

The Pennsylvania State University

The Graduate School

College of Education

AN ETHNOGRAPHIC CASE STUDY OF CONTEMPORARY BENGALI STUDENTS'

'*ĀDDĀ*' (HANG-OUT) IN ONE UNIVERSITY IN KOLKATA:

ALTERNATIVE PATHWAYS TO LEARNING, OR A COMPLETE WASTE OF TIME?

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Curriculum & Instruction and Comparative & International Education

by

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ABSTRACT

While a lot of Bengali cultural texts and D/discourses name *āddā* as central to the social-intellectual lives of the Bengali people, when it comes to the lives of the unemployed or under-employed Bengali middle-class youth and students, *āddā* is often considered a waste of time. This, thus, creates a cultural dissonance for most Bengali middle-class youth and students, who often cannot bring themselves to summarily concur with the prevalent view of youth *āddā* as a waste of time. It also belies a dominant teleological view of education and the time spent by youth and students in such non-curricular activities as *āddā*.

In this dissertation, through participant-observations, archival documents, and interviews with young people and some concerned adults such as parents of young students, the author investigates and critiques the complex politics of representation of Bengali youth *āddā* in the adult D/discourses, as well as in the counter-D/discourses of the young people, and examines the nuanced and multi-layered relationships between contemporary youth *āddā* and the prevalent cultural notions about gender, class, intellectuality and productive use of time in one university in Kolkata in the state of West Bengal in India as an ethnographic case.

Focusing particularly on the cultural worth of contemporary Bengali student and youth's *āddā* vis-à-vis its gender and class dimensions, as well as the popular cultural notions of success, productivity, materialism and creative-intellectuality, the dissertation primarily seeks to understand how a group of contemporary Bengali students and youth, who regularly hang out in one university in Kolkata, negotiate the cultural dissonance regarding the representation of *āddā* in cultural texts and D/discourses as a valued intellectual practice and an intangible cultural heritage of the Bengali people on one hand, and as a complete waste of time, on the other.

The dynamics of young people's negotiations of the dominant cultural representations of their *āddā* is approached through an ethnographic analysis of actual *āddā* practices of the youth,

including utilization of time, participation in production of ‘texts’ and (counter) D/discourses, consumption of controlled substances and the use of certain *āddā*-specific linguistic registers that reveal a terrain of class-inflected gendered demeanors and the masculine underpinnings of the social tensions that structure the spaces of youth *āddā* today.

Through an analysis of consumption of controlled substances, production of texts and D/discourses, and the use certain linguistic registers in the *āddās* of the students and youth in the university campus and its surroundings, the thesis demonstrates that the discursive cultural dissonance between the ‘good’ and the ‘bad’ *āddā*, tied to gender and class specificities, is both structuring of the students and youth’s understanding of their *āddā* practices and is informed and influenced by the same. More specifically, the dissertation demonstrates that while the students’ *āddā* practices often attempt to challenge and subvert the dominant discursive representations of Bengali youth’s *āddā*, these often also inadvertently provide new fodder to the same D/discourses; and that young people are often simultaneously critical of and also to some extent subscribers of the dominant cultural D/discourses on *āddā*, including young people’s *āddā*, although mostly when it pertains to someone else’s *āddā* and rarely to one’s own. Additionally, the dissertation points out the importance of places like university campuses and some commercialized spaces of convivial sociability like cafés, pubs, bars, lounges and discs for the flourishing of young people’s *āddā* culture as we know it today and for their roles in pushing the horizon of expectation regarding the contemporary youth *āddā* culture. The dissertation also iterates the pedagogical possibilities inherent in the youth *āddā* culture that educators can exploit to their students’ learning benefit in their classrooms and outside.

Situated in a premier university campus in the capital city of India’s eastern state of West Bengal – Kolkata (once known both as the intellectual and cultural capital of India) – this case study, thus, attempts to produce a critical ethnography of the intellectual Bengali *āddā* as it pertains to a group of Bengali, middle-class students and youth, who regularly hang out in the

university that has consistently been awarded a status of a Center of Excellence by the University Grants Commission and NAAC for the last 15 years in a row.

However, rather than trying to produce a unified picture of the Bengali youth's *āddā* culture or of the students' attempts to negotiate the cultural dissonance regarding *āddā* as mentioned above, the author takes a non-dialectic approach to propose multiple plausible and powerful perspectives, and to explore their productive tensions with one another.

It is hoped that the dissertation would encourage further research on *āddā* and similar youth cultures of the Indian subcontinent that are presently under-researched.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Figures.....	x
List of Tables.....	xii
Acknowledgements.....	xiii
Chapter 1.....	1
What is <i>āddā</i> - waste of time or a symbolic marker of the modern Bengali intellectuals?	1
Introduction.....	1
<i>Āddā</i>	11
The ‘who-when-where-and-what’ of the Bengali <i>āddās</i>	21
The rhetoric of ‘ <i>sikhshā</i> ’ (education)	29
The birth of the <i>bhodrolok</i> – historical contexts	34
<i>Bhodrolok</i> : Class or a class-category?	40
<i>Āddā</i> : A collectivity of the <i>bhodrolok</i> intellectuals?	44
The social space of <i>ro’k</i> in the Bengali cultural imagination.....	48
Contesting positions & contesting spaces	52
Students in the Bengali cultural imagination	57
Conclusion	59
Chapter 2.....	63
Youth sociability and contemporary Bengali students’ <i>āddā</i> : An ethnographic case study... 63	
Introduction.....	63
Conceptual framework and theoretical approaches	63
The problem with pedagogy	74
Youth cultural studies	80
Literature review	83
Hangout.....	83
Tangled up in school.....	88
The company she keeps	90
Café culture	91
Timepass	96
Liberalization’s children	102
Provincializing Europe.....	104
Conclusion	104
Chapter 3.....	106
Methods and methodology	106
Introduction.....	106

Research questions	109
Ethnographic case studies	110
What is case study research?	110
Data collection and sample size in case study	114
What kind of case study?	116
Case study research design and the role of the researcher	118
Ethnography vs. case study	120
Why and how I used ethnographic case study for my research.	123
Kolkata (Calcutta)	127
The university	130
Academic reputation of the university	132
Diversity in the student body and cultures of the university	133
Site of the study.....	143
Down memory lane: A walk through the campus	144
The 'parking lot'	146
The 'Viewpoint'	150
The canteens	155
The students' hostels and other common places of <i>āddā</i>	157
Gaining entry	158
Participants.....	160
Data collection	169
Conclusion	175
Chapter 4.....	176
My experiences of <i>āddā</i>	176
Introduction.....	176
PART I.....	176
Early exposure to <i>āddā</i>	176
My first <i>āddā</i>	178
Learning in <i>āddā</i> with the slumdogs	183
Making friends in the <i>busti</i>	185
Being ostracized by the housing-estate kids	186
My education and miseducation in <i>āddās</i> with the slumdogs.....	187
Experiencing <i>āddā</i> at the university as an outsider and as an insider.....	189
PART II	190
Experiences of campus <i>āddā</i> as a researcher	190
Vignette 1: Intertextuality (UG Arts building, August 28, 2014)	190
Vignette 2: An evening spent in campus <i>āddā</i> (Parking Lot, January 17, 2015)	200
Vignette 3: A musical evening in an <i>āddā</i> (Viewpoint, November 3, 2015)	206
Conclusion	209
Chapter 5.....	211
Our <i>āddā</i> , their <i>āddā</i> : Negotiations of class and gender identities in middle-class Bengali youth <i>āddās</i>	211
Introduction.....	211

<i>Āddā</i> is for all, but not all <i>āddās</i> are made the same	211
<i>Sāri</i> or <i>gāri</i> (car)? Gendered classification of <i>āddā</i>	234
Social sanctions and censorships of <i>āddā</i> activities.....	246
Gendered social sanctions and censorships of the <i>āddā</i> spatiality.....	261
Exceptions to the gendered social sanctions/censorships of <i>āddā</i> spatiality and the 'new (commercialized) spaces of civil sociability'.....	269
Gendered social sanctions/censorships of <i>āddā</i> temporalities.....	273
Conclusion	276
Chapter 6.....	278
‘To-do or not to do’: Young people’s <i>āddā</i> and notions of productive utilization of time	278
Introduction.....	278
Time and the D/discourses of schooling	279
Productivity, learning, <i>āddā</i> and the D/discourses of schooling	282
Learning and knowing in <i>āddā</i> vs. in schools.....	293
‘Funds of knowledge’ in the school-world.....	294
Dialogism	296
Answerability	298
“‘This is where I am heard’”	302
<i>Āddā</i> and productivity: Three <i>āddā</i> -entrepreneurs	312
Sane - a poet, lyricist, and a storyteller	313
Piku – a musician and composer.....	315
Tirtha – a poet, an editor, a layout-designer, and a curator of digital Bengali folk music	319
“I don’t need no books to learn, and no laptop to be productive”	324
Conclusion: “ <i>āddā</i> is unpredictable – like one long love affair”	328
Chapter 7	330
Discussions and conclusions	330
What is <i>āddā</i> ?	330
Defining <i>āddā</i> – a failed attempt and a realization	331
Why is <i>āddā</i> considered bad and a ‘waste of time’ for students and youths?.....	333
(Mis)education in <i>āddā</i>	334
Class and gender in the practices and D/discourses of <i>āddā</i>	336
The role of alternative <i>āddā</i> -spaces	338
Possibilities and potentials of <i>āddā</i>	339
The social world of <i>āddā</i>	340
Final thoughts and remarks	344
Limitations and future directions	346
References.....	350
Appendix A.....	389
Sample Questionnaire (Draft)	389
Demographic Questions	389
Opinion Questions	390
Appendix B Sample Interview Prompt.....	394

Phase I - The Personal (exploratory) phase	394
Phase II - The Probing Phase.....	396
Phase III - The Clarification Phase	397

