

The Armenians of Kolkata: Unravelling Identity

Կոլկաթայի հայերը. Բացահայտելով ինքնությունը



The Armenians of Kolkata: Unravelling Identity

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“There is a Kolkata of yesteryears that lingers in people's memory of the city, particularly in the diasporas of Kolkata. A city, Kolkata, I can only read about. I can never have the chance to experience the city as an outsider.”

Navras Afreedi, Professor, Presidency College

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the work incorporated in this report entitled “The Armenians of Kolkata: Unraveling Identity” submitted by the undersigned Research Team was carried out under my mentorship. Such material as has been obtained from other sources has been duly acknowledged.

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ABSTRACT

The Armenian influence in Kolkata has been key to the identity of the city since its very origin. Over the years, the diaspora has undergone various changes in its dynamics and in its adaptation to the changing times. The prominent presence of the Armenian diaspora can be seen reflected in the extensive architecture, streets, and churches left behind by them, and can be read about in the expansive literature about their history and trade network. But there is more to the Armenian Diaspora in Kolkata than what meets the eye at first glance. The role of institutions more than two hundred years old such as The Armenian College and Philanthropic Academy (ACPA) and the Armenian Churches in Kolkata in keeping the Armenian culture and traditions alive forms an important - less talked about - part of the diaspora today. The decline in population over the years and the potential future of the current population form pertinent questions to the survival of the diaspora and to this study. The dichotomy of the identity between the Indian-Armenians and the Migrant Armenians formed the central point of this research. The main sources of this inquiry were semi-structured and unstructured interviews with Migrant Armenians, Indian-Armenians and other locals who have covered the activities and practices of the Armenians in Kolkata. Overall, this research explored the various socio-cultural aspects of the Armenians in Kolkata with the key focus being on their identity.

Keywords: Armenian, Kolkata, migrant, Indian-Armenians, identity

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CHAPTER 1. Introduction

Thus the midday halt of Charnock – more's the pity!
Grew a City
As the fungus sprouts chaotic from its bed
So it spread
Chance-directed, chance-erected, laid and built
On the silt
Palace, byre, hovel – poverty and pride
Side by side
And above the packed and pestilential town
Death looked down.

- Rudyard Kipling, *Calcutta: The City Revisited* (1971)

Kolkata, formerly known as Calcutta, has been one of the most written about cities in India. This 'City of Joy' has served as an inspiration for countless artists and intellectuals who have relentlessly strived to capture the soul of this fascinating city. The recorded history of Kolkata begins in 1690 with the arrival of Job Charnock, an administrator employed by the East India Company (EIC), who was formerly largely known as the founder of the city. After quite a few battles with the Bengali Sultanate that had been ruling Bengal since the 14th century, the East India Company set up trade on the banks of the Hooghly River by the late 1600s, in the city that would become their trade capital. Over the next century, the hold of the EIC over Kolkata became progressively stronger with the establishment of Fort William, a stronghold for the protection of British interests. Following a tumultuous time, rife with battles with the Mughal Nawab Siraj ud-Daulah, Kolkata was declared a presidency city in 1773 and became the official headquarters of the EIC. By the year 1793, The EIC had complete control over Kolkata and began the development of the city and its architecture in order to establish their government area on the banks of the Hooghly. Kolkata was the stronghold of British trade in India until the early 20th century, prior to the partition of Bengal in 1905 and subsequent revolts, which made the city

inhospitable for the British. The capital was then moved to New Delhi in 1911, and Kolkata became a hotbed for cultural, intellectual, artistic and political movements (Sinha & Banerjee-Guha, 2009).

The 19th and 20th century saw the advent of the Bengal Renaissance, a cultural, intellectual and artistic movement, in which the modernization of Bengali literature took place through the literary work of writers such as Rabindranath Tagore, Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, Michael Madhusudan Dutt, etc. In the early 20th century, The Bengal school of art, an art movement and an Indian painting style that had originated in Bengal thrived and became known for being associated with *swadeshi*. Satyajit Ray, the Academy Award-winning director is still famously known as the last prominent figure of the movement, as well as being considered one of the most talented filmmakers of the 20th century (Sarkar, 1990).

Apart from being a rich mosaic of intellectual, artistic and cultural sites, Kolkata is also a mosaic of various cultures. The city has a majority of Bengali Hindus with Muslims, Marwaris, and Biharis as its minorities. There are also several smaller communities, such as the Chinese, Parsis, Bagdadi Jews, Armenians, Tibetans which make the city truly multicultural. This multiculturalism is what has led to Kolkata being called a “parliament of religions” with temples, mosques, sufi shrines, synagogues and churches within walking distance of each other (Gustafsson, 2018). A diverse range of people call Kolkata their home, coexisting within the montage of culture, art, history and time.

One of the peoples that have found solace in this city are the Armenians. Some Armenian merchants were the first to set foot in the Indian subcontinent through the Malabar coast in the 8th century C.E. By the end of Mughal King Akbar’s reign in the 17th century, Armenians had established settlements in cities all over India, including Kolkata. Here, their trade flourished and they became some of the most economically prosperous and influential people in the city, through employment in the Mughal courts as lawyers and administrators. Due to their trade relations and their fluency with the languages of both, the Mughals and the British, Armenians in Kolkata were instrumental in helping the English establish trade in India (Zenian, 2001).

Not only did the Armenians lay the foundation for British commerce in India, they also left behind some of the most iconic monuments and architecture in the city. As Professor Navras Afreedi says, “A scent of Kolkata’s history reeks in its architecture”, and so, places like The Oberoi Grand, Stephen Court, Park Mansions, The Armenian College and Philanthropic Academy (ACPA), The Holy Church of Nazareth, etc. as well as entire neighbourhoods like Armenian Street and Sookias Street were erected by the Armenians. Their architecture is an important part of their legacy, which remains revived in Kolkata. However, this community that was once an integral piece in the cultural kaleidoscope of Kolkata and had numbers reaching thousands, has become almost invisible today (Shah, 2018). Their numbers have declined rapidly and their story almost forgotten, but the Armenian Street and the Armenian churches still stand today and continue to be a symbol of the Armenian presence in the city.

Historical Overview

One of the most defining features of Armenian history was their immense economic contribution to a region. Their economic contributions were not just limited to the aspect of trade but also included the crucial role of the community in shaping the polity, economy and social infrastructure of a region (Caplan, 2012). Their ability to blend in with any culture, their fluency with a wide range of languages, and their capability of setting up an extensive trade network in the remotest parts of a region made them plant their feet firm and have a strong hold over the people. Much of this is a fitting description of their contributions in the Indian subcontinent. Their adeptness in the field of trade along with their professional expertise of commercial markets and trade routes made them earn the title- ‘Merchant Princes of India’ (Caplan, 2012).

While the reasons behind their entry into India are quite contested, a significant amount of evidence suggests political instability in Armenia to have instigated their migration. In 1604, after Shah Abbas I deported several Armenian merchants, professionals and intellectuals from Julfa to New Julfa outskirts of Isfahan, the migration rate kept witnessing a steady increase (Caplan, 2012). Shah Abbas’s primary motive was to strengthen the economy of Persia and the Armenian merchants delivered just that.

Persia flourished until it was invaded in 1722 by the Afghans. After a consistent cycle of instability in the region, many prominent Armenian professionals and experts migrated to various regions. These reasons contributed to a steep rise in the population of the Armenian diaspora in India (Zenian, 2001). While their settlements already existed in India owing to the instrumental role they played for the Mughals, the construction of the Church in 1562 at Agra, further attracted a large pool of Armenians as they saw it as a form of ‘acceptance’ (Caplan, 2012). Moreover, the political stability in India during the Mughal rule also accorded to their choice of migrating to India.

Armenian merchants were given unprecedented access to travel and to set up their trading ventures which the other trading communities were not given. By the end of the 16th century, their trade infrastructure grew exponentially and they did not just indulge in transcontinental trade like they did during the onset but were key players in the international market as well. Their base for trading in India included the prominent port cities such as Surat, Bombay and West Bengal (Caplan, 2012). Spices, gems, indigo, silk and muslin were some of the commodities that were traded by the Armenians. Through their commercial acumen, they maintained a stable relationship with prominent trading, manufacturing and production centres in the international market, reduced their overhead costs, and made profit maximisation fairly easy (Chaudhary, 2002).

Their thoroughness in these areas, prompted the East India Company to align their commercial ventures with the trading diaspora. In the early stages of the British Raj, it seemed as if the Armenians acted as their ‘trump-card’ to get anything and everything done. This was primarily because of their influential role at the *Darbaar* and their personal relationships with the independent *nawabs* of the erstwhile Mughal Empire (Chaudhary, 2012). In the years that followed, the East India Company established their dominance in Bengal along with several other regions. The British Raj furthered their commercial ventures with the Armenians in various capacities as, in their eyes, they were the best set of facilitators available at their disposal. Moreover, many prominent merchants used Hughli as their chief port for trade which was a

cherry on the cake for the British as brokering had less than anticipated transaction costs due to their expansive commercial connection.

“A community is made up of intimate relationships among diversified types of individuals – a kinship group, a local group, a neighborhood, a village, a large family.”- Carroll Quigley

Armenian trade practices can be summed up as an embodiment of what Carroll Quigley says. It is quite fascinating to understand how a displaced population maintained a thorough professional relationship. Since a majority of the sectors such as manufacturing, export, production centres were run by Armenian merchants, kinsmanship bound them together (Chaudhary, 2002). These kin networks helped each other minimise their costs of production and ensured safe passage of export/import items. An infrastructure that was not just built on the premises of pure profit maximisation but, built on trust and kinship gave rise to a robust network.

Armenian Genocide

“Armenia is dying, but it will survive. The little blood that is left is precious blood that will give birth to a heroic generation. A nation that does not want to die, does not die.” - Anatole France

The period between the onset of World War I and foundation of the Turkish Republic in 1923 witnessed the deaths of approximately 1.5 million Armenians as a result of deportation, starvation, mass executions, and massacres (Melson,2013). The Armenian Community in Anatolia had technically been wiped out. The cultural heritage left behind by the Armenians in the form of churches or landmark buildings were either destroyed or incorporated into the Turkish culture (Melson,2013). It was believed that the Armenians were “targets” of violence due to the provocations made by them and this was not merely a policy of genocide. Being aware of the Armenians quest to form an ‘independent Armenia’ on foreign soil, the Turks formulated their plan of executing Armenians to leave scope for their future ambitions (Melson,2013).

Further, in the wake of grave political instability in that timeframe, it was the belief of the Turks that a unified state could defend itself against the greater powers such as Russia who wanted to destroy Turkey, according to them. The primary obstacles of unification were the minority communities that were present in Turkey who were very attached to their culture and language. This in the eyes of young Turks, was a problem that needed a 'permanent' solution which eventually resulted in mass deportations, serial massacres, and mass starvations.

The "scheme" was extended to all the population in Anatolia and it began by beheading the intellectual class of the nation. Following which, the villages were raided which displaced the Armenian population further. The Genocide had devastating effects on the Armenians and shaped a very unstable future. With several families destroyed, intellectuals killed, and a rich tradition in shambles, a vibrant community ceased to exist in Turkey (Melson,2013). The Armenian diaspora might have been shattered by the wrong doings of a nation but they were not defeated. Several Armenians kept migrating to conducive environments and built an ever-lasting legacy with their contributions in various manners at prominent geographical locations (Gasparyan, 2016). It is rather heartwarming to see how any contribution made by the previous generation of Armenians, regardless of its expanse or scale, is a defining feature of their identity. To this day, the entire diaspora commemorates the genocide on the 24th of April, every year.

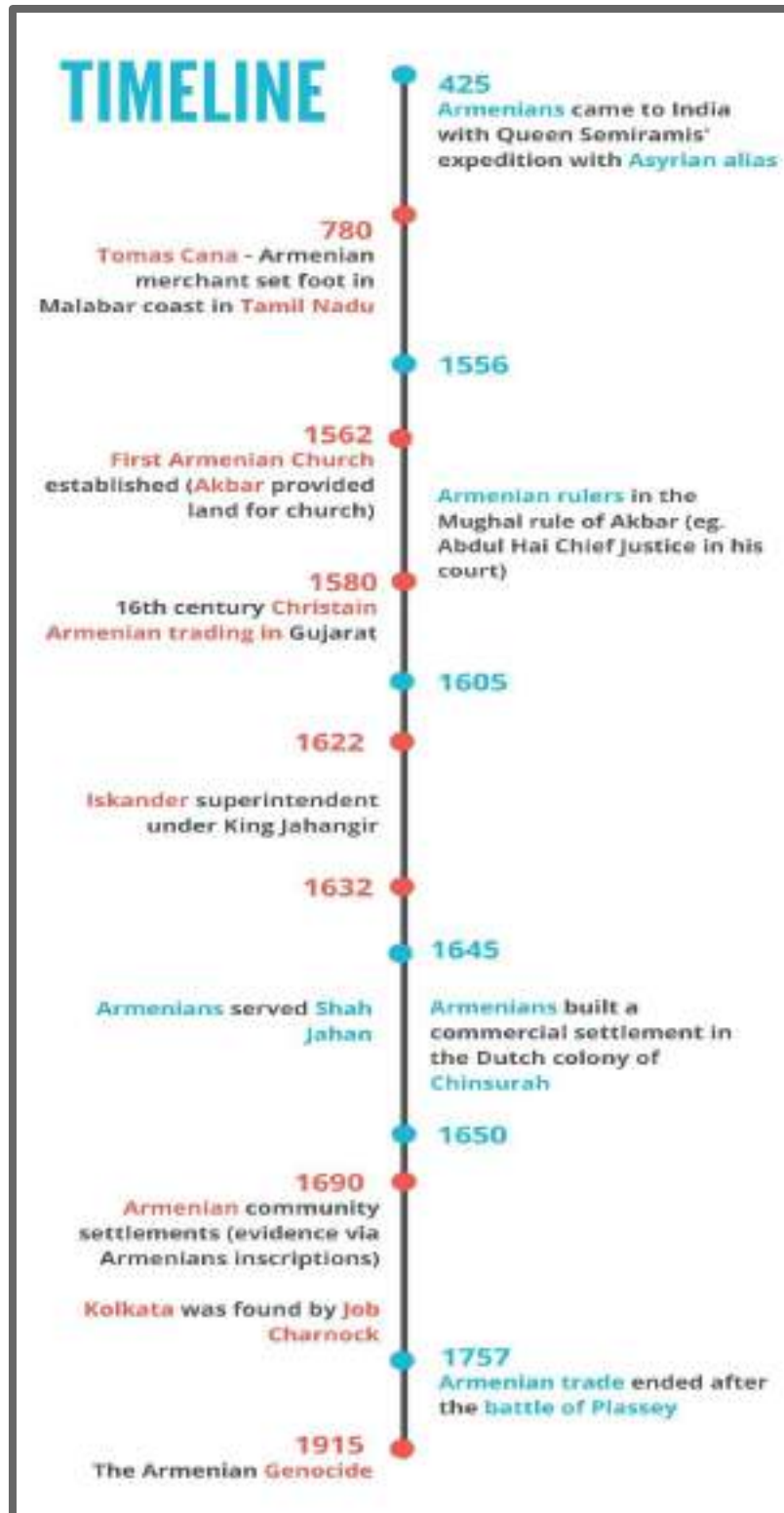


Figure 1 : Timeline of the major events that led to the arrival of the Armenians to India.

