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BABUISM IN THE JUTE INDUSTRY ALONG THE BANKS OF THE HUGLI

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Abstract

Calcutta or Kolkata, as it is now known, is renowned for being the British capital of India. The influence of the colonial era of India can be vividly observed not only in quite a few of the heritages but also in the collective way of life of the people here. Apart from the monuments in Kolkata which have been earmarked as heritage spots, such as the Victoria Memorial, there are a large number of unlikely heritages which lie on either side of the mighty Hugli river flowing through the city and its suburbs. These regions by the river had formerly been the colonial industrial zone of Kolkata where the jute industry had thrived. Stretching from Howrah to Chinsurah in Hooghly and Budge Budge to Halisahar in the North 24 Parganas, the once-glorious industrial zone now lies in its death throes. In these regions lie a large number of towns which are significant in the annals of Indian history owing either to being associated with the Indian freedom movement or with renowned historical personalities.

Keywords: Babuism, colonization, mimicry, jute mills, middle-brows, Bengali, Bongs, Khardah Jute Co, Gourepore Jute Co

These regions were adapted by the British to suit their colonial ventures. The abundance of water from the Hugli, coupled with the abundance of raw materials from the surrounding rural areas gave them the idea of industrializing the region. Here, as in many other places in India, raw materials cost of production and labour cost was cheap. Between the years 1870-1915, many large industries comprising chiefly of majestically proportioned jute mills sprung up in these regions. Most of the mills, with a few exceptions, have either gone defunct or are on the verge of closing down.

The jute mills were equipped with heavy machinery and had their own broad-gauge freight corridors. They had their huge signature brick boilers and river jetties where broad/narrow-gauge railway tracks ran up to the brink. These jetties were equipped with huge and powerful cranes which lifted the bales of jute which were transported along the Hugli in barges and loaded them onto wagons which would then transport them into the mills. Labourers

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would then toil day and night, drenched in sweat and oft blood, for meager wages in order to convert the raw materials into high end finished products which would leave the mills in huge railway wagons. The architecture inside the mill premises are nothing short of amazing and many have historical significance too like Lord Hastings' bungalow inside the premises of the Hastings Jute Mills in Rishra and the dilapidated bungalow of Lord Inchcape at the Gourepore Industrial Estate.

Back in the colonial era, trouble cropped up in the industrial zone at times. Sometimes there would be unrest among the labourers over the salary structures. Sometimes, it would be a plain outburst against the colonial masters. As the British were largely unacquainted to the native Indian languages, the managements of the industries were compelled to put their wits together in order to seek a way out of the situation. This was not a problem which was just limited to the industrial sector. Other sectors, like the general administration, were facing this problem too.

Thus, as a solution, the British decided to recruit people who had received Western education into the industrial sector. In their probable opinion, these people could serve as mediators between them and their native work-force and provide a buffer to many of their problems. The English Education Act¹ had been introduced back in 1835 by the erstwhile Council of India based on a decision taken by Governor-General Lord William Bentinck. The East India Company was ordered by the British Parliament to reallocate funds to spend on education and literature in India. They were asked to support establishments teaching a Western curriculum with English as the language of instruction. As a result of this, a handful of Indians were taught the English language and as a result of receiving Western education, became familiarized with the Western way of life.

Some of these people had received along with Western education, the tendency to look down upon the Indian culture from their colonial masters. These people gradually began to identify with the colonizers as opposed to people of their own brethren. They looked up to the colonial masters as role models and tried to replicate their ways of life. However, still being Indian from within, these 'mimic men'² (a term coined by V.S. Naipaul for his novel of the same name) were unable to adapt the positives envisioned by the colonizers, via their progressive thoughts and positive work culture. They only tried to copy the British dress code and the social way of life. These people, especially the wealthy ones among them, came to be known as 'babus'³.

