

Down Memory Lane on Kolkata's Park Street

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Every now and again they talk about renaming Park Street, in what is now called Kolkata. On hearing such rumours, old Calcutta hands—from Melbourne to Montreal, from Sheffield to San Diego—suffer a twinge of regret, rather like what one feels on hearing that a childhood sweetheart has got married.

For, to many who lived in Calcutta, "the Street" was more than just the cosmopolitan heart of the city; it was a colourful strand in the jumbled, vivid design of growing up. It was cakes and buttered toast in Flurys; dog-eared Enid Blytons borrowed from the Oxford Library; jiving to Calcutta's first juke box in Magnolia's Soda Fountain; dozing in the back row of a St. Xavier's College classroom while the lecturer and the summer afternoon droned interminably on.

Like many others, I was a "Street" kid. Aged seven, I remember shaking hands with a Japanese robot being exhibited in India's Hobby Centre, just

around the corner on Russell Street. A year or so later I wandered through the clearance sale of the last of the old department stores, Hall and Anderson's, the smell of rolled-up carpets making me want to sneeze, and a man with tired blue eyes came up to me and asked, "And what do you want to take away from here, sonny?"

At about that time the talk of the town was the Sky Room restaurant with its deep blue ceiling studded with small lights just like a scattering of stars. A little later it was upstaged by the red windmill that formed the façade of Moulin Rouge and the illuminated sails of which actually revolved.

But the Street was more than just the restaurants and shops and their upper crust patrons. Park Street was people. It was old Father Jorres ferreting St. Xavier's College boys out of coffee sessions and dragging them back to class. Legend has it that he once hauled away a Presidency College type, over whom he had no



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jurisdiction whatsoever. On realising his mistake, Father J was not in the least abashed and sent the hookey player packing back to Presidency with a flea in his ear and a taxi fare to foot.

Park Street was the old waiter in Mags who bore an uncanny resemblance to Lal Bahadur Shastri and ran a bucket shop on the side. It was the *paanwallah* who

on being offered a lakh by a property tycoon to vacate his hole-in-the-wall premises made the magnate a counter offer of the same amount if the latter would allow the *paanwallah* to expand his shop. It was the "blind" beggar who was known to snap out an aggrieved "*Dhut, salah!*" at any cheap wisecrack who dropped a spurious coin into his open palm.

It was the elderly engineer who would enliven his retirement by crouching in his balcony with buckets of water to upend on the heads of any who dared commit nuisance in the gutter below his flat. They were all equally and essentially Park Street people.

Named after Chief Justice Sir Elijah Impey's deer park which once abutted it, the dog-leg street traces its history from the old cemetery (where among other crumbling mementos mori the visitor can find the grave of Rose Aylmer whom Walter Savage Landor immortalised in verse) to the great wedding-cake slice of Queen's Mansions built by the Armenian magnate JC Galstaun, the "grand old man" of the turf who lost a fortune on the race track.

Like Galstaun's, Park Street's career has been a chequered one. From the heydays when men like Sir David Ezra, the Jewish entrepreneur, built their imposing mansions along its length in a *belle époque* of flower beds and long white gloves, the street had declined to a kind of seedy raffishness when I first got to know it.

Since then there has been a lot more change. The quondam sa-

hib, white or brown, has given ground to the *burrababu* in a sharkskin safari suit. A Punjabi tycoon, who already owns a hotel and several restaurants there, is said to have the avowed ambition of buying up the entire thoroughfare and local wits once suggested that the street be renamed after him.

Strewn with the rubble of development projects, spattered with paan juice, hemmed in by laundry-draped multistorieds that have elbowed aside more gracious residences, the street is barely recognisable to the old habitue who comes back to visit it again. If and when it takes place, the change of name will be a formal acknowledgement of the very real transformation that has already occurred.

Regret, however, would be out of place. By any other name, and in any other guise, "the Street" will retain its essential character: tantalising, seductive, forever on sale—yet never available on a permanent basis. And 20 years from now another generation might well recall with a pang the days when "the Street", like a fickle mistress, promised to be theirs forever.

