chop and cutlet (finely chopped or a thin piece respectively of meat, fish or vegetables coated with breadcrumbs going into a batter before it is deep fried). Devilled Egg is a version of Mughlai Nargisi kofta. In the Bengali variety the yolk of the hard-boiled egg is taken out and put back after it is mixed with spices. The whole egg gets a coating of mashed potato and deep fried after it is battered. For details on cosmopolitan food consumption practices in colonial Bengal, see Ray, Culinary Culture.
place is now in the hands of the fifth generation. Selling traditional
sweets and snacks at a reasonable price, the approximately 20-square
metre floor space between the counter and the sitting space with four
marble-top four-seater tables, draws a continuous flow of customers,
including students. No hot beverage was ever served here with the food,
only water was. Basanta Cabin had three outlets, one opposite the
Medical College on College Street, the second inside the College Street
Market and the third on Bidhan Sarani. The YMCA restaurant at the
corner of Bhavani Dutta Lane that also housed Public Restaurant and
Gyan Babu’s tea shop at the crossing of Harrison (Mahatma Gandhi)
Road and Bidhan Sarani are all history now. These places were a
favourite with the students who dropped in for a quick bite and to
satiate their thirst for tea. Many recall fondly Gyan Babu’s shop for
the quality of its tea. ‘Regulars’ at the Coffee House would go to one
of these places for a cheaper bite consisting mainly of toast, fried egg or
omelette—popularly called ‘mamlet’—and at times even handi kabab
before returning to their table at the ICH. One of the early places
in this area surviving the test of time is Favourite Cabin in Mirzapur
Street. It was begun in 1918 by the ex-Swadeshi activist brothers Nutan
Chandra and Gaur Chandra Barua of the Bengali Buddhist community
from Bailatali village near the Sankha River in Chittagong, Bangladesh.
Selling tea at one anna (1/16th of a rupee) a cup, and toast at 2 paise, this
shop soon became the favourite haunt of Biren Majumdar, the Congress
leader from Dhaka. Revolutionary leaders like Ambika Chakraborty,
Ganesh Ghosh and Surya Sen, and poets and others gathered here for
tea, and of course adda. The shop’s list of patrons includes names of
literary giants like Dadathakur (Sarat Pandit), Bibhutibhushan
Bandyopadhyay and Kazi Nazrul Islam in the past to that of the
social activist Medha Patkar, to name a few. The importance of this
shop is testified in the reminiscences of Achintya Kumar Sengupta:

170 Abhijit Modak (owner), interview, 24 July 2011; the original floor space was
halved and one half was rented out now housing a different shop.
171 Gyanbabu’s shop had been open for about hundred years before it closed
down; Gupta, ‘Amader’.
173 Achintya Kumar Sengupta, Kalol Jug (The Kalol Era), Calcutta: D.M. Library,
1960 (1366), 64.
The members of the Kallol (a post-Tagore literary movement) group used to visit the Favourite Cabin on Mirzapur Street for tea. They would sit in a tight circle round the white marble tables. Natunchandra Barua from Chittagong, the owner of the shop would welcome everyone with a gentlemanly charm (sujan sulabh snigdhta). That reception was so generous that it would send no signal that it was over even when the cups were emptied. You could carry on the adda as long as you wanted; the curious would come by attracted to the adda. Even if there would not be enough tea, there would not be want of space. Favourite Cabin saw the birth of many debates, bragging, vows and plans for future. Kallol would have remained incomplete without Favourite Cabin.

Till date the tea shop has a brisk business drawing regular customers ritually visiting the place every day. Operating since 1908, Dilkhusha Cabin near the Mahatma Gandhi Road crossing is still very much present in its ‘pomp and glory’ (jank-jamak). Founded by Chunilal Dey, with a seating capacity of 65 to 70 persons, the place is known for its kabiraji cutlet, the Bengali version of batter-coated, deep fried minced meat dumplings. Most visitors in the 1940s and 1950s could not afford to buy anything here beyond a chop or cutlet. The memory of adda at Basanta Cabin has been recalled and retold by many. Moving further north, there was Mitra Café opposite Sovabazar metro station begun in 1910 by Ganesh Mitra, another favourite joint for its chicken, fish, mutton chop, cutlet and kabiraji. Among the four outlets of this Café, the Shyambazar outlet was yet another hangout for an adda. Of all the eateries in the neighbourhood, Allen Kitchen, also in Sovabazar was perhaps the oldest. The late Jibankrishna Saha was an employee in the original

