UNIVERSE OF STUDY
BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The present study is based on the city of Calcutta. "The physiographic setting of Calcutta (22°34'N and 88°22'E) both at the time of its foundation in 1690 and in the present-day" (Dasgupta, 1990 : 2) remains unaltered. This is attempted mainly with the inclusion of city proper and the vicinity area for which the limit of city with the same is difficult to demarcate in unadministrative and socio-cultural perspective. The latter region is included in "greater Calcutta" or part of metropolitan city area. This areal coverage indicates the spatial limitation and comprises the geographical universe of this study. Within this area of coverage, there are a number of sub-regions, the limiting area of these components depends on a number of factors. These factors are elements of old tradition, recent intrusion of modernity, formality of indifference with business, residential traits of habitation and administrative bureaucracy. At the same time, there are areas primarily for different economic classes. It may be mentioned that in the total area, besides the Bengalees, people from other states with different languages other than Bengali are also residing. Other minor groups are Bihari, Marwari, Gujrati, Oriya, South Indian (commonly termed to represent Tamilian, Andhrites, Karnataki and Keralities), Punjabi etc. (Bose, 1965, 1967, 1968). All these groups are different from the Bengalees not only on the basis of language but also by their identities with ethnicity, culture, social norms and values.
and in cases with occupational profiles. A large number of individuals either solitarily or with family living in this city for a very long time, at times for a number of generations. This long-duration contact has made great change on their perception, values and attitudes. These shifts are expressed in the daily life with their Bengali neighbours. On the other, within their own communities, they show their original form of traditional custom and culture. It is true that in all circumstances the city of Calcutta has been turned to a melting pot with the final product of urban cultural element. In the same situation there are of course a number of units, based on various characters.

In addition to other Indian populations, for the long history of Calcutta there are other ethno-linguistic groups from different nations which are generally not very large. But they have their own identities which are revealed from the use of their own language and following up of their own traditional culture in rigid form. In this case, the groups to be mentioned are the Chinese, the Armenian, the Jew and the Parsi. The other population which is not very marked at present but had a dominance at one time is the Anglo-Indian. Since independence of India, gradually a major part of them has emigrated to other English-speaking countries, mainly in Australia.
All the above mentioned populations have not been included in the present study, it is only on Bengalee population. This has been intentionally done with a view to working on a sample with relative homogeniety in terms of ethnic, linguistic and socio-cultural factors. Inclusion of other populations may create a good deal of deviation, resulting in turning the problem into fluid state of affairs. In broad sense the sample is homogenous because of the inclusion of only Bengalee population. Further restrictions on the sample have been imposed. For the purpose of greater homogeniety, not only Bengalees but only the Bengalee Hindus have been dealt with. This dealing is with the idea and concept on the one hand and the samples on the other from which the data have been collected. However, within the same data there are sub-groupings which are based on local traditional and immigrant populations from formerly East Bengal. Thereby within this two sub-populations there are some dissimilarities as well as similarities. Considering the major issues related to power, status and caste, naturally of Bengalee populations of Calcutta, a comprehensive but brief background is indeed essential. This does not only set the problem in temporal dimension but help to understand the change in continuity through time. In fact, the present consideration related to power, status and caste is the final product of a long drawn process which has undergone through continuous changes.
More than three hundred years back the present area had its physical existence as mostly marshy land. But there was a lot of differences in geographical elements, population layout, culture, characters, social phenomena and economic diversities. There were three distinct villages, known as Sutanuti or Sootalooty, Gobindapur and Kalikata.

