

DEFINING ETHNICITY: A STUDY ON BOWBARRACKS, KOLKATA

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INTRODUCTION

The term Ethnicity has its origin in the Greek word *Ethnos*. This term is very convoluted in terms of its meaning. This word can be treated as an umbrella word for a gamut of cultural concepts. Ethnicity is very much related with the common origin of place and sometimes it interchanged with nationality. People having common ancestry, common place of origin are thought to be sharing the common ethnicity. Ethnicity assure some commonality in shared cultural attributes. Language, rituals, myth, homeland, legacy and common history of origin are some of the major components of ethnic identity. Ethnic identity has a deep connection with the geographical location of a community.

GEOGRAPHY AND ETHNICITY

In geography, the study of ethnicity plays an important role and it deals different branches of geography like social, cultural, political, economic and urban geography. In 1920, Chicago school of thought brought the concept of ethnicity very specifically in urban geography. They mainly focused on the urban social ecology (Light, 1998). Chicago school mainly emphasized on the ethnic neighbourhood formation. In the urban areas we can envisage the amalgamation of different group of people having myriad cultural facets in terms of their style of living, beliefs, day to day norms, political and social ideologies (Ungar, 2011). This type of variations creates an ambience of accommodation, acculturation, and several other ecological processes that run through the human society in a sublime way. Through the idea of Darwinism, the territorial attachments of the ethnic community are being explained (Best, 1998). This type of attachments can be defined from the very point of view of environmental determinism also.

Environmental determinism very aptly used for discussing the impact of geographical environment on the life style of ethnic communities. In a quite recent times, in the era of post-structuralism, the adaptation of the ethnic communities in different geographical locations got a new dimension (Wilkinson, 2012). The role of social super structures like polity, economy is being considered as the root elements for shaping the cultural aspects of the ethnic communities in various parts of the world. The vitality of these elements is often being over looked (Walker et.al, 2006). But from the perspective of geography, it is successfully explained that how the same ethnic community have different kinds of life style traits just with the change of geographical locations which in turn generates different sort of social and cultural belief systems (Westly et.al, 2012).

In 1980s, with the advent of post-modern ideas, the discussion of ethnicity gets a new dimension of multi layered sub texts. In this time of post modernism, the scholars have moved from the rigid idea of ethnic binary of assimilation and pluralism (Laws and Davies, 2000; Harari, 2019). Essentialism, constructivism are the new ideas that are being incorporated in ethnic study in the purview of geography. This gives the flexibility and freedom to the scholars for the study of ethnicity. In Anglo-American trend, they studied the issue of ethnicity from the view points of human rights. Ethnic minority rights (both civic and political) are their major concern of study (Mirchandani, 2005; Lash, 2014). This kind of by the geographers reflect the ideas of radical approach.

OBJECTIVE

The present study focuses on the life style of the Anglo-Indian community of Kolkata. The deep understanding will be generated through this study about the constrains the community faces while living in this city. The major objective of the paper is to unveil their very own subjective views towards the city. These objectives have been tried to be fulfilled through this paper. Thus, the very nature of the paper will basically qualitative with some association of quantification.

METHODOLOGY

The research paper is mainly based on reconnaissance study of the Bow Barrack area of Kolkata where the Anglo-Indian people stay. This study has been done in the month of February

2023. The field visit has been done for six times for understanding the nature of society of this particular locality. Interview with 45 (forty-five) local Anglo-Indian people have been done for getting some minute details about the life style trivia. For showing the proper location of Bow Barracks in Kolkata Arc GIS have been used. Statistical techniques have been used to analysis the information which have been received.

STUDY AREA

For this current research work, Bow Barrack of Kolkata has been chosen. This is an area situated in between Bow Bazar police station and Hare Street police station. The small locale is resided by the Anglo-Indian community people (Figure 1). Nearly 132 families reside in six numbers of three storied buildings. Bow Barracks was a garrison's mess which was built at the time of World War. The Anglo-Indians stay there in rent. There is no proper record of hand over of the property to the Anglo-Indians.