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The concept of ‘mimicry’ was formulated by the Indian English scholar and theorist, Homi K. Bhaba. According to him, mimicry appears when members of a colonized society imitate and take on the culture of the colonizers. In the opinion of Jacques Lacan, “The effect of mimicry is camouflage.” The ‘babu’ culture was largely fostered by the natives in India who were educated in the Western style. These people challenged the social ways that was prevalent in the Bengali society and gave rise to a completely new way of living in British-dominated West Bengal. Mimicking the ways of the colonial masters, they indulged in activities like drinking imported liquor, smoking cigars and replacing the traditional palanquins and carriages with expensive motor cars. They lived lives which mimicked the British way of life, but with misplaced eloquence and pathos. They somewhat became obsessed with some particular codes which they associated with Englishness. The general effect of this was often one bordering on ludicrousness.

The colonizers recruited some of these people in their mills as well as in administrative services. Initially, these people were recruited as clerical staff, serving as interpreters of sorts between the colonizers and the native labourers (in the mills). However, as time passed, some of them rose to the top of the hierarchy, occupying managerial positions in the mills. Unaware that they were being exploited by the British for their own ends, these people felt that they had been accepted by their colonial masters as their equal in some ways. In a bid to be closer to the colonial masters, they started distancing themselves further from the natives of their country. These gentlemen were the forerunners to the middle-brows⁴ in West Bengal- a class which is essentially closer to the lower-brows⁵ but constantly strive to mimic the upper-brows⁶ even till this day.

These Westernized-Indian people working in the mills quickly adapted themselves to the Western way of life. Taking up their residences within the mill compounds, they began to spoil themselves with the extravagances and luxuries offered to them. Centrally air-conditioned majestic bungalows, floors and stairways covered with red carpets, fine mahogany furniture, double seating areas overlooking the Hugli, twelve-seat dining rooms, swimming pools, lawns, grass courts for tennis, bowling greens and clubs with excise licenses were some of the facilities which were taken for granted in these industrial units. Apart from this, the Indians working in the higher hierarchical positions also received the same prerequisites as their British counterparts including furlough after every three years. They also adapted quickly to the English lifestyle in the mills like holding tennis matches, beer parties, swim and lunch on Sundays. The ‘babus of the mills’ who were contented considering themselves almost as inferior English citizens striving to adapt to the ways of their superiors.

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This paper traces the way of life of the Indians who used to serve in the jute mills in the colonial era. It depicts how they adapted to and oft mimicked the ways of their colonial masters and how they are, in a way, the forerunners of the Bengalis who flock to Park Street on Christmas Eve in recent times. The study was conducted in and around the premises of the now defunct Khardah Jute Co and the Gourepore Jute Co respectively.

Methods-



A glimpse of the Hugli river at Khardah.

Finding out details about the ‘babu’ culture in the Jute Mills was quite hard, owing to the fact that both the mills where the studies were conducted have remained closed for over a decade. The only people at the campus were the security guards who knew very little about the way of life in the mills when they were running; most of them having been recruited by the mill authorities for the purpose of guarding the vast mill campuses post their closure.

However, in the Khardah Jute Co. I was lucky enough to find Mr Banerjee who had previously worked in the mill as security personnel since 1980 during my visit to the mill campus. He kindly agreed to tell me what he knew about life in the Khardah Jute Co. Apart from this, the members of the Face book group called Jute Mill Days, comprising of the family members of former jute mill employees, also helped me get the details about the mill.

In case of the Gourepore Jute Co, the security personnel were kind enough to allow me the opportunity to go through the ruins of the vast Gourepore Industrial Estate. However, I was unable to access a large part of the campus owing to the fact that the mill premises have

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remained unkempt over the years and a large part of it has been covered by forests. However, I was fortunate enough to come across some people in various parts of the mill premises. Some of these people live inside the premises in the crumbling bungalows.

They had once been employees of the majestic mill and are now waiting for their dues to be cleared before they move out of the buildings which have housed them for close to five decades. The others were security personnel in various parts of the mill. Some of them had previously worked in the mill in various departments and had taken up jobs as security personnel post the closure of the mill in order to eke out a living. By bits and pieces, I was able to put together a picture of how life could have been in the mills via my interaction with them. The owner of a makeshift shanty outside the mill premises where I had a snack had also been an employee of the Gourepore Jute Co. He too was able to fill me on details regarding the lives of the high-ranked Indian officers in the mill. Apart from this, a couple of articles by renowned columnist, Mr Soumitra Das titled ‘A Little Bit of Scotland’ and ‘Golden Fibre Days’ which appeared on ‘The Telegraph’, enabled me to get a few more details on the Gourepore Jute Co. I also took help from a few online sources to get details regarding the mill.