174 Current owner Utpal Basu who inherited the place from his uncle, interview, 17 July 2011.
175 Sengupta, Kallol Jug, 65.
176 Syed Mujtaba Ali, Panchatantra, 2 vols., Calcutta, 1960; Mujtaba Ali’s adda at Basanta Cabin with Sajanikanta Das, recollected by the latter, has been fondly recorded by Sabitendranath Roy, College Street e Sottor Bochhbor (Seventy Years on College Street), Kolkata: Mitra o Ghosh, 2006–08, vol. 3, 60.
177 In collective memory this was another coffee house; Somak Das, interview, 22 November 2012; Sabyasachi Bhattacharya, interview, 20 August 2011.
outlet in Allen Market in Chitpur named after its Scottish owner who left the place to Saha in the late 1890s. Prawn cutlet fried in clarified butter, the speciality of this restaurant, stills draws a large clientele.

While the attraction of restaurants like Allen Kitchen, Dilkhusa and Mitra Café lay in the goodies on their menu, in the 1940s Basanta Cabin and Raybabu’s Café adjacent to Presidency College, were a couple of other places college students would go to in addition to the ICH. Basanta Cabin was famous for its ‘double half’ tea, and ‘toash’. A cup of tea with the full measure of milk and sugar used to cost 4 paise and half a cup 2 paise; in double half on the other hand, half measure of milk and sugar was added to the full measure of water for one cup of tea. You could choose between two tastes that ‘toash’ or butter toast came in: sprinkled with sugar, or black pepper. Since it was so cheap, it used to be very crowded; and ‘it was not a place where you could stretch your legs and have an adda’. 178

Very few of the connoisseurs of Sanguvalley would know that its name is derived from Sankha, the river in Chittagong. Around the time that the Baruah Brothers opened Favourite Cabin, another member of the same community opened the first Sanguvalley Restaurant in Wellington. It soon became a favourite joint selling tea, chop, cutlet and Mughlai parota among other items. Many outlets were opened after the Japanese bombardment of Burma ruined the business of the Chaudhuries, an influential landholding family of Chittagong (not from the Sankha Valley) and the displaced workers moved to Calcutta. Another wave followed after the Partition. Although neither the owners nor the forty outlets spread over north and south Calcutta were related to each other, Sanguvalley became a brand name. 179 Perhaps because they themselves were displaced, like the owner of Favourite

178 Ray Chaudhuri, Bangalnama, 115, emphasis added. This choice is still available in canteens, small restaurants and road-side tea shops in Bengal where the fresh and handy small (one portion) loaf is cut into two thick slices and roasted on fire. It is crunchy outside, but soft inside. The butter usually available in the Indian market is salted.

179 Interview of Prasun Baruah, the owner of the only surviving outlet bearing the name is at 6AB, S.P. Mukherjee Road, 1 February 2012. His father and uncle migrated from Chittagong after the Partition; also interview, Sanjay Baruah, Favourite Cabin, 13 February 2012.
Cabin, the owners of Sanguvalley were also kind and generous to the unemployed youth who spent endless hours at their place: 180

The kind young owner of Sanguvalley opposite the tram depot in Kalighat, himself from Chittagong, allowed unemployed penniless youth to take part in adda in his shop from 9 am to 12 or 1 pm and from 7 pm to 9 pm without bothering them. He would sometimes supply plain tea, double-half tea, toast, ‘mamlet’, cake, chop, cutlet to them on credit.

Down Bankim Chatterjee Street past Mahabodhi Society was yet another favourite joint from the yesteryear. Niharjan Majumdar, the founder of the cold beverage shop Paramount (1918), was a freedom fighter. He was inspired by the chemist Acharya Prafulla Chandra Roy to think of a drink that would both be filling and quench one’s thirst at the same time, without pinching the students’ pocket too much. That saw the birth of the daab sharbat, a mixture of coconut water, tender coconut flesh, crushed ice, and sugar. This narrow shop with four benches was a cover for armed revolutionary movement and the space at the back of this dingy shop served as a hideout. Part of the income of the shop was diverted to finance this movement in the 1920s and 1930s. A framed list of names of eminent personalities who had visited the shop in the past and in recent times, includes Subhas Chandra Bose, Nazrul Islam, Satyendranath Bose and Satyajit Ray among many others. It is the shop’s prized exhibit that has overwhelmed many a newcomer adding to its popularity, and increasing footfall especially during the summer months.