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Coffee House <i>āddā</i>	5
Figure 2: Elite <i>āddā</i> of youths in a café.	14
Figure 3: Working-class women's <i>āddā</i> around a community tap.	14
Figure 4: A non-elite, road-side <i>āddā</i> of working-class men in Kolkata.....	15
Figure 5: Bengali youth in an <i>āddā</i>	18
Figure 6: Students going through class notes in an <i>āddā</i> before an examination.	19
Figure 7: Students in an <i>āddā</i> at the university.	24
Figure 8: Young men giving <i>āddā</i> at a <i>ro'k</i>	49
Figure 9: A Facebook post by a student depicting students attending classes in a hallway....	76
Figure 10: Students having a brief evening <i>āddā</i> over tea with a professor in the university..	80
Figure 11: A collage of pictures of billboards, adverts and storefronts promoting businesses through the use of the <i>āddā</i> metaphor.	93
Figure 12: A cartoon where <i>āddā</i> is defined as “doing nothing”.....	100
Figure 13: Students march in the rain to meet the Governor.....	136
Figure 14: Students hold up posters during the march.....	137
Figure 15: A poster published by the students during the <i>#hokkolorob</i> movement.....	139
Figure 16: A student holds up a pad with a message during <i>#PadsAgainstPatriarchy</i>	141
Figure 17: Students passing a chillum around in an <i>āddā</i>	147
Figure 18: An early-evening student <i>āddā</i> at the 'parking lot.'.....	149
Figure 19: The 'parking lot' is one of the primary sites of student <i>āddās</i> in the campus.....	149
Figure 20: Participant observation in an <i>āddā</i> at the 'parking lot.'	150
Figure 21: Day-time student <i>āddās</i> at the 'Viewpoint.'	151
Figure 22: A morning <i>āddā</i> at Milan's Canteen.....	152

Figure 23: A skit being performed at the 'Viewpoint.'	153
Figure 24: A poster-show at the 'Viewpoint.'	154
Figure 25: A students' convention being held at the 'Viewpoint.'	154
Figure 26: <i>Jalke chal</i> : the gendered practice of rural women fetching water <i>en masse</i> from a local pond or river (here, accompanied by a lone man).....	228
Figure 27: Students dancing in an <i>āddā</i>	246
Figure 28: Two young men engaged in a mock-fight in an <i>āddā</i>	246
Figure 29: A young woman smoking pot in an <i>āddā</i> with three young men.	247
Figure 30: A young Bengali woman in USA participates in an <i>āddā</i> from the kitchen, while cooking dinner for her husband and his male friends.	263
Figure 31: Women participating in an <i>āddā</i> from the kitchen as shown in the film, The Bong connection.....	264
Figure 32: A woman serving food (fish) to men engaged in an <i>āddā</i> in the film, <i>The Bong connection</i>	264
Figure 33: Women discussing jewelry in an <i>āddā</i> by the kitchen in the film, The Bong connection.	265
Figure 34: <i>Āddās</i> at road-side <i>chāi</i> shops are considered typical male spaces.	266

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Demographic information of research participants	163
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Chapter 1

What is *āddā* - waste of time or a symbolic marker of the modern Bengali intellectuals?

Introduction

The idea originated from a Facebook discussion. A Bengali teacher friend and I were discussing the possible advantages and disadvantages of student *āddā* – a form of social gathering of peers similar to ‘hanging-out’ or ‘messaging-around’ time (Moje, et al., n.d.) – for learning, intellectual growth and life-successes of students. In response to one of her colleagues (who is also Bengali like us, is known to both of us, was a student of the same university department as I and my friend were, and is a common Facebook friend of us) post on Facebook about the poor results of their undergraduate third year students in a recent examination (which according to my friend’s colleague reflected how little students had learned), my teacher friend opined that it was because the students were not interested in ‘learning’ and preferred spending time in *āddā* instead. She further predicted that these students would never get anywhere in life if they “continued to waste their valuable time in *āddā*” (public Facebook post, April, 2013; later deleted by my friend upon complaints to the department by the class of students in question).

I had always been interested in *āddā*. As a student, I was a regular participant in many *āddās*, as I suspect most Bengali students before and after me would have been. I couldn’t agree with my teacher friend that *āddā* was a waste of time or that there wasn’t any learning potential in

āddā, because I believe that I have learned a lot from my own *āddās*, although my learning from *āddās* were diverse and didn't always match my curricular learning in college (see chapter 4).

Coming from a comparative literature background, I was at the time toying with the idea of doing a comparative study of two very popular serial characters of Bengali young adult fiction by two celebrated Bengali writers, Narayan Gangopadhyay and Premendra Mitra. The characters in question, *Teni dā* and *Ghanā dā*¹, respectively, are both noted for their penchant for *āddā*. In a story-within-a-story format, each of the stories in the respective series are about the fantastical stories narrated by the two principal characters mentioned above in their respective *āddās*. I was reading extensively on *āddā* at the time and everything I read reflected positively on *āddā*, when I chanced upon my friend's post on Facebook and was drawn to it. When I contested my friend's claim with what I had read, she retorted that there's nothing wrong with *āddā* as such but that there's a time and place for everything; and that a student shouldn't indulge in it *too much* (emphasis added to reflect that the key-term here is "too much").

While debating the values of *āddā* with my friend on Facebook, in a moment of epiphany, I realized that our contradictory positions on the issue essentially reflected the dissonance regarding *āddā* in the cultural D/discourse of the Bengali people. There exist numerous celebratory stories and anecdotes of "glorious *āddās*" of intellectual celebrities, particularly those in creative professions – authors, musicians, actors, journalism, media and advertisement professionals, etc., that circulate in the public discourses both orally and in literature, and are even reflected in popular music and contemporary films. For instance, in music, the late Manna Dey's once-chartbuster song – *কফি হাউজের সেই আড্ডাটা আজ আর নেই* [That

¹ 'da' is a shortened form of 'dada' - a social kinship term in Bengali, which literally means 'elder brother'

āddā at the Coffee House is no more], a eulogy to an *āddā* that the singer sorely misses – that is repeatedly blasted over loud speakers in almost every neighbourhood in Kolkata during the *Durgā Pujā*, the biggest autumnal festival in Bengal, comes immediately to mind. In popular movies there are many more instances that can be cited, including some that have been analyzed for the writing of this dissertation – *সাত্বে চুয়াত্তর* [Seventy-four and a half] (1953), *আপনজন* [The kin] (1968), *তিন ভুবনের পারে* [Across three worlds] (1969), *পিকনিক* [Picnic] (1972), *প্রতিদ্বন্দ্বি* [The competitor] (1970a), *আগন্তুক* [The guest] (1991), *অরণ্যের দিনরাত্রি* [The days and nights of the forest] (1970b), *আবার অরণ্যে* [Once more, in the forest] (2003), *চার মূর্তি* [Four guys] (1978), *টেনি দা* [Teni dā] (2011), *Adda: Calcutta, Kolkata* (2011), etc., just to name a few. In fiction, we have references to *āddā* in all the numerous short stories, novellas and plays featuring either of the two immortalized *āddā*-loving characters of popular Bengali YA literature – *Ghanā dā* by Premendra Mitra (numerous short stories and novellas, later anthologized in an omnibus in 3 volumes and at least a dozen comic-adaptations) and *Teni dā* by Narayan Gangopdhyay (5 novels, 33 short stories, 3 comics, 2 feature films, 1 animated series and 1 one-act play). Besides these, references to *āddā* can be found in innumerable other works by many authors from the early 19th century to contemporary times, and include notable authors like Kali Prasanna Singha, Rabindranath Tagore, Samaresh Basu, Samaresh Majumdar, Sunil Gangopadhyay, Saradindu Bandopadhyay, Buddhadeb Basu, Buddhadeb Guha, Sayyad Mujtaba Siraj, Satyajit Ray, etc.

Despite this large corpus of cultural texts on *āddā*, except for the *Teni dā* stories by Narayan Gangopdhyay mentioned above, very few texts engage with students' *āddā* and those that do, for example, Radhaprashad Gupta (2010), mention it only in the passing, even though *āddā* is extremely popular among middle-class Bengali college students, particularly, young men. And if students' *āddā* is not adequately acknowledged in the Bengali cultural texts on *āddā*,

young women's *āddās* are even less acknowledged. Some early Bengali and Sanskrit texts, particularly quasi-religious literature on Radha and Krishna² (for instance, *Geetagovindam* by Jayadeva³), often mention rural young women's convivial peer sociability practices (although not *āddā*, because *āddā* is typically considered an urban practice. See Sen, 2011.⁴) during bathing in the river or while fetching water, and sometimes older, urban housewives' *āddās* are mentioned in contemporary literature, although often contemptuously as *meyeli āddā* or 'girlish' *āddā* that aren't quite at par with the *āddās* of the educated, middle-class, Bengali men (see chapter 5 for a detailed analysis). But educated, urban middle-class, young Bengali women's *āddās* have been seldom written about, barring a few exceptional works by women writers, like, for instance, *মেয়েলী আড্ডার হাল চাল* [The state of womanly *āddās*] (Basu, 1998/2012), *মেয়েদের হস্টেল জীবনঃ অন্তরের কথামালা*. [Hostel⁵ life of women: Insider's discussion] (Biswas, 2009), and *আকাশবাণীর আসরে* [In the gathering at *Ākāshbāni*] (Singh, 2010).

Thus, going by the cultural texts, it might seem that students and young women did not participate in *āddās*, but in reality *āddā* is popular among both young men and women, whether students or not, although women's access to *āddās* were limited in comparison to men's (see chapter 5). For instance, on any given workday, the College Street Coffee House in Kolkata could be found brimming with people of different ages giving *āddā*, including a sizeable number of college-going young men and women (see figure 1).