Geographical Overview

Kolkata, the capital of the state of West Bengal, is a city that is located in eastern India at 22° 33' N 88° 20' E along the eastern banks of the River Hooghly. It borders the states of Jharkhand, Odisha, Bihar, Sikkim, and Assam and lies in the lower Ganges Delta of eastern India, about 75 kms west of the international border with Bangladesh. It has an elevation of 1.5-9 m and was originally a wetland which was utilized to fit the rapidly increasing population. The rest of the area is known as the “East Kolkata Wetlands” (“Kolkata”).

Kolkata’s climate is usually tropical, with a mean temperature of 28.6° C. The temperature goes up to more than 40° C during May and June, the hot and humid months of summer. The city receives an annual rainfall of 1,582 mm during the months of June, August, and September. Winters last around two and a half months, in the months of December and January, with the temperature dropping as low as 5° C (“Kolkata”).

Research Statements

1. To study the socio-cultural and religious aspects of the lives of Armenians in Kolkata.
2. To undertake a comparative study of the distinct identities of the Indian-Armenians and Migrant-Armenians living in Kolkata.

Operational Definitions:

- Indian- Armenians: For the purpose of our research, the term ‘Indian-Armenians’ refers to naturalised Indian citizens of Armenian descent, from Kolkata.
- Migrant Armenians: For the purpose of this report, the term ‘Migrant-Armenians’ refers to citizens of Armenia, Iran, and other countries, of Armenian descent, currently residing in Kolkata.
- Identity: Since identity is a broad and subjective term, for the purpose of this report, we shall be using ‘identity’ in reference to what they identify with (i.e. history, values, beliefs, food, festivals, language, etc.) and what they identify themselves as (i.e. nationality, religious and cultural identity).

Research Objectives

1. To study and document socio-cultural and religious aspects of both the Indian-Armenians and the Migrant-Armenians in Kolkata.
2. To understand the role of institutions like the church and the Armenian school in sustaining the non-native community of Armenians.
3. To understand and compare the factors that contribute to the formation of the distinct identities of the Indian-Armenians and the Migrant-Armenians.
4. To gain insight into the co-existence and dynamics of these two groups of Armenians in Kolkata.
5. To arrive at inferences about the future of the Armenians in Kolkata.

Research Methodology

As part of our primary research, we identified the heads and officials of Armenian institutes like the church and college, the local long-time Armenian residents, migrant Armenians that live in Kolkata, non-Armenian local citizens as well as researchers, photographers, and experts in the study of the Armenian diaspora, as the major stakeholders of our study. Our sample was selected using all these stakeholder groups to make our study as well rounded and complete as possible.

Purposive sampling technique was used to select our key informants, like Armenian officials and researchers. These informants were contacted to set up further interviews with local Indian-Armenian and migrant Armenian through snowball sampling. Convenience sampling was used to conduct random street interviews with non-Armenian residents in order to gain insight into the influence and visibility of the Armenian community in Kolkata.

Our main tool for data collection in this study has been in-depth semi-structured and unstructured interviews with various stakeholders (individual and group format) mentioned above. The semi-structured interviews were mainly used to interview Armenian officials and our key informants, while unstructured ones were used to interact with local citizens as well as migrant Armenians. Audio-visual recording of these interviews took place after obtaining

consent from all those involved. Telephonic interviews were conducted for key contacts that were unavailable. We also used the method of naturalistic, non-participant observation as we studied Armenian architecture and cultural practices like festivals, rituals, food practices, etc.

After collection of primary data and transcription of all interviews, field notes, as well as recordings of interviews, were analysed to identify and examine recurrent themes and patterns in our research. Relevant quotes were coded and compiled, to be added when necessary.

Having completed the primary research, it was clear that there were certain limitations that affected the amount of data collected on the field. Firstly, the short span of only six days on field severely restricted the number of people we could interview as well as the amount of time we could spend in and around the Armenian institutes like the ACPA and the churches. We also faced issues due to an internal conflict between two of our major primary contacts in Kolkata. We were unable to use one of these contacts for fear of losing the other. This not only restricted the number of other contacts we could interview but also led to a skewed sample that had more migrant-Armenians than Indian-Armenians. The rapidly declining population of Indian-Armenians in Kolkata also meant that the sample of Indian-Armenians was relatively small. Since most of the Indian-Armenians in Kolkata today are above the age of sixty, we also had difficulty in scheduling interviews due to their health and other issues.

Table of interviews (Table 1) :

Group	Number of interviews
Indian-Armenian citizens	4
Migrant-Armenian citizens	11
Experts and researchers	4
Local street interviews	6
Non-Armenian officials of ACPA and the church	3

CHAPTER 2 . Literature Review

Introduction

Kolkata, regarded as the 'City of Joy', has been home to a variety of diasporas over the course of its history. One of the most prominent diasporas that thrived in its history was that of the Armenians. Locations such as Park Street, the Armenian Ghat, and the Armenian Street are some of the many examples of the everlasting mark that the community has left not just in the city but also on the country's history.

The literature on the Armenians in India includes extensive records of their history, roots, and arrival to India. In addition to which it covers the various sociological and economic factors that were responsible for the decline of the community's population in the era of Post-Independence in India. The establishment of institutions like the Armenian College and Philanthropic Academy (ACPA) and the Holy Church of Nazareth and their contribution to the formation of the Armenian Identity has also been discussed.

History

Trade Network

Trade was one of the central aspects of the Armenian Diaspora. In his journal article for the University of Calcutta, titled *Trading Networks in a Traditional Diaspora-- Armenians in India C. 1600--1800--* Sushil Chaudhary elucidates on a key observation of the Directors of East India Company about how Armenians "most certainly are the most ancient traders of the world." (Chaudhary, 2002, p.2).

The article extensively focuses upon the central features of trade among the Armenians, some of which being- A strong trade network, the crucial aspects of Armenian migration in close relation with trade, their fluency in various languages that facilitated trade throughout the region

and how Armenians identified with kinship through trade practices. To begin with, the article breaks down their extensive trade network by emphasising upon several trade ventures that extended from their homeland to various parts in Eurasia (Chaudhary, 2002). Their expansion was not limited to a few important port cities or trade marts in Europe and Asia but also extended to “remote” production centres in both continents (Chaudhary, 2002).

Further, the author accentuates upon the extensive trading practices of Armenians that enabled them to lay a firm foundation not just at home but, away from home, enabling them to engage in intercontinental and international trade. The article then expounds on how intercontinental trade along with international trade laid a firm foundation. Their trading infrastructure over a period of time was efficient, fluid and very effective. Through the evidence of a strong trade network provided in this piece of literature, the establishment of a trading infrastructure contributed to their success and they were referred to as the “trading diaspora” of the seventeenth and eighteenth century (Chaudhary, 2002).

The writer identifies historic events that contributed significantly to Armenian migration, one of which was Shah Abbas I of the Ottoman Empire strategically forcing the professional trading class to move to New Julfa in Isfahan after the invasion of Armenia. With the professional expertise of Armenians, Persia prospered economically (Chaudhary, 2001). The trade of silk and various other textiles enabled them to set up various markets and commercial hubs to expand their reach of trade (Chaudhary, 2001). The community succeeded in attaining their objectives until the Afghan invasion of Persia in 1722. According to the author, these events prompted several Armenian merchants to consider an alternative base for carrying out trading practices because of the instability in the region which eventually led to their migration (Chaudhary, 2002)

The author further explicates the pretext of migrating to a region which would give the Armenian merchants a strategic advantage to carry out trade. His reasoning was not just limited to political stability but also covered other parameters such as, the availability of raw materials

and the geographical location which would make trading least disruptive and conducive. India was one of the countries in Asia where Armenian trade was well established under the Mughal rule during the 16th century.

Chaudhary (2002) goes on to highlight in his article that although the Mughal rule almost disintegrated by the 18th Century, India was still a popular choice because of the availability of cheap raw material especially for silk and other textiles. The disintegration of the Mughal rule was accompanied by political chaos and economic ruin in the northern parts of India (Chaudhary, 2002).

While the economic downfall continued in various parts of Northern India, Chaudhary (2002) put forth a key point about how Bengal was an exception where trade and commerce flourished under the independent rule of *Nawabs*. Bengal was one of the regions with the most sought-after raw materials for silk, textile, and few other commodities “in the then world” (Chaudhary, 2002).

The further sections of the article focused on how the Armenian community began active trading in Bengal from the late sixteenth or early seventeenth century which is assumed to be well before the arrival of the Europeans or any other communities. Their presence in Bengal from such an early stage has given them a tag of “traditional diaspora” (Chaudhary, 2002). Furthering the point of trade infrastructure, the author highlights the points about the trade infrastructure developed by the Armenians strengthened in the case of Bengal due to their motive of profit maximisation. This led them to reach the remotest of locations and facilitate trade which was not the case with most other trading groups in Bengal. (Chaudhary, 2002).

The author observes their diverse areas of expertise and their *raison d'être* of trading in Bengal by emphasising upon their profit maximising motives coupled with their thorough knowledge of markets, production and consumption centres that made them thrive domestically. Further, the author addresses the fact of how their trade had very low transaction costs because of

their relationships with kinsmen or traders overseas who were in most cases members of their own community. Due to such factors, the Armenians could not just compete with traders in India or Asia but also compete with other European traders in Bengal (Chaudhary, 2002).

There is a considerable amount of mention in the article about Armenian-British relations strengthening due to their proficiency in trade. The Armenians' sound expertise in the areas of trade and commerce gave way to their partnership with the East India Company. The Directors of the East India Company, came to an agreement in 1688. The article cites that it was Khwaja Phanoos Khalantar in London who came to an agreement with the East India Company for a 30 per cent profit margin for the company's investment in Bengal (Chaudhary, 2008). The Directors of the company eulogised about Armenians trade sense as "thrifty", "close" and "prudent like" (Chaudhary, 2002, p.5).

Armenian tradesmen had a significant role to play in the socio-economic, cultural and political realms in Bengal. According to literature, one of the most prominent figures of the community in Bengal was Khwaja Wajid. He was instrumental in shaping the economy and polity of Bengal. The importance of kinship through trade was reiterated in the article by the fact that Armenians played an influential role in shaping Bengal in multiple manners. It is pivotal to note that the community was never disconnected from their base in New Julfa (Chaudhary, 2002). There are several instances which suggest how Armenians kept in close touch with New Julfa through their 'regular' traffic in Bengal for various purposes (Chaudhary, 2002).

The evidence for the same has been cited in one instance when "Coja Avtook Cunnon and Coja Surhad Cunnon" died and their brother "Coja Turcawn Cunnon" came to Bengal from New Julfa to "claim their effects" from one of the prominent traders, Khwaja Nazar Jacob in Bengal (Chaudary, 2002). These factors further accentuate the importance given to the ethnic and cultural ties built in the "entrepreneurial" networks established by the Armenians. The trade networks established by the Armenians in the remotest parts of Bengal for the textile and silk industries along with the utilisation of port Hughli to the Persian Gulf, Red Sea and various parts

of India for trade in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries are indicative of their strong presence in Bengal (Chaudhary, 2002).

Arrival to India and Contributions made in prominent Armenian Settlements:

Literature suggests that Armenians had arrived about seven centuries before Vasco Da Gama set foot on Indian soil on the 20th of May, 1498. An Armenian merchant by the name of *Thomas Cana* landed on the Malabar Coast of South India in 780 A.D. There was very little known about him but he was believed to be an adroit diplomat who built a great fortune (Zenian, 2001). According to a piece of literature published by the parish priest of Senhora da Expectora Church, built in suburban Little Mount of Madras in 1523, the Portuguese were informed about the burial of the Apostle Saint Thomas by the Armenians in 1517.

Evidence of further contributions were made two centuries later by a prominent trader Khojah Petrus Woskan, who constructed 10 steps to this hilltop place of worship. It is believed that Woskan also built a bridge across river Adyar in 1726. This bridge still stands and serves as a mode of commuting between Madras (Chennai) and the airport (Zenian, 2001). A stone marker on the western side of the Marmalong bridge connecting the northern and southern banks of the Adyar River has several Armenian and Persian inscriptions that are almost eroded now (Zenian, 2001).

Although Madras was familiar with Armenian traders as early as the eighth century, it was not until 1504 that a community started taking shape. The article highlights the contributions of Armenians in the field of journalism. Madras was the “birthplace” of Armenian Journalism and home to Father Haroutiun Shmmavonian who published “Azdarar”, the first Armenian periodical in 1794. It is also believed that between 1794 and 1863, 11 Armenian language journals were published in Madras, Calcutta, and Bombay. ‘The Patriot Armenian’, the official newspaper of the Araratian Society, formed in 1845 (Zenian, 2001).

Armenian traders had been active in India for centuries but, it was not until the reign of the Mughal Emperor Akbar, that the first “full-fledged” Armenian colony was established in the town of Agra, where the first Armenian Church was made in 1562 (Zenian, 2001).

