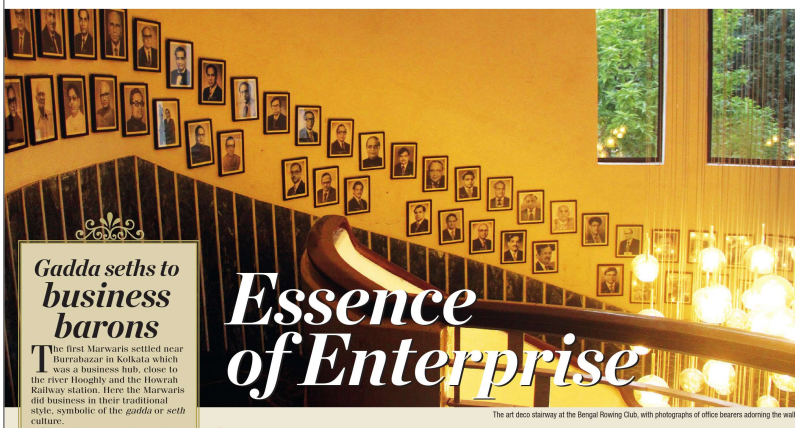


News monitored for: Emami Group



### Gadda seths to business barons

The first Marwaris settled near Burrabazar in Kolkata which was a business hub, close to the river Hooghly and the Howrah Railway station. Here the Marwaris did business in their traditional style, symbolic of the *gadda* or *seth* culture.

This culture was unique and introduced new innovative business dealings like *bandi* or other home-span accounting system on a daily basis that reduced business risks and made long-distance trade possible. Similarly, the *desi* tradition of futures trading or *faka* in jute trade was introduced in early 1900s at the *Azra* or *intal* exchanges in Burrabazar area of Calcutta where *tef* and *mandi* or call and put options respectively, came into play.

On the other hand, the other group of Marwaris who were more like first generation industrialists were a part and parcel of the emerging corporate culture of India.



SUNDEEP BHUTORIA

Marwaris were, in general, an affluent community and they earned every bit of this affluence through hard work. There were few of them who donned the industrialist cap and were big names because they dabbled in politics, the British being the foremost with Ghanshyamdas Birla becoming a nationally famous figure. Many of the later generation Marwaris of Kolkata have their roots in the *gadda* culture.

## Essence of Enterprise

THE EVOLUTION OF MARWARI COMMUNITY IN KOLKATA IS A TALE OF BUSINESS AND INDUSTRY WOVEN INTO THE CULTURAL SOUL OF THE CITY

ADITYA AGARWAL@timesgroup.com

Bengal aka Kolkata is unique in her essence. Multicultural, cosmopolitan and pluralistic, she is an ethnic cauldron with that perfect mix of those from the state and beyond. While the city has embraced people from all over the country, one community that has blended seamlessly into the Kolkata fabric, more than any other, is that of the Marwaris.

### BUSINESS & BEYOND

So, what induced the initial influx of the Marwari community? Business, not comes the reply from most of the community pundits. The Marwaris reached the city even before the British era. In the words of Sandeep Bhutoria, culturalist and philanthropist, "I think there are two basic reasons for Marwaris choosing Kolkata as their second home. First, it proved an old adage — *Jahan na pahuchay bayel gari, wahan pahuchay Marwari* (where the bullock cart cannot reach, Marwaris do). The Marwari community has been very enterprising, and Kolkata being the old capital of India and a trading and financial hub during the British days, was a natural choice. Second, the early Marwari businessmen and traders were close to the British regime and they followed the then government where there were business opportunities. Kolkata had it all. The railway and port infrastructure were important for carrying out business."

### CATERING TO BASIC NEEDS

By the mid-19th century, the Marwari outmigration had become a

Marwaris involved themselves with the festivals of Bengal and its food, music and ancient culture. Records say, Jaipur was planned by a noted Bengali architect. Such was the relationship

The British stronghold in Kolkata was also an important reason for the Marwari outmigration, as they were looking towards growth and expansion

pan-Indian phenomenon and erstwhile Calcutta was much a part of it.

Going down the lane, the Marwaris were instrumental in the expansion of the Dhauwantry Group, honorary consul, the Republic of Niger, Kolkata and president, Calcutta Chamber of Commerce, reminisces, "In the pre-independence era, the frequent droughts and drinking water problem, forced, communities from Rajasthan and Haryana to shift, look towards Kolkata. It was primarily the basic needs of job, and education as also combating of poverty, that forced the influx." The Marwaris used to get well with the local communities that helped them do business with affluent Bengal businessmen in jute, tea, iron, steel etc. in undivided Bengal.