New York Times journalist, Peter Trachtenberg (2005) describes his visit to the College Street Coffee House in search of *āddā* as follows:

² Krishna is an incarnation of Lord Vishnu

³ Jayadeva was a Sanskrit poet

⁴ I do not concur with Sen

⁵ A hostel is a dorm

As I climbed a dank stone staircase, I heard a hum that might have been a generator, but when I rounded the corner it became apparent it was the sound of people talking. There seemed to be hundreds of them. I couldn't be sure because the room was so dark. In the tobacco-colored gloom, people sat at tiny tables built for one or two, but some had six people squeezed around them, gesticulating through a haze of cigarette smoke.



Figure 1. Coffee House *āddā* (Source: Google Images)

But, on the other hand, very few Bengalis, myself included, could perhaps speak of never being admonished by a well-meaning teacher, parent or a neighbor for “wasting time” in *āddā* when they were young students. Even youths who didn’t go to schools or colleges, having dropped out or, perhaps, never being enrolled, were often admonished by adults for “wasting time” in *āddā*, instead of focusing on learning a trade and earning a living, or helping with household work and learning skills that would make them marriageable, depending on their gender.

Growing up, I had a diverse friend circle from different economic class backgrounds. When I was in middle school, I had a friend named, Sreedam – a motherless child of a rickshaw

puller and a junior school drop-out, who had taught me how to ride a bicycle. We used to hang out often in the evenings. He would come mostly for a chance to ride my bicycle for a few minutes, after he had run alongside my bike, shouting instructions and supporting me when necessary, for an hour. Later, we would sit somewhere along the road and talk. One evening, his father caught him sitting with me by the road and, in a fit, he started slapping and punching Sreedam. As he dragged Sreedam away by his scruff, I could hear him shouting to him in Bengali something that, as far as memory serves, could be roughly translated as: he [me] is rich and likely goes to a good school; he will get a good job. What are you going to do if you spend all your time sitting around like this? Sreedam never came to meet me after that and, even though I had a rough idea of where he lived, sadly, I never dared to go looking for him.

Similarly, a few years before I met Sreedam, I had a friend named, Manu. Manu was Oriya, but born and brought up in Kolkata. Her father was the local ‘pump-man’⁶. Manu was the eldest daughter, and unlike her younger sister and brother, she never went to a school. She and I were friends and often hung out together, and just like Sreedam, I had often witnessed her being reprimanded and even getting a beating for wasting time in hanging out when she could have made herself useful around the house.

Therefore, while *āddā* is quite popular among the youth in Kolkata, yet despite the cultural value attributed to *āddā* in the cultural texts and D/discourses, it was sometimes considered a deviant activity for youths, particularly for young men and women from the lower classes, who could ill-afford to give *āddā*, unlike middle-class young men like me, as it was pointed out by Sreedam’s father. Adults sometimes consider *āddā* a deviant activity or, at least, a

⁶ A person entrusted with the duty of manning the local water pumping station and ensuring smooth water supply to houses in the in the locality.

‘waste of time’ for working-class, out-of-school young men or adolescents like Sreedam and also, even if to a lesser extent, for many middle-class school-and-college-going young men, perhaps because *āddā* is a time-consuming leisure activity that seemingly contributed nothing towards preparing the youth for earning a livelihood, unlike obtaining a degree or learning a skill or trade. Of course, as already mentioned, unlike youth from affluent families, unemployed young men and women from poorer economic backgrounds often could not afford to spend much time in giving *āddā*, but that, however, did not mean that these unemployed lower-class young men and women spent any less time giving *āddā* than the average middle-class and upper-class men and women. In fact, the unemployed, lower-class young men and women in Kolkata perhaps spent more time in *āddā* than the middle-class working youths and students – often seemingly out of compulsion for not having anything better to do with their time, rather than by choice. This notion of a ‘forced leisure’ (spent in ‘*timepass*,’ hanging-out or in giving *āddā*) that is thrust upon young men from certain disadvantaged section of the society, for which they are criticized is explored in Craig Jeffrey’s (2010a & 2010b) research, where he documents lower middle-class young men in Meerut in northern India in various acts of ‘*timepass*’ at street-corners and in road-side tea-shacks outside two colleges in Meerut, while they ‘waited’ to be gainfully employed. In the context of West Bengal, several Bengali films⁷ produced between the late 1960’s and early 1980’s (when the country was still reeling from the aftermath of partition and the economic and political turmoil that ensued), similarly depicted unemployed middle-class and lower middle-class young men taking to all-day long *āddās* on the *ro’ks*⁸ of their neighborhoods in an attempt to while away the sheer amount of unscheduled hours in a day that their unemployment forced upon them,

⁷ Such as ‘The competitor,’ ‘Kolkata’⁷¹

⁸ Elevated stoop like structures on the street side facade of some of old, Calcutta houses meant for sitting, similar to the *dāwā*, but smaller

which, ironically, caused them to be culturally viewed as time-wasting bums or *ro'kbājs*⁹, and the *ro'ks*, where they typically hung out, as places to be contemptuously avoided by middle-class *bhdro*¹⁰ men. Like the *ro'kbāj* young men in Bengali cinema, a similar trope of the *tāpori* in Hindi cinema of the 70's and 80's that Gooptu (2010) explores in her book, similarly depicts unemployed middle-class and lower middle class young men strolling the streets of Mumbai in a flâneur-like manner and often hanging-out, in between, at shanty tea-shops at street-corners. These young men are, thus, often shown in the cultural texts as unfortunate victims of a broken system, who, being despised and shunned by society for their lack of respectable occupation and being unable to change their situation for the better, hung out in the streets for the better part of the day and formed what Whyte (1943/1993), in the context of young Italian-American men in a slum in the North End of Boston, termed as "Street Corner Society." And not unlike the "corner boys" in Whyte's ethnography, these young Indian men, known variously as *tāporis* and *ro'kbājs*, too, often dabbled in various anti-social activities, including street-harassment of women, which resulted in them being both despised and feared; and along with them, most public places where they generally hung out, which in the context of West Bengal were the *ro'ks* and tea-shacks at street-corners, also came to be feared and avoided by the middle and the upper classes.

Therefore, if the reason for criticizing lower-class young men who 'wasted time' in unprofitable sociability practices like *āddā* (instead of finding a respectable occupation) is primarily economic, for middle-class young women the criticism seemed to stem less from economic reasons as it did, apparently, from concerns for the women's safety and moral reputation, and, by extension, the family's social reputation (see chapter 5), particularly in the

⁹ One who spends time on a *ro'k*. '*Ro'kbaaj*' is a derogatory term for those who while away time on the *ro'k*, being little productive

¹⁰ Genteel

latter half of the twentieth century, given that most open, public places during this period were considered unsafe for young middle-class women due to socio-economic and political reasons, as mentioned above, that caused an increase in unemployment, which, in turn, resulted in an increased number of unemployed men from the lower classes to take to the streets for want of a better occupation.

Thus, while generally public *āddās*, particularly street-*āddās*, came to be viewed by the Bengali middle-class as lowly and undesirable for reasons given above, for the educated Bengali middle class, the sole determining factor in the classification of *āddās* as good (high) or bad (low) was, perhaps, the perceived intellectuality of an *āddā*, where ‘intellectuality’ was typically understood as discussions on “Dostoyevsky to the blockade of Leningrad to Cioran to Calasso to Indian mythology to the demographics of Calcutta to the vagaries of the United States publishing industry” (Trachtenberg, 2005) or “Indian politics, Soviet Communism, Spanish Civil War” (Gupta, 2010, p.43) or “some supernova beyond the Milky Way to Plekhenov’s *The role of individual in history*” (Gupta, 2010, p.43) or, more generally speaking, “local and global politics, art, literature, and music” (Sen, 2011, p.522).

Thus, the educated Bengali middle class men, who were (and still are), typically, the ones to produce the majority of the cultural texts on *āddā* (stories, essays, memoirs, articles, songs, and films), generally considered the *āddās* of the little-educated, lower-class people; of the rural folks; or the rich and perhaps even educated but not ‘*sikhshito*’ (see below) upper-class people; and of women, irrespective of class, demographic or economic backgrounds, as unintellectual and, thus, inferior. And while women disagreed (for instance, see Bani Basu, 1998/2012), their voices did not find adequate representation in the cultural texts.

Thus, Buddhadeb Bose (2010) termed what seemed like *āddās* of lower-class and rural people as “lackasidical gatherings”¹¹ (as opposed to an *āddā* proper) in his essay titled, *āddā* (p.12), while also stating that when only women give *āddā*, the inevitable discussions that ensue are about such unintellectual and mundane topics as *sāri*, jewelry, family and kids (p.14), and Nipendrakrishna Chattopadhyay (2010) wrote that “an *āddā* fails when there is a woman within ten feet of it” (p.32).

Besides crying themselves hoarse about the quintessential intellectual Bengali *āddā* that none but the educated, middle-class Bengali men ever seemed to get right, the only other things that most of these Bengali cultural commentators agreed on were that *āddā* was difficult to define and that the glory days of the Bengali *āddā* were over, as Trachtenberg (2005) notes: “The other thing people agreed on was that those addas were a thing of the past.”

Like the above mentioned cultural commentators, the Bengali students I studied, too, often shared their own lore about great *āddās* of the past, particularly those that they were related to in some manner, while also criticizing the *āddās* of others, like junior fellow students, for instance, as ‘*fāltu*’ (bad or worthless) *āddā* on account of being materialistic or unintellectual.

