

KOLKATA

THE SOUL OF THE CITY

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“Calcutta has absorbed all the vicissitudes that history and geography have thrown at her, and managed to retain her dignity.”ⁱ

INTRODUCTION

The city of Kolkata is known internationally for her physical realities, aesthetics and history of exploitation. Yet simultaneously, she is the cultural capitol of India and is known as “The City of Joy.” What do these paradoxical realities tell us about her soul? What, if anything, does Kolkata tell us about her Creator?

Through a survey of Kolkata's past and present realities, I will seek to articulate some aspects of Kolkata's soul to understand where she aligns with and strays from from the ideal city of God. In the process I will utilize a trinitarian view of the relationship between body, spirit and soul in a study of the state and content of Kolkata's soul.

“Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them...”

‘Thus says the Lord God: “On the day that I cleanse you from all your iniquities, I will also enable you to dwell in the cities, and the ruins shall be rebuilt. The desolate land shall be tilled instead of lying desolate in the sight of all who pass by. So they will say, ‘This land that was desolate has become like the garden of Eden; and the wasted, desolate, and ruined cities are now fortified and inhabited.’ Then the nations which are left all around you shall know that I, the Lord, have rebuilt the ruined places and planted what was desolate. I, the Lord, have spoken it, and I will do it.”

Ezekiel 36:25-27,33-36

THE SOUL

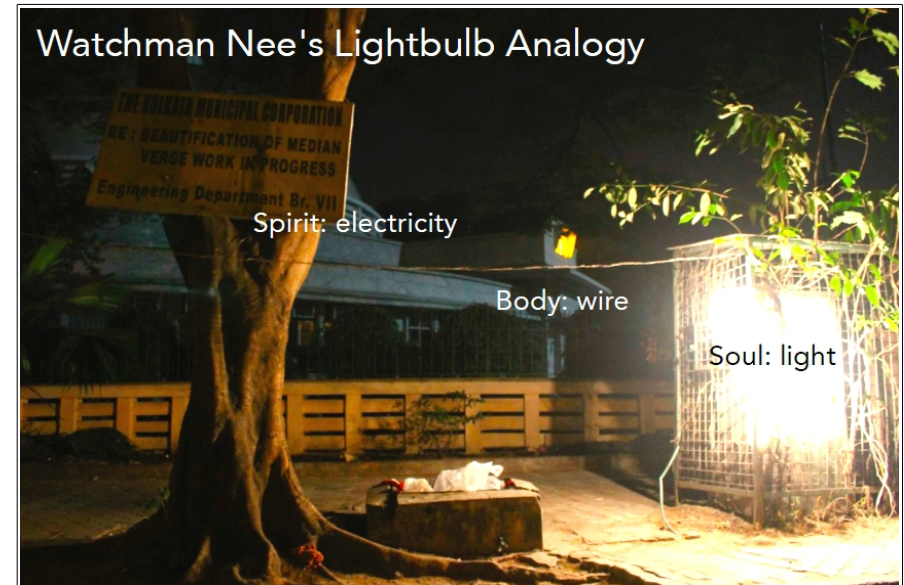
The soul actually is the very life of man.ⁱⁱ

Before attempting an analysis of the soul of Kolkata, I want to provide a brief study of the concept of the soul. The evangelical Christian culture often discusses the soul and the spirit as if they were the same thing. Looking at the Church of England's prayer after communion, we see the words "And here we offer and present to you, O Lord, ourselves, our souls and our bodies, to be a reasonable, holy and living sacrifice."ⁱⁱⁱ Are they merely being verbose for the sake of sounding spiritual, or is there some Scriptural basis for the distinction of these three elements?

The body is quite clearly a distinct element of the self. The soul and the spirit are difficult to distinguish. Looking to Scripture, however, we can see that they are not one and the same. "My *soul* magnifies the Lord," Mary says in her song, "and my *spirit* has rejoiced in God my Savior." (Luke 1:46-47) In the garden of Gethsemane Jesus said to his followers, "My *soul* is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch with Me... Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The *spirit* indeed is willing, but the *flesh* is weak." (Matthew 26:38, 41)

The spirit is that part of us that communicates with God. The soul seems to contain our emotions, will and intellect. As Watchman Nee puts it, "God dwells in the spirit, self dwells in the soul, while senses dwell in the body."^{iv} The soul, then,

merges the spirit and body: "the seat of our personality."^v The spirit as source of life is where transformation occurs. The body is generally where sin enters .



In *The Spiritual Man*, Nee uses the image of a lightbulb to describe the trinitarian relationship of the spirit, soul and body. The bulb represents "the total man," the electricity the spirit, the wire the body, and the light the soul.

Electricity is the cause of the light while light is the effect of electricity. Wire is the material substance for carrying the electricity as well as for manifesting the light. The combination of spirit and body produces soul, that which is unique to man. As electricity, carried by the wire, is expressed in light, so spirit acts upon the soul and the soul, in turn, expresses itself through the body.^{vi}

What does this mean for the city? For the sake of this paper, I will subscribe to the idea that a city does indeed possess soul, and therefore by definition also body and spirit. Composed of human beings and their structures, what defines a city's component spirit, body and soul? I will propose a few through which I will attempt to describe the soul of Kolkata in this paper:

Body (wire, senses)

physical structures, geography, peoples, historical context, sights, smells, sounds, what brings soul to sin

Spirit (power, connection with God)

conscience, intuition, worship, commitments, where God works first

Soul (light, self)

intellect, ideals, choices, emotions, love

In *Ministering Cross-Culturally*, Lingenfelter and Mayers consider that the body "is not merely an internal psychological sin nature... but also refers to cultural standards."^{vii} When Paul calls the Romans to transformation through renewing their minds in Christ rather than conforming to the standards of the culture, he suggests that sin is not only personal but also collective. Entire people groups may be unknowingly separating themselves from God, either through misdirected energy toward the body and soul *instead of* the spirit, or through the focus of a misdirected spirit.

In view of the trinitarian self and collective sin that can be transformed through renewing the spirit in Christ, I will look at some of the motifs of history and consider what they reveal about the soul of Kolkata.