### ON BENGAL SOIL

The Jagat Seths were known to have reached Kolkata even before the British. The Seths were essentially the first Marwari bankers and were based in Murshidabad. Coming from the arid desert regions, the Hooghly with its gentle waters, excited many an entrepreneur to set up jute and paper mills," opines Kishu Mohla, president, The Bengal Rowing Club.

### SOCIO-POLITICAL BROTHERHOOD

Mingling with the socio-political fabric of India, Marwaris joined hands with the likes of Mahatma Gandhi, Swami Vivekananda and other freedom fighters to usher India's Independence. Kolkata was then the capital of India and a better place to live in with a better quality of life. Bengali businessmen found natural partners in the Marwari community. Together they established hospitals, schools, colleges, community kitchens (*thasas*) including temples, *maths*, *ashrams* etc.," feels Khandaev.

### CULTURE CONNECT

While trade, commerce and business have been the plinth on which the Marwaris came and settled in Kolkata, they took little time to blend with Bengal's famous culture, literature, sports and art fraternity. The Bengal Rowing Club was started 90 years ago with just a few members but with a heartfelt determination as the Marwari Rowing Club, later rechristened in its present name," adds Mohla. Calcutta never discriminated against communities and the credit for this goes to the Kolkata culture and mind set. "Marwaris too found Kolkata suitable for their business and the local Bengalis culturally accommodating, and many of them found the city to be so conducive that they settled down permanently," avers Bhutoria.

ADITYA AGARWAL, DIRECTOR, EMAMI GROUP, ASSERTS THAT PEOPLE HERE ARE A LOT PROGRESSIVE AND ADAPTIVE TO CHANGES

### Cauldron of Rich Culture

Born and bred in Kolkata, his association with this city is almost as old as he himself is. A third generation Marwari from Bikaner, whose grandfather had come down to settle in erstwhile Calcutta, he considers himself to be no different from an average Kolkatan as far as his ethos is concerned. Speak to him and you are likely to mistake him for a Bengali. But then that is Aditya Agarwal, director, Emami Group, for you. His love for the city is apparent in the way he states that Kolkata is "the city of culture."

"Rajasthan too is culturally rich but people out here in Bengal are a lot more progressive and adaptive to changes," asserts Aditya Agarwal, director, Emami Group. He owes his Bangalians to all those who mingle around with. "I spend most of my time with Bengalis so that makes me a Bengali too. When you interact closely with people from other communities, you learn so much from them. It is such a rich exchange of culture," shares Agarwal.

Art and culture is what keeps him rooted to this city. Having drawn much from the City of Joy, it is time now to give back. "Next month will see the curating in risk Kolkata Centre for Creativity, a dynamic interactive arts centre. It will have everything to do with art — it will juxtapose art, craft and design with viewing, collection and preservation," he informs. His passion is palpable and like any true Kolkatan, he too eats, lives and breathes art.

Every venture of Emami has been keeping an average Kolkatan in mind. People here are avid book lovers. There were not too many good bookstores around. "Starmark was founded by my father RS Agarwal to keep the habit of reading alive among young Kolkatans," says Agarwal. That he is no less a Bengali also comes across in the taglines of his edible oil — *Khasi Bengali ke bhaat diye jai chono gao!* "So what if he is a Marwari? Agarwal does not recall when he was last told he was from outside. "Be it the simplicity of people, the attitude of the government, the sense of inclusiveness or the lip-smacking food, it all contributes to the genial feeling that we associate with Kolkata. You can find it nowhere else," voices Agarwal.

While he feels the city wants for nothing, somehow art evokes common people. "It should not be restricted to the realm of the affluent. We need to take it to everyone and I hope to be able to do just that," concludes Agarwal.

(As told to Irene.Saha@timesgroup.com)

KOLKATA HAS DISTINGUISHED ITSELF AS INDIA'S CULTURAL CAPITAL. MUCH LIKE PARIS, THE WORLD'S CULTURAL CAPITAL, AVERS MK JALAN, CHAIRMAN EMERITUS, KEVENTER GROUP

### Key to Success

Some 300 years ago, his ancestors came down to Kolkata from Rajasthan. Coming from an enterprising family, doing business comes naturally to him. "We Marwaris, have a knack for doing business. We understand money matters really well. Bengal is an intellectual hot and thanks to your work input, we have been able to take our businesses to great heights," opines MK Jalan, chairman emeritus, Keventer Group. Bengali education combined with Marwari money is what runs the show. According to him, both communities have enriched each other. He calls it a complementary effect. "Marwaris have a few qualities. The first one is their money sense. They know how to make money. You cannot beat them at that," specifies Jalan. The other quality is their commitment. "Once committed, they never go back, irrespective of suffering a loss or making a profit. There is no written agreement. We just rely on each other. You cannot do business if you don't keep your word," believes Jalan. It is quick to point out how Marwaris do not go to court. "They settle it amicably among themselves. If there is any difference of opinion, the Marwari society intervenes. This is our plus point. That is why businesses have grown," he maintains.