This extraordinary preoccupation with the intellectuality of the quintessential Bengali *āddā* of the educated middle classes in the cultural texts and D/discourses is but one end of a thread. If we follow this thread long enough, it will lead us to various issues of class, caste, gender, social status, notions of ‘distinction’ (Bourdieu, 1979/1984) and some emerging tropes of a new economy and nationalism under the colonial modernity in the nineteenth century Bengal. Therefore, this dissertation proposes to follow this thread to the historic-cultural origins of

¹¹ All translation from Bengali texts are my own, unless otherwise noted.

modern Bengali *āddā* in an attempt to unpack some of the complexities of the contemporary D/discourses on *āddā*, and to investigate how these might (or not) pose an interesting dilemma for Bengali students today, torn between the attractions of *āddā* and guilt for wasting time like I sensed being torn between the two as a student in the same university not too long ago. More specifically, the dissertation seeks to understand how contemporary Bengali students of one university in Kolkata, known both for its academic repute and its student *āddā* culture, understand and perform *āddā* so as to be able to negotiate the above mentioned cultural dissonance surrounding *āddā*, and if their understanding of *āddā* is culturally laced with larger social issues of class, caste and gender hegemony and cultural elitism as it used to be in the 19th century Bengal. Additionally, the dissertation also seeks to understand if the quintessential middle-class Bengali *āddā* is/was necessarily intellectual, failing which if it is, indeed, a waste of time.

Lastly, although this dissertation is not primarily concerned with the cultural history of the Bengali *āddā*, yet, in order to understand the *āddā*-habitus of the contemporary Bengali students, it is important to gain an understanding of the cultural history of the Bengali *āddā*. Therefore, in the following sections of this chapter, I shall attempt to historically locate *āddā* within the Bengali cultural landscape in order to better understand how *āddā* is understood by contemporary Bengali students.

Āddā

Āddā, could and does mean various things to different people. Despite the various attempts of the educated Bengali middle class to culturally define *āddā*, orally and in cultural texts, I contend, based on my observations during field research and my experiences of being a

cultural-insider, that the meaning of *āddā*, just like “[t]he MEANING of skin colour,” as Stuart Hall once famously said, “is not always the same” (ChallengingMedia, 2006; emphasis in original). Thus, the discursive concept of *āddā* often functions like a floating signifier. This, of course, does not mean that *āddā* does not exist outside of D/discourses; it does, but just that what *āddā* actually entails or what its norms are in reality are variously understood by different people. This is amply illustrated, for instance, in the following observation from a feature-story by Peter Trachtenberg (2005), a New York Times journalist, who puzzled over trying to understand what *āddā*, actually, was during a visit to Kolkata:

"Adda is something typically Bengali," said the tiny, patrician Dr. Krishna Bose, a retired English literature professor at the University of Calcutta and a former member of Parliament... "It is something very spontaneous. The club life that the British have, that is not adda. It cannot be 50 people together. That becomes a meeting. So it should be three persons minimum, because if you have two that also is not an adda."

Amithabha Bhattasali, a BBC reporter, believes that two people can have a perfectly decent adda, while the sisters Rakhi Sarkar and Pratiti Basu Sarkar, who run the events at CIMA, say that their addas typically draw 20 or 30 people. Most cognoscenti would say that the CIMA events don't qualify as true adda, since there is a program of topics...

During my stay in Calcutta, I began to feel that I was taking part in a never-ending adda about adda. The participants were scattered throughout the city, and I scurried back and forth among them, relaying an opinion and having it accepted or elaborated upon or shot down. Of course, everyone had an idea of what constituted a real adda. Was it peasants chatting at sundown by the Kali temple; the pensioners gabbing at Bhaumik's club; the tailors and goldsmiths opining by the tea stalls on Ganguly Road; the literary heavyweights who meet every Wednesday to discuss the arts?

Thus, clearly, there is difference of opinion regarding what “real” *āddā* is or isn't, and whose participation in *āddās* is accepted as culturally legitimate. However, the differences are not limited only to the subjective understandings and opinions about *āddā*.

Indeed, there are various kinds of *āddā* – each different from the other in its affect, if not in essence. Depending on the social, cultural, political and religious environment of the place where the *āddā* is held or the class, caste, gender, religion, social status, profession, educational level, political, professional and cultural affiliations, and special interests and habitus of the participants, each of these *āddās* differ from the others in its norms. For instance, the after-class (or after-office) evening *āddās* of a group of young, college-going (or working), middle-class or upper middle-class, unmarried Bengali men and women in an upscale café (see figure 2) would differ ostensibly from the non-elite, after-the-chores *āddās* of a group of young, working-class women (married or unmarried) around a community tap (really, a pipe out of the ground that spews safe drinking water at certain specific hours each day) in a slum in the late-afternoons (see figure 3), just as both these *āddās* would differ from the any-time, road-side *āddās* of working-class men taking a break from work (see figure 4).

The norms and the topics of discussions in each of these very different *āddās*, as well as the affect that each of these *āddās* produces in the participants, are, understandably, also likely to be very different. For instance, one wouldn't normally squat with friends on the floor of a café; nor would a frivolous discussion with friends over Frappuccinos in an air-conditioned Starbucks or Café Coffe Day outlet with light music in background be comparable to the clamorous street-side discussions in a queue for drinking water in the balmy heat of a sub-tropical summer afternoon in terms of the affect they produce.



Figure 2. Elite *āddā* of youths in a *café* (source: The Economic Times)



Figure 3. Working-class women's *āddā* around a community tap (Source: Development Alternatives, 2010)



Figure 4. A non-elite, road-side *āddā* of working-class men in Kolkata (Source: Anindya Roy Photography)

Nevertheless, if asked, more often than not, the young participants of the frivolous discussions at the café, the working-class men squatting along a busy street in Kolkata and the working-class ladies waiting their turn in the queue for drinking water at a community tap in a slum would all say that they were in the middle of an *āddā*, although I am not certain if many educated middle-class Bengali men and women would term these two latter instances as *āddā*. Many other near synonymous Bengali words such as *gultāni* (chit-chat), *golpo* (narrating of events), *kothā* (talking), etc., would perhaps be used, instead of *āddā*, to designate the activities of the latter two groups, where *āddā* as a noun-verb differs from the rest of the designators only in its connotation as an intellectual leisure activity of the educated, middle-class, Bengali men.

Thus, what is intellectual or not as far as *āddās* are concerned is a debatable matter. Even if we go with Sen's (2011) example of 'intellectual' as discussions about "local and global politics, art, literature, and music" (p.3), no *āddā* discussion could possibly always be limited to these few topics because not only is it not plausible, but, moreover, if it did, it would not quite be

the unrigorous, free-flowing conversation that most other cultural commentators claim *āddā* to be.

Nevertheless, certain people's unrigorous, free-flowing conversations are counted as *āddā* and others' aren't, and, typically, the views of the educated, middle-class Bengali male cultural commentators cited above are accepted as authoritative in these matters because they are the ones who mostly write about *āddā*, while the rest of the Bengali populace give *āddā* the way they know how to.

However, *āddā* has had a vicissitudinous history and had not always been quite so revered as an intellectual activity. *Āddā*, perhaps a Hindi word originally loaned from Persian, literally means (both in Hindi and Bengali) a perch or a hang-out or gathering spot. Chattopadhyay (2010) cites noted Bengali author Rajshekhar Basu's definition of *āddā* as a rendezvous of rogues (p.16) in a Bengali dictionary compiled by him, although Chattopadhyay did not concur with such a definition. As such *āddā* is frequently used in Bengali with descriptors like *mostānder āddā* (*āddā* of goons), *neshākhorder āddā* (*āddā* of substance abusers), *chotoloker āddā* (*āddā* of lowly people)¹², etc. Even a neutral (and somewhat rare) usage such as bus *āddā* (literally, a bus terminal) has a shady connotation in the average middle-class¹³ Bengali's mind because bus *āddās* are open, (mostly filthy) public places that are frequented by such people of low social standing as bus-drivers, conductors (ticket checkers), laborers, beggars, street dwellers and homeless people and street-urchins. These people, the urchins particularly, instead of being

¹² Although literally, a 'small person' in terms of status, wealth or position as opposed to *borolok* (the rich or big in position, status, etc.; *boro* being big or greater), yet in various context this epithet could also signify anything from literally uneducated to educated, but uncultured, lowly and uncouth person (that is, a person lacking in *sikhshā*), and in this sense it is the exact opposite, and therefore, the cultural other of the *bhodrolok*. In India, where class and caste often get conflated, the etymological origin of the term, *chotolok*, could be traced back to the caste hierarchy, where a *chotolok* would mean a person (*lok*) of low (*choto*) caste origin.

¹³ although used somewhat generically here, it is to be noted, however, that middle class is neither easily defined, nor is it a homogeneous category the world over. C.f., Robinson (2014)

viewed sympathetically as unfortunate and disadvantaged people, often indeed offspring of our various social maladies, who need our support, encouragement and active assistance, are, unfortunately, often viewed as the infancy of future social ills – of little threat at present, but nevertheless undesirable and potentially dangerous. The urchins, in particular, is the antithesis or the ‘other’ of “our kids” in urban, middle-class Bengali sensibility – a very important trope that has no mean share in making young people’s taking to *āddā* so very problematic in Bengali middle class worldview. We shall revisit this trope later in chapter 4, but suffice it to say here that growing up, many of us, myself included, have often been chided for behaving like these urchins or the kids from the slums (that are imagined to be the source of uneducated, dirty, snooty-faced undesirable menaces of youngsters in the streets of the city, whose ultimate resort is believed to be either beggary or taking to petty crimes) or reminded that we shouldn’t be like “them” – something that, as a teenager, egged me on to actually go make friends in the nearest slum (see chapter 4).

Āddā is then both a noun and a noun-verb. As a noun-verb, it is an activity or a cultural practice that people do or participate in (the Bengali infinitive is ‘to give’), and as a noun, it is also a place where such an activity takes place (see figure 5).