MOTIFS OF HISTORY

Any movement forward must begin with a look backward. Listening for God's heart for the city, the cries of the city, the winds of the Spirit, and the lessons of history helps us to understand what God has done in the city, is doing now, and wants to do. It also helps us understand what parts of the city desperately need to be heard and responded to. In this section, I will attempt to extract some specific motifs of Kolkata's history in order to later consider how they reveal aspects of her soul. These motifs include exploitation, refugees, civil rights activity, violence and the mothers of Calcutta.

John Dawson says, "This is our planet, and the only authority Satan has is stolen human authority. He initially gains authority when, at some point in history, human beings believe his lie, receive his accusation and are seduced into an allegiance to his plan."^{viii}

Exploitation

Foundations

The first and most obvious motif in Kolkata's history is that of exploitation. The very founding of the city was for the purpose of physical and social exploitation and this scar remains to this day. Kolkata's founding occurred nearly 324 years ago by the British Job Charnock at a location chosen for its suitability for international trade along the Hooghly River. He joined the settlements of Sutanuti, Kalikata and Gobindapur and brought the new city "Calcutta" under the control of the British East India Company.^{ix} For a city, however, the location was ill-advised. Some called Calcutta's geographical location "a pan of alluvial mud... close to the malarial marshes of the Salt Lakes to the east."^x Others considered it "lunacy for anyone not born and bred in Bengal... to settle down here and make an Empire from it. Everything in Nature was against it."^{xi}

Black Hole of Calcutta

Geoffrey Moorhouse comments: "Yet on this bog the British created their capital in India. Nothing but commercial greed could possibly have led to such an idiotic decision."^{xii} Then rulers of India, the Mughals were equally interested in profit, and sold extensive rights to the land around Calcutta to the Company in the eighteenth century.^{xiii} After India's central government began losing power, the Mughal nawabs (governors) instigated an invasion of British Calcutta. During this invasion, the infamous Black Hole of Calcutta event occurred, during which the British claimed they were

incarcerated and suffocated in a cell in their own Fort William. The truth of these claims are disputed, but what remains indisputable is the effect the story had in illustrating the savage behavior of Indians and the need for the Empire to civilize India. Thereby, a tragic event in Calcutta's history was exploited for the sake of the gospel of colonialism.^{xiv}

Indian and British Calcutta

The British reclaimed Calcutta in 1757, after which the city really took its place on the city stage.^{xv} She was one of the world's major trading ports, at which the Company made a fortune off of the surrounding countryside's natural resources while largely reducing the indigenous population to servants. Northern Calcutta housed the Indian residents, while central Calcutta was home to the British. It housed the economic and political center of British India. Central Calcutta remains as a testament to its British founders, with Dalhousie Square, Fort William, the Calcutta High Court and Victoria Memorial as the central points of the cityscape.

One author states: "British Calcutta was a uniquely introverted, self-obsessed and self-regarding society, a little island of Britishness with remarkably few links to the real Indian India beyond."^{xvi}

In an attempt to centralize the *zamindar* (landlord) system in Bengal, Lord Cornwallis instituted the Permanent Settlement of Bengal in 1793. According to this plan, rural land tenants would pay their landlords annually, who would in turn pay the

British. This was to protect the against corrupt *zamindars*. However, as the traditional system in place included obligations and generosity in the complex relationship between *zamindars* and tenants, the new system actually made it more difficult for rural peasants during difficult financial times. Familiar support networks were effectively destroyed, and many peasants began to migrate to the city.^{xvii} Whether intentionally or not, the traditional support networks of the Bengali people were exploited for the increased profit of the British, to the detriment of the poor.

The urbanization of Bengal began. Industry was centralized in the city. Ignoring the plight of the indigenous poor, Calcutta's economy flourished in the 1850's. Trains, bridges and factories built in those years remain until today. Krishna Dutta points out, however, that "there was hardly any notion of town planning. The rapid commercial expansion took its toll on the physical appearance of the city and its environs."^{xviii}

Partition of Bengal

The first partition of Bengal into East and West Bengal was instituted in 1905 by a nervous British government who wanted to disunite the Bengali people whose nationalistic tendencies were growing. Dividing the state roughly by faith, with a Muslim majority in the east and a Hindu majority in the west, the British succeeded in creating religious clashes and tensions within the minority communities. The Muslims of East Bengal supported the partition. The partition did not, however, decrease any feelings of nationalism. It was

cancelled in 1911 when India's capital was moved to Delhi.^{xix} A second partition occurred with India's independence in 1947, when what was once East Bengal became East Pakistan. Viv Grigg points out in his economic study of Calcutta that "almost all the jute mills were on the banks of the Ganga river near Calcutta and jute cultivators were living in East Bengal. With the partition, the supply of raw jute to the mills stopped overnight."^{xx} A politically-motivated move by the British 42 years earlier created an atmosphere of volatility to the point that the second partition was almost inevitable, along with all its repercussions.

Refugees

At the time of the second partition, Hindus from East Pakistan started flooding into Calcutta as refugees. By 1951, only one third of Calcutta's population was born in the city.^{xxi} Repeated famines, for which the new central government was of no help, turned the city into "a refugee relief centre."^{xxii} As India was by then an independent nation, and Britain was recovering from the Second World War, England did not aid in Calcutta's refugee emergency relief efforts. Squatters began taking advantage of empty homes in the suburbs, and the police were overwhelmed. The city was unable to deal with this sudden influx of humanity, and the refugees were forced to find jobs as domestic servants, rag pickers and rickshaw pullers. Desperation turned some to crime, child begging and prostitution.

Visible everywhere in the city,
officially they were invisible.^{xxiii}

That was the beginning of the stagnant economic and social situation of Calcutta's migrant population, which remains little changed until today.



(Taken from Munsif)^{xxiv}

Civil Rights Activity

It must be noted that although Calcutta's history is rife with exploitation by the British, her founder is known to have adapted to his context and associated with Bengali culture.

“His adoption of Indian culture meant that Calcutta was established in a much more cooperative manner than many of the British cities of the Empire.”^{xxv} It is said that Job Charnock married a widow, having rescued her from the traditional ceremony of being burnt after her husband's death.

At the same time as exploitation of Bengalis was rampant in Calcutta from her very foundation, elite members of society did arise among the Bengalis. After the pan-Indian mutiny of the mid nineteenth century, Calcutta was placed under the power of the crown of England. At this point, social reforms began to take shape.