"Thanks to their plus points, Marwaris have evolved and how! "Wherever they go, they develop. They are open to taking risks," he says. Having grown up in this city, he is very much a part of it. He feels that Marwaris have contributed to the city in significant ways. "Hospitals, schools and colleges — so many of them belong to Marwaris yet it is not an instrument of money making. Profit motive is not there. It is a way of giving back," avers Jalan who heads the consortium Heritage Group of institutions. What he loves about this city is its people who, he claims, are very good. "You can work here. You can trust people here. When I was abroad, I missed Kolkata because of the people," he remembers. As former consul (hon) of France in Kolkata, he cannot help but notice the parallels between both places. "Kolkata has been the cradle of India's political and cultural thinking since pre-independence era while Paris has been the cradle of political thinking in the world," states Jalan. Be it the art and culture or the warmth that the city throbs with, Kolkata is as much a part of him as he is of it. (As told to Irene.Saha@timesgroup.com)

FOR PREEYAN BUDHIA, PRESIDENT, BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT, PATTON GROUP, THE ZEAL TO GROW IS NOT JUST LIMITED TO BUSINESS BUT ALSO HER CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE SOCIETY

### Biz with a Cause

Down syndrome, autism, learning disabilities and ADHD are some of mental health issues that iCanFly, an institute co-founded by Preeyan Budhia, caters to. "Students come here not only to receive vocational training but also to be a part of a community that embraces the idea that being different does not make one less of an individual," shares Preeyan Budhia. An MBA from the University of Nottingham, she has also studied in the London School of Economics and Political Sciences and worked with esteemed organisations abroad. The primary role Preeyan currently plays in her family business, the Patton Group, is that of president, business development. She looks into the expansion of the EMT Steel Filings Export division in newer territories such as the Middle East, North Africa and Europe, and also heads the plastics and new projects division of her company. That's not all. Preeyan is also involved in Patton's CSR activities. From very early on, she has also had the opportunity to not only observe, but also work hands-on with her grandfather H P Budhia, father Sanjay Budhia, and mother Mimi Budhia, across projects. Preeyan's ideas and processes are an amalgamation of the traditional and the new, the east and the west. "Each individual brings something new to the table, as does every generation. Although the approach may be different on occasions, no business goals align with that of the company perfectly," she maintains. Despite being a hardcore traveller, the lady feels there's no place like Kolkata. "Even in terms of business, industries and commerce, West Bengal has so much to offer. It's a charming city with a soul — it is home," she concludes. (As told to Piyasi.Mitra@timesgroup.com)

THE CITY'S CULTURE AND ITS WARMTH MAKES IT ONE OF THE MOST CONGENIAL PLACES TO LIVE IN. OPINES HEMANT KANORIA, CMD, SREI INFRASTRUCTURE FINANCE LTD

### Adding Colours

His grandfather Kedar Nath Kanoria moved to Kolkata from his native village in Bihar for studies and eventually settled here. It's been four generations in this city. "For long, our family was in flour mill, food and agriculture business. Srei Infrastructure Finance Ltd was started in 1989. Today, it is one of the largest holistic infrastructure institutions in India," informs Hemant Kanoria, CMD, Srei Infrastructure Finance Limited. About Marwaris in Kolkata, one thing is for sure — having spent centuries here, Rajasthanis do not think they are from a different state. "I think the beauty of our culture is that it integrates anyone and everyone. No one is ever made to feel left out. And, if someone feels alienated, it is because of their own thinking and attitude," believes Kanoria. Communities, who settled in Kolkata, have not only adapted to the city, but also evolved with the times to make themselves relevant and contemporary. "Incidentally, Marwaris go back a long way. They began migrating to Kolkata way before the British came here. Most of them came here to trade and eventually settled down. "The community has certainly added more colour and happiness to the city. Apart from its entrepreneurial flavour and values, the community has gone on to influence various aspects of Kolkata, including its cuisine, culture and even infrastructure," points out Kanoria. What is it that he loves about this city? Kolkata's indomitable spirit of embracing every hurdle and overcoming it — is and will always be one of his most favourite things about the city. The city's culture, its warmth makes Kolkata one of the most congenial places to live in Kolkata's deep-rooted connection with heritage and literature makes it even more special. Be it the bookstores of College Street or the infrastructure wise superior Rajarhat, Kolkata breathes enthusiasm in the lives of its citizens," says Kanoria. He believes life in Kolkata is full of opportunities for budding talents and skilled professionals. Kolkata has the potential to leverage opportunities, market those strengths in a structured manner and invite businesses and industries. "Some of its key strengths are its talent pool and quality infrastructure. The forward to more industries in Kolkata and Bengal at large with immense potential," concludes Kanoria. (As told to Irene.Saha@timesgroup.com)