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Name Callers, Note. Politicians Are People Too.

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Democracy, by its very nature, is the crucible of dissent. Casting a vote is an act of free expression, not only in favour of one candidate but also against another. By this very action, democracy ensures the freedom of the individual to express opinion without fear.

Last week, Tamil Nadu Police arrested a young girl for yelling on an airplane that the Modi government is fascist. The enraged BJP woman politician who bore the brunt of the girl's ire called her a 'terrorist': an OTT explosion of power's hauteur.

Prime Minister Modi is India's most beloved leader in spite of a kid from Canada calling him a fascist. However, also obscured by the fervour of protest is a basic privilege—of Modi's inalienable right to be protected from insults or being called a fascist in public.

In the prevailing heat of moral fever that has gripped Indian liberals who even see the arrests of urban Maoists as a threat to fundamental rights, we forget that politicians are people too: they have the same Constitutional protection from abuse as anyone else.

Arresting people who

question or slug governments and leaders is not an exclusive BJP trait. In 2012, when the Congress-led UPA government was in power, a young gentleman from Tamil Nadu was arrested for questioning the dodgy assets of Karti Chidambaram, then Finance Minister P Chidambaram's son. In 2012, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee ordered the jailing of a Kolkata professor for forwarding a cartoon of her. A farmer was crimped for asking her a question at a public meeting. In 2011, Kapil Sibal, then the telecom minister, wanted to censor the internet from showing offensive memes of Congress leaders. In 2012, cartoonist Aseem Trivedi was

thrown in the slammer for

lamponing political corruption. The same year, cops picked up two teenage girls of Mumbai for criticising Shiv Sena founder Bal Thackeray's funeral arrangements. In 2015, a school student was jailed for sharing a Facebook post against Samajwadi Party minister Azam Khan for "instigating communal tensions."

There are countries that



have jail terms for people who knock the government. Insulting the Azerbaijan President can land you in the clink. The same goes in Poland, Turkey and Venezuela. Even in fiercely liberal Netherlands, dissing the monarch will earn you an unwanted stay at the government's expense. Rulers of Arab countries punish critics vengefully and harshly.

Political leaders across the world are easy game for mud missiles. It is one of the unwanted perks of power, to keep them from acquiring divine status through oblations of sycophants. And it is the government's right to bring the wrath of the Constitution down on the head of anyone who maligns it. Whether it chooses to exercise this right or not is

RIGHT ANGLE

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Micro & Macro Layers of Teacher Education Policies

If you are planning for a year, sow rice; if you are planning for a decade, plant trees; if you are planning for a lifetime, educate people." This Confucian saying has a significant impact on the role of individuals in shaping a society, however big or small it may be. The teacher-student relationship is eternally valid as there has been no recorded evidence in the past nor will there be one in the future of a teacher-student divorce.

Teacher policies globally recognise the unprecedented pace at which the dynamics of the 21st century teaching profession is shifting and calls for sweeping reforms in teacher education policies, systems and practices. There is no disagreement hence to the fact that teachers and teaching quality is the double-barrelled gun that can fire a knowledge explosion—the explosion being multi-dimensional to include not only academic knowledge but also cognitive abilities in addition to human values to life. The World Innovative Summit on Education and Qatar Foundation in association with National Institute of Education, Singapore, published a report recently on 'Teacher Policies: Global Best Practices for Developing the Teaching Profession'. The report is a result of a survey that captures various established and emerging high-performing systems in Finland, Singapore, Ontario, Shanghai, Hong Kong, Massachusetts, California,

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South Korea, New Zealand, and Qatar. The report identifies 10 key areas for countries and societies to align themselves to shape the careers of teachers.