During the 19th century, there was a renaissance of sorts in Bengal. As the arts began to flourish in Calcutta, so did education and societies for social development among elite Bengalis. The recently educated Bengalis became aware of their exploitation.^{xxvi} Movements began for improving treatment of peasants. City infrastructure was improved.

Among the British, some leaders such as Lord Ripon and Allan Octavian Hume encouraged the political involvement and education of Indians. Bengali Elites exhibited patriotism and solidarity with their fellow Indians through their writings and social action. The Brahmo Samaj was born, a new monotheistic religion of Hindu origin.^{xxvii} Families like the Tagores founded colleges. Spiritual leader Swami Vivekananda founded the Ramakrishna Mission dedicated to social welfare as well as religious devotion to the teachings of Ramakrishna.^{xxviii} Movements among upper-class Bengalis

were characterized by the combination of “an enlightened Western educated mind with an Eastern spirituality.”^{xxxix}

In 1905, Bengalis began to boycott foreign goods in alignment with the nationalistic sentiments growing throughout India. This “swadeshi” movement, however, took an ill turn towards violence. Terrorism became the norm in Bengal.^{xxx}

Violence

The violence of occupation, capture, and re-claiming that happened in Calcutta's early years returned as nationalism spread in the country. Since the 1905 partition, Hindu-Muslim violence was a daily reality in Calcutta. In 1930, Subhas Chandra Bose became the city's mayor. Once a follower of Gandhi, he had severed ties with the Indian National Congress due to their non-violent approach. Although he began trying to improve the city and the situation of the city's poor, he was overcome by an anti-British warfare mentality, and dedicated his life to the violent removal of British influence not only from India, but in countries abroad during the Second World War. In Calcutta, he became a local hero, earning the title of “netaji,” or “revered leader.”^{xxxi}

In 1947 India became an independent democratic nation. The pan-India famine of 1967 resulted in increased violence in Bengal, in which the army intervened brutally. The Indian-Pakistan war of 1971 increased the numbers of refugees flooding the city. Left-wing ideologies emerged, and the Beijing-backed Naxalite terrorist group, driven by anger (in name of freedom for oppressed peasants) terrorized the people, and utilized violent land redistribution mechanisms to spread their ideology.^{xxxii} After the failure of the central government in dealing with the growing tide of refugees to the city and from a history of disdain for commerce, the Bengali elite began to side with left-wing ideologies. The theoretical focus of Marxism on the proletariat made the Communist Party of India (Marxists) a popular vote for Bengalis. In 1977, the party took power in West Bengal, and remained in that position until 2011. While much was promised and some basic services for the people of Calcutta improved, the overall contribution of the CPI(M) to the welfare of Calcutta was not simply unremarkable, but negative as the party encouraged violence in an already defeated city.^{xxxiii} “That the Left Front was a dismal failure should no longer be a matter of debate.”^{xxxiv} Grigg points out that, “After the British left there was no single social group that could fill the power vacuum holding the various caste groupings together. An inertia set in.”^{xxxv}

Give me your blood and I'll give you freedom.
-Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose

Two Mothers of Calcutta

Kali

The deity for which Kolkata was named cannot be ignored: the Hindu goddess of death and darkness, Kali. The name Calcutta likely originated from the name of one of the fishing villages Job Charnock united to form the city: Kalikata. In 2001, the city's name turned officially to Kolkata, a Bengali pronunciation of the British "Calcutta," with a nod to its historical roots.^{xxxvi} The namesake of Kalikata, Kali, remains the goddess to which the city is dedicated. Krishna Dutta describes Kali as ""the destroyer of all evil and the female principle at the root of all creation."^{xxxvii} Britannica associates Kali with "death, sexuality, violence, and, paradoxically in some later traditions, with motherly love."^{xxxviii} Destruction and creation. Violence and motherly love. The images of Kali are confused and feared.

[Kali] springs from the anger of the goddess Durga to slay the demon Raktabija... During the struggle a new demon emerges from each drop of Raktabija's blood as it hits the ground; to prevent this, Kali laps up the blood before it can reach the ground.^{xxxix}

Although Kali has her own festival, the Hindu festival of her origin goddess Durga is also associated with her. Records of the celebration of "Durga Puja" go back to 1610, and it remains the biggest festival in Kolkata.^{xl} Streets shut down and beautiful new structures are created to hold the Durga idol and host cultural events. If Kolkata is known as the seat of Hindu spirituality, Durga Puja is the central symbol of this reality continuing today.

The centrality of Kali can be seen not only during festivals and in the many idols lining the streets and dashboards of the city, but also in a major red-light area. Kalighat is located in South Kolkata and named for "the landing-place of Kali." It was apparently the landing-place of one of her toes when her body was accidentally hacked into pieces by Lord Vishnu.^{xli} Kalighat is both the site of the central temple of "mother" Kali and a central point for another mother of Kolkata, Mother Teresa.

Mother Teresa

Although much-debated among writers regarding her impact on the global perspective on Kolkata, the social and spiritual impact of Mother Teresa and the Missionaries of Charity is undeniable. The simplicity and single-mindedness of the love exhibited to the untouchable and unlovable has echoed across the world. It calls the people of Kolkata to re-think the value their culture places in power, and reminds the Church of the way in which Jesus walked. As a very clear representative of Jesus Christ in the streets of Kolkata, Mother Teresa revealed the mercy of God in a place considered by much of the world forgotten and condemned.

“The Christian worldview offers a God who not only made the beautiful, whose glory offers glimpses, but the God who can take away brokenness, and transform a disordered creation in Jesus Christ. This is a God who takes all the glimpses and introduces the whole—not as an escape from reality but a deepening of it. For the beauty of God is one that can hold life as well as death.”^{xlii}

PRESENT CITY CONVERSATION

“Kolkata may lag behind much of the world economically, but it is still a city where the pursuit of knowledge, beauty and justice for their own sake are admired and cherished.”^{xliii}

Kolkata's Identity

Names

Kolkata has had many titles on the international stage. As the second city of the British empire, it was called the City of Palaces.^{xliv} Kipling called it the City of Dreadful Night, a name which has stuck in the imaginations of the west. Dominique LaPierre coined the title City of Joy in his book of the same name, based on the name of a slum. While the fact

that the city has taken on a title meant (possibly ironically) for a slum may be unfortunate, it is the title that Kolkatans seem most proud of. It is a very hopeful name to embrace, whatever its origins. Recently, the term “City of Bhoy” has arisen.^{xlv} *Bhoy* means fear in Bengali, and the term is usually used in reference to the perspective of rape and trafficking victims. The very spectrum of these titles gives one a glimpse into the complexity of the city's past and present.