As per the article, Akbar played an instrumental role as a facilitator for the community in various ways. He funded the construction of the Church, gave opportunities to Armenians by appointing Abdul Hai as his Chief Justice and an Armenian doctor Juliana to look after his family among other Armenians who he helped (Zenian, 2001). The article further states that Akbar arranged Juliana’s marriage with Prince Jean Philippe de Bourbon of France in 1560. The grandson of Abdul Hai, Mirza Zul-Qarnain was named by Akbar himself who grew up to become an Emir of the Royal Court during Jahangee’s rule. In one of Jahangee’s writings, he made several references to Qarnain and sang praises of his work in the court and also wrote that he was a noteworthy composer of Hindi songs (Zenian, 2001).

There is a considerable amount of literature published about the works of Mirza Qarnain. Michel Angelo Lualdi, a Jesuit wrote about the Christian faith being propagated in the province of Mogor ruled by the Governor, Mirza Qarnain in 1619. Angelo also acknowledged the church that was constructed by Qarnain as his contribution towards propagating the religion. He further mentioned the philanthropic deeds of Qarnain by mentioning how he took “200 of them at his place” to support them because of an increase in poverty at that time (Zenian, 2001).

Qarnain and his father Hagop made charitable donations to Jesuit charities and Armenian churches in Jerusalem. Both of them together developed several mercantile enterprises and held high administrative positions in the 17th century that left future generations with a lump sum of endowment which furthered their trade practices. With such practices that were continued for centuries, the Armenians managed to establish a vibrant community in India, particularly Agra (Zenian, 2001).

Agra's prominent Christian cemetery at the outskirts of the town has an ancient mausoleum which serves as a chapel and the old tombstones of several Armenians serves as a significant piece of evidence. The mausoleum was built by Khojah Martiros which is the most ancient Christian structure in northern India. More than 110 Armenians, including priests, were buried between 1611 and 1927 (Zenian, 2001). Literature suggests that the inscriptions on their graves, though in classical Armenian, recite stories of the community which considered Agra to be their home. Another important fact is that not a single woman was buried here between 1611 and 1777 and this served as a possible indication of Armenian women being present at home itself. However, literature does cite the burial of women at a later stage in 1777 which further indicated the possibility of Armenian families residing in Agra (Zenian, 2001).

There is very little written on the community's presence in Delhi. According to the sources cited in the article, the delegation exchange from Calcutta to Delhi which had Armenian members present indicated the presence of a community. One of the most prominent Armenians as per literature was Colonel Jacob Petrus who fought for India against British colonialists. As much as Colonel Jacob was remembered, the famous poet Sarmad, remains the most famous. He was a merchant who came to India during Jahangeer's rule and became a sufi who was beheaded in 1611 near the Jama Masjid. His contributions in the field of poetry and music are still very renowned and hold an important place in Sufi literature (Zenian, 2001).

Zenian (2001) also points out other prominent Armenian settlements in his article. Surat, a port of North Bombay also had an Armenian diaspora during the 16th and 17th centuries. One of the most important signs of Armenian presence in Surat was the grave of Marinas who was the wife of the priest Khwaja Waoskan (Zenian, 2001). The Armenians used Surat as their base for trading with Europe specifically for buying and selling jewellery. Along with this, weaving silk and cotton and transporting other goods through Armenian owned ships were other trading activities the community in Surat undertook (Zenian, 2001). The British takeover in various regions of India, especially the important port cities, made the Armenian communities work closely with the colonial powers in India. Due to this, Surat lost its "luster" and prominent

traders such as Kojah Minas and his trading company were asked to settle in other parts of the country especially in Bombay. The example the author cites is that of Doctor Joseph Marcus, a physician who rose to the rank of Deputy Surgeon General of the Bombay region (Zenian, 2001).

Eminent merchant Khojah Israel Sarhad, played an instrumental role in helping the British establish themselves in Calcutta. He was held in high regard at the Court of Delhi and had been sent as an “emissary” to the Emperor Azem-Ush-Shan in 1698. Other prominent Armenians included J.C. Galstaun, Sir Catchik Paul Chater. Galstaun left his legacy by building his residence, museum and Galstaun Park. Chater made his living in Hong Kong where he worked as a broker and financier (Zenian, 2001).

Presence in Kolkata

Calcutta’s geographic, strategic and commercial position along with various historical, economic and political reasons has attracted a kaleidoscopic influx of people from numerous corners of the country, neighbouring states and far off countries to settle in Kolkata. As Calcutta emerged as the capital of British India and became a centre for trade of entire South-East Asia and China, a deluge of international immigrants like the Jews, Chinese, Dutch and Armenians contributed to Calcutta’s cosmopolitan character (Banerjee et al., 2009).

Kolkata has a rich history, and a large contributor to this history is the British presence in the city. At the same time, there have been a number of other diasporas and communities that have added to Kolkata’s reputation of being the ‘City of Joy’. Although the architecture in Kolkata continues to give the city an old city feels, there isn’t much of a British population found there. But, the presence of other communities that have contributed to the city’s identity is still felt. And one of these communities happens to be the Armenian community. Literature published in the past decade widely covers how Kolkata continues to house Armenians and also provides details on how the community has moved from being extremely influential during the British era to one that only has a handful of families left.

Newspaper articles written by local journalists form a crucial part of the resources available in the recent past. They widely speak about the existence of the Armenian College and the Church and how they function in today's day. A few of them also talk about tangible aspects of the community's culture and identity in the form of the food, architecture, celebrations and traditions. A very important aspect of the literature is the current presence of Armenians and the numbers that reside in Kolkata at the moment. Different articles provide varied estimations of the population, ranging from 5-10 families to an estimation of 40 families.

There has been a mention of the population seeing a decline in numbers since the post-independence era. (Chakraborty, 2016) But, none of the sources can be considered as credible sources as they are mostly online blogs and opinion pieces. One thing that is known, is that most of the current presence in Armenia is that of the students studying at the Armenian College and Philanthropic Academy. In addition to this, the mention of the Sunday mass in the literature available could be used as a possible gauge of the number of people of Armenian origin that are currently residing in Kolkata. A major part of the current Armenian presence in Kolkata is linked to the presence of Armenian Institutions currently functioning in the city-ACPA and the Armenian Churches in Kolkata being the most prominent ones at the moment.

Armenian Institutions

The Armenian College and Philanthropic Academy and the Armenian Church

The Armenian culture is defined mainly by two aspects - religion and education. The Armenian College and Philanthropic Academy in Kolkata, which are funded and run by the Armenian Church, tries to instil these core values in each student that studies and lives here. It is their attempt at having a little Armenia, a home away from home.

Bagchi (2018) emphasizes the importance of the functioning of such an institution in a diverse country like India. Students in the ACPA, for the past few decades, have been provided

education and shelter at no cost. Almost all of these students are from countries such as Armenia, Iran, Iraq, and Syria. The article mainly speaks about one such student, Razmik Hakobyan, and provides an account of how the ACPA provides a safe haven for students hailing from conflict areas. All these students have one thing in common; they are all Armenian. The ACPA is a 200-year-old institution that provides education and falls under the ICSE syllabus. It also provides this free of cost and provides scholarships to all that study here.

The college follows the Armenian calendar and celebrates the festivals and follows the tradition as they would in Armenia. It is their attempt at preserving their culture and values wherever the people of Armenia go. Their language is playing the most crucial part of this process. The ACPA prides itself on teaching Armenian to each one of its students and teaches it as a part of their curriculum (Bagchi, 2018). Gustafsson (2018), on behalf of The National, like Bagchi, provides more of a student's accounts on how this small part of Kolkata gives them a sense of belonging and purpose. At the same time, the community is very guarded and considers the security of the students it houses of topmost priority. The students don't get much exposure to the city of Kolkata, barring their Sunday visits to the Holy Church of Nazareth for their Sunday Mass (Gustaffson, 2018).

Parallely, the Armenian churches in Kolkata are another pillar holding the Armenian Community together. Armenia is the first country to identify Christianity as its state religion, and so, religion forms another major part of their identity. Kolkata houses three Armenian Churches. The Holy Church of Nazareth is considered the mother church of the community in Kolkata. It was established in 1707 and is one of the first few churches to be constructed in the city of Kolkata. The Church is in charge of the management of the college and also hosts the students and the local Armenian community every Sunday for a Sunday Mass held in Armenian (Caplan, 2007).

Most students who have arrived at the ACPA, attribute this move to the initiation by advertisements and awareness spread in their home countries by the local Armenian churches.

The functioning of the Church and its funding are results of a large amount of wealth the prominent personalities of the Armenian Community in Kolkata have donated to the Church. A few of these personalities are buried within the boundaries of the Church. Their epitaphs, one of the standout features of the Church, are a way of conveying gratitude for everything they have done. This enormous amount of funding is what enables the Church to provide scholarships and provide a top-class education to Armenian children in Kolkata and will continue to do so for the years to come. What it once again highlights, is the flair Armenians had for trade and commerce (Shah, 2018).

The prevalent literature talks about the educational institutions in Kolkata and how the institution provides education and state of the art facilities to students that are Armenian. And this is something the ACPA takes pride in. Especially for a country such as Armenia, with one of the world's largest diasporas, preserving the sense of identity and nationality becomes of prime importance. Therefore, a lot of emphasis on the current literature on the Armenians in Kolkata revolves around how these institutions continue to follow the traditions and culture of their home countries, in spite of being in a country that is foreign to them. An article in the Telegraph by Rangan Datta (2013), gives special attention to one of the events held at the Holy Church of Nazareth. Armenians celebrate Christmas on the 6th of January and also hold celebrations for Easter and Good Friday, and they celebrate these festivals in true Armenian style. This is also supported by the architecture their predecessors left for them. The article goes on to provide a description of the rites and rituals that the Indian-Armenians and Armenian migrants studying at the ACPA undertake at the Church. In the process, it also is a demonstration of the position that religion holds to their culture and also their individual lives (Datta, 2013).

Architecture



Figure 2 : The Oberoi Grand Hotel constructed by Arathoon Stephen

The Armenians' flair for trade and commerce provided them with the availability of an abundance of funds. A large part of these funds was given back to the community in the form of donations to the institutions. Another mode of the utilisation of these funds was the construction of various mansions and buildings in the city. A few of them are quite popular among the locals. Almost every article on the Armenians in Kolkata either speaks of the prominent personalities of the Armenian community that are responsible for the construction of these mansions or mentions the building themselves. Multiple articles speak of how the affluence of the Armenian community is reflected in their architecture.

An article published by the Calcutta Architectural Legacies, written by Avik Chanda is based on an interview of a historian of Armenian descent, Anthony Khatchaturian.

Khatchaturian, in the interview, provides a detailed description of the Armenian landmarks in Kolkata. Park Street, a street that houses the Queen's Mansion, the Park Mansion and Stephen Court are all built by Armenians and are now a part of the legacy they have left behind (Chanda, 2016). Several other such newspaper articles and online blogs provide accounts of the various depictions of Armenian heritage through their architecture. Ajantrik (2015) in his website article, elaborates on the Armenians presence in a different area of the city. Barabazaar, an integral part of the old city is home to the Armenian Street and the Holy Church of Nazareth. The article supports the claim that the Armenian's did leave a mark on the city. The Armenian Street that used to be a centre for trade continues to do so even today. The Holy Church of Nazareth is also located on the same street. It hosts Armenians every Sunday for their Sunday masses and for other festivals in their calendar as well.

Sports

Sports played a significant role in the lives of the Armenians in India. The Armenian community was strongly associated with their contribution to Rugby in India.

There is no clear mention of the origin of Rugby or the reason for its adoption by the Armenian Community in India. What started among the Indian-Armenians way back in time, has carried on in the legacy of the Armenians in Kolkata by the Armenian College and Philanthropic Academy for a couple of centuries.

In their book, Banerjee, Gupta, and Mukherjee (2009) highlight the importance of Rugby to the Armenians in India. They write that the social life of the 'Calcutta Armenians' revolved around 'their churches, their school and colleges, and rugby.' Ashram Sookias, President of the Old Armenians Club says that rugby, for the Armenians of Calcutta, was not a game but a way of life. The legacy of rugby has been nurtured passionately for more than a century by the Armenians without letting it be forgotten in its history.

However, ‘the fortunes of Armenian rugby followed the fate of the Armenian Community and Armenian College in Kolkata’, that is, the dynamics of the team and its victories witnessed a constant change. This happened until rugby resurfaced after a short gap. The credit for this went to Ashram Sookias and two ex-students of the College, Emil Vartazarian, and Henrik Terchounian. Emil and Henrik were prominent contributors to the sports; while Emil was the former captain of the Ol Armenians, Henrik was among the last few great players to have emerged from the Armenian Community (Banerjee et al., 2009).

Armenian Identity

The profound historical identity of Kolkata is not just limited to its native Indian population. It is the culmination of the national identities of the many communities that thrived in its history - including that of the Armenians.

In the era of active foreign presence, the Armenian Community was one such community that was able to create a distinct identity for itself in the city. There is no doubt that architecture was central to the formation of the Armenian Identity in Kolkata but language, religion, and their connection with history played a key role in defining it.

In his article, Ajantrik (2015) writes about the social structure of the Armenians in India. He explains the identity markers of the Armenian Community, which are, their names, accent, and race. Often the Armenians were mistaken for Anglo-Indians because of these traits.

The article concludes with how their social structure changed and diversified into jobs such as lawyers, doctors, architects, etc. In line with this change, they started the Armenian College in order to educate their children about their forefathers and language (Ajantrik, 2015).

Culture: Traditions, Beliefs, Language, and Food

The Armenians in Kolkata added their own shades of colours to the kaleidoscope of cultures - beliefs, traditions, and food, that the city of Kolkata was.

The Armenians in Kolkata follow one of the oldest forms of Christianity. Most of the Armenian traditions in India revolve around their religion which can be seen reflected in the celebration of Christmas and Good Friday by them in Kolkata. In 'Easter with Armenians', Rangan Datta describes his experience at the Good Friday Service at St. Gregory the Illuminator Armenian Chapel in Kolkata. The celebration is marked with prayers and songs sung in Armenian along with rituals surrounding the coffin. The coffin -decorated with flowers symbolizes the burial of Christ; the flowers are considered to be good luck by the Armenians (Datta, 2013).