Last but not the least; when I visited the campuses of both the mills, I made it a point to talk to the people living in the coolie lines just outside the mill premises. As many of them had ancestors who had served in the mills during the colonial era, they told me their recollections of what they had heard in their childhood. These interactions too were immensely informative and helped me to put together a picture of the ‘babu’ culture which had prevailed in the jute mills in the bygone days.

Discussion

THE KHARDAH JUTE CO.



A glimpse of the Khardah Jute Co, fallen into disuse.

Standing by the B.T. Road in Titagarh (Tata Gate) lays the now-defunct CESC thermal power plant (Titagarh). Along the left wall of the plant runs a road lined with crumbling shanties separated only by open drains. At the end of the road, we come across a large number of crumbling brick structures, separated from the road by a wall adorned with political propaganda all around them. Among all these structures, a couple of red brick boilers (the signature of the

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jute industry) stand out. However, the shock of shrubs, resembling tufts of hair, atop the boilers tell a tragic story... a story of political betrayal leading to death and devastation. These are the ruins of the Khardah Jute Mills which has remained closed since 2004.



One of the defunct brick boilers of the Khardah Jute Co.

Taking a walk along the lane lying to right side of the wall, we come across a couple of iron gates located close to each other. An open drainage system carrying its unhygienic contents to the Hugli, separates the gates from the main road. However, if one was to take a close look at the gate on the left, the person could unmistakably spot a couple of rails jutting out under the gate. This was the rail gate which connected the mill to the broad-gauge railway network running past the Titagarh railway station. The railway connection had been cut off even before the mill had closed down. The beginning of the end to this glorious mill had begun with the cutting off of the railway network in 1970 in an attempt to minimize the losses that the mill was going through. Finally the looms in the mill ground to a final halt in 2004 when the power supply was disconnected due to non-payment of bills caused by working capital crisis.

The Khardah Jute Co. was founded in 1892 by Mc.Leod & Co. It comprised of a total of 1370 looms and was one of the premium jute mills in the industrial region by the Hugli. Of all the jute mills, the Khardah Jute Co had the highest output of hessian. It is rumoured that pay packages in this mill were so attractive that people would forgo government jobs even post-independence for a chance to work here. If one succeeded in securing the position of an officer in this mill, that person would enjoy a lordly existence for years to come.



Bungalow of the General Manager at the Khardah Jute Co.

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Bungalow of the Director at Khardah Jute Co.

Walking further along the right wall of the mill, we approach an array of old abandoned buildings opposite to the mills. These were the living quarters of the clerical staff in the mill. However, they undoubtedly bear the stamp of British architecture, being built in the signature red bricks that smack of British colonial influence. However, time and pollution, coupled with a lack of care have blackened the buildings in a large number of places. These were living spaces with basic facilities but still their proportions were palatial by today's standards in an era of space crunch. These buildings were made in apartment style with each apartment comprising of a couple of bedrooms, a living room (which could be used as dining cum drawing room), a kitchen, one or a couple of bathrooms and a balcony... in short everything that we get in 2BHK apartments these days. Each of the bathrooms had a small water storage space known as 'chaubaccha'⁷ in Bengali. Kids could even turn those into makeshift bath tubs for fun. These living quarters were located close to the Hugli which rendered coolness to the air even in hot summer afternoons. The quarters had fans or punkhas to keep the inmates cool.

Moving further, the apartments give way to palatial bungalows which undoubtedly housed the high-ranking officers in the mills. Each of these bungalows was equipped with a central air-conditioning unit. Each of these bungalows had lawns with swings, a garage and a servant's quarter attached to it. The officers in the mill led lordly lives and were even entitled to personal valets who would help them to get dressed or undress. At the Khardah Jute Co, all the staff were male. Such was the case with all the other mills too. This was because the society back then was greatly patriarchal and women education was largely restricted.