Associations

Once the capital of British India and a major international port, the name Kolkata is no longer associated with splendor. What, then, is it associated with? Within and without India, Kolkata seems to mean two different things. For university students, it is a destination city. Since before independence, the city has boasted some of the country's best academic institutions. It is also known as a center of culture: the source of world-class artists. It is a center of Hindu mythology, and has been so since its foundations. It is a place of opportunities for those able to take advantage of them.

However, visions of the Black Hole of Calcutta somehow remain etched in the global mind. While the goodness of Mother Teresa is remembered, it comes alongside imaginations of despair in the city streets. The 1950's-1990's saw an influx of tourists to Calcutta, many of whom described the city using “poetic” and “morbid imagery,” taking the misery they saw at face value and returning home with “a collage of random repulsive images.”^{xlvi} This depiction of

Kolkata in the outside world is a sore spot for locals, and many essentially equate short-term volunteerism in Kolkata with disaster tourism.

But there is another side to it, almost unheard of, rarely figuring in its reputation, sorely neglected by travelers from other parts of India as well as from farther afield, who dash in and transact their business, observe the miseries, then turn tail and run for it before they are totally overcome by violent claustrophobia.^{xlvii}

Urbanism, Urbanization and the Urban Poor

“The squatter's claim to citizenship is precisely this: a claim that is always staked but never fulfilled, outside of any framework of enforceable rights.”^{xlviii}

The city of Kolkata is characterized by urbanism. Urbanism is the culture resulting from life in a city. Its features include anonymity, mobility, pluralism and injustice. These are considered to go hand in hand with cultural secularism. In terms of anonymity, the urban culture of Kolkata is definitely one of urbanism. This is most clearly evident in the invisibility of the most poor: the squatters and pavement-dwellers. Injustice, which I will discuss later in this paper, is evidenced in every hour of life in Kolkata.

Urbanization, on the other hand, is that which allows for urbanism to occur in the first place. It is the creation and expansion of urban spaces, and the movement of migrants into these spaces. According to the Department of Industrial

Policy and Promotion's secretary Amitabh Kant, the explosive rate at which India is urbanizing equates to “every minute during the next 20 years, 30 Indians [leaving] rural India to settle in urban areas.” He states that for India to sustain its current urbanization trend, 500 new cities need to be created. He considers this “a unique opportunity to plan, develop and build a new India that is ecologically and economically sustainable.”^{xlix}

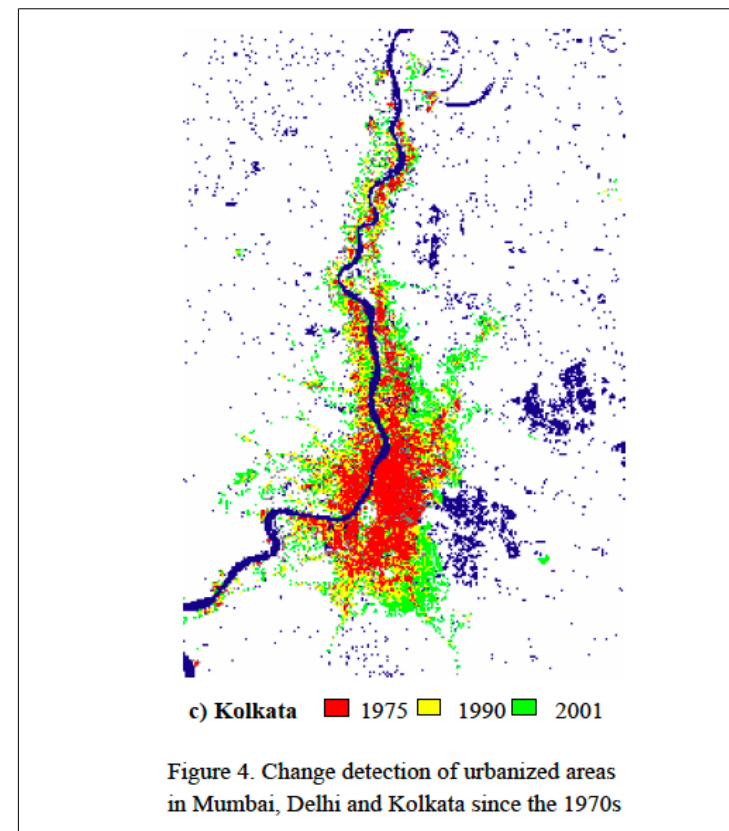


Figure 4. Change detection of urbanized areas in Mumbai, Delhi and Kolkata since the 1970s

(Taken from Taubenböck et al, 78).¹

It is clear to anyone living in Kolkata or any other Indian megalopolis that more cities are needed. In a meeting with former Calcutta Metropolitan Development Authority Planning Head, Dr. Animesh Halder, he expressed pessimism regarding the development of Kolkata. When asked to talk on the topic of shelter for all in a 1987 international forum, he stated that it was neither feasible nor desirable within the existing situation. The migrants who end up squatting or living on the streets will not be able to survive if they are moved to places where housing is available: the city fringes. As they are desperate for jobs, it is essential that they live as close to those centers of potential employment (railroad stations, major ports, etc.) for a chance at a day's wages. In that sense, it is not desirable for them to gain housing because it will be in a location far from work. The option remains to develop housing near these employment hubs. However, the already saturated city center contains no space for additional housing, nor would such housing be affordable to these individuals.^{li}

Culture of Poverty

Oscar Lewis' concept of a culture of poverty can be used to understand some aspects of Kolkata's urbanism. Lewis distinguishes a culture of poverty from poverty itself as a specific way of life involving solutions or reactions to, among other things, a lack of integration into society, poor housing, absence of childhood, and feelings of marginality and dependence. Generally, Lewis considers that what keeps the poor in or out of the culture of poverty is solidarity and identification with a greater community or network.

