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Baitakkhana to the Public Adda: Byomkes Bakshi Stories and the Construction of Democratic Public Sphere

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Abstract: *Adda* is, on one hand, the discursive site of cultural identity, and on the other hand, a formulation to cope with the imperial domination of club culture. *Adda* became a place for the anti-colonial debate, particularly in the latter half of the nineteenth-century Bengal. *Adda*, a Bengali cultural phenomenon modified through the different physical spaces, is equivalent to the Habermasian ‘Public Sphere’. Many South Asian historians focus on the teleological evolution of *adda* as a symbolic representation of Bengali cultural identity. However, its development as a socio-cultural institution and its transformation from colonial to modern nation-state have often been overlooked. The paper explores the elements that contribute to the creation of *adda* and the physical spaces associated with this transformation. It focuses on shaping the Bengali character and developing *adda* as a socio-cultural institution within the public sphere. *Adda* represents the emergence of modern Bengali civil society and embodies the democratic principles of modernity. This paper restricts the study to the teleological development as a Bengali social practice of twentieth-century Bengali modernism. To trace the development of *adda*, historians have relied on historical documents rather than literary artefacts. However, the study focuses on the literary representation of this cultural space in Bengali literature.

Keywords: *Adda*, *Baitakkhana*, Public Sphere, Habermas, and Byomkesh Bakskhi Stories.

Introduction

Adda is commonly seen as a quintessentially Bengali practice, serving a vital role in shaping the identity and concepts of life and vitality within the Bengali community. This cultural tradition is deeply embedded in Bengali life and displays both uniform and diverse characteristics. *Adda* takes place in various settings, both public and private. *Adda* transcends the boundaries of social, political, and religious spheres, occupying various spaces throughout Bengali life, such as offices, municipal corporations, tea stalls, hotels, sports grounds, political party offices, and educational institutions, including schools and colleges. It is important to understand that *adda* is not a male-dominated practice; in Bengali households, both men and



women come together in social settings to enjoy companionship; there is no exclusivity to any particular group. The term 'Public Sphere' sparked significant debate in the academic field, especially since Habermas's "Theory of the Public Sphere" was published in the late twentieth century.¹ Many South Asian historians focus on the teleological evolution of *Adda* as a symbolic representation of Bengali cultural identity. However, its development as a socio-cultural institution and its transformation from colonial times to the modern nation-state have often been overlooked. The paper explores the elements that contribute to the creation of *adda* and the physical spaces associated with this transformation. It focuses on shaping the Bengali character and developing *adda* as a socio-cultural institution within the public sphere.

Adda refers to an informal social conversation in Bengali among friends and colleagues, covering a wide range of topics. These discussions often explore significant intellectual subjects, including local political issues, as well as art, literature, and music. In the early nineteenth century, the streets and alleys of Calcutta became gathering places for the *Bhadralok*, an educated class. These meetings typically take place in tea shops or restaurants; the educated youth primarily congregate on College Street in north Calcutta. *Adda* represents the emergence of modern Bengali civil society and embodies the democratic principles of modernity. Sociologist Benoy Sarkar argues that the vibrancy of *adda* has helped Bengalis nurture and enhance their inherent instincts as a community. He states:

Bengalis enjoy a tremendous reputation in the world as the people best at practicing *adda*. No other race has been able to build up such an institution as *adda* that stands above all ideas of need or utility. To enjoy *adda* is a primordial and perennial principle of life—no other people have succeeded in acknowledging this in life as Bengalis have. (qtd in Chakraborty 210)

***Adda* and the Making of the Democratic Public Sphere in Bengal**

The formation of the democratic public sphere in India evolved through a historical process. The stories under study examine the development and function of the public sphere in Bengal. The origins of *adda* can be traced back through various historical phases, reaching its full expression after independence. This fully developed form emerged alongside industrial advancement and the establishment of a welfare state. In addition to the rise of modern institutions, several sociological factors contributed to the development of the public sphere.

The mass production of newspapers, the availability of printed media, and women's engagement with Western education transformed the interactions between men and women in both private and public domains.