Therefore, to put it simply, *āddā*, at least for the purpose of this dissertation, is the *common cultural practice of spending time (usually several hours at a stretch) in uninitiated social talk in peer groups that meet frequently at a favorite hangout, although the place of āddā or the hangout might shift frequently or from time to time*. But then again, not all *āddās* meet regularly or have a fixed rendezvous. If two old friends, for instance, happen to bump into each other in the streets and end up having an hour-long (or more) conversation at a tea-shack at a street-corner, it could be designated an *āddā*, although neither the meeting, nor the place were

planned. Again, let's say, if I invite some friends over, never to invite them again, it would still be an *āddā* despite its non-recurring nature, if the conversation is enjoyable, lasts sufficiently long in the opinion of the participants, and the purpose (at least explicitly) is pleasure, and not business. On the other hand, some *āddā* are even actively organized (for example, Bengali associations in several states in the United States of America organize 'monthly *āddā* sessions' for their members and even the alumni association of one of the universities where I conducted my study organizes a 'Saturday *āddā*' every week).



Figure 5. Bengali youth in an *āddā* (Source: Anandabazar Patrika, 21 December, 2015)

Therefore, according to the authors mentioned above, *any friendly gathering of peers where enjoyable, purposeless, unrigorous social conversation of considerable duration (usually several hours, but not necessarily so) is the primary objective, could be designated as an āddā, whether or not it recurs, or is planned.*

While I have pieced together the above definition from numerous different descriptions of *āddā* by various Bengali authors, yet a few observations about *āddā* in the definition given

above is either not always true or requires further elaboration. For instance, although most *āddās* comprises of people of roughly the same age group, yet there are some notable *āddās* in Kolkata (for instance, one that convenes at the stairs of a bank at Gariahat in the evenings) where people in their early twenties to those in their late sixties come together; and while they may all be friends, yet they could hardly be called peers due to the differences in age. Similarly, conversations in *āddās* are not always purposeless because I have observed people talking business, work or studies in *āddā* (see figure 6).



Figure 6. Students going through class notes in an *āddā* before an examination.

In fact, I would argue that conversations in *āddās* can never be purposeless because even the desire to have a relaxing, friendly conversation is a purpose in itself. Again, enjoyable, purposeless and unrigorous, social conversations may not always be the primary objective of participation in *āddās*. People like the women waiting in a queue for water or students between classes or passengers in a train compartment may participate in an *āddā* to pass time, while waiting for something else to happen.

Therefore, to further simplify, *any enjoyable and unrigorous friendly conversation of considerable duration (usually several hours, but not necessarily so), where the primary objective of participation in the conversation is not business, can be called an āddā, whether or not it recurs, or is planned.*

However, numerous Bengali writers (Bose, 2010; Chakrabarty, 1999; Chattopadhyay, 2010; Das, 2010; Ghosh, 2010; Mitra, 2010; Sen, 2011; Singh, 2010) who have attempted to define *āddā* or, at least, describe it in their own ways, have concerned themselves with the recurrent form of the daily or weekly *āddās*; and it is this kind of *āddā* that I would focus on in this dissertation, particularly since students who partake in *āddās*, typically do so on a daily basis and it is this form of *āddā*, as we shall see, which is considered the most problematic when indulged in by students and youths.

Another reason for focusing on frequently recurring *āddās*, beside the fact that it is a form of *āddā* that Bengali students, who are my primary subjects, mostly participate in, is that my concern here is not the nature, form or the classification of Bengali *āddā*, for much has already been written on it (see Das, 2010). Instead, what I would like to focus on in this dissertation pertaining to Bengali *āddās* are the D/discourses that frame and situate *āddā* in specific ways within the Bengali cultural milieu, particularly, as the title of this chapter foreshadows, whether *āddā* is a waste of time or a symbolic marker of the modern, Bengali intellectuals, and this is best exemplified with the frequently recurring type of *āddās*.

Now, why is an otherwise celebrated cultural practice sometimes considered a waste of time; when and for whom? I have noted above that the hallmark of *āddā* are: pleasurable, and “unrigorous [social] conversation” (Chakrabarty, 1999) of considerable duration (usually several hours). Of these, the last – ‘of considerable duration’ – is of the utmost importance for the

student-participants of *āddās*, who, still being in their formative stages, are yet to become ‘someone’ in society: they are an unfinished subject, so to speak. I suspect that it is for these unfinished subjects that spending ‘several hours’ in *āddā*, especially in the recurrent form of daily *āddās*, which implies spending ‘several hours’ on a daily basis in pleasurable and even, perhaps, useful but not particularly utilitarian, “unrigorous [social] conversation” (Chakrabarty, 1999), is considered a waste of time, precisely because students are viewed as unfinished subjects in the cultural imagination. We shall return to the topic of how students are viewed culturally later in this chapter, but it should be noted here that students are not the only unfinished subjects in the Bengali cultural imagination – anyone who is yet to become ‘someone’ in terms of having a (respectable) profession and a decent income, typically through salaried jobs, business or independent practices like that of a doctor or an advocate, is considered an unfinished subject.¹⁴ As such, the urchins we discussed earlier, with whom Bengali, middle-class youngsters are often contrasted in social D/discourses, are considered unfinished subjects par excellence – unfinished, with little or no possibility of intellectual, financial and social growth. Therefore, in order to understand this predicament regarding the Bengali *āddās* for the middle-class Bengali students, one needs to consider the ‘who-when-where-and-what’ of the *āddās*.

The ‘who-when-where-and-what’ of the Bengali *āddās*

Dipesh Chakrabarty (1999) defines *āddā* as: “the practice of friends getting together for long, informal, and unrigorous conversations” (p. 110). Debarati Sen (2011) more or less uses

¹⁴ Women are, of course, excluded from this category because women’s worth are typically ascertained through marriage and child-birth, rather than through obtaining jobs or starting a career.

Chakraborty's definition, but posits *āddā* as a typically urban Bengali practice and points out its intellectual significance:

Āddā is a kind of informal social talk, usually done in Bengali, among friends, colleagues, even family members, but *historically its content has always been tied to something intellectual, like local and global politics, art, literature, and music*. Also salient is its urban setting. *Āddā* as a word means both a form of talk and a place associated with it. (p.522; emphasis original)

With regard to the intellectual nature of conversations in *āddā*, Bose (2010) takes a seemingly contrary position, pointing out that conversation in *āddā* does not necessarily have to be 'good'¹⁵, although, at the same time, he attributes his career and life successes as a celebrated Bengali author, academic and educator to *āddā*:

There's no obligation here to sound smart; if I don't have anything 'good' to say, will talk about regular stuff. If I can't even do that, will keep quiet (p.14)

For Bose, 'good' *āddā* is made of 'good' company, not necessarily by 'good' conversations. Dipesh Chakraborty (1999), on the other hand, notes the famous Bengali expatriate and scholar, Nirad C. Chowdhury's criticism of *āddā* as a social practice borne of and further engendering laziness and herd mentality of the Bengali people and Rajshekhar Basu's definition of *āddā* as a meeting place of rogues, as has already been noted above. Even with regards to the urbanity of *āddā*, there are disputes. While Debarati Sen (2011) directly labels *āddā* as an urban practice, and several others, including Buddhadeb Bose (2010), also hint at the same, connecting *āddā* intrinsically with the Bengali modernity and the city's (Kolkata) growing print culture that are believed to be gifts of the European settlers, there are others, including

¹⁵ Good here implies a degree of quality such as lofty; not enjoyable for if it is not enjoyable, it is not *āddā*

Dipesh Chakrabarty (1999), who traces *āddā* back to the village *chandimandap*¹⁶ and *dāwā*¹⁷, and to a much older, indigenous Bengali oral culture of *sruti*¹⁸. Evidently then there's room for debate even in defining *āddā*. This gets even murkier when we debate what is real *āddā* or 'good' *āddā*, as Bose (2010) posits it and what just merely resembles it, but is really inferior *āddā* or 'bad' *āddā*. Related to this is the notion of who may legitimately participate in an *āddā*?

Āddā is not exclusive – people from all walks of life and of all ages can and do 'give' *āddā*, but the famous Bengali author and collector, Radhaprasad Gupta (2010) wrote that typically one is introduced to the joys of unadulterated *āddā* during one's college days when young people get to spend some unaccounted for and unsupervised time with peers at their discretion (see figure 7). Quite obviously, Gupta is concerned only with the educated, middle-class or upper-class youth's *āddā* here as it seems from his description that only those who attend colleges participate in *āddā*, whereas, in reality, even people who have never even been to primary schools do give *āddā*, as noted above. Moreover, it should be noted that young women, unlike young men, often do not get to spend as much unaccounted for and unsupervised time with peers at their discretion.

With regards to the 'freedom' offered by some 'unaccounted for and unsupervised' discretionary time with peers, Robinson (2014) writes in her riveting ethnography on contemporary middle-class youths' 'café culture' in Pune:

[T]he cafés fulfilled a need for space away from home for these young middle-class 'Puneites'. They promised freedom. What was possible in the café culture deviated considerably from what was possible at home. The young adults felt

¹⁶ *Chandimandaps* are places of worship in villages that also doubled as a congregational space, usually in the evenings and usually for the elderly menfolk.

¹⁷ A *dāwā* is a stoop like structures in front of village homes meant to serve as a seat for family members and visitors. While the men usually gathered in the *chandimandap* in the evenings, the women would often gather, although in less number than the men, at a neighbour's *dāwā* in the late afternoons or whenever they could manage a breather from the household chores

¹⁸ a tradition of preserving and passing on important cultural legacy orally in a raconteur style

they were constantly moving between two worlds in Pune: the café culture and the comparatively traditional world of their elders. By engaging in practices that their elders and wider society disapproved of, such as timepass, conspicuous consumption, smoking, and drinking alcohol, premarital relationships and sex, the young adults of the café culture were challenging and asserting their independence from their parents' values [p.2; original emphasis].