UNHabitat states that dimensions of urban poverty include low income, human capital, social capital and financial capital. It appears that social capital (including participation in networks or membership in majority groups) is the key dimension of urban poverty that would distinguish one community from others in the question of a culture of poverty.^{liii}

Lewis states, "In India the lower casts may be desperately poor, both in the villages and in the cities, but most of them are integrated into the larger society and have their own panchayat organizations which cut across village lines and give them a considerable amount of power. In addition to the caste system, which gives individuals a sense of identity and belonging, there is still another factor, the clan system... [which] gives people a sense of belonging to a corporate body with a history and a life of its own, thereby providing a sense of community, a sense of a past and of a future."^{liiii} This would assume that the urban poor of Kolkata do not participate in the culture of poverty. However, such generalizations cannot be made of Kolkata, as many urban poor communities are *not* stable, as I have illustrated previously, nor are their residents considered so much as citizens.

Secularism?

In *Disciplining the City*, Harvie Conn follows the progress of cities throughout the ages. He suggests that while cities were originally religious, they then became the object of religion, and later a means of spreading a specific culture. In the years AD, however "Jesus Christ and his redemptive work meant a de-divinization of the ancient city."^{liv} In the move from theopolis to megalopolis, cities become secularized. Is this happening in Kolkata in tandem with a growing culture of urbanism?

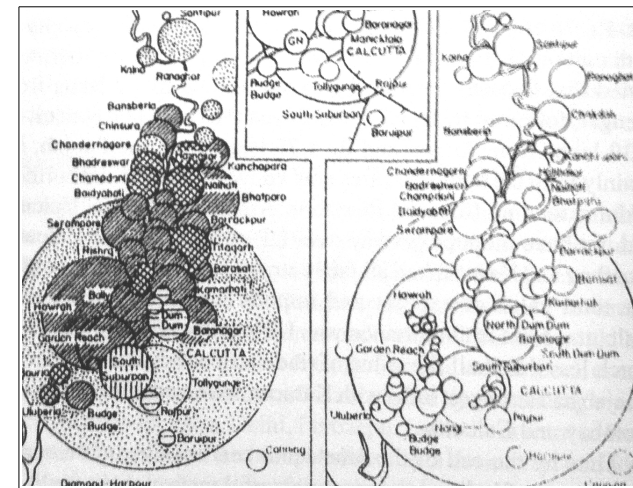
As a cosmopolitan city containing a majority of Hindus but devotees of many religions and none, it has become somewhat pluralistic. Though the city at her core is bound to her historical dedication to the goddess Kali, and the individual dedications of her people, the ancient dedication is not now the only one that may speak to her unfolding story. Perhaps this is one positive aspect of Kolkata's movement towards urbanism, starting with the gospel entering at the birth of the city.

Kolkata's Pain

"The city governments for the total life of the city have consistently failed to provide sufficient services."^{lv}

Environment and Physical Structures

From a purely aesthetic standpoint, Kolkata is disintegrating. All across the city, formerly grand buildings lie in various states of decay. They are used but not kept up. In 2011, a top-rated private hospital caught fire, killing nearly a hundred people because of "ineptitude, poor equipment and bad information."^{lvi} Garbage is thrown in the streets and public urination is a constant public health concern. The sun is often veiled by smog from not only the city's growing number of motorized vehicles, but also from the prevailing fuel among the poor: coal. Kolkata's many vast parks, many including "Eden Garden" dating back to the days of colonialism, remain her saving grace.



(Taken from Munsii, 92)^{lvii}

Migrants, Squatters and Slum-dwellers

Economic globalization, liberalization and privatization have had a detrimental affect on the rural population of India. In rural West Bengal, it has resulted largely in the unprofitability of farming. Outside of farming, with a lack of focus on rural development exhibited in the state, rural families have few livelihood alternatives and often fall into states of landlessness, debt and poverty. Roy suggests that as 80% of migrant squatters do not possess land in rural villages, they are pushed out by distress because of poverty.^{lviii} Dr. Halder, however, views the pull to the city as the greater factor: the hope of employment, "although possibly illusioned" brings people in droves to Kolkata from not only rural West Bengal but also surrounding states.^{lix}

In either case, those who migrate to the city have few if any skills, and initially settle in squatter or pavement communities. Kolkata's rural-urban migrants tend to enter into feminized livelihood networks (a 1997 survey shows that while 5% of migrant squatter families interviewed were supported only by male earners, 28% are supported only by women).^{lx}

Given the tenuity of migrant squatter's shelter and livelihood situations, without skills, education or social support, rural-urban migrants do not have opportunities for upward mobility. The money they do earn is often insecure and needed to support those who remain in the villages. The so-called "unskilled" labor force provides the city with rickshaw

drivers and pullers, rag pickers, tailors and truck loaders.

"So long they have the muscle power, they can work," Halder says, but with age migrants lose their strength and hence ability to work. Many move back to the villages, their offspring then moving into the city, creating the reality of permanent or "circular migrants."^{lxi}

"The rural-urban poor can be thought of as lacking endowments but possessing entitlements, but such that the mechanisms of enfranchisement leave them disempowered."^{lxii}

National, state and municipal governments have plans in place to aid rural-urban migrants. However, these plans remain ignored and migrants remain very much alone and exploited. Roy states that "the squatter's claim to citizenship is precisely this: a claim that is always staked but never fulfilled, outside of any framework of enforceable rights."^{lxiii} If they are able to acquire shelter in slums, these rights are at least somewhat present. Communities are built formally, under the supposed protection of the law. "Political games," however, as Halder says, keep even the slum-dweller's security of shelter precarious.