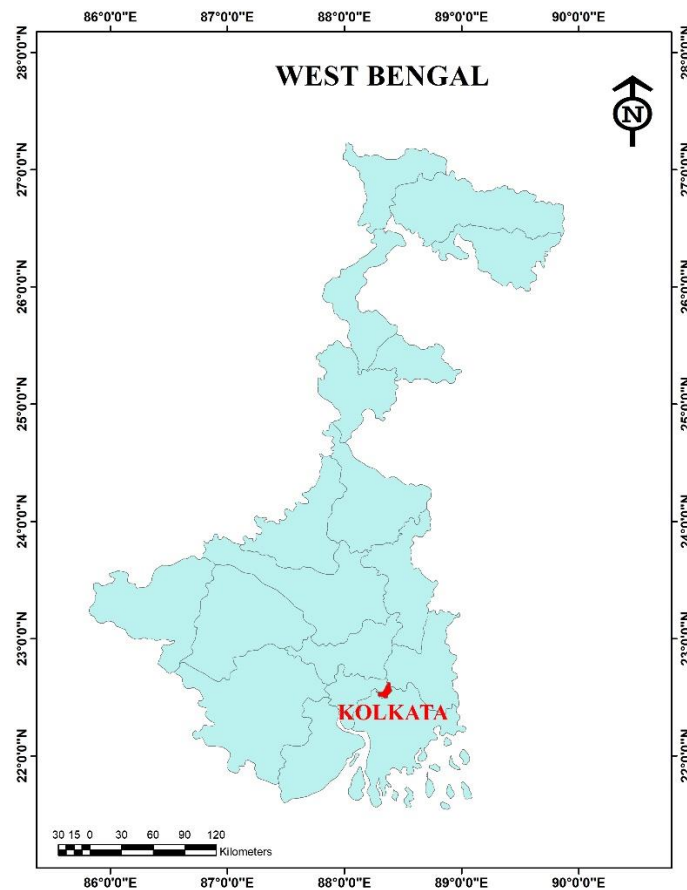


Figure 1: Location of Kolkata in West Bengal

RATIONALITY OF THE STUDY

Bow Barrack is a unique area located in the busy environment of Kolkata, near Central Avenue (Figure 2). It is almost like a different piece of city within the large city of Kolkata. While studying the issue of ethnicity, it is very interesting to look at this community. They form a very unique cultural turn in the city of Kolkata. It is quite rational to choose this community for the study of ethnic diversity of Kolkata. Kolkata is dominated by Bengali culture. It is clearly evident that, Anglo-Indian people form ethnic community in Kolkata. Bow Barrack can be considered as an enclave of them.