In the Indian context, the word *Adda* serves two main purposes: it refers to a physical space, such as a bus stand (Bus-*adda*) or an airport (Houwai-*adda*)ⁱⁱ. Another meaning of *adda* is conversation, intellectual exchange among the various members of a group. In this paper, the study of *adda* is restricted to the teleological development as a Bengali social practice of the twentieth century Bengali modernism. To trace the development of *adda*, historians have relied on historical documents rather than literary artifacts. However, the study focuses on the literary representation of this cultural space in Bengali English literature. Historically, *adda* started as a practice which emerged out of the bourgeoisie culture of the domestic *Baitakkhana* (private parlour). *Baitakkhana* is a place/room for the *assar* or the convivial gathering separately built from the main household. It is a place for socio-political exchange that is comparatively less democratic, dominated mainly by a rich patron. The members primarily belong to the different socio-economic strata.

The word *majlish*ⁱⁱⁱ is also used interchangeably with "assar," where dining and conversation are primary pursuits among the elite, linked to bourgeois private spaces for enjoyment and idle talk. The *Baitakkhana* could be seen as a form of "bonding," characterized by conversations that are more inward-looking and exclusive in nature (Johnson 2). In this newly emerged cultural space, discussions increasingly focus on external societal issues and events. Over time, the space of *adda* evolved into a hybrid model, blending elements of the *Baitakkhana* with the discussions that took place in newly established coffee houses.

The venue of the *adda* gradually moved to an external veranda, a common feature of the twentieth-century urban Calcutta households. A democratic sensibility emerges with this change in the physical space. Then, with time passed, the fencing-bound lawn became the new space, which lasted until the real estate crisis began. Historians claim that *adda*, as a practice, is peculiar to Bengali culture, and others find that it is the nationalistic character of the Bengalis that formed the cultural identity of colonial India. In this respect, Chakraborty says, the twentieth century began with a claim that the practice is peculiarly Bengali and that it marks a primary national characteristic of the Bengali people to such a degree that the Bengali character could not be thought without it (*Provincialising Europe* 211).

The democratic sensibility of the *adda* differentiates this space from that of wealthy bourgeois patrons held in the *Baithakkhana* where most members are from the same socio-economic strata. This paradigm moves from the male-dominated interaction of the upper-class patron and his equals within private parlour to a democratic public venue, *adda*. *Baithakkhana* involves wealth and patronage. *Baithakkhana adda* conversation here, even when it was not directly sycophantic, could never be democratic, for the very presence of the patron would influence the speech pattern of such a group in all kinds of ways (190).

The *Adda* is also essential because it helps to show the Bengali heterogeneous cultural identity. The democratization of *adda* created a space for the non-elite as well. Another notable aspect of *adda*, as pointed out by Chakraborty, is its ambivalent character, connected to its adjective in a Sanskritized word and the Persianized expression *addabaj(z)*^{iv} which denotes a particular temperament of Bengali character. Though the complimentary words convey a negative moralistic description of *adda* as unambiguously mentioned by Nirad Chaudhury^v. Suniti Chattopadhyay wrote of his student days:

The student has a large stock of hybrid words[mixing Bengali with English], which he can invent whenever he likes. *Addify* and *addification* have got nothing to do with mathematical addition; they simply mean to enjoy a chat and come from the Bengali word *adda*. The *adda* have no fixed agenda, there is no certainty that the centre of the discussion. Suppose this moment the conversation is about [a] supernova beyond the solar system, the next moment the discussion could be about Plekhanov's *The Role of the Individual in History (Hostel Life 212)*.

It may be unexpected to find an *addadhari* character in Bengali detective literature. Nevertheless, it is common to find some (imaginary) Bengali housewife waiting for her *addadharivi*^{vi} husband/relative for dinner. For instance, in the story, "The Rhythm of the Riddle", Satyabati is like Nipakrishna Chattopadhyay's imaginary Bengali housewife who looks upon *adda* as poison and becomes hostile towards Ajit, who came late in the night from the *adda*. (*The Rhythm of Riddle: Three Byomkesh Bakshi Mysteries 6*) According to Dipesh Chakraborty, this hostility of the wife towards her husband is a culturally conceived opposition between the worldly responsibilities and the non instructional pleasure of company and conversation (*Provinciallizing Europe 210*).