Their most celebrated festival, as they like to call the 'Armenian Christmas', distinguishes them from the other communities around the world. While the rest of the world celebrates Christmas on 25 January, the Armenians celebrate Christmas on January 6 in line with what they believe to be the birth of Christ. The festival revolves around the themes of incarnation and revelation of Jesus and so follow the Armenian greetings (Saha, 2018).

Saha (2018), in her article, writes that food holds the Armenian Diaspora together in modern day Kolkata by keeping alive memories and traditions of their homeland. In her interview with Metaksya Adiyani, an alumna of the Armenian College and Philanthropic Academy, Saha finds that Metaksya attributes her Armenian identity to being loyal to her culture, language, and history. She claims that food helps them preserve their traditions even on foreign soil (Saha, 2018).

Gaps in Literature

Prevalent literature provides an insight into how the Armenians found their way to India and the trade routes they came through. It also talks about the prominent figures that played a role in making the Armenian community what it is and enhancing its reputation in the city of Kolkata. Events in Armenian history, such as the Armenian Genocide contribute largely to their identity. The literature also extensively talks about the historical aspect of how the Armenians found their place in India and the conditions that aided this move. This history and its account are covered only until India's pre-independence era. There exists a gap in the coverage of the Armenian's history in India and reasons for their decline in numbers after British left India. The Armenian's trade practices, their fluency in various languages and the major events in their past are the main focus of these articles. Most of the literature that speaks about the history of the Armenians in India are journal articles. Religion and education and the foundation of the ACPA and the churches in Kolkata are also a part of these articles.

Sources that are more recent are predominantly newspaper articles and online blogs that provide insights into the current scenario of the community's current presence in Kolkata. These sources happen to be very brief in nature and fail to provide a detailed study on the dynamics of the community and explain the sociological factors that contribute to the presence of the community through the ages. What we see are the articles providing first person accounts by journalists that report how things are and not how they got there. The reasons for the shrinkage in the Indian Armenian population and the discrepancy in their numbers at the moment are more questions that the literature does not account for. How the individuals currently residing in Kolkata identify on a personal level and articles with a more personal touch is what the current literature lacks.

Building on the aspect of identity, a more refined distinction between the second or third generation Indian Armenians and migrant Armenians is something that has not been touched upon by any of the sources out there. As reported by the article by the Hindu written by Suvojit

Bagchi about the 200-year-old institution, the ACPA. Almost all of the students enrolled here are Armenians from other countries, but how many Indians are allowed to study at the institution? And what are the criteria that the College looks at before admitting a student? The economic aspect of the community and how it manages to continue funding the day to day functioning of the institutions while providing cost free education to migrant students is yet another question that seeks to be answered (Bagchi, 2018).

Marriage and how the community, which seems to be close-knit looks at marriage of an Armenian with someone from outside their community in another country is something that has not been mentioned so far. To summarise, studies carried out on the community do a good job in establishing the fact that the Armenians played a pivotal role in the formation of Kolkata's identity as a city. But these studies have been published a long time ago and may not hold true today. Recent studies do not provide an extensive enquiry into the functioning of the community and whether it continues to affect the city of Kolkata by its presence or whether this effect has diminished along with their population.

CHAPTER 3. Armenian and proud

Introduction

The community of Armenians that has been flourishing in Kolkata since the 15th and 16th centuries is dwindling in the present times. However, migration of Armenians from Armenia and its neighboring countries like Iran, Iraq, Burma, and Russia to Kolkata has preserved the Armenian culture that they bring with them. Those Armenians who have been migrating to Kolkata in the past few decades form the migrant Armenian community in Kolkata. They do not have Indian citizenship and most of them emigrate to other countries for higher studies after ten to twelve years. This community majorly comprises students who leave their native countries and families in order to pursue better education and learn English in India. The migrant community includes students currently studying in the Armenian College and Philanthropic Academy (ACPA), alumni of the ACPA who are pursuing their bachelors from other colleges in Kolkata, like the La Martiniere, NHSM College of Management and Technology, and St. Xavier's, alumni of the ACPA who have settled in Kolkata, and the teachers teaching at the ACPA.

On the other hand, the Armenians in Kolkata also comprise the Indian-Armenians, the descendants of those that migrated to India in the early 1900s. These Armenians are the ones who have grown up in Kolkata and are naturalised citizens of India. However, in this chapter, we shall be focusing mainly on the migrant Armenians and the socio-cultural and religious aspects of their lives.

Arrival to Kolkata

In 2007, education in Iran was severely affected because of war-like conditions. The students who migrated to India from Iran to study at ACPA, came here in the hope of a safe and decent lifestyle. The students who migrate from countries like Armenia, Iraq, and Russia, come to India mainly to learn English because they believe that it is a global language and can

guarantee a job. They also come here for better education, especially since countries like Iran do not give importance to fluency in English. They are also inclined towards migrating to India because their entire education is taken care of by scholarships that The Holy Church of Nazareth provides. Moreover, they choose India because of their ancestral familiarity with the country—their forefathers have a history in India and a part of their community lives here. Their culture, as Mr. Armen (the co-ordinator of the ACPA) shared with us, is close to that of India's. For example, values like respect for parents and practices like arranged marriages present in India are similar to those in Armenia.

Most interestingly, the influence of Bollywood cinema and the popularity of the stars amongst Armenians have also motivated them to migrate to India. However, for some students, it was also about becoming independent and living on their own. The majority of them report their population between 100-120 Armenians. Most of the population of the migrant Armenians is concentrated in the ACPA.

The Armenian Institutions

The Armenian College and Philanthropic Academy (ACPA) is a residential school located at 56B Mirza Ghalib Street (previously known as 39, Free School Street), Kolkata. Earlier, when the ACPA was founded on April 2, 1821, at 32B, Old China Bazar Street, Kolkata, it was located in the vicinity of The Holy Church of Nazareth. The vibrations of the Armenian culture are still palpable in the two lungs of the Armenians in Kolkata - The Church of Nazareth and the college (ACPA). The history of both these institutions can be traced back to the time when Armenians were flourishing in India - during the British Raj. Forming a significant part of the legacy that the Armenians left behind, the ACPA, a 200 years old institution, is the second oldest educational institution in Kolkata. Armenians are Apostolic Christians, part of the Oriental Orthodoxy (Amprapali, 2018). Their church is called the Apostolic Orthodox Church. The presence of the Holy Church of Nazareth also dates back to the 17th century when it was built in 1688, which caught on fire in 1707 and was reduced to ashes. However, the church was rebuilt in the 18th

century, in 1734, on an old burial ground of the Armenian Community. Hence, the Church, in fact, has an older history than the ACPA and is the oldest Armenian Apostolic Church in Kolkata. This Church is the governing body of the ACPA and is considered to be the mother church. All the expenses of the ACPA are taken care of by The Holy Church of Nazareth. A primal relationship between the church and the ACPA is that the students have to get baptized in order to study in ACPA.

The Armenian College and Philanthropic Academy (ACPA)



Figure 3 : Inside the Armenian College and Philanthropic Academy

The current count of the total students studying in ACPA is 80 which includes around 5 students from the community of the Indian Armenians. Currently, ACPA is affiliated to the newly formed Council for Indian School Certificate Examination (CISCE). This step was taken bearing in mind the welfare of students who, after completing their schooling in India, generally plan to pursue their higher studies in India itself, and an ICSE certificate would aid them in gaining

admissions in Indian educational institutions. ACPA's vision, as the school coordinator - Mr. Armen Makarian - puts it, is to "encourage the students to do something bigger, to think big." They are pushed to become influential - as Mr. Armen stated, "if you are leaving home and sacrificing so much, then you need to become big." The students are encouraged to pursue engineering because the management of ACPA believes that it will help them become successful. Besides this, ACPA is also the only school that offers them education and instils Armenian culture alongside.

Languages like English, Armenian, Russian, Farsi, and Hindi are taught at ACPA. English is learnt as the first language with Armenian as the second. The migrant Armenians learn English very late because they usually migrate to India at the age of 8 years and they mostly come without knowing the language. Hence, they have to be taught from scratch. This is why ACPA's education system is apart from the other schools in Kolkata. As the students come to India either with no background in English or with a scant amount, they receive intense and rigorous coaching for a couple of years to integrate them smoothly into the educational system and curriculum, which is carried out in English. However, the school is no different from other schools as the students converse in their mother tongue in the dormitories. "It's just the possible duration of time for which they are exposed to English is slightly different in that case and in this case", the school principal, Mr. Soumtira Malik states.

The ACPA, as most of the students suggest, is their home away from home. It is their little Armenia in Kolkata. It has kept them rooted to their culture and ensured that they grow up close to Armenian culture. Mr. Soumitra shared with us that their central concept is to ensure that their Armenian identity is not lost while having a curriculum that is typically designed by the Indian Council of Education. They have maintained this by continuously exposing the students to cultural and linguistic elements of Armenia so that they always retain their sense of belongingness with Armenia while residing in a foreign country. The students are taught subjects like Armenian history, music with special focus on traditional Armenian songs and hymns, Church history and so on. These subjects are specifically taught by the Armenian teachers who

too have migrated to India from Armenia, and live in the ACPA itself. There are several traditional and cultural events hosted every year by ACPA, where the students perform their traditional dance or drama and participate in various other showcase activities.

Staying in touch with their traditions is not very difficult for them because of ACPA. As long as they are in ACPA, they can keep up with every tradition of Armenia. ACPA is like a small Armenia for the students. They rejoice every festival and follow every tradition just like the Armenians in Armenia do. ACPA has tried to recreate Armenia for the students in every way possible, hence creating a perception of Armenia away from Armenia for them. They learn and know more about the Armenian tradition and Armenia than the other Armenians residing in Kolkata. As Mr. Armen says, “Our children know more about the Armenian culture than actual Armenians living in the home country.”

Hence, Armenian culture is still alive in their souls because they celebrate each and every Armenian festival at ACPA. One of the most riveting facts about their culture and traditions is that they celebrate Christmas on the 6th of January every year. According to Mr. Rangan Datta, a journalist, some Roman pagans used to celebrate the festival of their Sun God on the 25th of December, in order to supplant this, the Catholic church shifted Christmas to 25th December, so that festivals of the Roman pagans would be forgotten. However, since Armenians follow Orthodox Christianity, they continued to celebrate Christmas on the 6th of January. Their Christmas celebrations include cooking rice with dry fruits, serving fish and wine, and before the meal, a blessing of salt and bread is distributed to everybody. These practices are very similar to those in Armenia - Traditionally in Armenia, fish (usually trout) is served with lemons and greens, cooked with special care for the holy feast (Saha, 2018). Rice pilaf with sweet raisins, a variety of green vegetables, such as spinach, steamed or fried, to create a healthy balance of flavors, are also spread on the Christmas tables of the Armenians (Saha, 2018). Hence, the essence of traditional Armenian Christmas is replicated at ACPA every year for the students. Their Christmas celebrations take place in the Armenian Sports Club, which is now only used as a celebration ground, mainly for Christmas.

Celebrations of several other Armenian festivals echo inside ACPA every year. *Vardavar*, a festival similar to the Indian festival of Holi, but played only with water is celebrated on the 18th of June every year. On this day, Armenians splash water at each other. The festival is significant because of two reasons - the biblical significance is connected with Noah's ark, varying across different regions. According to Vladimir's (an alumnus of ACPA), in his region, it is believed that after Noah's ark landed on Mt. Ararat, situated in ancient Armenia, Noah asked his children to splash water at each other in the memory of the floods. Other than this, as water has cleansing properties (also used for cleaning hands), splashing it on each other can cleanse the soul.

Trndez is an ancient festival that has been celebrated since the time before Christianity to celebrate the God of war. However, in order to retain elements from the earlier religious order which were important to the Armenians, this festival was merged with Christianity and renamed *Tiarnundaraj*. During this festival, people jump over a bonfire three times while making wishes. Apart from this, they celebrate several programs like the Independence Day of Armenia on the 21st of September. A parade similar to that organized on the Indian Independence Day is organized as an ode to one of their great heroes- the Army. They also pay homage to the Armenian Genocide by celebrating the Armenian Genocide Remembrance Day on the 24th of April every year.

Apart from following Armenian festivals and organizing cultural programs, student's proximity with their home country is maintained by serving them Armenian food at the ACPA. The food served at ACPA is cooked with fewer spices as Armenians do not have a spice tolerance like that of the Indians. So, even an Indian dish like Biryani is Armenianized by adding fewer spices in it. Interestingly, Indians eat biryani with their hands, but Armenians use bread with biryani. Their Biryani is a mixture of Armenian, Indian, and Iraqi. ACPA has recruited some Armenian chefs from Armenia, who cook the Armenian specialties.

The students continue to savor the taste of Armenia in the Dolma, Khorovats, and Khash, which are their traditional dishes, served in the dining hall of ACPA. Dolma has traditionally stuffed vegetables like tomatoes, capsicums, and even potatoes, but after the unavailability of these vegetables, they were replaced with pointed gourds stuffed with fish or chicken, steamed and wrapped in grape leaves. There are several versions of Dolma and the essence of Dolma's taste has also taken over the Bengali cuisine now. There are other dishes such as Khorovats, which is like Barbeque and Khash (boiled cow limbs), which is like Nehari, but with lesser spice. Khash is relished, since it also gives a lot of energy for playing sports especially. Thus, ACPA has been successfully preserving the Armenian culture for years now through food.

ACPA has become home for the migrant Armenians since they are only allowed to visit their families once in 2-3 years, which is funded by the college. Most of them continue living at ACPA because they develop strong bonds with each other, and hence choose to stay back with them until they leave India for higher studies. The migrant Armenians become family to each other as we observed a sense of solidarity and brotherhood in them.