Bhusan Kar remarks on the situation of India as a whole: "a series of plans to reconstruct the city have been formulated... But implementations of all these plans are associated with the eviction of urban poor living in slums."^{lxiv}

Inertia Against Injustice

While countless women and children trafficked for commercial sexual exploitation face the gravest violations of human rights, the response systems are unable to address or redress their grievances and, often, exacerbate the harm and sufferings these women and children endure. This is obvious from the fact that when, on the one side, the traffickers and exploiters are seldom brought to book, on the other side, the victims are frequently criminalized and persecuted.^{lxv}

Whether by force, fraud or coercion, many individuals are trafficked into, through and from Kolkata for the purpose of labor and prostitution. Among slum dwellers in Kolkata, 65% report to be engaged in unpaid household labor.^{lxvi} Forced prostitution is the most common form of trafficking in Kolkata, and most of the victims come from rural West Bengal, although many are trafficked across the porous borders from Nepal and Bangladesh. Tens of thousands of “customers” abuse them every night in Kolkata's red light districts and private brothels.

Poor, uneducated girls are the most vulnerable to traffickers. Given the prevalence of this activity in Kolkata and the fact that in 1990, “about 34 percent of labour force in Calcutta slums who [were] actively searching for jobs or available for employment would qualify as “unemployed”,^{lxvii} the risk of trafficking of women and girls among the city's urban poor is high. For pavement dwellers, the risk is extremely high. The over 10,000 children living in Kolkata's streets are also

subject to substance use and HIV/STIs.^{lxviii}

Among pavement dwellers, physical and sexual violence against women is normalized. There is a feeling of helplessness among the general population of Kolkata: the poor and the rich, the safe and the exploited are all in situations dictated by karma. These things cannot be altered. Upward mobility, while available to the upper-classes, is close to if not absolutely absent from the lives of the poor.^{lxx} An inertia comes with an acceptance of fate and is a major psychological barrier to any upward mobility.



Politics

At the same time, however, Kolkatans are by and large very political. Mamata Banerjee, West Bengal's current chief minister, epitomizes the dramatic Bengali politician. In her book *Didi*, Monobina Gupta talks of Banerjee's “performances” and her “volatile personality, always awash with runaway emotions.”^{lxxi} The leader of West Bengal's Trinamool Congress (TMC), Banerjee took power after 24 years of communist rule in the state. Her volatility was

almost a required characteristic of a leader who had “inherited a political culture whose defining characteristic... was its running thread of violence.”^{lxxii}

When it comes to enforcing the many well-intentioned laws and schemes meant to benefit the poor, West Bengal's government has consistently fallen short. Municipal workers on lower levels of development work are jaded with the self-serving attitude of government leaders. The federal government's Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission is a progressive program for urban improvement throughout India, pushing for slum development rather than evictions. It includes a program that commits to 50% funding from New Delhi for any states affording property rights to slum dwellers on state land. No state has yet been willing.

Kolkata's Redemptive Gifting

Non-Governmental Organizations

It is thus outside of the political sphere that changes in Kolkata's social situation must begin. In addressing the role of the public justice system in the life of the poor, International Justice Mission (IJM) is a notable leader. IJM has been working in Kolkata since 2006 to equip and encourage the public justice system to work on behalf of the oppressed poor, while simultaneously conducting joint rescue operations, following up trafficking cases in court and supporting the rehabilitation of trafficked girls. Meanwhile, vocational unit Destiny Reflection is training and employing

both trafficking survivors and vulnerable girls in sewing and handicrafts to provide economic security.

Emmanuel Ministries Calcutta (EMC) contains an advocacy arm which has begun community organizing among Kolkata's pavement and un-notified slum dwellers. They have helped develop West Bengal's current night shelter policy, and are working on advocating to the government for benefits for unorganized laborers in the informal sector.

“Any movement... which organizes and gives hope to the poor and effectively promotes solidarity and a sense of identification with larger groups, destroys the psychological and social core of the culture of poverty.”^{lxxiii}

Desire for Transformation

While there exists a certain inertia towards justice issues and the city leadership is evidently ineffective in development, it is clear that there exists a *desire* in Kolkata for political, social, physical and legal improvement. Without desire hope cannot exist, and without hope, no change can happen in a city as averse to social equity as Kolkata.

While Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's dictatorial style of leadership of the TMC, lack of accountability, poor speaking skills and decision to unite the city by painting it blue cause many to question the wisdom of Banerjee's leadership, she possesses certain qualities that draw people to her:

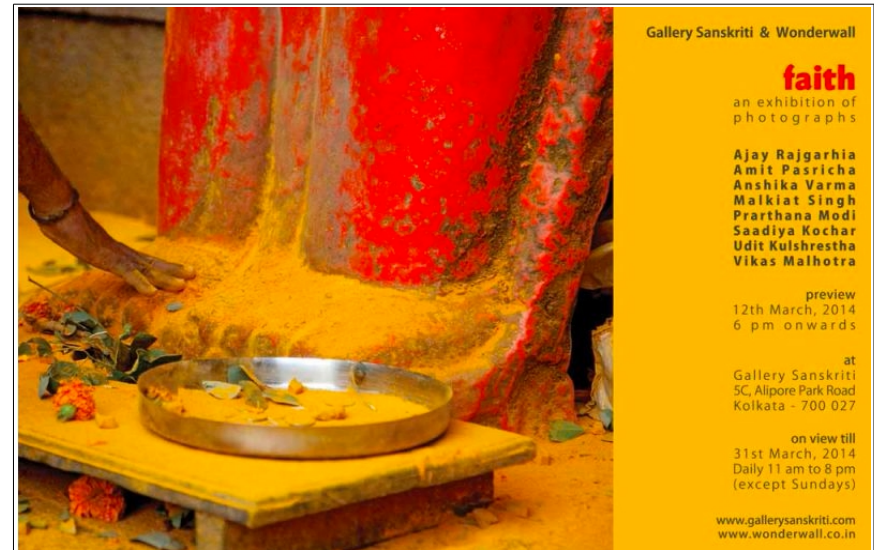
characteristics that bring if but a whiff of the Beatitudes to the political sphere. She is described as “non-elitist,”^{lxxiv} a woman known for her “Spartan lifestyle, humble lodgings, Gandhian attire, proletarian speech and fearless courage.”^{lxxv}

The area of Kolkata known as Salt Lake has been well planned to provide middle-class residences on small, affordable lots close to a central park. Surveys have resulted in pay-and-use toilet facilities being installed across Kolkata for the benefit of the poor whose toilet facilities otherwise constitute health and safety hazards.^{lxxvi} With the help of dogged NGO workers, some police officers, municipal workers, public prosecutors and judges are slowly shifting their sights to the improvement of life for Kolkata's poor. Dr. P.M. Nair, Nodal Officer of India's National Human Rights Commission, makes frequent visits to Kolkata, calling on law enforcement officers to “empower the masses, especially the vulnerable sections.”^{lxxvii}

