

HOW I WANT TO SEE MY KOLKATA

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Ei Samay, April 07, 2015
(English Version)

I have had the occasion to see quite a few metropolises all over the world, so when I come back to Kolkata, I see a lot of potential that we could put to good use.

The river is the centre of life in cities like the Siene in Paris, the Thames in London, the Nile in Cairo or even the Chhao Phraya in Bangkok. It is a “must” to get on to river cruises, both in the daytime and at night, but in Kolkata, land-loving Bengalis come up only to river bank to take a bit of the free air (howa khowa). All we see is either country boats, which have their own charms too for tourists or the huge cargo liners, most of which look rather ugly. I have travelled from Budge-Budge to Barackpur up the river, and I have seen that there are many patches like the one from Princep Ghat to Kashipur, which have a great potential for flood-lit tourism at night, as in Paris. We have some ugly spots, however, to clean up along the route.

Kolkata’s trams, especially along the Maidan and the Maidan area, are a treat and we could easily reserve some colourful trams only for local and foreign tourists. Chitpur Road, for instance, reeks of history but it is impossible to negotiate through its traffic. It would be wonderful to view this stretch from a tram better so if it is slow, which it is bound to be.

I have been taking photographs of lovely cast iron balconies of Kolkata, and in New York there is a special heritage walk in Trebeca to admire cast-iron urban art. So, why not Kolkata?

The Maidan is another place that could become the Kensington Gardens like in London. We need to fill it up with beautiful trees, shades, ponds and walk-ways with fountains and other attractions as the mid-city lungs of Kolkata. This would force the political rallies to find a place in Rajarhat or some other outskirts and save the city from traffic jams.

Park Street becomes a wonderland during Christmas and New Year. Why can't we have some similar 'Chandannagar lights' in some other streets throughout the year? Incidentally, we have one of the world's best skills in lighting decor of this type and the entire theme walls could be built in a selected zone, with other entertainment available in the open.

The warehouses on Strand Road can either be ugly dilapidated buildings or well-maintained old colonial structures, depending on how we treat them. All the world over, warehouses have become art galleries and museums.

The New Market area should be totally sealed off and made traffic free zone, now, that multi-storied car parking lots are available. It would be a lovely trip for walkers and in so many old cities of the world there are restricted 'pedestrian areas'. This would combine tourism with history and commerce.

Kolkata has very little "street art", unlike so many other cities where we see statues, sculptures, murals in the open and even imaginative graffiti decorating old walls. With so many artists in the city, all we need is just a push and some funding. Then, the streets will become live with art of all types: believe me. This is the city where the finest forms of urban folk creativity burst out during Durga Pujas in different pandals. So, just light the match and we will see a thousand wonders brought to life, throughout the year.