Figure 7. Students in an *āddā* at the university (Source: Aki)

Similar sentiments were echoed by some of the participants of the present study, who explained that they give *āddā* for hours at a stretch every day because they have nothing better to do with their time after classes at the university get over and that they get bored at home. *Āddā*, therefore, for these youths, just as the cafés for the young Puneites (Robinson, 2014), “offered spaces away from home for self-expression through consumption, friendship, and falling in love, which augured freedom” (Robinson, 2014, p.8) and promised possibilities unlike home. Several participants of the study mentioned that their *āddā* (as a place-space) was like “a second home” (R.C, personal conversation, 2015), except one where they felt they were better understood – a space where they felt they could be themselves without apprehension.

Robinson (2014) writes that the young people of the café culture in Pune strove for autonomy and asserted “their independence from their elders through their various (illicit) activities, their friendships, and their use of spaces like cafés” in their aspirations for “more autonomy with their own lives, independent of parents, customs, and traditions (pp. 8-9). The young Bengali students that I had worked with used their *āddā* much in the same way and towards similar ends as will be discussed later.

It is, perhaps, for this reason that *āddā* is often associated in Bengali cultural imagination with youthful vigor and passion that is often believed, at best, to have little concern or care for practicality and, at worst, to be utterly misguided¹⁹. Such cultural imagination of the youth goes well with the central notion of *āddā* as purposeless or lacking in agenda as Bengali scholar and author, Buddhadeb Bose (2010) claims that trying to find purpose in *āddā* is futile as *āddā* could include anything from small talk and tall tales to debates and arguments, and even singing if one’s in the mood for it, and is, by definition, ‘purposeless talk.’ Bringing an agenda to *āddā*, Bose claims, is the surest way of ruining it (Bose, 2010).

Given such cultural reception of *āddā*, it is not surprising then that my friend, her colleague, and perhaps many other teachers like them find students’ penchant for *āddā* as a challenge in their attempts to provide education to these young adults and to keep them on the narrow track of ‘success’ that formal education is known for. Yet, on analyzing the cultural D/discourses on *āddā*, one would find that the notion of *āddā* is inextricably related to culturally charged ideas of ‘education’ and ‘intellectualism’ as observed by Sen (2011). This is not just because one is introduced to *āddā*, as noted by Gupta (2010), as a college or university student,

¹⁹ Misguided, reckless and headstrong youth is a popular trope in the Bengali cultural D/discourse as, I suspect, it is in other cultures as well, and points to certain politics of the cultural construct of the youth.

nor because the college caf  terias are popular sites of *  dd  *. There's more to it than just a superfluous temporal and spatial connection. Let us recall my friend's comment here. It appears from her comment that spending time in *  dd  *²⁰ for a student is posited dialectically against devoting one's time to education, and consequently to their future career and social position. As Robinson (2014) observes, this is perhaps because:

In socialist modern India, prestige rested on access to government jobs and state resources; in economically liberalized modern India, status lies in the accumulation of wealth in the market through jobs and commodities. [p.8]

Therefore, parents and other well-meaning adults such as educators like my friend, often view 'excessive' (the definition of which is, of course, very subjective) *  dd  * as a direct impediment to their wards' future social successes. On the other hand, however, D/discourses celebratory of *  dd  * frame the practice as a sort of intellectual sport of the highly educated Bengali people. In the memoirs of numerous Bengali authors (Bose, 2010; Chattopadhyay, 2010; Das, 2010; Gupta, 2010; Mitra, 2010) *  dd  * is represented as a unique leisure activity of the intellectually insatiable Bengali people that is incomparable to anything in any other culture, except for the French, maybe, who are considered to be the only other artistically-inclined, intellectual race, and avid producers and consumers of the *belle-lettres*, as a person interviewed in the documentary film, *Adda: Calcutta, Kolkata* (2011) observes; no other race could boast of anything similar to *  dd  *:

Is there an exact synonym of *  dd  * in any other language of the world? Even without being a linguist/polyglot, I can say that there isn't, because the temperament of *  dd  * does not exist in any other country. Even if the spirit does exist, a congenial atmosphere/ambiance does not. People in other countries give

²⁰ This generalization of student *  dd  * might vary depending on whether the conversations in a particular student *  dd  * are perceived to be of intellectual or mundane nature, where, in the case of the latter, it is particularly considered a 'waste of time.'

speeches, crack jokes, participate in debates, have fun all night long, but they don't do [the verb in Bengali is give] *āddā*. (Bose, 2010, p.11)

Āddā, then, is not only believed to be distinctively Bengali, but is also distinguished from all other leisure activities like partying or playing cards or simply hanging-out. With enjoyment or pleasure of social company being common to all of these aforementioned activities, what distinguishes *āddā* from other such leisure activities then is its markedly intellectual nature pointed out by Sen (2011) and hinted at by Bose (2010) and others. Bose (2010), in fact, goes on to account this exclusivity of the Bengali *āddā* to the geographical climate of Bengal, besides Bengali people's temperament and the cultural atmosphere/ambiance of Bengal²¹. Of course, when he speaks of the Bengali people's temperament he means, as we shall see, the temperament of a certain class of Bengali people – middle class, urban, educated (often English-educated)²², and relatively upper caste men in respectable professions:

The dress for *āddā*²³ is just what I like [to wear] – clean, but not too clean²⁴; very loose – with more room than one needs; soft on the skin; not stiff [i.e., not starched and ironed]. It doesn't scratch one's skin, doesn't restrict the [free] movement of one's limbs, and doesn't prevent one from stretching out on one's back. Yet it is not dull/faded [i.e., yellowed with age], is not stained with [drippings from] fish curry or betel-leaf juice²⁵; nor [should] it [be] crumpled from the lackadaisical [and] shameless, bare-bodied gatherings on the

²¹ Unless otherwise stated, 'Bengal' here implies the state of West Bengal in India.

²² Education (*sikshā*) here also implies values, aesthetics, taste, sense of decorum, etc.

²³ Not that there's a particular dress or uniform to be worn for *āddā*; the author means what people normally wore to their *āddā* in his time.

²⁴ While, Bose talks about the opposition between comfort and care, and turns it into an exemplar case of opposition between respect for public decorum and giving in to one's physical inclinations (like taking off the shirt in public when it gets too hot), as being reflective of one's *sikshā*, 'the particular descriptions he uses, for instance, "clean, but not too clean," also point to two very important qualities of the educated, Bengali *bhdrolok*-intellectuals, as they were culturally imagined by the Bengali *bhdroloks*: characteristic taste (or aesthetic sense) and a spontaneous antipathy to materialism. Thus, the clothes worn to *āddā* should be "clean, but not too clean" or they shouldn't be "dull/faded/yellowed or stained" but, on the other hand, should also be loose, soft and not stiff with starch and ironing. In other words, one's clothes should reflect his tasteful attention to appearance, but not excessively so [see the section on '*āntels*' or pseudo-intellectuals in Chapter 4].

²⁵ The author probably implies that one shouldn't wear what one normally wears at home to one's *āddā*; that one should wear clean clothes to *āddā*

*dāwā*²⁶. There's comfort in it, but not lack of care/effort; its comfort is never an excuse for discordance [literally, lack of rhythm]. (Bose, 2010, p.12)

Thus, the Bengali middle class is not much different from the average Indian middle class in general, about whom Robinson (2014) writes, quoting Baviskar and Ray (2011), that “[t]o be a part of the middle class is to express oneself through consumption, and to establish one's identity as being distinct from the lower classes through a set of cultural markers that proclaim one's ‘good taste’ and style” (pp.15-16). In fact, the class and gender positioning of the Bengali *āddā* in popular cultural imagination of the educated, middle-class Bengali gentlemen, or *bhodrolok*²⁷, as they are known, becomes immediately apparent in Bose's (2010) memoir when, in stark contrast to “the lackadaisical [and] shameless, bare-bodied gatherings on the *dāwā*,” or the *r'ok* for that matter, he describes the ideal *āddā* as follows:

There should be plenty of comfort in the place of *āddā*, but there shouldn't be an excess. The furniture should be low and soft; should not be too flashy and if they are light enough to be moved around as per desire then nothing like it. Close to the tables and chairs there should also be a mattress so that if it gets late or if somebody is too tired then one needn't ask permission to crash (literally lie down). Beverages served [in *āddā*] should be cold water in glass tumblers and fragrant golden colored tea in thin, white [bone china?] cups. If there's to be any food, it should be tasty, dry and not too much, so that one can eat lying down and wouldn't have to get up even to wash hands after eating... and having relieved the servants for the day, if the lady of the house [i.e., the wife of the patron] serves the food and drinks herself only then the prestige of *āddā* could be preserved. (Bose, 2010, p.14)

And although Bose (2010) mentions that a proper *āddā* should have a proportionate mix of men and women, yet the gender stereotyping slips out through the cracks:

Āddā does not work only with men or only with women. In a gathering of men, the discussion invariably veers along the line of talk about work or else it crosses the limits of good taste. When only women gather, no one can prevent the

²⁶ The author implies that men who gathered at a *dāwā* for social conversations would often take off their tops and stash them on the floor next to them, leaving them crumpled and creased, when worn again.