Just as in the north, there were many tea shops in the southern part of the city. Reminiscing about the 1940s, Mrinal Sen has noted that during this period, he, along with his friends, used to visit a tea shop called the Paradise Café on Hazra Road where they would spend eight to ten hours of the day. Just like Satyajit Ray, Mrinal Sen, a pioneer of Indian parallel cinema was influenced by existentialism and neo-realism. It was those days when he and his friends interested in film-making were in search of an entry point.

180 Gupta, ‘Amader Jubakaler Adda’.
to the world of cinema, this café served as the venue where such plans were discussed: 181

There was a tea-shop called Paradise Café on Hazra Road; it is not there any longer. A few of my friends including myself—those days we were outsiders to the world of film, but were intent on making films—would sit at that place. We were not able to afford the coffee house, hence. Out of twenty-four hours, eight to ten hours were spent there. I cannot imagine it now. Many of the members of this group became famous in their respective field later in life.

Till the 1980s, Adi Sutripti opposite Deshapriya Park (now a hotel), Shobha Restaurant and Amritayan on the east and west of the crossing of Rashbehari Avenue and S.P. Mukherji Road, were places for whiling away some time over tea and snacks. Another popular joint for tea in the neighbourhood was Radhubabu’s tea shop on Jatin Das Road (near the Lake Market end). The shop was always crowded and tea there was immensely popular. It was discovered later that the owner laced the tea with cocaine in order to ensure the serpentine queues of tea-drinkers in front of his shop. 182 Another favourite meeting point in South Calcutta was the Banaphul Cabin near Purna Cinema on S.P. Mukherji Road. Till the 1970s there was a thriving adda at this place where a few Leftist intellectuals would meet. 183

It is interesting to note that while writing about the South Indians in Calcutta, P.T. Nair never mentioned coffee at all, perhaps because hailing from Kerala, he himself did not drink coffee. 184 Gupta, the antiquarian of Calcutta recalled that the culture of coffee drinking had been introduced in Calcutta by the South Indians. 185 Many migrants

181 Mrinal Sen, ‘Addamela Hoke’ (Let there be an adda-fair), in Bangalir Adda, 33–40. One member of this group was Ritwik Ghatak, another luminary in the field of parallel cinema. Another person was Tapas Sen who later earned fame in stage lighting.

182 Anecdote, the late P. K. Bhattacharyya (71), interview, 30 August 2011.

183 Interview, Dr Sudeshna Banerjee, Department of History, J.U., 28 September 2013.


185 Gupta, ‘Amader Jubakaler Adda’.
from other states were attracted to the city in the first half of the twentieth century. Institutions of higher education and opportunities in the public and private sector attracted the educated middle class, while the jute factories in Bengal worked as a pull factor for the working class from neighbouring states and states like Tamil Nadu and Karnataka till at least the 1960s. Boarding houses and lodges were required for the many migrants coming from different parts of the country. Founded in the mid-1930s by C.V. Iyer, a Palghat Brahmin from Kerala, Komala Vilas on Rashbehari Avenue was one lodge meant especially for the migrants from the South. Initially people used to put up at the place for a week or two; later many of them stayed on. Young male members would come first and rent a room in a house or a mess. Later, after they secured a job, they would go back to their ancestral village to get married and come back with their newly-wed wives. The first South Indian eatery was set up by P.C. Rama Iyer, also from Palghat, in Paddapukur Road around the year 1922. South Indian restaurants were opened in Central Calcutta around the business centres in Dalhousie Square, Esplanade, Chittaranjan Avenue and Burra Bazar. Madras Café on Hastings Street dates back to 1935. Quite a few typical South Indian eateries came up especially in the residential quarters between Hazra and Deshapriya Park/Lake Market in the south where there is a conglomeration of South Indian communities. While a few Calcuttans like Radha Prasad Gupta and Amitabha Sen familiar with coffee went to restaurants like National Lodge and Paniyan, these joints had not quite attracted the adda of the tea shops mentioned above, so the ‘onus’ was left to the ICH to take coffee to the Bengali middle class.