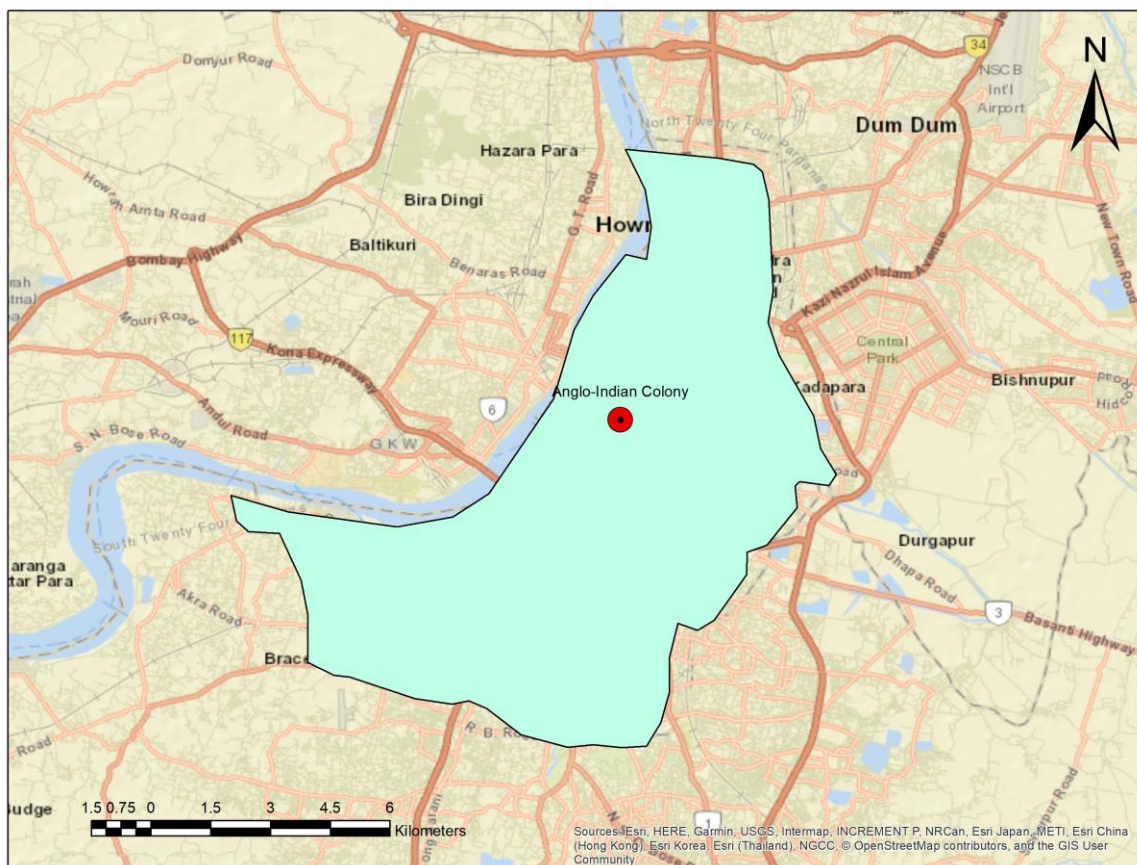


Figure 2: Location of Anglo-Indian Colony (Bow Barracks)

ANGLO-INDIAN COMMUNITY IN KOLKATA

Numbers of Anglo-Indian people in Kolkata are dropping in the recent time. In 1970's the total number of Anglo-Indians staying in Kolkata were near about 20000 (Times of India, 2016, August 2). They are quite accustomed with the lifestyle of Kolkata. They can manage their own life style traits while residing in the predominance of Bengali culture of Kolkata. They are seamlessly accommodating with the larger population of Kolkata. Anglo-Indians are well educated, economically well off and empowered which added in the cosmopolitan culture of

Kolkata (Andrews, 2006). Their culture is quite colourful filled with festivity, ethnic foods, vibrant dressing sense. Kolkata always played a role of welcoming nature in terms of place of residence. The reverse migration of the Anglo-Indian people had never been witnessed up to 1980's. The ecological balance was always there with the larger neighbourhood of Kolkata (Sen, 2017). The community is so much well mingled with the major Bengali community that they can understand Bengali very well, some of the community people can speak the language very fluently. Assimilation with the culture of Kolkata and acceptance of the pluralism of Kolkata made the community very well adjusted with the native people of Kolkata.

MAJOR CONSTRAINS

While visiting the narrow alleys of Bow Barracks, some constrains of the living condition can be seen with naked eyes, which are as following:

1. The housing condition is not up to the mark. The renovation work is not taking place regular basis. Many of the parts of the red coloured buildings have shown the signs of lack of care. This kind of lack of maintenance of the buildings make the standard of living for the community quite risky.
2. The amenities like electric supply and drinking water are also not well distributed among all houses of the community and the lack of the basic amenities makes the situation worse off. Especially the condition of electrical wirings is not at all taken care off. They are in a horrible situation which can lead to a any kind of fatal accidents.
3. Aged people face a difficult situation in living alone. Because of the trend of reverse migration towards outside India, many of the young generation Anglo-Indians choose to reside and settle outside India. The decreasing opportunity of employment in Kolkata make them to think of out migration to the other states or even to the other countries. This kind of a reverse migration makes the situation quite difficult of survival of the aged population alone in the Bow Barrack area.
4. The Bow Barrack area is surrounded by some commercial houses. The entire surrounding locality of Bow Barrack is highly congested and the environmental quality is not at all good for a residential area. As it is a commercial area, the mixed pack of population can be seen here on a daily basis. According to some of the residents of Bow Barracks, the movement of unknown people through their residential area make them feel quite insecure. Their privacy somehow hampered due to this kind of movements.