Just by the river, we come across a bungalow which stands out from others merely on account of its majestic proportions. This bungalow used to house the Managing Director of the

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Khardah Jute Co. It is called the 'Burra Sahib Ka Bangla' meaning 'Bungalow of the Managing Director'. This bungalow is still in use on account of the fact that the NJMC (National Jute Manufacturers Corporation) rents it for picnic purposes ever since it took over the Khardah Jute Co in 1985. This bungalow gives us glimpses into what life could have been for those who held managerial positions in the mills. Everything about the bungalow smacks of extravaganza. Apart from all the things found in the other bungalows, this bungalow had a swimming pool and a Babylonian balcony attached to it. The floors all carpeted in red, the bathrooms with their white marble floors and majestic bathtubs speak of a dream existence in a bygone era. All this splendor coupled with the serenity of an existence by the river present a life which most can think of only in their wildest dreams.

Lives of Indians in the Khardah Jute Mills

Every morning at about seven in the morning, the sound of the factory horn announced the end of the night shift and the beginning of the morning shift at the Khardah Jute Co. The British were very punctual and had very strong reservations about unpunctuality. However, the officers (both British and Indians) had to rise at about five in the morning to attend to their daily chores. Nearly all officers at the top of the hierarchy had personal valets who would help them get dressed for the day. The campus of the mill was large and officers had to move around in bicycles or motor cars to keep an eye on the staff. People, irrespective of hierarchy, had to work hard in the mill. However, the mill authority had the interests of the workers at heart and provided them with ample benefits. There was a hospital-wing and dispensary within the mill where the treatment provided was top class, going by the standards of the day. After a day of hard work, it was time to relax and enjoy all the luxuries associated with life in the mills back in those days.

There were two clubs within the housing compound of the Khardah Jute Co. One was for the officers in the mill, the other for the clerical staff. Both the clubs held excise licences. Indian history has often portrayed the Europeans as radically racist. Surprisingly, I have been told that in the Khardah Jute Co, Europeans and Indians mixed freely when it was time to relax. The attitude that the Europeans held with respect to their Indian counterparts was: 'In the club, I'm your friend.'

However, there were certain reservations among people with respect to hierarchy. The officers in the mills had their own social group and rarely mixed with anyone beneath their hierarchy. However, when it was time for festivities like Christmas, all differences would be put aside and people from both the races and all hierarchies would mingle freely.

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However, Indians who were at the top of the hierarchy took great pleasure in mimicking the ways of the British. Sometimes they even surpassed the British with respect to maintaining hierarchical boundaries. Beyond the walls of the mills, these people had no identity or world. They sort of lived in their ‘glass menagerie’⁸ of mimicry. Their sole purpose in life became mimicking the foreign masters. They started drinking expensive foreign liquor because the British did so. They bought expensive motor vehicles because the British did so. Despite all these things, however much they tried, they could not be truly British.

Their manners were British but their ways still remained Indian. They still believed in all the age old superstitions. I have been told that there was an officer who refused to step out of his house for five minutes if someone sneezed on the eve of his departure. Then again they clung as hard as possible to some of the Indian customs which would have been better to get rid of like the process of taking dowry. Mr Banerjee told me that officers would sometimes receive huge amounts of gold or expensive cars on their marriage or the marriage of their sons. I have also been told that the Indians did not have the spirit of their British counterparts. The Indians officers sometimes failed to make it to their charges in time.

The culture that flourished at the campus of the Khardah Jute Mill was British culture in its purest form during the pre-independence era. Saturday was a half-day and Sunday was a full holiday at the Khardah Jute Co. On Sundays, the babus of the mill would have tennis or cricket matches. Then they would go swimming and afterwards they would have lunch and beer parties. On Christmas Eve, the trees in the campus would be decorated with electric bulbs. The celebration of Christmas would take place with great pomp and show on the mill campus. Everyone would get together at the clubs for Christmas dinner which too comprised of European delicacies like roast turkey and red wine. English songs would be sung at these gatherings and there would be ball dances in which the mill babus would mimic the Englishmen and their wives by putting up ball dance performances. Sometimes they would succeed in mimicking the steps. At other times, they would fail miserably. This failure was often a result of trying to mimic the dance by just watching it and not learning it. However, there had some positive impacts too. Many of the Indians who worked in the mills, gradually picked up the sense of discipline and punctuality from the British. This greatly enhanced the quality of their output, as well as their contribution towards their work place.