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The gathering places for *adda* were most often outside the bourgeois parlour of the respective households. The veteran Mohidharbabu, the *addadhari* in Byondyopadhyay's story "The Picture Imperfect", would like to invite his friends and relatives to his home and hold an *adda*. Surprisingly, while staying in the Santhal Parganas, Byomkesh, Ajit and other members of the Bengali intelligentsia like Prof. Adinath Some, Aswain Ghatak and Usha Natha Majumder are invited to a public *adda* which is less democratic and represents the emerging bourgeoisie class. Mohidharbabu, the landlord, has gained influence by negotiating with imperialist power and has become the ideal model of an urban, modern, educated man of colonised Bengal. As mentioned by N.C. Choudhury, in his book, *An Autobiography of Unknown India*, it is possible to find in every character the four major outings 'the morning wandering in search of casual gossip, the midday stay in the office and the systematised cultivation of company in the evening' (qtd. in Chakraborty 185)

Colonial Modernity, Middle-Class Identity, and the Hybridization of *Adda*

The other paradigm shift was the popularisation of *adda* among the middle classes. The Bengali middle class made *adda* a socio-cultural identity in response to the cultural hegemony of British imperialism. *Adda* is, on one hand, the discursive site of cultural identity, and on the other hand, a formulation to cope with the imperial domination of club culture. It is a consequence and a response to the Westernisation of Bengal. *Adda* became a place for the anti-colonial debate, particularly in the latter half of the nineteenth-century Bengal. The colonial government contributed to the emergence of cultural institutions like the coffee house, which was meant for debate and discussion among the academic elite. Though eighteenth-century London coffee house culture differed from the Bengali *adda*, an imitative connotation is easily conceivable.

The seed of nationalism germinated through such discussions in the *adda*. *Adda* constructs the very act of the anti-colonial resistance, what Edward Said calls 'recalcitrant phenomena' (*Orientalism* 145). It is a response to the British club culture and a counter to the dominating culture and its naturalization (158). It would be a mistake to recognize *adda* as a complete form of resistance to the colonial impact as it was not a medium of subversion of the colonial process. As Debarati Sen writes, I would not say that *adda* was a resistance to Westernization. It was not a conscious attempt by the Bengali middle class to use it as a medium of subversion, but its effect points towards a process of hybridization (*Speech Genre and Identity: The place of adda in Bengali Culture discourse* 7). Hybridization of *adda* is a twentieth-century phenomenon and

combines the elements of the bourgeoisie *baithakkhana* with that of English coffee house conversation. Though the *adda* culture started as a kind of hangover of the elite bourgeoisie Bengali culture, its malleability of content and purposefulness of productivity resulted in the appropriation of *adda* by the non-elites (2). Buddhadev Bose's observation about the *adda* in the 1950s is that it is unmistakably middle-class, cosmopolitan, heterogeneous and equal. Everybody must enjoy equal status in an *adda* (*Adda 14*).

The main attraction of *adda* in both public places and domestic parlours is the political discussion, regional and global politics and the issue of the colonial government's policies. These topics were vigorously debated and criticised in such discussions. Byomkesh Bakshi's *adda*, the discussion opens with literature, art, newspaper reports, or advertisements. The story "Gramophone Pin Mystery" starts with the *adda* of the newspaper advertisement followed by a discussion on crime and the irresponsibility of the police. As the author says:

The editorial comments about the effectiveness of the police department grew sharper and more critical. A terror gripped the city of Calcutta, reigning over the mind of every citizen. There is no topic of discussion in *addas*, tea stalls, restaurants or drawing rooms across the city. (*Picture Imperfect and Other Byomkesh Bakshi Mysteries 37*)

The tradition of men and women gathering in the *Chandimondap* is an age-old practice, allowing them to meet informally and discuss the issues affecting their lives. *Chandimondap* serves as a place to worship the goddess Chandi. An elevated platform made of rawk is built for elders to sit together and contemplate contemporary issues. This pre-colonial institution known as *adda* plays a significant role in social mobilization. Later, the physical space of the house provides a suitable space for *adda*. In the middle-class household the *adda* is associated with the elevated veranda attached to the front of the household. The external veranda or rawk, an architectural feature of Bengali households until rising prices made it obsolete, may indeed have been a structural remnant of the *dao* (veranda) that went around a traditional mud hut in the village of Bengal (qtd. in Chakraborty 189).