Armenian Churches in Kolkata



Figure 4 : Inside the Holy Church of Nazareth

The Church is the representation of the Armenian religion in Kolkata. When it comes to the church's architecture, it is visibly different from that of the Armenian church- the Etchmiadzin Church in Armenia. The Armenian architecture, as they put it, is "unique, but not so in India." Perhaps due to the British influence in India (eg. presence of a lot of pillars), the architecture lost its Armenian touch. In Armenia, the church is constructed with brown colored "Tuff", an Armenian stone which gives away a very natural and rustic appearance. Moreover, the Etchmiadzin Church is very old (303 AD) and has been left untouched since then. Astoundingly it has continued to stand strong for centuries now.

On the contrary, the churches in India have less intricacy, coats of paints, and a more modernized architecture. From what Mr. Armen told us, some of the Armenians also believe that the structures are more alike to the Iranian structures because the churches in India were built by the Iranian Armenians who migrated to India mainly from Isfahan.

While ACPA plays an important role, it is a balanced amalgamation of both ACPA and the Church that has furthered and preserved the Armenian culture in Kolkata for years now. The church and ACPA operate in harmony. There are three Armenian churches in Kolkata, The Holy Church of Nazareth, The St. Gregory, the Illuminator Church, and The Holy Trinity Chapel. In fact, the students visit all the three Armenian Churches every Sunday on rotation- Gevorg reveals that “Every week we go to the church and practice other traditions like any Armenians would.” As trustees of the church, ACPA keeps the church active by running the Sunday service and mass.



Figure 5 : The Holy Trinity Chapel

Nonetheless, the Armenian culture in terms of their practices remains the same in the churches of Kolkata. For example, the communion plate is placed in the west, as it is supposed to be. On Christmas, 6th January, they recreate the birth of Christ in the Holy Church of Nazareth and on Good Friday, the death of Christ in St. Gregory, the Illuminator. Rituals of Good Friday take place in the lower circular cemetery which is actually a mortuary. An empty coffin is

decorated with flowers and the red rituals performed during death are carried out. The coffin is then taken around the church and brought back.

“The Blessing of the Grapes” is a ritual that proceeds in the month of August every year since grapes and wines are seen as salient indicators of the Armenian culture. During the harvesting of grapes, they are first worshipped before being consumed. Two weeks after the Armenian Christmas, the migrant Armenians make a pilgrimage visit to the Armenian Churches in Chinsurah and Murshidabad for service. In fact, the church in Chinsurah, the St. John’s Baptist opens only for this auspicious day.



Figure 6 : The Museum of the Holy Church of Nazareth

Armenian history is treasured in a museum inside the Holy Church of Nazareth. Artifacts such as the ancient chalices, the holy golden cloth, the Armenian Bible along with its stand, the church candle stand, ancient books, and the Armenian scriptures have been preserved and kept for display here. Children from ACPA are taken on chaperoned visits to this museum after the weekly Sunday service at the church in order to acquaint them with their history. Moreover, the church serves as an important landmark; it has been mentioned in poems and other literature. Professor Arindrajit Saha and the Principal of ACPA, Mr. Soumitra Malik, were both acquainted

with the Armenians through literature. Prof. Arindrajit Saha shared that, “We used to read a book called “Sahaj paath” which is prima in Bengali, written by Rabindranath. And in second part, I think, there was a passage which said “Armaani Geerja”. This word “Armaani Geerja” means the Armenian church, and at one point of time near the China bazaar, we still have the Armenian church there and they have a bell free and people used to set their clock, by the chime of the church clock and so the “Armaani Geerja” and the Armenian Church kind of connected.”

The church has played a vital role in holding the students close to their religion. The Armenians were the first community to adopt Christianity as their state religion. The migrant Armenians take pride in this, as Razmik proudly stated, “we are the first Christian nation, so you cannot compare our faith.” Most importantly, the church, as well as the ACPA, have instilled this pride and respect towards their religion. They strongly identify themselves with their religion. In fact, according to what Razmik emphasized upon, it is a compulsion for Armenians around the world to get baptized in order to be recognised as an Armenian- “It is an Armenian school, you need to be an Armenian.” and being Armenian in their opinion is defined by their baptism. Davit (alumnus of the ACPA) also stated that “most of our traditions are related to religion” and hence, religion becomes a part of them. In accordance with Razmik’s notions of the church being the mediator of religion, it forms the foundation for their identity.

Marriage

Keeping their religion close-knitted, the Armenians prefer marrying within the community as a way of preserving their culture. However, with the dwindling population of the Indian Armenian community, and considering the small community size, they have begun to accept marriage outside their community. As Armen shared that the community size matters for marriage, a small community leads to more mixed marriages. Hence, the Indian Armenians are permitted to marry local Indians at the church. Serjik, an alumnus of ACPA, settled in Kolkata shared that an Armenian married to an Indian will have as much of an effect on the Indian that the Indian will have on the Armenian. While one might ask their spouse to learn Armenian, the

other might expect them to learn Hindi. This way marriage creates an exchange of culture between Armenians and their spouses from outside the community. However, this could lead to a gradual change in the Armenian way of life. And this implies to those migrant Armenians who stay back in India even after completing their education.

Language

Armenian may appear similar to Iranian, Persian, and Turkish, but is indeed a unique and difficult language to understand. Language, as Armen said, is notably the main factor for determining one's identity because "the language you think in, the person you become - speak like an Armenian, think like an Armenian." The church takes special care to safeguard the language since the importance of language was first realized by church officials, during the creation of the Armenian Bible. Language plays an essential part in reviving and keeping the culture alive. ACPA acts as the medium for the same - Armenian is taught as the second language.

The migrant Armenians know Armenian very fluently and it binds them to their culture. They also strongly ascribe their identity of being an Armenian in relation to their language. As Mr. Armen opines that "when you don't speak the language it becomes difficult", they believe that knowing Armenian connects them to their culture as well the identity of being an Armenian.

Their desire to carry forward their language has lingered since the birth of ACPA. One of the reasons why ACPA was founded, ties back to teaching the children their language. Even for the students who are local Armenians, language is one of the ways for reconnecting with Armenian culture. Vladimir, an alumnus of ACPA spoke about how a lot of local Armenians have lost touch with their language and have therefore lost their culture.

Culture and identity

The migrant Armenians strongly identify themselves as Armenians because they associate a sense of belongingness with Armenia. This need to retain a sense of belongingness in one's home country becomes reemphasized in a foreign country. They earnestly feel the need to give

back to Armenia, and not their community in India. As Serjik shared, “for me, for local Armenians, if they want to keep the Armenian identity, they should keep their connection with motherland Armenia.” This not only explains why ACPA makes its students imbibe the Armenian culture but also highlights the fact that the migrant Armenians derive their identities from their roots in Armenia. It is as if their hearts are marooned in Armenia, while they are residing in Kolkata. Their identities will always resonate with Armenia, and as observed, they are extremely proud Armenians. But there is also another side to their perception of their identities. Some of them who have spent several years in India, the likes of Serjik share that they feel equally Indian as they are Armenian - “Personally I feel as equal as an Indian as I am Armenian.”

Thus, their identity is very important to them as it builds a sense of community. While religion principally shapes their identity, culture has also largely impacted them in maintaining their Armenian identity in the city of Kolkata. For them, it is about how they have grown up- appearance and place of birth do not matter, whereas, how they practice the culture and how they live is what makes them who they are. Serjik mentioned, “we have been brought up as Armenians at ACPA” and this has majorly contributed in their recognition of themselves as Armenians. Moreover, they seem to draw a direct relationship between their culture and their identity- as Razmik Hakobian said “They exist everywhere but it’s all about the culture. The events and all are the reason we exist and have the identity. These are the things that gather us other than studying and sports. Embolden our foundation. Like going to church every Sunday.”

As aforementioned, ACPA has played a pivotal role in shaping their connection with Armenia. They take enormous pride in being called as Armenians in a foreign land. Mr. Armen Makarian expresses that “Armenians talk about their country as if they have a huge empire.” They feel responsible for preserving their culture and reckon that “heritage is the connection between past and present.”

The Armenian Genocide



Figure 7 : Memorial of the Armenian Genocide

When we look at the migrant Armenians, we cannot see them without understanding their past. The memories of their genocide are still fresh in their minds. The trauma of their persecution by their neighbors - Turks, Persians, and Russians, holds more relevance to them because they are a part of the Armenian community that is still living in Armenia. For the local Indian-Armenians, the trauma is a distant story. For example, they have only heard the stories or witnessed it from the lived experiences of their forefathers. Thus, this sense of insecurity motivates the migrant community to maintain their culture more rigidly. They believe that in order to understand Armenians better, we need to know about their genocide.

As the genocide is of chief importance to their community, they long for their genocide to gain worldwide recognition, especially in India. And they believe that only then will their

Armenians be preserved. They do not want the memories of their genocide to be forgotten because it is a part of them, it is what they identify themselves with. It is what ignites the passion of preserving their culture within them. In fact, some of them specifically requested us to discuss their genocide in our report because of how significant it is to them and their history.

Rugby



Figure 8 : The Armenian Sports Club

Even though they are a migrant community in Kolkata, they have adopted certain practices that the Indian-Armenians left behind. This is evident when we look at rugby. The migrant Armenians have achieved victory in several tournaments and are famous for their game across Kolkata. The history of rugby with respect to the Armenians is as old as their history with India. They believe that “sports are in our genes”, and sports is a compulsory subject for them at the ACPA. Gevorg called rugby a tradition in itself, “it just has to be there. Just like studies are important, so are sports for us.” Similarly, Zaven (alumnus of the ACPA) said that “Rugby is like

a big part of us if you go anywhere or talk about Armenians, the first thing they say is how good Armenians are at Rugby and that they have a really good history with Rugby.” Therefore, their connection with rugby has also played a huge part in both their lives, as both are avid sportsmen.

Rugby was introduced at the ACPA for promoting unity and friendship. According to Mr. Armen, who played rugby for the Indian team, playing rugby was always about his Armenian pride. Rugby also provided the migrant Armenians with a medium to dialogue with the city. They participate in the inter-school events, where they meet students from other schools and the localities know them because of how well they play Rugby. The migrant Armenians have in fact evolved Rugby as a tradition and are responsible for the growth of the sport. It is because of their active participation in Rugby that the Armenians came to be recognized and associated with Rugby in Kolkata.

Life History - Razmik Hakobian

Razmik came to India from Baghdad in 2007. He arrived in India with 7 other boys after receiving a scholarship for studying at the ACPA. After graduating Grade 10 from ACPA, and completing his 12th from La Martiniere, he is currently completing his bachelor’s from St. Xavier’s. The Indian government has been very helpful in renewing and extending his and other student’s Visas. He has completed approximately 12 years in India now. He respects Indians because he finds them very “honest, good friends, humble, and down to earth”. He feels accepted in the Indian community and also highlights how the other students at ACPA feel the same.

Razmik believes that he is the role model for the other students at ACPA, as they look up to him. Speaking of his experience in adjusting at ACPA, he shares that he faced difficulties in the initial years. He constantly missed home because they were allowed to go back only once in 3 years. But now he misses India whenever he goes back to Iran. He decided to stay back in India because he feels that it is logical to continue studying in a system one becomes comfortable with. But he may go abroad after completing his Bachelor’s. Similarly, the other students also leave India for pursuing higher education in order to seek better job and educational

opportunities for themselves. Apart from that, he also connects with India in terms of food. He loves Indian food, his favorites being chicken butter masala and biryani.

Kolkata has been very friendly towards him, he says. He has not witnessed any discriminatory behavior towards him. When speaking about his life in India until now, Razmik says that he and his family are proud of where he is today. He has represented the Armenians by playing rugby against a lot of teams at the club level. He says, “Rugby is the game that Armenians have been known for. So, talk about rugby and everyone gets involved.” and “the only thing that rugby gave us was friendship, strength, and unity which is the most important thing. Unity has been the motive of introducing rugby within the Armenian school.”

Lastly, his experience in other cities was not similar to that in Kolkata- “They were not as humble and friendly.” There is also a class differentiation, which he does not see in Kolkata. And he concludes by saying, “It's not about Kolkata, it's the people. It's about the people, Kolkata is just a place. A place without people, there is no life.”

CHAPTER 4. Through the lens of the Indian-Armenians

Introduction

The Armenians of Kolkata, apart from the migrant Armenians, also include the Indian-Armenians. The term Indian-Armenians, for the purpose of our research, refers to naturalised citizens of India of Armenian origin. These people are the descendants of the exodus of Armenians who immigrated to India from Armenia and Iran due to various reasons like persecution by neighbouring countries and search for better economic prospects etc. Most of these Armenians arrived in India to escape persecution during the Armenian genocide (1914-1923), which was carried out in Turkey and adjoining regions by the Ottoman government. They chose to settle in Kolkata due to the city's existing connection with Armenians in the form of the Holy Church of Nazareth (the Armenian church) as well as the Armenian College and Philanthropic Academy (ACPA). These Armenians made Kolkata their home and forged a long-lasting connection with the city that is strong even in today's times. Their descendants i.e. the second and third generations of the immigrants who became naturalised citizens of India, still reside in Kolkata and form the Indian-Armenian community, which will be explored in this chapter.

Population

Since Indian-Armenians are naturalised citizens of India, there is no separate census that lists down the exact number of Indian-Armenians in Kolkata. There is no way of knowing the definite number of Indian-Armenians currently residing in Kolkata, which is why we had to rely on the estimates provided by various experts in the study of Armenians in India, such as journalists, professors, documentary makers, photographers as well as the Armenians we interviewed, to reach an approximate population figure. According to most interviewees, the number of Indian-Armenians in Kolkata is currently quite low. The strength of this community that once reached tens of thousands is about 50 to 60 people, i.e. not more than 10 families today.