- Recruitment of quality candidates: The need for attracting the right people with a right bend of mind.
- Compensation and incentives: The need to change the negative image of teaching profession as the last resort.
- Initial teacher preparation and accreditation standards: For effective teacher career growth.
- Career development structures: Multiple career tracks and resourceful talent allocation.
- Professional development and continuous learning: To align teaching practice with evolving learning outcomes.
- Accountability, performance management and evaluation: Focussing on teacher development and accountability
- School leadership: Capacity building to prepare teachers as leaders.
- Teacher symbolism: The profession as an inspirational role model
- Policy integration, alignment: Coherent synergy with an integrated policy framework with intermediating layers
- Future orientations: The changing roles of teachers from being knowledge disseminators to assimilators.

The first five are the micro layers targeted towards individual teacher development while the next five are the macro layers towards the establishment of the structure for implementing teacher policies with a visionary eye on the long term. India's response has also been significant with its efforts aligned towards policies, strategies and implementation in these areas. As we celebrate Teachers' Day, may the noble profession of teaching charter a nobler future to advance the noblest ideals of life.

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The Vietnam Connection

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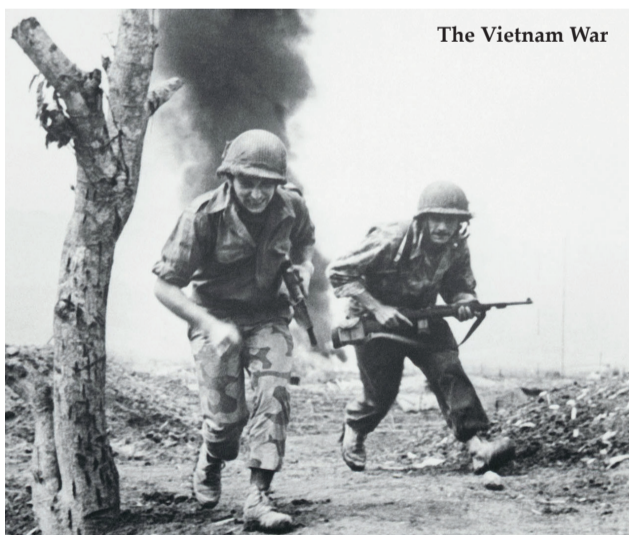
In 1964, during a general knowledge test in the 7th grade, I failed to correctly name the guerrillas then fighting in Vietnam. My answer was Americans as against the correct one, Viet Cong. To make up for that cardinal sacrilege, I had to atone with a visit to Hanoi, the capital of the modern state of Vietnam. Visiting that country for a soldier is like a good pilgrimage and opportunity came a few days ago as I was invited to be a part of the Indian delegation to attend the Indian Ocean Conference 2018 at Hanoi. It was organised by India Foundation, the high-profile Delhi-based think tank. One may just wonder, why organise an event about the Indian Ocean so far away from the ocean itself? In fact, Hanoi has no connect with the Indian Ocean and Vietnam as a nation appears quite far removed from any interests in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). So this needs a little explanation.

For India, Vietnam is a crucial nation within the ASEAN grouping. Not to be forgotten is Vietnam's resilience and ability to respond to unjust threats against its security from larger neighbours. Having virtually humiliated two reputed armies, the French and the American, Vietnam went on to defeat China's People's Liberation Army (PLA) in 1979 as the Chinese vented their frustration on a perceived hapless people. Speaking to the common Vietnamese one is struck by their level of geopolitical understanding and sense of pride. They put forth their perception that they fought against subjugation but did not carry that enmity beyond the wars. They realise that both the US and China are important nations vying for domination of the region in which Vietnam exists. Yet, they are also aware that stepping into geopolitical camps only comes at a cost.

Hence multilateralism and interest-based partnerships with bias towards none remain Vietnam's concept.

With the IOR and that of the Pacific being viewed as a continuum and not demarcated by boundaries, the Indo-Pacific region is yet emerging in the understanding of the world and will probably take some time in doing that. Merely naming the US Pacific Command as the US Indo-Pacific Com-

mand does not change thinking and equations, although it is along with other steps a definite trigger towards that. From a US and Western point of view, visualising the region of the Indo-Pacific as a single entity helps draw in multiple important players who may not be inimical or wary towards Chinese growth and ambitions but are yet watchful and do consider China with varying degrees of skepticism.