In pre-colonial Bengal, there were several cultural and political institutions in rural Bengal. In this informal mode of communication, equal opportunity and participation, democratic flavour, and freedom of expression were absent. These could not keep up with the changing times and could not incorporate modern

features such as freedom of will, freedom of speech and equal opportunity to all. The modern *adda*, compared to the other pre-colonial institutions, is democratic in participation. Some of them, like *Tarka* (debate), *Majlish* and *Jalsa*^{vii} are informal social practices primarily confined to a group, a particular class or a religious community.

The physical space of *adda* has changed over time from its origin to its modern development. It moves bourgeoisie domestic parlour to the club and the tea stall to the coffee house. Later democratization of *adda* changed and formed a new structural form of this practice. The narrow domestic parlour does not fulfill the modern demand. In the meantime the basic component of the discussions also undergo changes along with its physical transformation. The patronize *adda* is no longer sufficient for this new democratic mode of communication.

Hereafter, the *Adda* exists in a different guise in physical space, spreading to domestic rawk (veranda), offices, schools, colleges, sport pavilions, clubs of political parties, district organizations, tea shops, restaurants—all aspects of Bengali life. *Adda* became synonymous with the Hebermasian Public Sphere where private individual men and women come in contact with the public and paves the way towards a vibrant civil society where more existed. The transition of *adda* manifested through the institutional transformation from feudalism to capitalism. These institutional changes marked varied characteristics of public *adda*.

It would be simplistic to see *adda* simply as a hangover of an older feudal lifestyle as a vestige of a rural pre-urban past surviving as an obstacle of Bengali modernity. What function does *adda* play in the colonial to the post Independent India in general and Bengal in particular. The answer leads to the discussion of *adda* as a socio-cultural institution changing over time and mode of operation (188). Nripendra Krishna naturalizes the practice with the comparison with season. Some of Bandyopadhyay's stories witness how the changing season evokes responses creating new topics of discussion. "The Hidden Heirloom" starts with the description of monsoon in the household *adda* where the discussion goes on about —rice fry which every Bengali experiences in the monsoon. Seasonal *adda* continues in other stories and such "The Bloodstain", Byomkesh often recites the spring poetry of Bharatchandra during the *adda*. Nripendra Krishna beautifully romanticizes the seasonal influence during one such *adda*.



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Our [Bengalis] *Chaitra* [mid-March to mid-April the last month of Bengali year] evening rain –patter-fluid afternoons of *Sravon* [rainy fourth month in Bengali calendar] the moon-washed nights of autumn, the sweet and the bright morning of winter –they all go ringing the silent bell of *adda* (Nana Katha 2-3)

Adda and the Bhadrakok: Negotiating Modernity and the Public Sphere

The observation of Bengali public activities helps us understand their social life and behaviour within the influence of modernity. The modern Bengali intelligentsia was an outcome of the intellectual exchange among *bhadrakok*. *Adda* helped to cultivate the rich fertile ground for Bengali modernity. The people practise the habit of discussion, argument and debate. The *Adda* became a space for the interaction of the cosmopolitan members of the middle and lower middle classes. The democratization of the *adda* proved a radical shift over time and engaged members from different multi-ethnic backgrounds. Chakraborty opines that “*Adda* of Calcutta of the 1920s were spaces where a democratic and the cosmopolitan vision of the world could be nurtured and sustained” (*Provinciallizing Europe* 199). The liberty of equal participation and the liberty of speech are the basic components of the vibrant *adda*. This democratization and indigenization of *adda* characterized the Bengali intelligentsia as a product of modernity. The most important achievement of *adda* was to make logical arguments acceptable and triumph among the educated and logical.