After the Independence of India, the Khardah Jute Co was still in British hands till 1950. Post 1950, the mill changed a couple of hands until it was taken over by the National Jute

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Manufacturers Corporation (NJMC) in 1956. The babus in the mills continued to enjoy a regal lifestyle until trouble struck the mills in the 1970s. They still continued to host parties in an attempt to preserve the traditions that had been bequeathed to them by the English. However, with the passing of time, the parties became increasingly ‘Indianised’ with ball dances⁹ being replaced with classical dances performed by the family members of the officers. English songs too became replaced with classical songs¹⁰, ghazals¹¹ and Rabindra Sangeet¹² (songs composed by the renowned Rabindranath Tagore). In this way, the babuism in the mills took on a new turn. A ‘neo-babuism’ culture was born which was, in a way, a unique blend of British and Indian elements. This ‘neo-babuism’ finds resemblance in the culture that we get to see in family reunions and social occasions in middle-class Bengali families these days.

THE GOUREPORE JUTE CO-



A glimpse of the ruins of the Gourepore Jute Co.

A short walk from the Naihati station towards Hajinagar brings us into the heart of the Naihati industrial belt. In this largely defunct industrial zone lies a vast tract of forested land enclosed by walls. As far as the eyes can see, endless forests stretch away into the very heart of this hinterland. However, on a closer look, glimpses of Scottish architecture can be seen through the gaps in the shrubs. The wall surrounding this vast stretch is cracked at places. It is not uncommon to mistake this place for a ‘Jurassic Park’¹³ of sorts. A lone red brick boiler with a tuft of shrubs atop it rears solitarily over the stretch. It is nearly impossible to think that Scots had once made this place their workplace and abode. This vast tract of forested land is what remains of the Gourepore Jute Co which was once known as ‘the best jute mill in the world’.

The place was once a township in itself enclosing three industrial units, namely the Gourepore Jute Mills, the Gourepore Thermal Power Station and Gourepore Containers and Closures. The Gourepore industrial estate originally belonged to the Inchcape Group under Barry & Co. It is said that Naihati once bustled with activity owing to the presence of the

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Gourepore Industrial Estate. However, in the post-independence era, the ownership of the mill changed hands. It was taken over by the Hemraj Mahabir Podder group and by the Goyals before it ceased operation in 1998.

The Gourepore Industrial Estate had a large role in the economy of Naihati. It would not be an exaggeration to state that the economic condition of the Naihati industrial region largely collapsed with the downfall of the Gourepore Co. However, the role that the industrial estate played in the socio-cultural lives of the people is no less important. Back in the days when the Gourepore Co was at the peak of its glory, its sirens would keep the time in Naihati. Sirens of the morning, evening and night shifts would symbolize the pulse of this vast industrial zone which would impart a collective sense of time and discipline and a united communal life among the residents. Inside the Gourepore Industrial Estate were staff quarters for the people working in the mills. The life inside the mill was almost ethereal... a way of life which was a stark contrast to that of the surrounding areas.

The fairy-tale jute mill environment at the Gourepore Jute Co has been succinctly described by columnist Soumitra Das in his article titled 'Golden Fibre Days' in 'The Telegraph'. Mr Das also took pains to reconnect with people who had seen the way of life in the Gourepore Jute Mills back in its heydays. This included an interview with a Mr Jeffrey Clark, whose father had worked as a supervisor at the Gourepore Jute Co. The articles by Mr Das, coupled with my own experience of going through the ruins of the Gourepore Jute Co along with the neighbouring coolie lines helped me to reconstruct how the way of life might have been when it was 'the best jute mill in the world'.