The Vietnam War

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Vietnam in the Pacific Rim and India in the IOR are two

it is not willing to toe the Singapore-Japan-South Korea mode of acquiescence to the US regional agenda. The great game being played by China in the Pacific and the Indian oceans to limit navigation for others and facilitate it for itself through coercion and influence building provides a common challenge to India and Vietnam besides the international community in general. The purpose of holding the Indian Ocean Conference first in Singapore in 2016, then in Colombo in

2017 and now in Vietnam 2018 was also to message the importance of India's Act East Policy, which includes the outreach to ASEAN and East Asia besides enhancing awareness of the Indo-Pacific. It was good to see that India invited Chinese officials and academics in good measure. In keeping the ongoing great game in the Indo-Pacific a little more transparent and allow engagement to flow, India is only doing what it should. Reset after the run of meetings with the Chinese through 2018 requires engagement for continuity. However, that need not be from any position of weakness or lack of understanding. The continuous Chinese attempt to paint India red over alleged attempts by it to take ownership of the Indian Ocean was countered by the Indian delegation's pitch against China's attempts to helm in India through supposed economic cooperation with India's neighbours but actually virtual quasi-military activities in the IOR. The Indian Ocean Conference is now a regular feature in the annual Indian strategic calendar. There is a need to consider balancing the strategic messaging by perhaps conducting it next in Mauritius and then in Bangladesh before returning to Malaysia and Indonesia. A point that emerged in sideline discussions was whether India should consider a regional Quadrilateral alongside Japan, Indonesia and Vietnam. Perhaps the larger international body with the US, India, Japan and Australia may be sending signals not as conducive to a cooperative Indo-Pacific. Whether the US and China should both be special invitees for such engagement is something for consideration. One thing is for sure; as the Indo-Pacific gets murkier and more complex, a single annual Indian sponsored strategic engagement may soon be too little for India to straddle the complexities which are likely to arise.

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Monument of Remembrance

UNFAITHFULLY YOURS

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One lives in hope of becoming a memory." Is that true? Do we live our today with an eye on how tomorrow treats us? If we're honest, many of us do. But since few of us can build a marble memorial on the bank of a river, we try and build our Taj Mahal in our offspring instead. The more creative souls among us strive for posterity by writing books, making music, producing films, generating works of art. Others collect patents for their innovations, scientific or otherwise. But is that enough?

Whom are you thinking about today? Whom will you remember tomorrow? Will it always be the same person? No, it won't, for

We establish memorials for many reasons. A wall of photos or a bench in a temple are put up as a way of coping with the grief that follows the death of a beloved. Giant structures, like India Gate, are built to remind people of a landmark event.

our gods whom we idolise. From Rana Pratap astride his beloved Chetak, to Nehru to Gandhi to MGR to Ambedkar, we have statued memorials for all of them.

Which is probably why when I read that a loyal British aristocrat had commissioned a monument to celebrate Queen Elizabeth II's reign, I immediately envisioned a giant, gowned statue wielding a bejewelled sceptre. Only to discover—much to my surprise—that the Elizabeth Landmark will be in the shape of a 180-ft steel column that'll merge with the "rugged and undulating landscape" of the Northumberland countryside in which it will sit. Its creator Simon Hitchen says the memorial's industrial look will reflect the economic history of Northern England, which once hosted bustling coal and iron mines, and thereby honour the countryside over which the Queen presides. How's that for a memorial with a difference? Fitting, I guess, for a lady of mettle.

make the best memorials.

There are varied reasons why we establish memorials. The small entities, like a wall of framed photographs or a bench in a temple or gurdwara, are put up as a way of coping with the overwhelming grief felt following the death of the beloved one. Big structures, like India Gate in New Delhi or the Tawang War Memorial in Arunachal, are created to remind people of an event, and to shape future generations' understanding of the history of that time. In India, besides the *smritis* created to commemorate our political leaders at Rajghat, most memorials take the form of statues. It's not just

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