According to Chakraborty, —[the] participants always try to perform in a particular way to recontextualize the *adda* to retain its cosmopolitanism because they desire to be identified as Bengali even in a varied cultural context (212). Some institutions are responsible for the transformation of public *adda* from the informal, indigenous *baithakkhana* towards cosmopolitanism. One of them is the newspaper. The literary *adda* formed and centered mainly around the literary artifacts, contemporary newspapers and the easily accessible books in English. The growing trade in the city, the market of global literature, is organized around the culture and institution of *adda*. The public conversation and debate over the newspapers had a tremendous impact on the life of the *bhadrakok* and newly acquired modernity.

Within the enormous literary production of Bengali literature, *adda* finds a voice as a Bengali modernist. Dipesh Chakraborty thinks the practice was given a self conscious nationalist home. It is much more restricted to twentieth century Bengali literary modernism. The public *adda* is open to all who want to engage in mutual deliberation more or less equal in their perspective and experience. (*Provinciallizing Europe*

195) Thus the *adda* paved the way for Bengali modernity through institutions and practice of western modernity.

Historians claim that *adda* as a practice is peculiar to the Bengali culture and some others find the nationalistic character of the Bengali people also foregrounds the cultural identity of colonial India. Chakraborty claims that "the practice is peculiarly Bengali and that it marks a primary national characteristic of the Bengali people to such a degree that the Bengali character 'could not be thought without it'" (205). Another nationalist claim for *adda* as a perennial Bengali cultural practice is made by Bengali writer Nripendra Krishna Chattopadhyay:

Bengalis enjoy a tremendous reputation in the world as the people best at practicing *adda*. No other race has been able to build up such an institution as *adda* that stands above all ideas of need or utility. To enjoy *adda* is a primordial and perennial principle of life—no other people have succeeded in acknowledging this in life as Bengalis have (*Nana Katha* 3).

The availability of Western printed media faced a great response in the *adda*. It was predominantly male dominated when they were the first to be exposed to English education. But the paradigm of *adda* was changed from male dominated to one that had much more mixed interaction between both genders. Men and women gather in equal numbers in a social space to enjoy conviviality. Suniti Chattopadhyay argued for a process of democratization and the indigenization of literary taste in the lives of young middle class people (*Hostel Life* 210).

Some Bengali intelligentsias criticize *adda* as 'gregariousness' and a symptomatic of a deep and continuing malaise of Bengali characters (212). Bhabanicharan Bandyopadhyay's *Kalikata Kamalalaya* criticized the Bengali character asserting that the morning gossip, the midday spell of business or siesta, the afternoon relaxation, and the evening court, had all come down unmodified (*Kalikata Kamalalaya* 8). *Adda* mentioned Nirad Chandra Chaudhury in his *The Autobiography of Unknown Indian* (1951). *Adda* he says:

...had its fixed adherents....these gathering places were most often in the outer parlour of one of the wealthier members of the group, but at times also office after office hour, and more rarely, a tea shop.... As a general rule, these meeting places were located in the quarter in which the greater



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majority of frequenters lived. But it is not unusual to find a man travelling five or six miles by tram in order to join his company. (Chaudhury 364)

The development of the Bengali intelligentsia is attributed to the Bengali mutual relation to the *adda* which occurs mainly through the amalgamation of European and Bengali literature. The establishment of modern educational institutions like Calcutta University and institutions of women education. The initiation of English literature as an academic discipline had a tremendous influence on the *adda*. This institution played a role in making *adda* as a mass product as they provided a space for the intense discussion on literature, history and art. The Bengali *bhadralok* who were educated in the western education system and came in contact with the British administrative service and the local administrator popularized *adda* in the colonial Calcutta to a larger extent. They had greater accessibility to the global world of knowledge, the Westernized view of life and global economic affairs.