SOME FACTS AND FIGURES

From the estimates made from various sources of records, Sinha (1978 : 6) has given some figures of land areas. His data have further been recomputed and on the basis of the results, a few information may be put forward. The three villages of Kalikata, Gobindapur and Sutanuti have a total area of 812,000 sq.yds. After the entry of the British the village Calcutta passed through rapid transformation and two distinct regions have been found, these are bazar (market) area and town areas. Habitation was stretched within an area of 1036800 sq.yds. In case of Sutanuti and Gobindapur, the areas of habitation are 214400 sq.yds out of a total of 2707200 sq.yds. and 81600 out of 1884800 sq.yds. respectively. Jungle covers were present in town Kalikata (420000 sq.yds), Sutanuti (779200 sq.yds) and Gobindapur (8160000 sq.yds). It may further be stated that out of the total land area, 81.96% was covered by habitation in Kalikata bazar. The figure comes down to 14.44% in town Kalikata. In villages Sutanuti and Govindapur the figures are too meagre, 7.92% and 4.33% respectively. On the basis of
above calculated figures it may be suggested that the popu-
lation was large and dense in bazar area of Kalikata. The
position is small and thin in rural situation of Sutanuty and
Govindapur.

Demographic differences are provided with bearings on
the society in the dimensions of caste, power and status.
About population, authentic reports are seldom available. Specu-
lation increases with backward move. From various sources
(Roy, 1961; Sen 1960; Sinha 1978; Roy 1982), very tentatively
estimation of population figures may be made. The earliest
one is of 1701 with 10,000 inhabitants which rose upto 30,000
during 1752. In 1801 the figure is 1,40,00C and in 1837 it went
upto 2,29,714. From the beginning of the present century, the
increasing trend made accelerated growth, as 10,00000 in 1901,
25,00,000 in 1951 and 31,41,180 in 1971. At present the total
population is 33,05,000, with a density of 31779 per sq.km.,
is also an indicator of the changed situation in the aspects
of caste, power and status and the interaction among them.
Besides such forms of landuse pattern, land areas also cons-
titute a major part which were 774400 sq.yds. in town Calcutta,
82,4000 sq.yds. in Sutanuty and 816000 sq.yds. in Govindapur.
The area of the city Calcutta has been extended to 104 sq.km.
from 8120000 sq.yds. within the last 300 years. 

The major economy was agriculture, associated with subsi-
diary forms of occupation, as fishing in marshy areas. Sugges-
tion of etymology of Kolkata from kalichun, heeps of lime,
at least proves that during very early days lime manufacturing industry was present. The producer had the technological knowhow and some persons were engaged in such work. Agricultural labourers were also there. These conditions were also reflected both in power and status during the same time. In addition to the same, the caste grouping was present and very broadly there were high Brahmins and alliance, and low non-Brahmins. Even among the high caste there was further groupings, kulinism "on the basis of such factors as learning, wealth and family background" (Pranda, 1971:19). This is another form of micro-hierarchy within the caste. From the reports and records it shows that the high caste groups, though lesser in number, had better economy and higher privileges in the area of power and status. It may be recalled that the concept on structure and function related to power and status were quite different, compared with that of the presentday. It is important to note that more than three hundred years ago the area where the present city of Calcutta is situated with dense crowding of people, the same was virtually inhabited by a thin low density population. Despite this, the rigidity of caste structure and associated role of power and status were perhaps stronger earlier than the presentday. In terms of power, the attitude was strong from top to base. With regard to status, the person who held it had a higher distance from lower level. In addition to the same, the caste hierarchy was marked with the expression of distance in acceptance and refusal of food, touch and such other regulations. These rules point to customs
of purity and pollution. During the same time the occupational pattern of caste did not make even minimum deviation. In other words, occupation-based castes were very much in presence. This condition prevailed for quite a long period of time and no conspicuous change took place until the British came as workers of the East India Company, primarily with the expressive aims of business. Sociological, economic and political facts on transitory stage have been discussed in historical framework by a number of authors (Davis, 1957; Mukherjee 1968; Bose, 1969, 1978; Palit, 1973; Mukherjee 1973; Ali, 1977; Ghosh 1981).

CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE BRITISH

The advent of the English in India, and more specially in Calcutta, brought about various changes. The foremost one is urban transformation. After all, the city of Calcutta is a British creation. Without going into the details of the whole spectrum, in the present context three major issues, viz. power, status and caste have been touched upon. As mentioned earlier, the British entered in the disguise of businessmen. But in strict reality, their ultimate desire was to invade, capture and conqueror India. For such purpose they showed the attitude from the beginning with enormous power in the field of economy, administration and social hierarchy. To them caste was not a factor of consideration. But they did not disturb
the system for their own interest. During the initial period their relationship was close to the business communities but still there was a flavour of self-hierarchy. In connection with business they did not pay heed to caste belongings, rather finance was most important. Besides the business people, they had affiliation with big landlords (amindars), mostly of upper caste groups.

British played a significant role in minimising the distance between the low caste peoples and the high caste Brahmins including closeby groups. In fact, to them the common point of interest was wealth. The British played a great role in the Hindu caste system. Through time they were accumulating greater influence and in quick succession they practically became the lords over some parts of Calcutta. Being foreigners, they were numerically recessive and to compensate the same they distributed the various duties to other people of their own or under their control. As a result, people belonging to different caste groups, holding different positions, were working together. For their supremacy and so also of their economic dominance over the local indigenous people, such distribution irrespective of caste groups were agreed upon. In the formal sectors among different castes, high and low, there was hardly any distance. On the other hand, in social performances and operations, caste groupings with hierarchical system had very little change. During the British rule "... in the social and ideological spheres of the society Brahminism ... reasserted ... with the
support ... received from ruling authority" (Mukherjee, 1957: 83). In fact, the British took a stand to support the group from which direct or indirect support is assumed. In fact, they made the caste position congenial and at times strained, depending on their need in the policy matter.

Both in power and in status the British were higher up. They were practically controlling almost all the affairs. Through time their influence made penetration over larger areas. On the other hand, the British won the battle of Pallasuya and thereby they turned to be formal rulers. This position quickly geared up their position both in power and status. Gradually the three villages went through the process of progressive change and turned into three bigger units. The agglomeration of one another gave rise to a large area, the incipient city. This spatial growth also gave rise to both development and complication in other sectors, like society, culture, economy, administration and politics, and so also in interpersonal and inter-group relations. It may hardly be denied that with the impact and influence of the British there were spectacular professional change in varied directions. They introduced English and modern education. With their endeavours relationship was established with various countries. Thereby there was interchange of commodities between India and other nations. They were also responsible for giving shape to Calcutta for an urban centre. On the other hand, their policy of exploitation and polity of divide and rule went on through continuity (Saxena, 1987).
With the advent of British rule there was a great division among the people, primarily based on religion. On the one side, there was the Christian-English who also achieved success in transforming some non-Christian Indians to Christians. The other side consists of non-Christian Indians, primarily Hindus. In such movement Hinduism was the main factor irrespective of caste differentiation. The British policy, planning and operation made significant contribution in minimizing the distance among different caste groups. It was only possible for the British because in the milieu of educated class they made other kind ideological conversion through education and thereby conservation was minimized to a considerable extent.

CONSIDERATION ON CASTES, POWER AND STATUS

From the census data of as late as 1931 it is observed that among three high castes both literacy and minimal converse with English were dominant. These castes were Brahmins, Kayasthas and Vaidyars, with percentages of literacy 37.3\% and 14.3\%, 32.9\% and percentage of English education were 13.2\%, and 51.7\% and 28.1\% respectively (Pranda, 1971 : 21). This is also indicative of the fact that the "British government secularized education. It made accessible to anyone, irrespective of caste or community ... (Desai, 1981 : 251). This difference in literacy and especially in English education placed them in a favourable group. An appreciable percentage from these high castes were later cut off from land-holding and land-based
income. They entered into urban professions. This gave rise to emergence of a new class, commonly known as middle class, an equivalent of bhadraloko, which is near to the English word "gentry". With the onset of this classes some form of renaissance appeared on the scene. This has brought about significant changes in the areas of new occupation and profession, class formation and social order on the one hand and so also in the milieu of caste, status and power on the other. With this some form of liberalization came in vogue. In such phenomenon westernized education spread out by the British played a crucial role. Concept of bhadralok is still in operation at the present day, with some amount of change from the earlier connotation (Sinha and Bhattacharyya 1969).