There are many factors that have contributed to this definite, continuous decline in the population of Armenians in Kolkata. According to Arunava Patra, a documentary filmmaker on the Armenians, a lot of Indian-Armenians migrated to other countries due to the socio-political unrest caused by the rising Naxal movement in Bengal starting from the 1950s and lasting till the 1970s. Subsequently, from the mid 1980s to early 1990s, other economic reasons also contributed to the decline in population. Armenians in India were mainly interested in trading and business, which is what led to the formation of the Armenian community in India in the first place. However, the economy of India started suffering post-independence, and the businesses owned by the Armenians were severely affected due to the recession. During this period, a lot of Armenian traders left India for better economic prospects in countries like Australia, Canada, America, etc. An Indian-Armenian we interviewed, Mr. Saco Stephen, says “I am the only one from my generation who has stayed here in India, Kolkata all these years”. In fact, this trend of Armenians emigrating from Kolkata in search of better economic opportunities elsewhere has continued even today. Two of our interviewees, Zaven and Gevorg, both pursuing their Bachelor’s degree in Kolkata, are planning to leave India to study and settle down abroad due to perceived lack of economic as well as educational opportunities here.

According to Professor Navras Afreedi, an expert on the micro-minority communities in Kolkata, the desire to regain a communal life is also a cause for migration along with economic reasons. Professor Afreedi theorizes that it is very hard to maintain cultural practices for a community that is numerically weak. When members of such a community begin to leave in search of better opportunities, there is a desire in the remaining members to join the bandwagon and regain that lost sense of communal life, which, in addition to economic factors, leads to them slowly moving out. The Indian-Armenian community in Kolkata too, experienced a similar phenomenon, wherein, as more and more people started to emigrate, others who had initially not planned to leave, also followed. A current example of this would be the recent spate of migrations of the third and fourth generations of Indian-Armenians to countries like Australia, Canada and the United States.

A more obvious cause for the gradual population decline is the death of the oldest generations. Due to the population of the first and second generations of Indian-Armenians decreasing, the latest generations marrying into other Indian communities or moving out of Kolkata the population of the Indian-Armenian community in Kolkata continues to shrink to this day.

Social Visibility

There seems to be a divided opinion regarding the social visibility of the Armenians in the city. Officials of the Armenian College and Philanthropic Academy and the Holy Church of Nazareth, as well as journalists hold the view that the Armenians are well known in the city due to the presence of Armenian architecture and landmarks such as Stephen Court, Park Mansion, The Holy Church of Nazareth, The Oberoi Hotel, as well as famous areas named after the Armenians such as the Armenian Ferry Ghat and the Armenian Street. Famous hotels owned and managed by Armenians such as the Fairlawn hotel as well as racetracks managed by Armenians also contribute to them being one of the most well-known and respected communities in Kolkata. However, the ground reality is slightly different, as we discovered through our street interviews with taxi drivers, shopkeepers, pedestrians etc. on Park Street- an area that was largely built by Mr. J C Galstaun, an Armenian, and is symbolic of the Armenian contribution to the city due to the presence of Stephen Court, Park Mansion, Queen's Mansion, etc. Although most people are aware of these Armenian architectures and landmarks, they do not realise that there is still an Armenian presence in the city. A lot of the locals also seem to confuse Armenians with the British. The constantly decreasing population of the Armenians in Kolkata is a definite cause for their reducing social visibility along with the intermixing of Indian-Armenians with other cultures and communities in Kolkata.

Lifestyle

Indian-Armenians can be observed to have a very mixed culture, integrating certain aspects of Armenian Culture as well as certain aspects of Bengali/ Indian culture. Since the Indian-Armenians, in contrast to the migrant Armenians, have spent their entire lives in India, from their childhood to their adulthood, their lifestyle is much more Indianized than the lifestyle of the migrants. Apart from celebrating Christmas on the 6th of January, they are not inclined towards celebrating any of the other Armenian festivals. However, due to their interaction with the locals and friends from Kolkata, they do engage in certain Indian festivals. When it comes to their food culture, they can be observed to be aware of and consume certain well-known Armenian delicacies, such as Dolmas, but most of their food habits are Indian in nature, with dishes like *dal-chawal* being a staple. Earlier, there was the presence of certain Armenian restaurants and pastry shops in Kolkata, but since there are barely any Indian-Armenians left in the city, there does not seem to be any effort taken to preserve their food culture anymore.

The earlier generations of Indian-Armenians are well-versed in Armenian and English and have a basic understanding of Hindi, however, the later generations that did not study in the ACPA, cannot speak or understand Armenian at all, but are definitely fluent in Hindi and English. This tells us how the Indian-Armenians, with each generation that spends their lives in India, are growing closer to Indian languages over their native tongue, Armenian.

Even when one considers their approach towards other traces that their ancestors have left behind, such as important architectural landmarks throughout Kolkata, it can be said that though they seem to be proud of it, it is almost as if they have moved on from that aspect of their identities, as if their Armenian heritage is a distant memory which comes secondary to their, now Indianized and to an extent, liberal and non-conventional ways of life. Their non-conventional approach is also apparent in their relationship with religion, and so, the Church. Even though Armenians follow the Apostolic Orthodox church, very few Indian-Armenians are observed to visit Sunday mass regularly, and Christmas is the perhaps the only religious festival which brings both the migrants as well as the Indian-Armenians together. Even though Arunava Patra says, “this church is the only point which integrates them all”, it can still be said that it is quite a weak

thread which seems to connect them. Most Indian-Armenians, hence, are observed to show very little inclination towards preserving their cultural and religious ways. However, there are certain families in Kolkata, out of the 7-8 that are present at the moment, which definitely intend to keep their Armenian roots alive. They ensure this by enrolling their children into ACPA, an institution which recreates the Armenian culture and lifestyle within their walls while providing education. Since they teach their students about the Armenian history and their language, the Indian-Armenian children grow up in “a small Armenia”. Razmik, a migrant Armenian graduate from ACPA said, “they’re one of us now”, which indicates how these Indian-Armenian children, despite being Indian citizens, have formed a strong bond with their Armenian roots due to the ACPA. The majority of the Indian-Armenians though, apart from having lost touch with their national language, their food culture as well as festivals, can also be seen to be somewhat disconnected to their origin and the idea of Armenia as their homeland. When their views on their Armenian ancestry are seen in contrast with the views of the migrant Armenians, it is strikingly obvious how the former merely acknowledge it and have drifted apart from it due to the formation of a much more intense bond to India and their Indian-identity, a result of having lived here their entire lives.

The data that we have presented in this section is based on the sample that we managed to collect as well as the information gathered by experts who have conducted their own research on this community. However, based on our research, we have inferred that the Indian-Armenians do not seem to have one specific culture and that each Indian-Armenian has a unique culture, based on their lives and circumstances. Hence, the following data comprises certain trends that we managed to recognise while analysing each of their individual stories as well as information gathered from experts who have been working in this area. We have included each of their life histories as an important part of this chapter, since we realized that it is essential that we capture each one’s unique story so as to provide insight into how their circumstances have shaped their lives and so, their culture.

Life histories :

Anjali Jangiani

Anjali Jangiani is a journalist working for Sakal Times in Pune. Born to a mixed parentage of an Armenian mother and Sindhi father in Kolkata, Anjali grew up in her maternal grandparents' house due to her father's demise while she was still very young. Although Anjali grew up in an Armenian household, she never felt like there was any special Armenian influence on her life. This was mainly because her maternal grandparents and her mother would go to the Pentecostal Church near their home and not the Armenian Apostolic Church. There, she attended the church services that she describes as "mini-concerts, with electric guitars and drums" and was also part of the church choir. She claims that she thought of herself as all her other Anglo-Indian or Christian friends, and not as an Armenian. In fact, describing her limited experiences in the Armenian Church she says, "I was really small when I went to the Armenian Church for their service. And their service is really very serious and sombre. They have this procession at the start of the service, where all the people in their gowns, capes and pointed hats and everything. They will be coming in, like an enigma and the music would be really eerie. They would be swinging this pot kind of thing with smoke coming out. That was all alien to me. That was the culture that was completely opposite to what I grew up with and it made me very uncomfortable. So, I didn't feel like going to the Armenian Church."

Apart from not following the same religion, another reason for not identifying as Armenian was the fact that everybody was spread out in Kolkata, and the community was not very tight-knit. Her family had a few Armenian acquaintances, but they were never close to any of them. These acquaintances also did not follow any specific Armenian traditions or customs that would differentiate them from other Anglo-Indians. In fact, Anjali claims that "They were all Armenians when it came to food. You know, the Dolmas, the Kulkuls, sweets- all that was Armenian."

For Anjali, her Bengali identity and culture is very important. She says, "I was born and brought up in Calcutta, so I identify with Bengali culture rather than the Armenian culture. That

is what I have seen, I have grown up with that language, grown up in that culture. I imbibed that more than the Armenian culture.” In fact, from her personal experiences, she opines that this is true for most other Indian-Armenians as well. Apart from the students at ACPA, who have come to Kolkata only for education, most Armenians in Kolkata would identify as Calcuttans rather than Armenians, since Kolkata is where they have been born and brought up.

When asked about what she feels about the decreasing population of Armenians in Kolkata, she says, “If you ask me, I don’t see any need to revive the community. Because in Armenia, you already have an Armenian population- it is not decreasing there. People who have come to India, of course have imbibed Indian culture outside their community. I feel like that is very natural- it is bound to happen.” She also does not see the Indian-Armenian community lasting very long. She says, “The first generations of Armenians that came here, they are really old now. They are the community- and the generation after them, maybe. But my generation- the third generation- I won’t say that we don’t care, but we don’t really identify.” However, although Anjali does identify as Armenian, she is still connected to her roots. She recently got married and was adamant about ordering a traditional Armenian wedding cake from Kolkata’s oldest, authentic Armenian bakery called ‘Saldanha’s’. She is also curious to know more about her roots and has planned a trip with her cousins to Armenia in the near future.

Saco Stephen

Mr. Saco Stephen is an Indian-Armenian who has been born and brought up in Kolkata. He has had an illustrious career in media, journalism, creative writing as well as teaching and currently conducts various creative writing workshops in various schools in Kolkata. Mr. Stephen is a second generation Indian-Armenian whose parents took refuge in India to escape persecution in Armenia. His maternal grandmother, a survivor of the Armenian genocide, fled Armenia and settled in Jerusalem where she gave birth to his mother. His paternal grandmother too, had to flee Armenia, due to his grandfather being taken as prisoner by forces of the Ottoman Empire. His paternal grandmother heard of the ACPA and decided to come to India to find

refuge. Mr Stephen and his sisters were all born in Kolkata and studied in the ACPA among other Indian-Armenians.

However, despite his Armenian descent, Mr Stephen claims that he does not follow any traditions at all. Although he can speak Armenian, he does not consider it a very important part of his life and prefers to converse in English and is also comfortable in Hindi and has a basic understanding of Bengali. He thinks of himself as non-conventional, non-conformist, out of the box thinker who has never been fond of tradition or any conservative ideals about religion and customs. He also does not follow any one religion and has been part of various inter-faith groups, along with attending both Catholic Church services as well as Armenian Church masses. For Mr Stephen, religion is a relationship between the human and the divine and therefore has no place for any discrimination. As a result, he also does not ascribe much importance to his Armenian origin, since he does not try to preserve any of his Armenian heritage in his day to day life.

Having been born and raised in Kolkata has shaped Mr Stephen's life to a great extent, as he considers India, Kolkata, and nature to be his three mothers. He speaks fondly of the warmth and acceptance that he has found in Kolkata, as well as his special bond with South Kolkata- its people, its places and its food. Speaking about his love for India and his reasons for staying here despite his companions having migrated to other parts of the world, he says, "I have taken the philosophy of John F Kennedy- ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country". As a non-conservative, he does not believe in dwelling in the past and thus the Armenian history-including the genocide- does not play a significant part in shaping his life, even though it directly affected both his parents. In fact, he admits to being completely detached from his history and revealed that he once attended a Turkish convention and embraced the Turks present there to symbolically put an end to the decade's long enmity between the two nations. He also does not believe in taking excessive pride over his forefathers' contributions to Kolkata and its making. About those Armenians who played an important part in the history of Kolkata, he says, "I admire them, but I have not seen them, I haven't met them, they all died before I was born. Yes, I acknowledge them and I am happy and proud of them, but I have my own unique identity and I am not clannish." He further goes on to describe how he cannot relate to the

“clannishness” of other Armenians- another reason he chooses to dissociate himself from his Armenian brethren.

However, although he does not believe in looking back, he was curious about his roots and had planned to visit Armenia thrice in his life, but could not go due to issues relating to his health, political instability, etc. After three failed plans to visit his “so-called homeland”, he completely gave up on the idea of going there, accepting that perhaps he is not destined to go. Despite his reluctance to label himself as Armenian, he does acknowledge his Armenian origins and says that although he did not choose to be born as Armenian, he still is a part of that community by birth. He claims that although there are very few Armenian families left in Kolkata, there is still a small community which is somewhat tight-knit. He also claims that although he does not believe in being clannish, he does not believe in condemning any lifestyle either- which is why he has maintained healthy relations with all other Indian-Armenian families as well as the ACPA.

Zaven Gasparian and Gevorg Hovsepya

Zaven and Gevorg, both ex-students of the ACPA, are Indian-Armenians who have been born and brought up in Kolkata. Their stories are strikingly similar, since both of their paternal grandparents are Armenians who arrived in India from Baghdad, while both their mothers are Indian. They both studied in other non-Armenian schools before their parents decided to enroll them in the ACPA. For both Zaven, as well as Gevorg, the decision to join the ACPA was largely influenced by their fathers’ desire to imbibe in them the Armenian culture and values. According to Gevorg, his father was keen on him joining the ACPA because “that (Armenia) is where we belong, we have to grow up and become accustomed to the customs and traditions (of the Armenians).” The ACPA has been described by both of them as an “Armenia away from Armenia”. About life at the ACPA, Gevorg states, “As long as we are at the college, we keep up with every tradition there. It’s like a small Armenia there so we follow all festivals and traditions like Armenians, just like if we would have been in Armenia.”

However, it has not been an easy ride for either of them, since fitting into ACPA was challenging initially. Due to the fact that they were the only local Armenians in the school, they had problems with communication. The students who had migrated to India were not fluent in English, while both Gevorg and Zaven could not speak Armenian. It took time for them to adjust to the complete upheaval of their life, but now that they have been at ACPA for more than ten years, it feels like home. Although both of them have graduated from school and are currently pursuing Bachelor's degrees in sports management in another college, they choose to stay at ACPA rather than at their own houses in Kolkata. Speaking about his attachment to the ACPA, Gevorg says, "We can go back to the house (their parents' house), but we need to go back home and ACPA is home."