Lives of Indians in the Gourepore Jute Co

Unlike the Khardah Jute Co which was managed by the British, the Gourepore Jute Co was managed by Scotsmen. The Scotsmen too were very well disciplined with a strict sense of punctuality. However, they were a little relaxed with respect to class differences. Unlike in the mills managed by the British, the Gourepore Jute Mill had a single large club that was open to all, irrespective of hierarchal differences.

The Scotsmen were renowned for their love of Scotch whisky, especially the largely popular Loch Lomond¹⁴. Loch Lomond was regarded as a class in itself. It was generally regarded that anyone who possessed that specific brand of whisky was a class above others. And it did not take long for the Indians working in the top hierarchal level in the Gourepore Industrial Estate (babus) to get enticed by the bandwagon effect of this brand. They too started

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consuming Loch Lomond in an attempt to imitate the Scotsmen. However, in the Gourepore Jute Co, the Scotsmen too picked up some of the Indian traits. They started enjoying Indian music like ghazals and took to enjoying Indian delicacies like biriyani¹⁵ too. At the topmost hierarchal level, the Scotsmen and the Indians mingled freely.

Like in the other jute mills, the officers, both Scottish and Indians enjoyed regal lifestyles in palatial centrally air-conditioned bungalows. The clerical staff too received shared accommodation in bungalows. Two or three families would share a bungalow. However, the bungalows of the clerical staff were not air-conditioned. An example of a bungalow shared by the clerical staff is the Neechi Kothi inside the Gourepore Jute Co premises. It is one of the few buildings that have still been kept partially intact by the mill authorities ever since the mill went into liquidation in 2013.



A photograph of the 'Neechi Kothi' inside the premises of the Gourepore Industrial Estate.

The environment inside the Gourepore Jute Co was different from that of the other mills in the sense that it resembled quite a bit of Scotland. Christmas was celebrated with great pomp and show inside the campus. The babus in the Gourepore Jute Co soon picked up the trend of celebrating Christmas to such an extent that even after the Scots had departed post-independence, they still continued to celebrate Christmas with great extravagance and grandeur performing the same rituals which they had seen their Scottish superiors perform like singing Christmas Carols, drinking Scotch whisky and consuming roast turkey. Such was the impact of this culture on these mimic men that they continued to carry on with this extravagance even when the mill fell into bad times. It may be mentioned that the Western culture of consuming liquor on multiple occasions has increasingly found its way into the Indian youth across all ethnicities and social strata in recent years.

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The Indian officers at the Gourepore Jute Co are still remembered for their love for fancy motorcars. Very often, they would try to mimic their superiors outside the mill campus by going about in imported cars. Back in the heydays of the jute mill, I have gathered from the coolie lines that many of the Indian officers had managed to acquire fancy motorcars. During my visit to the Gourepore Jute Co, I came across an Audi Wanderer lying abandoned by the main road that runs in front of the mill campus, connecting Barrackpore to Kachrapara. On inquiring about it in a small makeshift shanty where I had snacks and tea that afternoon, I got to know that the car had belonged to a Mr Banerjee who had once held the position of Head of the Finishing Department at the mill. Mr Banerjee had ‘received’ the car as a gift on his wedding day. Indeed, the salary structure of the Gourepore Jute Co was such that those working in the mills were regarded as prospective grooms back in the day. Thus their value in the ‘marriage market’ used to be quite high in their respective localities and this enabled them to get expensive gifts as dowry from their parents-in-laws.



A vintage car left outside the premises of the Gourepore Jute Co.

The mill itself was no less regal. It had its own captive power plant and water supply. The power plant of the mill also used to supply electricity to the neighboring areas. I have been informed by the security personnel that the mill had its own train and its engine used to carry coal to the power plant. The way of life in the jute mill, as it appeared, was too good to be true. However, like all good things, this too had to come to an end. And this happened in 1998 when the boiler of the mill finally stopped billowing forth smoke in the month of December, following five tumultuous years in the mill.