During early British rule, status was very much connected with power. It may be of family heritage or finance or education or such other criteria. The highest status in the overall society was with the English and simultaneously they were possessing the highest power. The people who were close to them were not left behind and they were also gaining status and power. In such case caste affiliation was not acute as the major criterion. Examples may be set forth from the Subarnabanik (Goldsmith), a lower ranking caste. Members of this caste were in close relation with the English. The connection was primarily with business affairs.
Similarly was the caste with highly educated Bengalees and high ranking Indian officials. This upheaval was continued for a long time and later artists, educated men, engineers and doctors were included in such relationship. Such connections made impact in other directions. For example among the Subarnabanik and such other communities in order of caste hierarchy they belong to comparatively lower stage with the members of similar ranked castes. But such similarity did not stop them to be close with other high caste groups.

Rigidity of the caste hierarchy is evident from endogamy and the manner of observing other activities like inter-dining. In the domain of power and status supremacy was there of some families belonging to different castes. In other words, such contradictions may be explained as a kind of dichotomy between caste on the one hand, and status and power on the other. The above situation went on for more than 200 years during which appreciable change has been found in the transference of power and status and so also distribution of caste system giving rise to relatively flexible condition. Later, power, status and so also caste underwent through a process of change and in this regard the freedom movement cannot be set aside as one of the major responsible factors.

At the fag end of British rule, despite higher form of administration, power and status of a group of people, their social position which is not completely different from power
and status of other groups, made a shift. In fact the freedom fighters irrespective of their caste ranking received higher status. This condition was prevalent in the pan-Indian context and the position of West Bengal was not an exception, rather it was more progressive.

There was some amount of equality of action within urban and rural situation. It may be borne in mind that in the meantime Calcutta achieved the status of an urban centre and scored the rank of the largest city in India. Almost the same status was continued for long, even after independence. Later other cities in India also made accelerated progress and in this case the growth of Delhi is spectacular.

Political thoughts and operation were not static and in 1947 India became independent. In association with the same, partition took place giving rise to West Bengal and East Bengal, belonging to Republic of India and Pakistan respectively. At least in Pakistan, there was both base and bias on religion, and it turned into an Islamic state. This has resulted in great scare among the Hindu resident in East Bengal. A great majority of them migrated into the Republic of India with primary destination \( \rightarrow \) Calcutta. The immigrant known as refugees continued to be more during which the only criterion of leaving East Bengal was religion. This also made a change in the dimensions of power, status and caste. Most of the refugees came down to Calcutta for a number of reasons. Calcutta is the
capital of West Bengal with a long history (Makherjee, 1957) and is provided with large spatial dimension. For many families their distant and close relatives used to live in Calcutta, which acted as the expected centres of assistance. It was thought of that being a large city, there were ample job opportunities. Inspite of the fact all the immigrants were not provided with necessary help of minimum nature. There was a good deal of defects in the distribution mechanism of assistance, mostly financial. Sporadic placement in the fringe area of Calcutta, covering all its parts, was made to the refugees for their settlements.

The total process and the effect of the same brought out a condition of break through. In such case the caste hierarchy was not given much attention. But power and status extended into different folds. The factors responsible for attaining high power and status were not present earlier in the character of politics and muscle power. Such shift in power and status were possible for a socio-political alteration. Since then without any appreciable change the power and status are governed by a number of dominant characters. The dimension and stratum of power entered into a new area. On the other hand, the condition of caste system went through rapid transformation and turned into a fluid condition. The net results are of two types. The caste system did not completely wipe out, as revealed from the fact that each individual has his/her caste and caste endogamy is in vogue. It is also true that
caste hierarchy is not as strong as it was. As a result many of the taboos, connected with caste, are being lost.