Having stayed at ACPA for most of their lives, both of them have grown up following Orthodox Christianity, attending mass every Sunday and celebrating traditional Armenian festivals. Apart from enjoying Armenian food, festivals and sports, Zaven and Gevorg both also have a very strong connection with the Armenian history. They learnt Armenian history as a subject in the ACPA, since "a student at ACPA is supposed to know about his history, his ancestors, the college, the church and about Armenia. You just have to know all of it." This exposure to the Armenian history has affected their relationship with their homeland. According to Gevorg, "It (learning history) made me aware of how our ancestors fought for our motherland and we should give something back to it. Not just in terms of its borders, but I could become a good sportsman and play for the Armenian national team and do something big."

Although both of them are Indian by birth and nationality, they identify with Armenian culture more than Bengali or Indian culture. They do not follow any Indian festivals, although they have witnessed celebrations for Diwali and such. For them, their Armenian heritage and history forms a huge part of their identity and thus, must be preserved. Speaking about the difficulty in preservation of culture, Gevorg opines, "It is difficult to preserve culture now that everyone is into their own jobs, we can't always be together." At the same time, they believe that "Even if Armenia is destroyed, if two Armenians are together, they would make a small Armenia."

While speaking about Indian influence of their identity and culture, both Zaven and Gevorg feel that living in India has made them more accepting of people different from themselves. Being surrounded by non-Armenians has taught them to appreciate diversity and be inclusive and tolerant of all types of people, no matter how different they are. However, they both plan to leave India soon, for further education and job opportunities. While Zaven is going to move to Australia with his family for further studies, Gevorg is still undecided about where he wants to go- but going abroad is a certainty for both.

CHAPTER 5. The Transients and the Descendants

Introduction

Until now, we have elaborated upon the lifestyles, beliefs, cultural and religious practices of both the migrant Armenians as well as the Indian-Armenians. However, looking at both these groups separately, without contextualising them with each other does not provide a complete picture of the Armenians in Kolkata. According to Mr Rangan Datta, a journalist, “There is a huge distinction between the Indian-Armenians and the migrant Armenians”. In order to truly understand the co-existence of these two distinct groups of Armenians in the same city, it is important to undertake a comparative analysis of both groups - detailing their differences, but also taking into account their similarities. In this chapter, we would be comparing various aspects of their life such as culture i.e food, festivals, language and religion, along with religious beliefs and practices, their views and connect with their history and past, their national identities while also looking into communal identities, and inter group dynamics.

Culture

Culture- mainly food, language, festivals and religion- is probably the one aspect that reveals a huge contrast between the Indian-Armenians and migrant Armenians. The Indian-Armenians, having lived in Kolkata for quite some generations, have imbibed Indian culture into their lives. According to Mr. Rangan Datta, “The Indian-Armenians have transformed into Indians, or rather, Bengalis.” Apart from this, the Indian-Armenians also do not seem to possess an instinct for preservation for their Armenian culture, says Arunava Patra, who goes on to claim that there seems to be a marked disinterest within the Indian-Armenian community towards any sort of traditional cultural activities. On the contrary, the migrant Armenians take special efforts to preserve their culture and follow traditional practices even in day to day life. “Migrant Armenians have always been a very closed community, they hardly have any interaction with the outside world, which is why they have been able to maintain their culture”, opines Mr. Rangan

Datta. Thus, a comparative analysis of cultural practices reveals interesting information about the differences and similarities between the two groups.

Food

Both, Indian-Armenians and Migrant Armenians have distinct food cultures. The migrant Armenians are a community that certainly attempts to preserve their distinct food culture by providing certain important Armenian food items in their daily meals, as well as Armenianizing Indian food items. The residents of ACPA, hence, are able to retain their Armenian food culture in this manner. However, it is also true that the migrant Armenians, having lived in Kolkata for a certain number of years and having been introduced to Indian food, have formed a certain bond with it. Several migrant Armenians mentioned how they immensely enjoy consuming “Biryani”, as well as “Chicken Butter Masala”. Hence, despite having limited interaction with the city and its food culture, as well as consciously attempting to continue their own food culture, they can be said to have a liking for Indian food.

When it comes to the Indian-Armenians, a certain attachment for Armenian food, in the case of some of them, can definitely be observed. In the case of Anjali, an Indian-Armenian, Armenian food played a big part in her childhood memories. However, even though Anjali grew up consuming this food, there was not much effort taken by her to continue this food culture in her family. She remembers eating this food, but it is merely a memory, not an active aspect of her life anymore. Similarly, Zaven and Gevorg mentioned how they did not eat a lot of Armenian food at home i.e. before joining the ACPA. This shows the differences in the approach taken by both communities when it comes to preserving the Armenian food culture.

Festivals

The migrant Armenians can be observed to celebrate a lot of Armenian festivals apart from Christmas, such as Vardavar, Trndez, etc. which the Indian-Armenians do not. Mr. Stephen, an important member of the Indian-Armenian community even proudly speaks about how he lives a very non-conventional, non-traditional life, in which, apart from celebrating Christmas on both the 25th of December as well as the 6th of January, he does not partake in any of the religious and cultural festival celebrations that the migrants do. Mr. Davit, a migrant Armenian says, “I think the Armenian Christmas is one day where you can see everyone turning up. That’s the only day you can see everyone turning up and, you know, having a cup of tea, and some snacks here in the club,” when he was asked about whether both communities celebrate festivals together. Some Indian-Armenians, also engaging in the celebration of Indian festivals, can be observed to be involved in both festivities, at least up to a certain extent. This shows us how, on one hand, the migrants all seem to uniformly celebrate every Armenian religious and cultural festival, due to their strong connection to the Church and ACPA, whereas the Indian-Armenians seem to be inconsistent in their approach to both Armenian as well as Indian festivals.

Language

When it comes to language, the migrant Armenians can be observed to place a large amount of importance on how their language is the very basis of their culture as well as their identity in India. Language, for them, is what preserves a culture. This view of theirs manifests in the curriculum of ACPA, since students are taught Armenian as their second language, the first being English, as it is considered to be a global language, an essential requirement of the times. Hindi is hence, taught as the third language, which makes it clear how they place Armenian before Hindi even though they are residing in India. This is an important indicator of how the migrants are taking active efforts to preserve their language within their community, something that the Indian-Armenians definitely do not seem to be doing. Mr. Stephen, an Indian-Armenian from the older generation is well-versed in Armenian but still does not speak it much, even at home. However, Anjali, a third generation Indian-Armenian, though owning the Armenian Bible, mentions how she cannot understand it at all and how it “is Greek to me”. This tells us how the

earlier generations of Indian-Armenians are much closer to their mother tongue, while the later generations are not. However, even though Zaven and Gevorg are from an even later generation, they are quite well-versed in Armenian since they were taught the language in ACPA.

Religion

Religion is also an aspect of life that is extremely important for the migrant Armenians. As noted by Arunava Patra, “Armenian nationalism and Armenian religion is intricately linked” as well as Rangan Datta, a journalist, “The Armenian identity is drawn from both nation and religion”- for migrant Armenians, their religion is as important a part of their Armenian identity as their nationality and ancestry. This leads to quite a bit of importance being placed on religious activities in day-to-day life at the ACPA. Apart from celebrating all religious festivals, the students and other officials attend mass at the Armenian Church every Sunday- something that is not observed in the Indian-Armenian community. According to migrant Armenians who attend church regularly, Indian-Armenians do not frequent the church much. There are some members who do attend mass every now and then and also visit the Church for Christmas and other religious days, but a majority of the Indian-Armenians seem to be uninterested in keeping a close touch with their religion. This is especially true of the younger generations (except, of course, people like Zaven and Gevorg, who are students of ACPA), who have moved far away from their orthodox religious tradition.

Connection with history and national identity

The migrant Armenians have an extremely close connection with their history, since they are taught their history in ACPA and are much more knowledgeable of it as compared to the Indian-Armenians. However, apart from being close to it because of their curriculum, the fact that they are a very close-knit community which takes conscious efforts to keep their culture pure, ensures that they remain in close contact with who they are as a people, where they are

from, what makes them who they are and what they suffered as people to bring them to where they are now. Every migrant Armenian, in their interview, spoke about the pride they have about being an Armenian as well as the respect for and lingering trauma of, the genocide. Their history continues to shape their current lives as well as their futures, which is one of the reasons that they all intend to give back to the community in whichever manner that they can. As Arunava Patra put it, “The trauma of the genocide and all past atrocities is much more relevant to the migrant community; for the Kolkata Armenians the trauma are distant stories but in life they are free, so that level of insecurity is never there, this history or past is not very central; they have less insecurity about their community and identity which is why they don’t work as hard to preserve culture.” This tells us that the Indian-Armenians, though acknowledging their Armenian roots, are not as close to them since they have grown up much closer to the culture of Kolkata and hence, Bengali culture. Mr. Stephen, in his interview, when asked about his connection to Kolkata, spoke about how the city has played an important role in shaping his life and how the “warmth” of Kolkata is what he feels most connected to. He calls Armenia his “so-called homeland”, indicating how he acknowledges it as his ancestral home but does not feel particularly close to it, given that he considers Kolkata, India, and Nature as his “three mothers”. Even though he feels extremely connected to the city, he does not seem to feel the same for the Armenian architecture that his ancestors have left behind in the city. This also shows how his bond with Kolkata is much stronger than the one with his Armenian ancestry. Zaven and Gevorg, however, can be observed to have a very close connection to their national history and have an intense desire to “give back” to the community. Even though they are Indian-Armenian, due to their upbringing in ACPA, they can be observed to have a close enough bond with Armenia to consider wanting to play Rugby, not for the Indian National team, but for the Armenian one. Hence, there is a clear distinction in the approaches taken by the migrant Armenians and the Indian-Armenians when it comes to their connection with Armenian history and nationalism.

Communal identity

Another important aspect to be considered when comparing the Indian-Armenians and the migrant Armenians is the feeling of community that they have towards others like themselves as well as towards each other. Although the migrant Armenians might not appear to be a typical community, with kinship structures, to outsiders, it can still be called a community based on the bonds that they have formed with each other. Since the students studying at ACPA come to India at a very young age, all alone and away from their families, the college becomes their home away from home and provides them with comfort and safety as well as familiarity by replicating cultural and religious practices they follow in their home country. Most of the alumni of the ACPA we interacted with, along with the officials of the institute and the church share a tight-knit relationship with each other. They all seem to have a sense of solidarity since most students have come from similar backgrounds and faced similar challenges settling in a foreign place. Similarly, their shared history and culture also contributes towards strengthening their ties with each other within the community.

Contrary to what is observed with the ACPA, the Indian-Armenians do not seem to have the same level of communal identity. Their numerical insignificance, along with the geographical dividedness of the community members have reduced their interactions with each other. This communal identity keeps getting weakened as the older generations pass away and more and more young Indian-Armenians leave Kolkata. The fact that most Indian-Armenians in Kolkata do not identify strongly with their Armenian roots and do not actively try to preserve their culture also exacerbates this disconnect. However, this does not mean that there is absolutely no sense of community among the Indian-Armenians. According to Mr. Stephen, “There is definitely a community”, since he is still very much in contact with three Indian-Armenian families that he has known since he was a boy. On the other hand, according to Church and ACPA officials, “there is no local community remaining.” This disparity in responses also indicates a disconnect between the two groups of Armenians, as is elaborated in the sections to follow.

Inter group dynamics

The dynamic between these two groups of Armenians co-existing within the same city is quite interesting. While on one hand, they do not have a lot of contact with each other, they are also not completely ignorant about the existence of one another due to meetings at the church or during festivals and social gatherings. They also seem to have opinions on the way each separate community conducts themselves. While the Indian-Armenians we spoke to seemed to think of the ACPA as a sheltered, exclusive community that does not interact with the culture around it, the ACPA officials and students seem to find it difficult to understand how and why the Indian-Armenians have allowed their culture to get ‘dissolved’ by the Indian culture. Similarly, there have been reports of land conflicts between the church officials and certain Indian-Armenian families over the ancestral property of Indian-Armenians that has been managed by the church for all these years. Rangan Datta mentioned how the early Indian-Armenians were the ones who set up the church and ACPA, and so, their descendants consider it unfair that the Indian-Armenian wealth is being utilized for the migrants in today’s times. There also seems to be additional tension between the two groups, with the Indian-Armenians (who, according to journalists, are extremely wealthy) being reluctant to send their children to the ACPA, due to it being a scholarship-based school. Instead, they prefer to send their children to other schools that they perceive to be finer in terms of quality of teaching, since they can afford that sort of expensive education.

Given the complex dynamic that exists between Indian-Armenian and the migrant community, it is interesting to note that along with there being an internal communal identity within both these groups, researchers in the field have observed that there also seems to be a larger sense of community- one which includes both the Indian-Armenians as well as the migrant Armenians. Speaking about this Anjali - an Indian-Armenian- likens this shared identity of being Armenian to the similar phenomenon seen with Indians who form bonds with each other when outside of India. She says, “At the end of the day- we’re all Armenians!” However, noting the sense of distance that exists between the two groups, Professor Navras Afreedi said, “The migrants exclude themselves from the community because both groups know that they are not

permanent members of the community.” Speaking about this complicated sense of community, Arunava Patra comments, “There is an inner conflict but at the same time they are all Armenians. It’s like the Indian concept- every province is against another province, but at the end of the day we are all Indians. It’s the same.”

Chapter 6. Conclusion

The city of Kolkata can be called a mosaic of many cultures. Its culture has been shaped by the influx of several communities that evolved Kolkata's culture over time. These communities that settled here have also been instrumental in carving the city's history. A memory of these communities still lingers in the city's unique architecture, the shrines, streets and their names. The communities like that of the Armenians may have become numerically insignificant now, but that does not vacuum their contributions in the making of Kolkata. In fact, from our empirical research on the field, on learning about the other communities that settled in Kolkata, we realized that a community cannot be studied in isolation. Armenians interacted with several communities in history, and these interactions help us understand their diaspora. They have not just left a mark on Kolkata's history, but also on India's- As Professor Navras opined, "They contributed to nation-building disproportionately more than what their small numbers warranted." These communities weave together Kolkata's popular identity of being known as the "City of Joy".