Conclusion

After the Independence of India, the British still held their sway over the mills till the 1960s. Post the 1960s, those who used to supply the raw materials began to take over the mills from the English and Scottish owners. This newly-formed bourgeois class was considerably

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myopic and was interested only in short-term profits. As a result, mill machinery was not upgraded to meet the challenges of changing times. This, coupled with the radical intervention of the trade unions post the 1970s, led to a sharp decrease in the profits and wages and increase in the unrest in the mills. Many of the new owners of the mills decided that a closed industrial unit was in many ways more profitable than an open one, especially in the face of a sharp decline in the usage and prices of jute in India. Soon afterwards, the mills began to close down and this initiated the beginning of the end of the West Bengal industrial area.

Those who held top positions in the hierarchy in mills that continue to struggle to exist were also hard-hit by the situation. Their job security became uncertain. Thus the officers were forced to cut back on the funds for their luxurious lifestyles. Instead, they had to focus on saving up for their future as they could no longer rely on the pension schemes provided by the mill managements. As the condition of the mills worsened, tensions continued to grow. Unrest among workers and vying to preserve one's position became the norm. This led to a fragmentation in the social circle of the officers. Parties and social gatherings became scarce as everyone started withdrawing into their shells. Jealousy and spite took over the spirit of camaraderie that had hitherto prevailed among the officers in the mills. Thus started the decline of the 'babu' culture which had sprung up in the jute mills along the banks of the Hugli river. With the onslaught of time, as the future prospects of those working in these mills became bleaker, the babuism died out as the people working in the jute mills, including the high-ranked officials, plunged themselves into the naked battle for basic needs and survival, shattering the treacherous barriers of pretensions and mimicry.

Though Babuism has perished in the jute mills by the Hugli, its traits can still be seen in the middle-class Bengali society today. Some of the traits which the 'Babus', both inside and outside the sphere of the jute industry, had picked up from their colonial masters were passed on to the middle-class Bengali society which increasingly began to take pride in 'Westernizing' itself. A lot of Westernized traits can increasingly be seen in the Bengali youth of today who pride themselves on successful mimicry of the Western way of life. The throwing of house parties on various occasions, the culture of wining and dining and the longing for the Western way of life, fairness of skin and imported motor cars have somewhat ingrained themselves into the collective consciousness of the middle-class Bengali proletariat, proving that the colonial hangover is far from being over. This has both its pros and cons. However, the people whom we know as 'Bongs'¹⁶ of today, have a distinct culture of their own which carry traits of the 'Babu' culture and is a quaint blend of the Bengali and British ways of life.

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Footnotes:

1. The English Education Act, 1835- The English Education Act, 1835, was a legislative Act of the Council of India. It gave effect to Lord William Bentinck's decision to reallocate funds for the purpose of spending on spreading English education and literature in India.
2. Mimic Men- A term coined by V.S. Naipaul for his novel of the same name. It indicates the tendency of colonized people to think of themselves as inferior English citizens and do their best to mimic the political, economic and social structure of the colonizers.
3. Babus- Earlier used as a word to describe men who mimicked the colonizers. However, now it is a respectful title or form of address for a man.
4. Middle-brows- People hailing from the middle-class society.
5. Lower-brows- People hailing from the lower-class society.
6. Upper-brows- People hailing from the upper-class society.
7. Chaubaccha- A Bengali word for a kind of water storage tank which somewhat resembles a bath-tub.
8. Glass Menagerie- A play by Tennessee Williams. It often means a make-believe world.
9. Ball dances- It is a set of partner dances, which are enjoyed socially and competitively around the world.
10. Classical songs- A general term indicating songs which have been composed or sung by musicians trained in the art of writing music (composing).
11. Ghazals- A lyrical poem with a fixed number of verses and a repeated rhyme, typically on the theme of love and normally set to music.
12. Sangeet- Sanskrit word for 'song'.
13. Jurassic Park- A movie directed by Steven Spielberg. It is often used to indicate forested tracts of land in daily conversation.
14. Loch Lomond- A brand of whiskey distilled and manufactured at the Loch Lomond Distillery in Scotland.
15. Biryani- An Indian delicacy comprising of Basmati rice, potatoes, eggs and meat.
16. Bongs- A word indicating modern-day Bengalis.

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