Although outside the focus of this work, one popular public space especially in Bombay but also in Hyderabad and Poona deserves mention here. Set up by Zoroastrians who migrated from Iran in the late nineteenth century, Irani cafés, often located close to an Iranian bakery,

186 R. Asokan, the chief manager Canara Bank, Chowringhee branch cited in Subhro Saha, ‘South to South’, The Telegraph, 21 July 2006.
187 Nair, South Indians.
188 Till 1946 coffee was not the on menu at Komala Vilas begun in the early 1940s. Mr Prem Raj, interview, 15 February 2011.
were informal restaurant-cum-tea houses, and were very popular for their freshly prepared snacks and tea.189 Beginning with Café Leopold in Colaba (1871), Kayani Café in Dhobi Talao (1904) and Britannia in Ballard Estate (1905), there were about 350 Irani cafés in Bombay in the 1950s. Run by independent families, these cafés were famous for their *maska pau* (butter on breadroll), *brun maska* (hard-crusted bun with butter) that could be enjoyed with minced meat, omelet, scrambled egg or just jam, and of course Irani *chai* and *paani kum chai*, thick milky tea, *khade chammach ki chai*, the extra sweet tea with condensed milk and a ‘standing spoon’, *gaz* (nougat), nan-khatai, Shrewsbury and other types of biscuit, *falooda* (chilled milk served with vermicelli, rose syrup and basil seeds) along with freshly baked cakes from the bakeries nearby. The café area usually had small square white marble-top tables and black chairs against a backdrop of dark brown glass cupboards stacked with groceries and varieties of cookies. Strategically located at junctions and street corners, these cafés offered not only wholesome food at an affordable price, but made it possible for people to linger over cups of tea, thus becoming a meeting point.

**CONCLUSION**

The survey above is only sketchy at its best. But is sufficient to demonstrate that although there was a break as far as the *qahwakhanas* of Mughal Delhi were concerned, there was a continuation of the thriving tradition of public gatherings in the shape of *mushairas*, and *kavi sammelans*, bringing the Hindi and Urdu literary worlds together in the early decades of the twentieth century. These formal events, however, had to be organized and lacked the spontaneity of the *adda* which I have suggested was an attempt of the urban man to rise above the mundane existence of everyday life. Considering the spaces of public consumption facilitating informal meetings, it can be said that ranging from posh restaurants on the one hand to neighbourhood tea shops on the other, from at least the early twentieth century there was a tradition of informal socialization in urban North India comparable

189 I am grateful to Devika Shetti for drawing my attention to the Irani cafés in Bombay.
to the *addas* in Bengal. At the one end of the spectrum were European-style restaurants like Firpo’s, Flury’s, Peliti’s in Calcutta, Alps and Volga in Delhi and B.N. Rama’s and the late entrant El Chico in Allahabad together with other clubs and hotels offering a luxury beyond the reach of a majority of the middle class; at the other, were the small-scale tea shops, cabins, restaurants, confectionaries and roadside tea shops run by local entrepreneurs selling tea and light snacks. Consumption of food was compulsory in the restaurants, but tea shops usually patronized *adda*. If Paradise Café and Sanguvalley in Calcutta allowed the unemployed youth to use their space for socializing, tea shops like Jagati’s, Malani’s among other places in Allahabad and Favourite Cabin or Banaphul in Calcutta were venues where the literati met and spent a considerable amount of time in leisurely *adda*. It should be borne in mind that this socialization at tea shops was inexpensive, and continued even after the Coffee House was launched. What is remarkable is that while these spaces were judged by the quality of the gathering they attracted, very little is said about the infrastructure of such establishments conveying that the agency was more important than the structure. The first time that the structure is mentioned is after the launch of the India Coffee House, when a comparison is made between the pre-existing restaurants and the new Coffee House, only then does it become evident that the Coffee House was not just an addition to the existing spaces of *adda*. The middle class, in spite of Gandhi’s practice of frugality which he advised the entire nation to follow, was prone to luxury. Instead of inspiring a movement against consumerism, his philosophy of abstinence was translated into a politics of consumerism. Moreover, consumption of new commodities was often projected as an indispensable part of modernity. So, did the cultural elite patronize the tea shops and cabins because there was no affordable alternative available to them? Was it only coffee, largely unknown to the average north Indian that attracted them to the Coffee House, or was there something more to it? The following chapter will shed light on the process of the production of the India Coffee House.