²⁷ *Bhodrolok* is the equivalent to the English gentleman - learned, genteel, well-mannered and well groomed, proper and polite - in the Bengali culture

inevitable discussions of family and children, and of sari and jewelry. *Āddā* thrives in the intermixing of men and women ...women lend their compassion, charm and orderliness to *āddā*, while men bring to it the untamed passion of a bohemian heart. (Bose, 2010, p.14)

Nipendra Krishna Chattyopadhyay (2010), however, notes with apparent criticism, but while, at the same time, comparing an ideal *āddā* with a beautiful lady, that “perhaps the greatest natural enemies of *āddā* are women” [p.25]. He further observes:

A major characteristic flaw of *āddā* is that *āddā* is an outright male world ...although a flaw, yet this is also the lifeline for *āddā* ...an *āddā* cannot survive if there’s a woman within ten feet of it...every married woman hates *āddā* with a passion...she is the one who has to keep up late into the night waiting for her husband to come home from *āddā*...On their way back home from *āddā*, every husband has to mentally prepare himself for the inevitable question that awaits him when he returns: “finally finished with your *āddā*?” (pp.31-32)

The rhetoric of ‘*sikhshā*’ (education)

As noted above, *āddā* seems closely associated with d/Discourses (see Gee, 1989, 1992, 1993, 1996) of education, whether as a cultural practice of the highly educated Bengali *bhdrolok* (gentlemen) or as a way of life of the uneducated loafers. As such, when it comes to the young people in Bengali culture, the *leitmotif* across innumerable cultural texts such as movies, music, memoirs, literature for adults and children, and even primers, etc., is that of the “good boy” – a young person who values *sikhshā* (education) and strives to attain the same in order to become a *bhdrolok* or gentleman (see Bandopadhyay, 1991) like the young protagonist Montu in the film *তিন ভুবনের পারে* [Across three worlds] (1969).

Education is generally perceived as a necessary cultural capital for upward mobility in life by obtaining *chākri*²⁸ or white-collar job for the Bengali middle class *bhodrolok* – the iconic middle class figure who “is celebrated as an English-speaking, higher educated, urban white collar worker” (Robinson, 2014, p.16). Modern western-style education, particularly English literacy, emerged as the new cultural capital for the aspiring Bengali middle-class approximately in the latter half of the nineteenth century under the colonial rule of the British East India Company and later the British Raj²⁹, when the colonial rulers decided to ‘educate’ the natives in order to equip them for government jobs to help spread the British rule over the country more efficiently.

However, while the word ‘education,’ as noted above, could be roughly translated into Bengali as ‘*sikhshā*,’ and vice-versa, yet the Bengali word ‘*sikhshā*’ typically signifies more than just formal education. More like upbringing, ‘*sikhshā*,’ in different contexts variously also signifies ‘taste,’ ‘refinement,’ ‘aesthetics,’ ‘culture,’ ‘morality,’ ‘ethics,’ ‘learning,’ and ‘manners.’ In other words, it is a curious concoction of what parties from the right of the center in India at present like the BJP calls ‘Indian (read: Hindu) values’ and what the English educated, Bengali middle-class, *bhodrolok* (gentlemen) once perceived as ‘western progressiveness.’ Additionally, it signifies all those qualities that make a person worthy of the label ‘*bhodro*’ (genteel, in this case), the equivalent of the ‘gentleman’ in Western cultures.

²⁸ Although literally *chākri* means (any) job, culturally it typically excludes manual jobs which are usually referred to as *kāj* (work). A *chākri* then specifically stands for white-collar jobs.

²⁹ Company rule in India effectively began in 1757 after the Battle of Plassey and lasted until 1858 when, following the Indian Rebellion of 1857, or the First War of Independence, as we like to call it, the Government of India Act 1858 led to the British Crown assuming direct control of India under the new British Raj. The Company was dissolved in 1874 as a result of the East India Stock Dividend Redemption Act (From Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/East_India_Company).

Similar notions of education have been noted by scholars in other non-European cultures as well. For instance, Prins (2011) notes that “Latin American cultural model of educación encompasses academic knowledge and social competence” (p.1476), just like the Bengali cultural model of ‘*sikhshā*’ noted above. More specifically, the Bengali cultural model of ‘*sikhshā*’ includes a person’s ability to express herself or himself orally in a culturally appropriate manner, through the use of polite language and acceptable body language; disposition for behaving in a friendly, civic, humble and respectful manner, both in language and conduct, particularly towards elders, parents, teachers and women; disposition for putting others before oneself and generally behaving in a friendly, kind and cordial manner with everyone; and the ability of a person to display good taste, refinement, etiquette, and good manners, besides some academic knowledge – most of which were also identified by Salvadorans in Prins’ (2011) study as facets of educación. Moreover, much like the Bengalis, Salvadorans too believed that educación was “simultaneously learned and innate,” which schooling or formal education can, at best, help with, but cannot ensure and, therefore, the pathways to becoming “educado” (or “*sikhshito*,” in the Bengali cultural model) depended upon “parental instruction and modeling, teacher instruction and schooling, ... social interaction, and individual effort” (Prins, 2011, p. 1478). Of these different pathways to being “educado” or “*sikhshito*,” “social interaction” is of primary importance to this study on Bengali *āddā* as *āddā* is a place for “social interaction,” and, therefore, *āddā* is also a possible site of education or miseducation (Dewey, 1938/1997) for the participants – and I believe, it is one reason why *āddās* are often considered as a ‘waste of time’ or a bad influence on students. Middle-class parents often warn their sons against giving *āddā* (and, indeed, often try to protect them by not allowing them much unsupervised time in public) for the fear of them becoming waywardly through their association with wrong crowd in *āddās*. Parents often fear

that their sons might pick up bad habits like smoking or drinking in *āddās*, or, otherwise, learn things that are not desirable for them to learn like, for instance, swearwords.

Ultimately, notwithstanding how highly the culture of *āddā* might be regarded in the middle-class Bengali worldview, respectable middle-class parents' objections to their sons taking to *āddā* could be narrowed down to parental concerns over how their sons' miseducation (or 'asikhshā' in Bengali³⁰) through their associations in *āddās* (if found out) could reflect badly, not only on their sons, but also on them as parents, and on the family lineage because somewhat like the Salvadoran notion of educación, 'sikhshā' is believed to run in the family, learned primarily through "parental instruction and modeling" (Prins, 2011, p. 1478).

This concern over miseducation (Dewey, 1938/1997) through wrong associations in *āddās* is, particularly, believed to be true for neighborhood street-corner *āddās* rather than *āddās* that take place in college and university campuses and in certain commercialized spaces of public sociability such as cafés, lounges, and pubs because, unlike the open streets that are completely public arenas, college and university campuses and the above-mentioned commercialized spaces of public sociability are believed to be exclusive public-private spaces that are ostensibly open to all but are, in reality, gated and monitored to keep the uneducated, lower classes out (see chapter 5). Therefore, in comparison to such places as mentioned above, street-corner *āddās* are considered to be ostensibly a greater threat for miseducation (Dewey, 1938/1997) of the impressionable, young, middle-class (male)³¹ students through association with the lower classes,

³⁰ Although 'asikhsha' in Bengali literally means the opposite of 'sikhsha,' i.e., lack of education, yet in different contexts it could also mean miseducation or improper education.

³¹ Typically, middle-class young men have greater access to *āddās*, particularly to street-corner, public *āddās* than middle-class young women, who, generally, participate in *āddās*, particularly in street-corner, public *āddās*, much less than middle-class young men did.

whom the middle-class Bengali *bhodroloks* often consider to be ‘*asikhshito*’ (un-educated/ill-mannered) and ‘*abhodro*’ (uncivilized).

Thus, within the middle-class Bengali cultural worldview, ‘*sikhshito*’ (educated/well-mannered) often gets conflated with ‘*bhodro*’ (genteel/civilized) and vice-versa. And since more than knowledge, *sikhshā* implies the presence of values (such as ethics, morality, manners, refinement, etc.) in a person, it is believed that *sikhshā* runs in the family, being passed on from parents to children as cultural mores, thereby functioning as cultural distinction (Bourdieu, 1984) that distinguishes the *bhodrolok* (gentlemen) from their cultural ‘other.’ Therefore, it is this marker of distinction that *sikhshā* is supposed to provide which makes characters like Montu, a *sikhshito-ro’kbāj* (an educated person who whiles away time at the *ro’k*) in *তিন ভুবনের পারে* [Across three worlds] (1969) and Robi (the young protagonist of another film, *আপনজন* [The kin], released a year before *তিন ভুবনের পারে* [Across three worlds]), a *sikhshito goondā* (an educated goon), such aberrations and sources of conflict driving the stories in Bengali films of the time.

This notion of *sikhshā* also explains why Arun in *আপনজন* [The kin] and Bireshwar *Bābu* in *তিন ভুবনের পারে* [Across three worlds], the respective antagonists in the two films, despite being educated, are considered contemptible as ‘*bhodrolok*.’

Montu, on the other hand, has most qualities of a genuine *bhodro* person, except for his lack of adequate formal education or schooling that left him with little option but to take to the *ro’k* as a contesting position out of frustration. Therefore, in order to turn into a complete *bhodrolok* like a chrysalis turns into an elegant butterfly, Montu needed to obtain adequate formal education and simultaneously disassociate himself from the culture of *āddās* on the *ro’k* – both of which Montu finally accomplishes with some help from Swarashi, the female lead and Montu’s

love-interest in *তিন ভুবনের পারে* [Across three worlds] (1969). In the end, Montu manages to claim a place for himself in the *bhodro samāj* (genteel society) – amongst some true and many pseudo-*bhodroloks* like Arun, while it is assumed that many *bhodro*-at-heart men like the former *ro'kbāj* mates of Montu were forced to live out their lives at the *ro'k* in ostensibly non-*bhodro* company of the lower class youth due to lack of opportunities, including that of formal higher education and *chākri* (respectable job).

The birth of the *bhodrolok* – historical contexts

In order to fully understand the connection between *āddā* and *sikhshā*, we need to investigate the socio-economic situations that gave birth to the Bengali *bhodrolok* (gentlemen) class-category and simultaneously catapulted (western) formal education as an emerging symbolic capital.

In a nuanced study of nineteenth century Bengal, Tithi Bhattacharya (2005) notes that certain changes in the political-economy of Bengal towards the middle of the nineteenth century made education and salaried jobs “the only avenue of survival for the entire petty bourgeoisie from the 1850s onward” (p. 58); and while the upper stratum of the petty bourgeoisie in Bengal had supplementary income from ancestral lands in villages, the lower two strata of this class had nothing but the *chākri* to fall back on. This is once again reflected in *তিন ভুবনের পারে* [Across three worlds] (1969) where we learn that the ancestral property of the young protagonist Montu’s family in their village and even their house in the city had been pawned, leaving the family dependent on the meager income of Montu and the little money they make from renting out a couple of extra rooms in their house.