The Byomkesh's household also acts as *adda* which transforms him from a socially situated person into an abstract individual who can reason in universal terms. The ontological subject of the public discussion constitutes everything from country affairs to newspaper columns. The domestic discussion in the Bengali household after the later part of the nineteenth century engaged mainly individuals coming from diverse social backgrounds with different social interests set aside their specific loyalties and interests to engage as abstract individuals in a strictly rational discourse. There were multiple cultural communities that showed considerable ingenuity in reinforcing identities of different orders. In addition, the individual interest gave a typical flavor to the nature of the public emerging out of early twentieth century Calcutta. The behaviour of individuals and the civil society's established institution of secular and rational discourse formed a new civil consciousness.

The colonial rule created and maintained the public sphere but left the private sphere free from the repressive apparatus of the colonial state. The government was reluctant to interfere in the private lives of the two major religious communities. The dichotomy between the public and the private spheres shaped the institutionalisation of the native elite to dominate the public sphere. Undeniably, the experience of the private sphere has been decisively shaped by the representational mode of governance of the British colonial government, which prioritises the selected individual to come into contact with the colonial administrator.



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This particular manner of interaction between the imperial state and the native paved the way for the productive public sphere in the colonial world.

The *adda* consists of an autonomous space, not a mediating institution of the civil society and the state, but also the sociopolitical and cultural mobilizing, including the modernization. The influence of modernity created *adda* as a space of critical self-reflections and public deliberations. The condition of the public sphere depends on voluntary participation and continuous struggle with the state apparatuses. A vibrant civil society requires a mobilized free public sphere for autonomy and social transformation.

Colonial Institutions, Club Culture, and the Bengali Public Sphere

The colonial assumptions of an exclusive European public sphere are challenged by the emergence of the Bengali public sphere from the early nineteenth century, primarily dominated by the Hindu Bengali elite. Swati Chattopadhyay opines that much of the nineteenth-century Bengali intellectual and political activity was directed towards erasing the hierarchical signification implied in the colonizer's view of public life (*Representing Calcutta* 155). The colonial government's mandated English education system of 1835 had a tremendous impact on the Bengali intelligentsia. As a corollary, many socio-economic changes, including caste mobility, occurred within the hierarchies of Bengali strata. By the second half of the nineteenth century, the social distinction between the middle class and the elite began to blur. Previously, the higher caste Hindus were regarded as a respectable group when they had a kinship with the colonial authority. Later colonial English education and the professional relationships provided respectability to the middle-class elite.

As a colonial capital, Calcutta saw a demographic expansion as people belonging to different communities and classes were drawn into the city after the steady increase of urbanisation. The introduction of the printing press, newspapers, and journals provided a platform for the middle-class Bengali intelligentsia. The public sphere emerged as a cultural phenomenon, taking on different dimensions in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Educational institutions such as Calcutta University, Presidency College, and new English medium schools for boys and girls contributed to the emergence of a new class of professional men and women. The vast array of publications, both literary and journalistic, along with the formation of new sociopolitical organizations like the Anusulin Samiti, religious groups such as Brahma Samaj and Arya



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Samaj, and political organizations including Hindu Mahasabha and the Muslim League, enriched the interactive and discursive nature of the average Bengali's experience.

These developments fostered increased gatherings and discussions in various public places such as marketplaces, restaurants, tea shops, coffee houses, boarding houses, riverbanks, gardens, parks, clubs, and more. To fully understand the urban public sphere, we must pay attention to the diverse experiences of the middle class. The goal is to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the public sphere, or *adda*, to clarify the internal dynamics of modern life in Bengali society. In this context, it is essential to examine both the private and public spheres of Bengali life.

Bhadralok is an important social category in Bengal, serving both as a cultural performer and a product of the *adda*. Traditionally, in bourgeois households, the public parlour was separate from the main domestic areas. In "The Hidden Heirloom" (1933), we see a hybrid, anglicized domestic *baithakkhana* belonging to Kumar Tribendra Narayan, where the influence of democratic sensibility is relatively limited. Unlike traditional meeting places that were built apart from the main household, this *baithakkhana* is integrated into the home. Similarly, in "Quicksand" (1934), the feudal lords of North Bengal, such as Himangshu Roy, also adopt this architectural style.