5. Now a days, a group of residents of Bow Barracks feels very disconnected with the larger population of Kolkata (Figure 3). According to their opinion, people are somehow becoming more and more conscious about their own cultural affairs and that make them narrow minded to accept the other cultures whole heartedly. The cosmopolitan nature of Kolkata is hampered by this kind of outlook. They feel very disconnected because they do not have any visibility in social cultural milieu of Kolkata. In the time of Christmas, they even feel worse that all the glitters and festivity is being concentrated in one part of Kolkata. Their narrow lanes and alleys remain unnoticed by the main stream citizens.

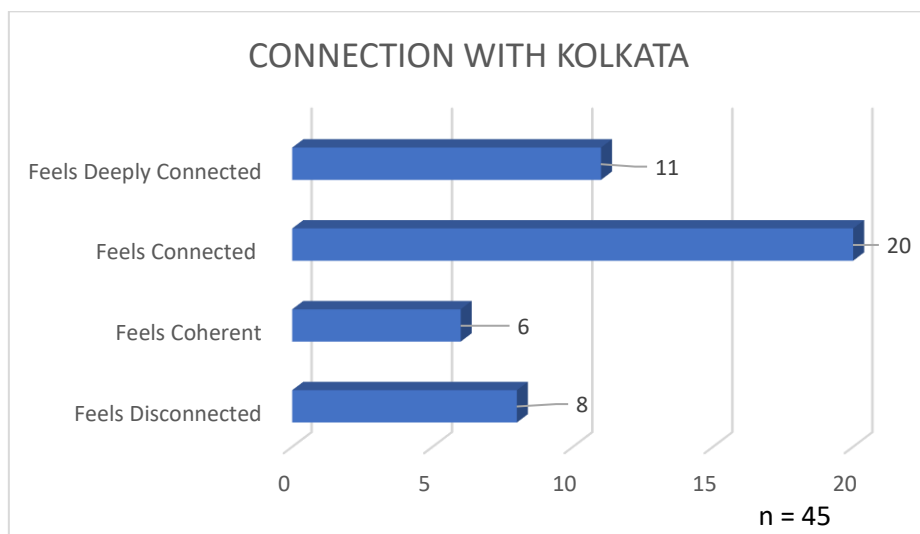


Figure 3: Feeling of connection with Kolkata among the selected respondents of Anglo-Indian residents of Bow Barrack, Kolkata

On a positive note, among all these constrains still the Anglo-Indian community people have deep topo-philia about the city of joy, Kolkata (Blake, 1974). After staying for a substantial amount of time, the aged people of Bow Barracks feel a deep rooted connected with the city. The propensity of out migration among the aged people are almost nil. They want to stay in the city because they do not want to take the hustle of shifting in another city. For them, Kolkata is the peaceful city where they can live a life without any trouble. Many of the aged people are very much fond of the Bengali culture. They have a very keen interest in knowing all the aspects of Bengali culture. Kolkata plays very important role in their life, not only as a place of residence, but an aspiration space.

NEW AVENUES TO DEFINE

Ethnicity is a complicated topic to define. Ethnicity deals with the concept of adaptation also. In the concluding remarks it can be said that ethnicity is not only a theoretical topic which just can be studied but it is a lived experience. Our life revolves around the cultural traits which actually work as a corner stone of ethnicity. On a critical note, ethnicity not only revolves around the idea of minor representation but it actually makes the cultural scenario of any country really full of colour and variety. Ethnic communities in Kolkata add up to the cultural enrichment of Kolkata as a metropolitan city. Ethnic communities are the beautiful part of society that keep the vibrant nature of cities to go on without any interruption. The urban human ecology remains alive with its all-pervasive processes of cooperation, assimilation, competition, accommodation with the help of the adaptations that are being made by the ethnic communities of urban areas.

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