PRESENT SITUATION

At present caste is seldom occupation based. It is true that inter-caste marriages are still considerably rare. But after marriage, of inter-caste nature, the attitude of avoidance has almost been ruled out. Earlier caste hierarchy was also related to the position in the framework of power structure and status orientation. At present this is seldom met with. On the basis of above observations it may be said that all the castes along with traditional system are in a melting pot in which the individual identity appears to be feeble and the total condition has turned to be liberal. This practically took place primarily with refugees who came to West Bengal from East Bengal (Ghosh, 1981: 4). The main reasons for such transformation may be accounted for critical conditions which they faced in the struggle for survival. In such adaptation, intense form of caste identity along with other paraphernalia was dropped.

In due course when the new condition became stabilized the whole concept and the function crept into the indigenous population of West Bengal. Till 1960, there was difference between West Bengal and immigrant East Bengal populations. From 1970s such difference, turned decreasing at a rapid pace,
is maintained. The whole gamut of collapse of caste system brought out changes in the domain of power and status. It may be mentioned that the so called lower caste groups were not considered as belonging to the lowest level; not their lowest position was due to other spheres in which they live, comprising economy, education, culture etc. In course of time the difference between high and low caste groups has almost been demolished. As a result, caste based power and status have completely been lost. On the contrary, other factors have replaced the condition in which education, wealth, family background, political affiliation, muscle power etc. are of great relevance.

Calcutta during partition was with a different kind of social, cultural, economic and educational milieu, compared to immediate post-independent period. The major difference between the two was due to socio-economic dislodgment which was initiated by the partition. Even then during its early period changes took place and there was a split in the traditional system. Large scale migration of huge populations was not a movement from one geographical area to another. On the other hand, it was primarily a shift of a society with its distinct culture to another society with difference of culture. At the initial stage there were encounters. This did not continue for long because both the groups are having the same language and in the traditional culture there are variations instead of differences. Moreover, both these groups were not completely
unknown to each other because of their placement in adjacent areas and earlier some contacts were established in very many ways. In course of time, specially in the city of Calcutta with its overall environment, relatively liberal in nature, there was a kind of cultural amalgamation. Finally, within about two decades a cultural uniformity was established. At present the condition of society with all its characters is the product of total process of change. For the present condition it is somewhat new. This is true with power, status and caste not only made contribution to an individual but the said characters were linked to one another. A higher caste was dominant over a lower caste, thereby power was gained and status was achieved. Nowadays such equation is not meaningful. An individual belonging to higher caste does not always make influence in the society with his power. In the same way, a man of power does not always possess status and vice-versa. In fact, these characters are having their own identities, without intricate relationship with one another.

Caste in the present society, specially in Calcutta situation, does not have much to play. Instead of caste based hierarchy, there is a considerable amount of equality for all castes. Again, caste alone has practically no bearing either with power or with status. In contrast to earlier terms, even four decades back, both power and status were separate entities. It is true that for both of them the necessary components may not be most different but the proportional weightage of such
components varies from one another. For example, political affiliation or contact is an essential element in the domain of power. The same criterion is not so important in case of status. This is also true with economic condition, better be said as wealth. On the other hand, in case of status, education has a greater force which does not affect in case of power. In the present study, necessary details have been worked out with the aid of componential analysis of characters, separately in case of power and status.

The above background with special emphasis on Calcutta has been given in terms of the genesis, practically from the very inception of Calcutta. The coverage ends with the present situation, during the condition of modern terms. In this case power, status and caste have been presented separately and in association. In such case the components of characters which are responsible for achievements of power, status have also been worked out. It may be said that at present power and status are not separate identities with or without much interaction between the two. The ascription part of caste which was dominant earlier has gone down and achievement parts like power and status have been elevated and turned conspicuous.