The construction of the Bengali domesticity in the later part of the twentieth century changes the domestic *adda*. The domestic parlour in modern Bengali domesticity is not built separately from the main household until land crises in urban Calcutta. This modern fashion of household construction makes *it* much more democratic and heterogeneous. Though the discussion is in the inner house, there is equal opportunity for men and women to participate publicly. Byomkesh's *Keyatala* Road household is the model of urban construction of modern households. It is marked by the equal share of this private parlour for public participation and private engagement.

The colonial government started the club culture as a public domain in the metropole and the colony as an imperial institution. The club culture eliding the boundary between the domestic and the imperial to defamiliarise the domestics has undoubtedly brought the imperial back home to Britain. The club culture in India, in general, and Bengal, in particular, emerges as a self-governing voluntary association of the Bengali elite as a counter culture to the hegemony of the British imperial culture. Bengali bourgeoisie's addiction

towards club culture appears in many of the post-independence Byomkesh Bakshi's stories. The gossip, enjoyment, drinking, eating and other lethargic activities are related to the elite club culture in bourgeoisie societies. Pranhari Sanyal and Fonish Chakraborty are an intimate part of the elite society in "The Riddle" (*Byomkesh Bakshi Stories by Saradindu Bandyopadhyay* 102). Gangapada's addiction to the race club, where gambling and bankruptcy represent a phenomenon common among anglicised Bengalis in the story "Locked Knott" (125). The club culture produces as far as possible the ambivalence of the culture and the Bengali character of the native elite. The adda, or the discussion of the club, is a cultural site for the distribution and the mediation of elite power.

The club culture in Bengal originated as an institution associated with imperialism and evolved to reflect the influence of the empire. British imperialism introduced certain aspects of metropolitan culture that directly relate to the bourgeois public sphere. As Edward Said highlights, "culture is itself the result and the symptom of the particular implications of cultural practices in the history of modern imperialism" (qtd. in Roy 28). These institutions played a significant role in shaping politically favorable domestic arrangements among the elite class of Indian natives.

The club's popularity was due to a heavy preponderance of young bachelor elite in Bengal. Mrigen Mallick, Madhumay, Arabindu Halder and Fonish are the representatives of the Post-Independent Bengali elite, for whom the club served to reproduce the desire to solve professional problems, recreation and enjoyment. Their coal club divides people, mobilises them based on specific sociopolitical identities, and simultaneously performs an ambivalent political function of society (*Byomkesh Bakshi Stories by Saradindu Bandyopadhyay* 45). It performs the role of a divider because the fellow members are at the top of the social hierarchy, where the contrast is inherent. On the other hand, social mobilisation made social mixing possible between the elite and the middle class. The club of pre- and post-independence India was indebted to European colonialism, coming as a response to the particular exigencies of colonial location.

The club culture among the native elite was adopted to legitimize the existing social hierarchy. An indigenous club culture also emerged later in the nineteenth century. Chakraborty notes the presence of several clubs for indigenous people, such as the Monday Club and the Four Arts Club (197). Provincial variations of this club culture can be traced back to both the colonial period and post-independence Bengal.



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Hiren Kumar Sanyal writes that the activities of these clubs included discussions on a wide range of topics, from Plato and Nietzsche to Bankim, Vivekananda, and Vaishnav poetry, as well as the poetry of Rabindranath Tagore (qtd. Chakrabarty 198).

The British club culture developed in post-independent Bengal. Earlier, it was not wholly absent in colonial Bengal. The English-educated elite and bureaucrats who had contact with colonial administration were the active participants in club culture. This public sphere is comparatively less democratic. Bandyopadhyay's post-Independent story "The Riddle" (Kahen Kobi Kalidas) vividly depicts Bengali elite club culture.

