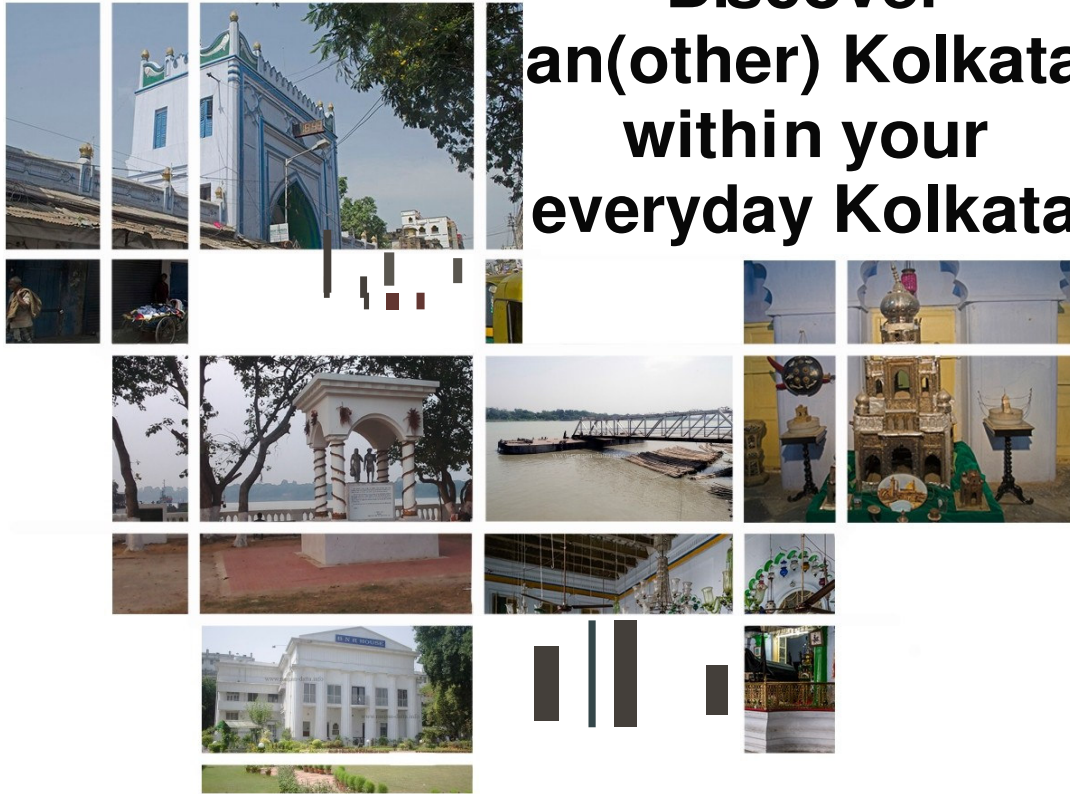


# Discover an(other) Kolkata within your everyday Kolkata



Global Protection of Migrants & Refugees  
Fourth Annual Research & Orientation Workshop & Confernece  
Calcutta Research Group

**Parikhana** used to be a palatial riverside resort that belonged to Sir Lawrence Peel, former Chief Justice of the Supreme Court in Calcutta, which was then the capital of British India. British history says that they had given the exiled Nawab Wajid Ali Shah this house to stay in after the breaking up of the Revolt of 1857. Wajid Ali Shah lost all hopes of getting back his kingdom after the mutiny. On 15 June 1857 he was arrested and imprisoned in Calcutta's Fort William. After spending 26 months in prison he walked out as a free man.



After his release from the Fort William he was allotted a beautiful house in Garden Reach. The milk white building built in 1846 was apparently inspired by the Temple of Winds of Athens. The latter was also the inspiration behind Metcalfe Hall on Strand Road. In those days it was known as the Parikhana (house of fairies) and it was where the emperor was entertained by musicians, poets and dancers. Today it serves as a residence of the General Manager (GM) of South Eastern Railway (SER).

Wajid Ali Shah spent the remaining three decades of his life in turning the Metiabruz area into a Chhota Lucknow. He built several palaces like the Qasrul Baiza, Murasa Manzil, Noor Manzil and Adalat Manzil. Wajid Ali Shah also came up with an open air zoo, which housed tigers and leopards along with a reptile house. Rare animals and exotic birds were procured from different parts of the world.

Wajid Ali Shah wrote several books which have been kept and digitized at the Victoria Memorial. This includes a book on the Kathak dance and an ornate astronomical and astrological calendar prepared by Wajid Ali Shah.



### **Balu Ghat or Suriname**

**Ghat** is historic in labour history because it was from here that over a million Indians migrated as indentured workers to the Caribbean, South Africa, Mauritius and Fiji Islands to work on sugarcane plantations during the colonial period. The indentured workers were recruited

from Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal and the former Madras Presidency area. Each colony, whether it was Mauritius, Guyana or Suriname had its depot in Calcutta where the indentured recruits were lodged while they waited for their sailing ship to arrive.

From these depots they were taken to jetties or ghats to embark on the ships or the small boats that took them to the large ocean-going ships. The jetties came to be known by the name of the destination to which the migrants were travelling. Most of the jetties fell into disuse and were forgotten after the indentured sailings ended in the early 20th century. But the area around Suriname's jetty is still known as Suriname Ghat but local residents call it by the name Balu Ghat.

In 1863 slavery was officially abolished in Suriname but the plantations, of the former Dutch colony, was in need of labour. The Dutch came up with a plan to get other people to replace the African slaves. On September 8, 1870, the Dutch colony on the coast of Guinea was ceded to Great Britain in return for granting Suriname the rights to recruit workers from British India.

On June 5, 1873, the ship Lalla Rookh carried 399 workers on board-279 men, 70 women, 32 boys and 18 girls under 10. During the period of 1873-1916 a total of 64 ships made it to Suriname from Kolkata carrying a total of 34,304 contract workers from India. The labourers were first collected in sub-depots of Benares, Allahabad, Basti and Muzzafarpur. From these sub-depots the recruits were transferred by train to the main depot in Calcutta.

Upon their arrival, they were given a thali, a Iota, a couple of kurtas or saris and dhoti. When there were enough workers assembled they were shipped to Suriname. With a sailing ship the voyage took three months, with a steamboat about 6 to 8 weeks. The sub-agents received 25 rupees for a male and 35 rupees for a female recruit.



**Bichali Ghat** is the place where Nawab Wajid Ali Shah's steamer named Mcleod, first docked in Calcutta on 13 May 1856. His palace Sultankhana is very close to the ghat. It still has the same name and is an important hub for bamboos, which come floating to the ghat from different parts of Bengal and Assam.

**Sibtainbad Imambara** is smaller and less ornate version of the Imambara in Lucknow and houses the grave of Wajid Ali Shah and his son Birjis Qadir.

The grave of Wajid Ali Shah is crowned with a Tazia, similar to the one of Imam Hussain, the third imam of Shia Islam.



Stained glass windows, massive chandeliers, royal emblems and wrought iron railings create a royal atmosphere. The fish motif, which used to be the royal emblem of Oudh, is engraved at the entrance.