The Arts

Kolkata has come to be known as the cultural capital of India, and indeed the arts hold center-stage in the city. From free weekly outdoor concerts by the Calcutta Classical Guitar society to international photography exhibits at Studio 21, the creative spirit of Kolkata remains alive in the footsteps of Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore and filmmaker Satyajit Ray. Ray is quoted as having said, “It is the bareness of means that forces us to be economical and inventive... And there is something about creating beauty in the

circumstances of shoddiness and privation that is truly exciting.”^{lxxviii}



(Taken from <http://www.galleriesanskriti.com/>)

The annual festival Durga Puja has also become a celebration of culture through daily performances of dance, theater, song and poetry. These take place within or around *pandals*. Originally built as simple housings for the idols, *pandals* are now also used as stages, and have become a central component of the festival, with competitions held for the most creative and elaborate structures. These structures are intricately constructed by expert craftspeople.

Walking through the streets or sitting on the bus it is not uncommon to hear someone singing one of the old songs of Tagore that remain close to the hearts of Kolkatans.^{lxxix}

Education

From Calcutta's birth, the British instilled in her the value of education. Bengali elites quickly became avid intellectuals. Today, Kolkata is a destination for university students with sights set on leading institutions such as the National University of Juridical Sciences. Halder reported in 1990 that "illiteracy rates are higher for higher age groups... suggesting a positive change of attitude of slum dwellers to wards education and increased coverages of slum dwellers in education/literacy activities over time."^{lxxx} As fierce devotion to the family characterizes the Bengali people, it is common for those parents in favor of educating their children to make major sacrifices for that purpose. There exists an incredible resilience among those who have not succumbed to fatalism.

The Body of Christ

The body of Christ in Kolkata seems surprisingly united. The annual Keswick meetings bring together individuals from many denominational backgrounds to worship their common King and learn from Christian leaders from across India. Many of the leading NGOs are supported and staffed by Christ's followers, others by those who have been encouraged by the Church to pursue their kingdom-reflecting goals and gifts.

Much work is needed to bring up followers of Christ to lead the city with eyes fixed on the kingdom of God. With the corruption evident in national, state and municipal politics, a revival is evidently needed on that front. From my experience, church plants are aimed at conversions and

outward distinction from the culture. More focus needs to be brought to inward changes towards meekness, justice and mercy in the personal and social senses. Although it arrived with the foundation of the city, the gospel came hand-in-hand with colonialism; a new vision of Christ's body is needed.

When individuals and communities seek to follow Christ and live as he lived, their values and rules are transformed as people apply them in such a way as to honor him and to love others... such a community embraces even its enemies and is characterized by forgiveness. In contrast, communities of the flesh exclude others, promote self-seeking and self-interest, and treat outsiders with disrespect and violence.^{lxxxi}

The Church can also participate in the healing of the city by continually seeking transformation and revival in order to provide a model of a community aside from that "of the flesh." The community needs to acknowledge its participation in structural sins and address the spiritual, psychological, physical and socio-economic plights of the city with wisdom, hope, courage and love. In the body of Christ in Kolkata, there is hope for a body of transformed individuals and communities in tune with the movements of the Holy Spirit for the transformation of the city to the glory of her Creator.

SOUL REVEALED

From the preceding studies of Kolkata's past and present realities, I have picked out what I understand to be several key components of Kolkata's body, spirit and soul.

Components of Kolkata's Body, Spirit and Soul



THE GOOD CITY

Those from among you
Shall build the old waste places;
You shall raise up the foundations of many generations;
And you shall be called the Repairer of the Breach,
The Restorer of Streets to Dwell In.

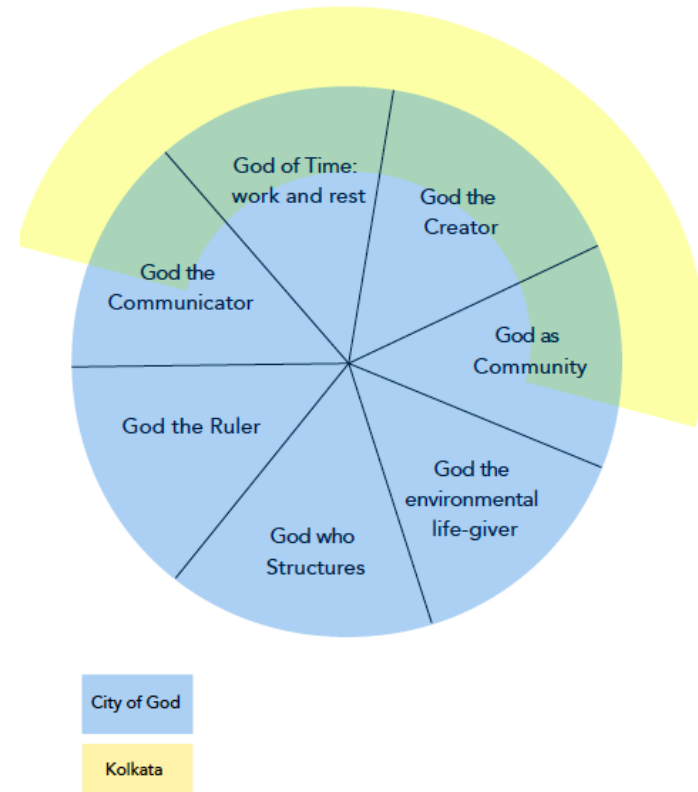
Isaiah 58:12

In *The Spirit of Christ and the Postmodern Church*, Grigg describes the good city as one that reflects her creator God. In the diagram "*The Nature of God as Reflected in the Good City*," he considers how functions of the city correspond to characteristics of God.^{lxxxii} These include God as:

- ruler
- who structures
- time
- creator
- communicator
- community
- environmentally life-giving

Kolkata: City of God?

To get a clear picture of where the city of Kolkata points towards her Creator and where she falls away, I will frame the city's soul in light of these characteristics. The below diagram shows where I believe the realities of Kolkata overlap with the aforementioned characteristics of God.