The second half of the nineteenth century saw a complex migration process from East Bengal to Calcutta. This movement and economic and socio-spatial changes contributed to the emergence of a politically ambitious middle class. Three key socio-economic and cultural aspects are significant in understanding the dimensions of modernity in Bengal during this period: the establishment of modern institutions, the development of public spaces and spheres, and a new notion of domesticity that emerged in relation to these changes. Establishing modern institutions such as colonial bureaucracies, judicial systems, and various 'repressive state apparatuses' like universities, schools, and cultural institutes facilitated colonial expansion. This also led to discussions and creating public, private, and personal spaces imbued with a newfound aesthetic.

The Bengali Public Sphere and the Limits of Habermasian Modernity

The emerging Bengali middle class needed a platform for intellectual and socio-cultural deliberations. As a result, Bengali public theatres were legitimised. However, there were others the arenas designated as belonging to the state and/or the coloniser through the stamp of colonial authority, the municipal office, the courthouse, the colleges supported (at least partially) by the colonial government, and the Town Hall – that came to be appropriated by the elite Bengalis in the process of claiming these public spaces as their own. The Town Hall was where people gathered for public debate and discussion. However, the peculiarity of nineteenth-century Calcutta was that the public place here was recognised as the production of the colonial government and dominated by the Anglo-Europeans. These became the place for contact, demands and discussions with the colonial authority. The emerging public sphere constitutes a theatrical stage for shaping



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public identities. The public sphere of colonial Calcutta played a predominant role in raising public demand and citizen rights.

If British residents in Calcutta, as elsewhere in India, formed a civil society, it was, however, not based on a strict separation from the colonial state; instead, it was based on status and professional affiliation as was expected in the ideal bourgeois public sphere in Western Europe. The civil society established by the British was interconnected with the local population. The need for administrative support required them to engage with the Indian people, leading to the creation of a common platform. An intellectual and social connection was essential to sustain the colonial government. The public sphere in Calcutta mirrored the structure of the European bourgeois public sphere. The individuals involved in this public sphere were primarily middle-class, English-educated *bhadralok*. They often opposed the colonial state, which granted subjecthood without citizenship. Scholars have pointed out the discrepancies between the Bengali public sphere of the nineteenth century and the Habermasian concept of the bourgeois public sphere.

Calcutta was a melting pot of migrants. In addition to European army clerks and soldiers gathering for the impending World War, people from all parts of India converged in the city. This included workers, artisans, servants, petty traders, shopkeepers, and educated residents, all of whom helped meet the demand for housing for students at the newly established institutions such as Calcutta University, Sanskrit College, Metropolitan Institute, and Calcutta Medical College. Calcutta was not only a center of colonial capitalism but also the administrative and commercial capital of British India. As a result, the city became a quintessential symbol of modernity in the subcontinent.

End Notes _

ⁱJurgen Habermas propounded his theory of Public Sphere in his seminal text *The Structural Transformation of Public Sphere*(1962). Though the original book is written in German, it was not translated until 1982.

ⁱⁱ The words exist in Hindi and Urdu language. These are the physical spaces used mainly in North India.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Majlish* a social gathering involves wealth and patronage, and often conjures up the picture of men gathering in a rich man parlour.

^{iv} Adda addicted person (*Adda* is the root word and Persian suffix *Baj(z)*).

^v For N.C Chaudhari adda signifies lack of social control. He put —The strong hard instinct people of Calcutta have virtually killed family life(Chakraborty 213).



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^{vi} Nipendrakrishna Chattopadhyay describes —every adda has a central personality, someone who could be called an addadhari. It is around him that the adda revolves. He has no office to go to, no wedding invitations to attend, no speeches to deliver at any meeting, no obsessions about going to the movies, no obligations to do with the marriage of his sister-in-law, no first-rice ceremonies of a son of his wife's brother, he has no Darjeeling, no Puri, his only job is to sit there like the immobile image of a deity lighting up the adda. The streets of Calcutta may be under water, the asphalt on them may have been melted by the sun, the Japanese may have dropped a few bombs, but every addabaj [adda-addicted person] has the assurance of knowing that there will be at least one person present at the adda. And that person is the addadhari (qtd. Chakraborty 220).

^{vii} *Jalsha* is controlled by the rich patron, is a social practice associated with some kind of performance like singing, dance and recitation.

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