

# “CALCUTTA” – GEOFFREY MOORHOUSE

(first published 1971)

## INTRODUCTION:

The period of president's rule ended with a state election in 1971 which produced a coalition government of eight parties led by a Congress man. Twelve months later the Corporation of Calcutta was effectively suspended, its elected representatives removed, its functions henceforth discharged by the state government. In 1975 the political life of the whole country was thrown into turmoil as a result of the emergency powers adopted by Mrs Gandhi's government in Delhi, and insurrection against those powers was as great in Calcutta as it was anywhere; likewise the Delhi government's response to insurrection. The prisons of West Bengal became as crowded as ever they had been during the most repressive days of the British Raj. But when, in 1977, the Prime Minister submitted herself to general election (a democratic act which her adversaries, axe-grinding opportunists almost to a man, had insisted beforehand to be quite beyond her), she paid the price for her authoritarian regime in West Bengal as elsewhere in India. Not only did the state return its tally of her opponents to the New Delhi parliament; in its own domestic elections it handed power, with a colossal majority, to a Left Front government – yet another medley of parties, but one dominated by the CPI(M). And so Jyoti Basu, whom I had last seen as the power behind the throne on which sat a bewildered Ajoy Mukherjee, came into his own as Chief Minister of West Bengal.

- Calcutta was established in the year 1686 as a result of the expansion plans of the British Raj.
- On August 24, 1686, Job Charnock, who was believed to be the founder of Calcutta first came to the village of Sutanuti as a representative of the British East India Company to establish a factory.

There is much discussion about the origin of the city's name. The most accepted view is that it comes from the Hindu goddess [Kali](#) and the original name was *KaliKshetra*, "the place of Kali".

Other theories include:

- The name comes from the location of the original settlement beside a *khal* ("canal" in [Bengali](#))
- The place was known for its manufacture of shell-lime, the name deriving from *kali* ("lime") and *kata* ("burnt shell")
- The name is derived from the Bengali *kilkila* ("flat area"), which is mentioned in the old literature.<sup>[5]</sup>
- The name came into being when Job Charnock asked a farmer the name of the area around Hooghly River. The farmer misunderstood due to language problems and thought that he was referring as to when he harvested his paddy. He proudly replied "**Kal Kaata hoe chhilo**" meaning "I cut it yesterday." Job Charnock thought that the name of the place is Calcutta.<sup>[1]</sup>
- Calcutta is an Anglicized version of the Bengali name Kalikata. According to some, 'Kalikata' is derived from the Bengali word Kalikshetra, which means Ground of Kali (the goddess)
- However, according to Britannica, some say that the name of the city is derived from the location of its original settlement on the bank of a canal (*khal*)
- According to the third opinion, the city's name was originated from the Bengali words -- lime (calcium oxide; *kali*) and burnt shell (*kata*), since the area was noted for the manufacture of shell lime
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“It was stupidity by the British to establish Calcutta as the Capital of India – chosen mainly for its commercial appeal for shipping etc”. (Calcutta – Geoffrey Moorhouse)

## CHAPTER 2 – THE IMPERIAL CITY

In 1630 the Muslim rulers defeated the Portuguese.

The British were then allowed to establish a foothold in Calcutta with the formation of the East India Company around 1660.

Fort William was established in 1696 to protect the East India Company

Howrah established with its docks.

The French and Dutch also established colonies not that far from Calcutta.

Robert Clive came to Madras

Corruption and licentiousness were very common in Calcutta at this time – opium was easy to obtain.

By 1756 Calcutta was not well fortified – the population was 120,000.

Fort William was established to protect the [East India Company](#)'s trade in the city of [Calcutta](#),

- On June 20, 1756, Siraj-Ud-Daullah, who was the Nawab of Bengal, attacked the city and captured the Fort William which was fortified by East India Company earlier

Many British fled the British prisoners were kept in the Black Hole of Calcutta which was very tiny 18 feet cube for 64 prisoners. The next morning only 23 people were still alive. They were released and made their way to the wharf to be picked up by the Dutch and returned to England. Some lived into their 80's. There is a plaque today near the General Post Office.

The **Black Hole of Calcutta** was a dungeon in [Fort William, Calcutta](#), measuring 14 by 18 feet (4.3 m × 5.5 m), in which troops of [Siraj-ud-Daulah](#), the [Nawab of Bengal](#), held British [prisoners of war](#) on the night of 20 June 1756.

- Calcutta was re-captured by Robert Clive in 1757 when the British defeated Siraj-ud-daullah on the battle-field of Plassey

Robert Clive led a punitive group of soldiers from Madras and easily took back Calcutta. He then annexed very large areas of land surrounding Calcutta.

CLIVE THEN LAID THE FOUNDATION STONE OF THE BRITISH EMPIRE IN INDIA.

CLIVE MADE GOVERNOR OF CALCUTTA IN 1765

In 1772, Calcutta was announced as the capital of British India by Warren Hastings, the first and most famous of the British governor-general of India (Completed to PAGE 56)

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In 1772, Calcutta became the capital of [British India](#), a decision made by [Governor General Warren Hastings](#).

In the time of [British India](#), Calcutta was "the second city of the [British Empire](#)"<sup>[20]</sup> (after [London](#)) and was aptly renamed "City of Palaces"<sup>[21]</sup> and the Great Eastern Hotel was regarded as the "Jewel of the East"

Calcutta underwent rapid industrial growth from the 1850s, especially in the textile sector, despite the poverty of the surrounding region. Trade with other nations also

grew. For example, the first U.S. merchant ship arrived in Kolkata in 1787. In fact, the U.S Consulate in Calcutta is the U.S. Department of State's second-oldest consulate and dates from 19 November 1792.

Despite being almost totally destroyed by a cyclone, in which 60,000 died, on 5 October 1864, Calcutta grew, mostly in an unplanned way, in the next 150 years from 117,000 to 1,098,000 inhabitants (including suburbs),

Following similar moves elsewhere in the country, the state government changed the city's official name from *Calcutta* to *Kolkata* in 2001.<sup>[34]</sup>

1971 – Calcutta's population was 8 million. Calcutta was the largest city in India and the richest city in India.

1980 – Calcutta's population was 9 million

In the mid-1980s, [Bombay](#) overtook Calcutta as India's most populous city.

From the air, Calcutta looked very tropical with lots of palm trees and also looked fertile with plenty of surface water.

2023 – Calcutta's population is 15 million

The monsoon breaks the first week in June – it rains for the next 4 months and the yearly rainfall is 64 inches.

The Hooghly River is a diversion from the Ganges