Grigg's central image is the Ideal City with "God the Holy Spirit as Source of City Life." Although God is quite clearly not acknowledged as the source of Kolkata's life, the Holy Spirit is nevertheless at work within the rhythm, creativity, communications and community of the city.

I see Kolkata as reflecting the nature of God as the Communicator, the God of Time, God the Creator and God as Community.

Communicator:

- Affirmation of Indian culture and acknowledgment of roots
- Center of knowledge and creativity
- Hub for intra and inter-national travel and trade

Time:

- Strong seasonal rhythm of work, rest and celebration
- Upward mobility in middle and upper classes
- Urbanizing city
- Central gardens as places of rest

Creator:

- Cultural center of India
- Ability to rest due to migrants' rural roots
- Value for intellect and the fine arts
- Lofty ideals
- Ingenuity
- British infrastructure and institutions

Community:

- Social conscience
- Willingness for unity in Church
- Communal spirit of people
- Familial devotion
- Desire for transformation

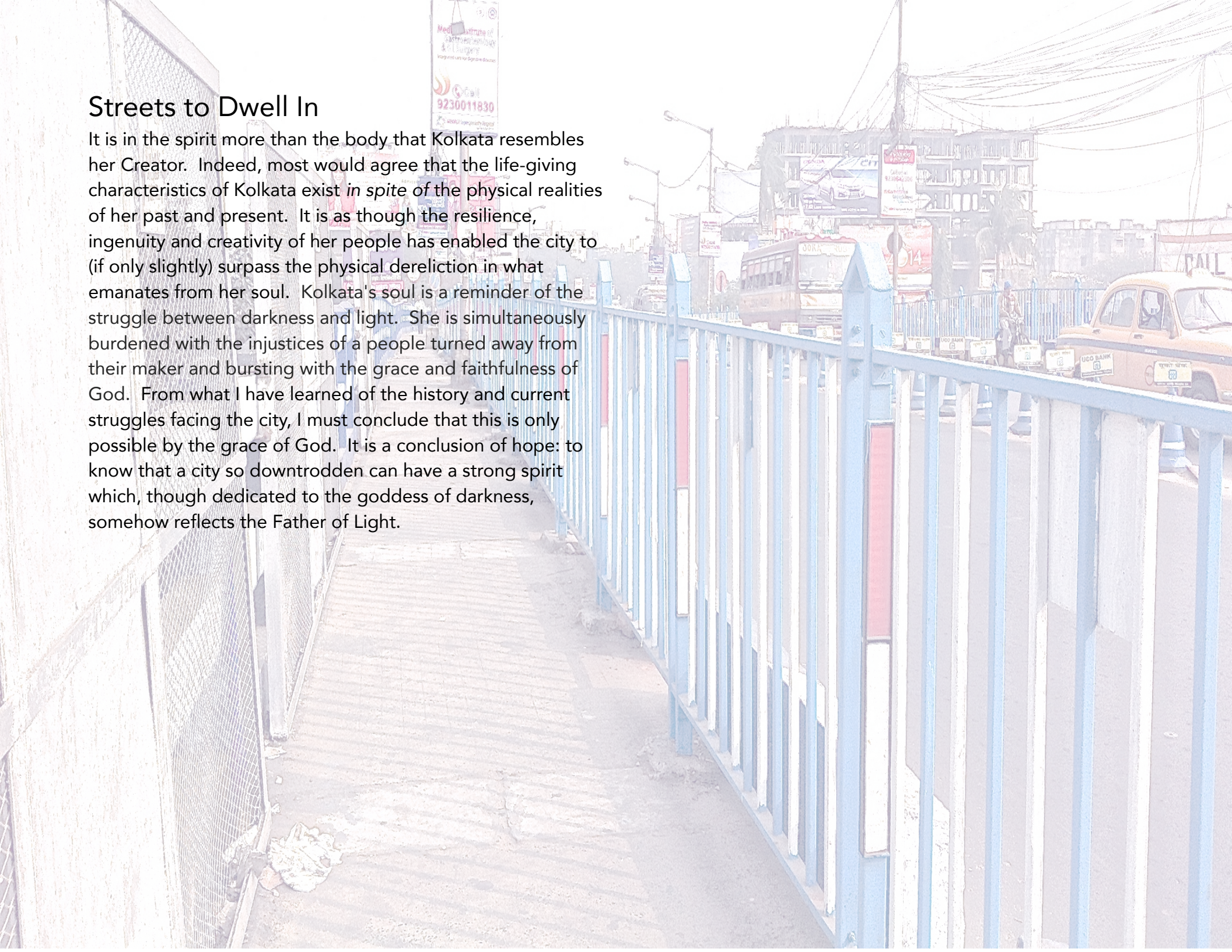
On the other hand, one can see easily that she is falling short of God's design. Kolkata contains many social, bureaucratic, physical, psychological and spiritual boundaries to freedom in the Kingdom. Fatigue, disease, anger and cultural inertia to change make work in this city slow. Kolkata is not a healing place, nor is it overall a place of environmental growth, social responsibility, justice, equality, proper management or efficiency. The bitterness of captivity that permeates the city's history affect her soul to this day. The violence that characterizes many of the Bengali heroes has seeped into the fabric of the city. The cultural pride can at times turn to arrogance, but it simultaneously stimulates great creativity.

Never let anything so fill you with sorrow as to make you forget the joy of the Christ risen.

-Mother Teresa^{lxxxiii}

Streets to Dwell In

It is in the spirit more than the body that Kolkata resembles her Creator. Indeed, most would agree that the life-giving characteristics of Kolkata exist *in spite of* the physical realities of her past and present. It is as though the resilience, ingenuity and creativity of her people has enabled the city to (if only slightly) surpass the physical dereliction in what emanates from her soul. Kolkata's soul is a reminder of the struggle between darkness and light. She is simultaneously burdened with the injustices of a people turned away from their maker and bursting with the grace and faithfulness of God. From what I have learned of the history and current struggles facing the city, I must conclude that this is only possible by the grace of God. It is a conclusion of hope: to know that a city so downtrodden can have a strong spirit which, though dedicated to the goddess of darkness, somehow reflects the Father of Light.



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