From most of the interviews that we took with the locals of Kolkata, it was apparent that there is no remembrance or remote awareness of the Armenians. In fact, the Armenians are confused with the British; for example, the British architecture is confused with the Armenian architecture. How has a community that left such monumental marks on the history of Kolkata, disappeared from the memories of people today? One explanation can suggest that it is because their population, which once flourished with 10000 to 15000 people, now struggles to maintain a count of 300. But is it fair to forget what these communities did for us? Is it not our responsibility to give back? What encumbers us? Why are they losing their identity?

Preserving micro-minority communities with insignificant numbers has become necessary because they are the ones vulnerable to being forgotten. On the one hand, for a community to be preserved, it needs to put an active effort to preserve its culture. In a

kaleidoscopic country like India, with multi-diverse cultures striving to co-exist, the stories of the Armenians are at a danger of being lost. These stories make up India's historical identity and it is of paramount importance to recognise and acknowledge these stories if we are to understand India's history completely. As the famous saying goes- "to understand the present, it is necessary to understand the past."

As it is becoming exceedingly important to recognize and create awareness about such micro-minority communities, Professor Navras and Artur (an alumnus of ACPA) shared with us about the vital role that academia can play in helping acknowledge these micro-minority communities. It is essential for schools and colleges to integrate courses on the micro-minority communities as a part of their curriculum and teach their students about them. For example, Presidency College in Kolkata is the only institution that teaches a course on foreign micro-minorities in India. As a part of this course, Professor Navras teaches the Armenian history to his students. Some of his students are also pursuing research on the Armenians in Kolkata. He, in fact, suggests that such courses should be taught at the secondary level because many students do not progress to the tertiary level of education. This helps instill a sense of appreciation for the contributions made by these communities in nation-building. For example, not many people till present day know that Armenians have contributed massively to the making of Kolkata. Kolkata owes a large part of its architecture and city planning to the Armenians. Artur also believes that people from various fields such as film industries and academia should come out and explore the stories of such communities for spreading awareness and sensitizing people across the country. Only then will people come to know that Armenians have stayed in Kolkata and continue to do so. In fact, several such micro-minority communities reside across India of which most people are unaware.

Armenia as a country has been subject to conflict and aggression from its neighbours in the past- the Armenian Genocide being the biggest example. The country's history caused them to move to different countries as time went on, thus making them one of the biggest diasporas in the world. It is clear from our research that the population of Indian-Armenians is on a

downward trajectory. As more and more first and second-generation citizens pass away and third and fourth generation citizens move away from Kolkata or marry into other communities, the rich culture of the Armenians is also at the danger of being lost. Despite that being the case, most Indian-Armenians we came across did not see the dwindling population as a cause for alarm. Rather, this intermixing of culture is viewed as a natural, organic process that is inevitable for any diaspora.

It is interesting to note, that while numbers of the Indian-Armenians continue to decline, the migrant Armenians have found a safe haven in the city. Institutions like the ACPA and the Armenians church have played a significant role in creating a home away from home for the students residing there. Their practices and activities are largely driven by history and traditions from back home. When we reflect on the same, it is intriguing to see a community that has managed to preserve their Armenian culture and identity in a city like Kolkata. This identification is strongly dictated by their relationship with their religious, cultural and educational elements that they are incredibly proud of. Their ideals can neatly be summed up in a statement made by Gevorg, an alumnus of the ACPA - "They say that, even if Armenia is destroyed - if two Armenians are together, they would make a small Armenia."

The presence of these two distinct groups of Armenians in the same city raises many questions about identity. What exactly makes one's identity? Is it the country one lives in? If so, what about the migrant Armenians who are so far away from their homeland, but still identify with it? Is it one's legal nationality? If yes, then does a mere passport dictate who one identifies as? Is it culture and traditions? If so, what about the Indian-Armenians who may not follow traditions, but still claim to possess the 'Armenian spirit'? Is it being part of a community? If yes, then how does one explain the tight-knit bonds of the ACPA, which exists without kinship structures and is therefore technically not a community? And then what does one make of the almost non-existent interactions among the Indian-Armenians, although they could technically be called a micro minority community? Does history shape our identity? If yes, then why do the two groups of Armenians differ so vastly, when they share the same past? What does migration

do to one's identity? Does it make one want to guard it vehemently, like the migrant Armenians? Or does it make one want to embrace newer traditions, like the ancestors of the Indian-Armenians? Furthermore, does the need to have a defined identity have something to do with a sense of having been uprooted, in the first place? If yes, then why do people who have lived in a particular region for eons still have such rigid ideals about having a singular identity? How does one negotiate with various layers of identity in today's day and age? These questions were raised time and again in our research and we have tried our best to make some sense of this vast, intangible construct that has such tangible results. However, it has become abundantly clear that there is no one answer to any of these questions. A person's identity can be made up of anything-including but not limited to - culture, language, tradition, history, religion, nationality, place of residence, sense of community and belongingness to an institution. In times like these, when one singular marker of identity can dictate whether or not an individual has the right to live in a certain place, it is heartening to witness a people that are so splintered, but still accept one another as part of a larger family.

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Appendix

An overview of the method of collection of primary data on field, including details regarding the sample and nature of inquiry:

Category of participant: Indian-Armenian

Respondents:

1. Anjali Jangiani

- Third generation Indian Armenian, currently residing in Pune but born and brought up in Kolkata
- Armenian descent from mother's side, Sindhi descent from father's side
- Brought up by maternal grandparents due to father's death at a young age

2. Stephen Saco

- Second generation Indian Armenian, born and brought up in Kolkata
- Armenian descent from both parents
- Parents and grandparents directly affected by the Armenian Genocide

Theme of Questioning:

- Traditional cultural activities followed, including festivals, food, language spoken, etc.
- Religious beliefs and practices
- Connection with Kolkata and its culture
- Views on Armenians in Kolkata and their population
- Life stories of self, parents and grandparents

- Sense of Armenian and Indian identity, connection with Armenian history and ancestral homeland
- Negotiation of identity i.e. being of Armenian descent, Calcuttan, Indian, etc
- View on and contact with ACPA, Church and Migrant-Armenians
- Presence or absence of communal identity among Armenians in Kolkata

Category of participant: Indian-Armenian alumni of ACPA

Respondents:

1. Zaven Gasparian

- Third generation Indian Armenian, born and brought up in Kolkata
- Armenian descent from father's side and Indian descent from mother's side
- Studied in non-Armenian school till the age of eight or nine years
- Graduated from ACPA three years ago, planning to move abroad soon

2. Gevorg Hovsepya

- Third generation Indian Armenian, born and brought up in Kolkata
- Armenian descent from father's side and Indian descent from mother's side
- Studied in non-Armenian school till the age of ten or twelve years
- Graduated from ACPA three years ago

Theme of Questioning:

- Insight into ancestor's history
- Educational experiences at ACPA
- Changes experienced after joining ACPA
- Understanding the role of the church

- Obstacles faced at a personal level
- Kolkata's role in shaping their lifestyle
- Impact of ACPA on lifestyle
- Traditional, cultural and religious practices undertaken
- Attachment towards Armenia
- Reasons behind opting for higher education abroad
- Interaction with other residing Armenians
- Views on community, population and negotiating identity

Category of participant: Migrant-Armenian alumni of ACPA

Respondents:

1. Razmik Hakobian

- Migrant Armenian
- Moved to India from Iraq in 2007
- Received a scholarship to study in India, continues to study in Kolkata and lives in ACPA

2. Vladimir Minasyan

- Migrant Armenian, 18 years old
- Moved to India 5 years ago from Armenia
- Studied at ACPA and then at La Martiniere

3. Sevak Azaryan

- Migrant Armenian, arrived in India from Tehran, Iran, in 2010.
- Studied at ACPA and then at La Martiniere

4. Artyom Ayvazyan

- Migrant Armenian, arrived in India in 2014.
- Studied at ACPA and then at La Martiniere

5. Artur Baghdasaryan

- Migrant Armenian, moved to India 11 years ago from Armenia
- Studied at ACPA

Theme of questioning:

- Connection with Armenian history and tradition
- Reason for migration to India, education opportunities in homeland
- Connection with Kolkata and its culture
- Views on Armenians in Kolkata, their population, communal identity
- Views on and contact with Indian-Armenians
- Life at ACPA, traditions and culture followed
- Role of the ACPA, Church and Sports
- Views on higher education opportunities in India
- Difference in other places and Kolkata towards a foreign community
- Negotiation with identity, national and religious pride
- Sense of belongingness to ACPA and Armenia or Kolkata
- Sense of duty towards homeland
- Need to preserve culture in a foreign country

Category of participant: Migrant-Armenian residing in Kolkata

Respondents:

1. Davit Gevorgyan

- Migrant Armenian, came to Kolkata from Iran in 2001 when he was 10 years old.
- Is into Sports Management
- Continues to live in Kolkata

2. Serjik

- Migrant Armenian born in Tehran, from Iran.
- Middle aged, came to Kolkata at a very young age, and has attended ACPA.
- Continues to live in Kolkata

Theme of questioning:

- Life history, arrival to Kolkata
- Kolkata's role in shaping their lives
- Significance of Rugby
- Role of ACPA and the Church for practicing religion and imbibing traditions
- Interaction with local Armenians
- Reasons for diminishing population
- Role of local sports clubs and *Maidans*
- Armenian food dishes
- Interaction of local Armenians and school students

Category of participant: Official of Church and ACPA

Respondents:

1. Armen Makarian
 - Coordinator of ACPA

2. Rev. Fr. Artsrun Mikaelyan
 - Assistant manager at ACPA

3. Vachagan Tadevosyan.
 - Chairman of the Armenian church committee
 - Arrived in Kolkata in 1998 from Armenia

Theme of questioning:

- Role of each individual with respect to their portfolio
- Role of ACPA and Church for every member or student
- Interaction with residing Armenians in Kolkata
- Significance of art, music and food to their culture
- Process of enrollment in school and baptismation
- History of Armenia and reasons for migration
- Architecture landmarks and its relevance
- Possible reasons for a diminishing population in Kolkata
- Sense of national and religious pride with respect to Armenia
- Connection with Kolkata
- Importance of preservation of culture
- Negotiation of identity in foreign land
- Opinions on Indian-Armenians
- Sense of belonging and community within ACPA

Category of participant: Non-Armenian local working with Church and ACPA

Respondents:

1. Soumitra Malik
 - Principal of ACPA since 2008

2. Aindrajeet Saha
 - Professor at ACPA, since April 2009
 - Teaches English

3. Appa Rao
 - Looks after maintenance of The Holy Church of Nazareth
 - Has been working there since 1976

Theme of questioning:

- Roles in Armenians institutions
- Personal experience of having interacted with Armenians
- Views on and details about Armenian culture, tradition, language
- Particular difficulties faced while teaching children from outside the country
- Information on Indian-Armenians, their lifestyle and population
- Armenian pride and sense of community as observed with the migrant Armenians

Category of participant: Researcher/expert

Respondents:

1. Arunava Patra

- Documentary filmmaker, born and brought up in Kolkata
- Also, an academic, journalist and writer
- Studied and documented the Armenians in Kolkata through films, articles and books

2. Rangan Datta

- Journalist working in Kolkata
- Has written multiple articles and blogs about the Armenians, mainly migrants
- Has studied their history extensively

3. Alaknanda Nag

- Photojournalist working in Kolkata
- Has worked to document Armenians in Kolkata extensively
- Published books, articles and papers about the same

4. Navras Afreedi

- History professor and academic at Presidency College in Kolkata
- Has studied micro-minority communities in Kolkata extensively
- Teaches a course on foreign micro-minorities in India. As a part of this course he deals with the history of Armenians in Kolkata/India

Theme of questioning:

- About diasporas and micro-minority communities
- Other micro-minority communities in Kolkata
- Meaning of community and its application for migrants
- History of Armenians in India and Kolkata
- Reasons for Armenian migration to India
- Lifestyle, cultural and religious beliefs of Indian Armenians
- Population decline and intermixing of communities in current times
- Sense of communal identity among Armenians in Kolkata
- Negotiation of identity, connect with history and homeland for Indian Armenians
- Culture, lifestyle and religious beliefs of Migrant Armenians
- Sense of pride for Armenia, importance of history for migrant Armenians
- Migration patterns for Indian and Migrant Armenians
- Internal dynamics and possible conflicts between the two groups
- Their understanding of the attitudes and beliefs regarding identity and belongingness of both groups of Armenians
- Personal experiences with Armenians in Kolkata

Category of participant: Local street interviewee

Respondents:

1. Taxi driver #1
2. Taxi driver #2
3. Flower market local
4. Local pandit

Theme of questioning:

- Awareness about the presence of Armenians in Kolkata
- Awareness about the Armenian architectural contributions to Kolkata
- Awareness about the role of Armenians in the history of Kolkata
- Opinions about Armenians of Kolkata

Glossary

<i>ACPA</i>	Armenian College and Philanthropic Academy
<i>EIC</i>	East India Company
<i>Pagan</i>	A term used by the early Christians for the people in Roman Empire before Christianity was accepted as a religion.
<i>Vardavar</i>	An Armenian festival similar to Holi, but celebrated with splashing water instead of colors.
<i>Trndez</i>	A festival celebrated by jumping over the fire three times.
<i>Tiarnundaraj</i>	Another name for Trndez originated after merging the festival with Christianity.
<i>Dolma</i>	A dish that consists of stuffed vegetables in grape leaves.
<i>Khorovats</i>	An Armenian dish similar to barbeque.
<i>Khash</i>	A traditional Armenian delicacy similar to nehari, consisting of boiled limbs of the cow.
<i>Tuff</i>	An Armenian brown colored stone.
<i>Kulkuls</i>	An Armenian sweet shaped like a donut, but hard like a pretzel. It is made with the same dough as a donut.
<i>Sakal Times</i>	Sakal Times is an English-language daily newspaper published from Pune, India.
Dal-Chawal	A common Indian dish consisting of cooked lentils and rice.