Bhattacharya (2005) explains that prior to the nineteenth century the *bāniā*³² among the Bengali people made quite a bit of money through commercial enterprises with the British. This enabled the *bāniā* to purchase land and join the club of the landed gentry who already enjoyed an aristocratic status by virtue of being land holders in a still largely feudal society (Ray, 2000). These *bāniās* were later to become the nineteenth century *bābus*³³, the precursors of the Bengali *bhdrolok*, who did not need to work on a regular basis, thereby, leaving them with ample leisure time when they indulged in spectacular display of wealth that included organizing cock-fights, *jātrā-pālā*,³⁴ *majlish*,³⁵ and *bāiji-nāch*.³⁶ In a way, even though mostly not much educated themselves, the *bābus* were the first patrons of elite arts and culture in colonial Bengal after the *zamindārs*³⁷ and the kings of the princely states.

In the traditional caste hierarchy of India, headed and dominated by the *Brāhmins*³⁸, who performed the functions of priests and teachers in the pre-colonial Bengali society, the *bāniā* occupied the third position, ahead of only the *sudra*³⁹. Therefore, historically, with the rise of the *bāniā* in the economic sphere, we discern a paradigmatic shift in the social power dynamics that was in many ways a direct result of colonialism. Although the rise of the *bāniā* was not related to western education but, instead, was entirely a result of their successful commercial relationship with the British rulers who needed them at the beginning of the colonial project in India as much

³² The *bāniā* is an occupational community of merchants, usually of grains or spices, and money-lenders in India. The term is used in a wider sense in Bengal, where it is generally applied to everybody from the *Vaishya* caste, which is the third, and, therefore, ranks relatively low, in the four-caste hierarchy in India. The word *bāniā* is derived from the Sanskrit word *vañij* or *bañij*, which means merchant

³³ *Bābu* is a generic form of address for people of relatively high economic and social standing and, consequently, of high status in society. It is also a form of public address that is added at the end of one's first name as a form of respect, if the addressee is deemed of respectable or *bhdro* standing in society.

³⁴ Indigenous forms of theatre.

³⁵ A kind of soirée hosted by the rich *bābus* that involved drinking, watching dances performed by brothel danseuses and a spectacular display of wealth

³⁶ A form of dance for the entertainment of the *bābus* performed by *bāijis*, who were professional dancers and call girls.

³⁷ Large land holders and feudal lords.

³⁸ The highest caste in the caste hierarchy, the *brāhmins* were traditionally priests and learned men in Indian society.

³⁹ The lowest caste in the caste hierarchy, the *sudra* were the former untouchable persons.

as the *bāniā* needed the British, yet we shall see that soon enough western education, introduced by Thomas Babington Macaulay through the famous Education Bill of 1835, would become a new channel of mobility superseding the currency of social position determined by origin of birth⁴⁰. That is, with the introduction of colonial education in India, we observe the beginning of a gradual shift from sponsored mobility to contest mobility. Turner (1960) explains that “contest mobility is a system in which elite status is the prize in an open contest” that aspirants achieve by their “own efforts,” in comparison to sponsored mobility in which elite status is conferred upon the chosen ones “by the established elites or their agents” based on some criteria such as the origin of birth and the same “cannot be *taken* by any amount of effort or strategy” (p. 856; original emphasis).

However, this doesn’t mean that caste was made redundant. In fact, caste was still a powerful force in the social reality of the 19th century Bengal (and still continues to be so, in many ways). Until this point in history, the *brāhmin* priests and teachers⁴¹ served a role in society similar to those Gramsci (1971) would call the ‘traditional intellectuals,’ and although the *brāhmins* appeared to be a distinct social category rooted in the caste system of India, independent of class structures, in reality, they were, as Gramsci argued about traditional intellectuals in Italian society, the deputies of the dominant feudal class and worked on their behalf to maintain “the subaltern functions of social hegemony” (p.12) over the masses. As Gramsci (1971) theorizes, the ‘spontaneous’ consent of the masses, in this case too, was

⁴⁰ While Macaulay has been strongly criticized by Indian historians, particularly on account of the Education Bill proposed by him that portrayed the indigenous learning and education system in poor light, yet there are certain Dalit groups in India who celebrate Macaulay’s birthday till date for introducing western education, particularly English literacy in India that allowed them opportunities for upward mobility, superseding restrictions imposed on the same by their caste origin.

⁴¹ There are several hierarchical sub-categories under the *brāhmin* caste and not all *brāhmins* were priests or teachers, although they were mostly part of similar ‘intellectual’ professions distinct from the work that lower-caste people performed.

‘historically’ caused by the *prestige* (and the consequent confidence) that the dominant group enjoyed because of its position and functions in the world of production (p.12; emphasis added). This notion of prestige, more specifically who was culturally considered prestigious and for what reasons, would historically become important for understanding the changing social order of colonial Bengal because with the advent of colonialism, and western education that came with it, this notion of prestige, although still important, was silently turned on its head. With the advent of colonialism and the concurrent economic prominence of the *bāniā*, Bengal witnessed the beginning of a change in the old-world class structures of the society. It was a change that was understandably in the interest of the colonial rulers and a section of the native population, namely the *bāniā*, who had never quite been in a similar position of power before, stood to benefit from it. Gramsci (1971) argues that the rural intellectuals represent a “social model” of upward mobility for the peasants to aspire for. It is possible that the *bāniā*, being the third in the caste hierarchy and, therefore, being more likely to be accepted in a position of leadership than people of *sudra*⁴² caste, had similar aspirations for social power and control, and colonialism afforded him a chance that he made good use of.

With ownership of landed property obtained as a result of their economic successes, the *bāniā* came close to emulating the feudal lords, but not entirely. For the *bāniā* still lacked two things that the dominant feudal lords enjoyed – relative autonomy of political control from the British and the cultural capital of prestige or distinction (Bourdieu, 1984).

Firstly, unlike the already dominant feudal class, the *bāniā*’s economic success and social power emanated from his commercial association with the colonizers who needed the *bāniā*’s

⁴² The lowest of the four broad class categories (*brāhmin*, *khsatriya*, *baisya*, and *sudra*), many among the *sudras* were considered untouchables and, therefore, unlike the *bāniā*, people from the *sudra* caste for a long time couldn’t have hoped for any vertical mobility despite the opportunities afforded by colonialism.

help to establish their economic hold over the society, but not for long. Secondly, having arrived at a position of power and influence only recently, the *bāniā* lacked the mass support-base of the more established feudal rulers. And lastly, as mentioned above, the *bāniā* lacked the social prestige or distinction that the feudal lords held as a combined result of their relatively higher position in the caste hierarchy, their position of power over the masses and the function served by the traditional *brāhmin* intellectuals as their deputies in exercising their hegemony over the masses. In fact, the '*bāniā bābu*' often came under severe criticism from the learned *brāhmins* for his crude and tasteless display of wealth, although he did also manage to surround himself with a cohort of yes-men through such displays. However, the *bāniā*'s yes-men, which also included some *brāhmins* from relatively lower orders, among people from other castes, did not quite perform the same social function of exercising the hegemony of the *bāniā* over the masses as the traditional *brāhmin* priests and scholars did for the feudal rulers. In other words, the organic intellectuals that Gramsci (1971) claims come into existence with any new group coming into position of power and assimilate the traditional intellectuals within its folds was a little late in coming for the *bāniā*. When they did come into existence, the prominence of the *bāniā* was already in the ebb and was largely replaced by a new social group of middle-class intelligentsia comprising of a mix of *brāhmins* and other relatively upper-caste Bengali people, including the *bāniā*, riding on the growth of a new politics of education introduced by the British in their own interests for a more effective governance and control of the native population.

It is my argument that as the British established their stronghold and subsequently proceeded to introduce western schooling, English education⁴³ gradually came to be viewed both

⁴³ Formal education system introduced by the English, as also formal education in the English language.

as a symbolic marker of distinction as the new cultural capital and a channel of vertical social mobility that overrode, at least to some extent, the restrictions to mobility imposed by origin of birth in traditional Indian society (see Bandyopadhyay, 1937; Islam, 1981; Nag, 1996; Sreepantha, 1999; Sur, 2015). This politics of English education and the cultural D/discourses associated with it is what, I believe, caused formal education (particularly in English language) to be culturally valued as a symbolic capital over wealth till date.

As Bhattacharya (2005) points out, following some complex politico-economic changes in Bengal in the early half of the twentieth century as the colonial project in India took off to a flying start, the landed class of '*bāniā bābus*' gradually went out of prominence but left behind their legacy. A new class of English educated, salaried people working for the Company emerged, many of whom were the progeny of the *bāniā* from the previous era. This new class of salaried people belonging to a middle-income group and working in different professions that assembled themselves under the broad umbrella category of '*bhodrolok*' (gentlemen) was in many ways similar to what Gramsci (1971) would call the 'organic intellectuals.'

The organic intellectuals, Gramsci (1971) argues, are "the thinking and organizing element of a particular fundamental social class" (p.5) that "come into existence on the same industrial terrain as the [new] economic group" (p.18) and align themselves with the more important or the more dominant social group, which in the case of colonial Bengal was the British. Gramsci (1971) further argues that unlike the traditional intellectuals who were typically priests, doctors, teachers, philosophers, etc., "these organic intellectuals are distinguished less by their profession, which may be any job characteristic of their class, than by their function in directing the ideas and aspirations of the class to which they organically belong" (p.18). Eventually, the traditional intellectuals are ideologically conquered by the emergent group and

assimilated in its folds (Gramsci, 1971), which is what happened in Bengal as the emerging educated *bhodoork* class included both *brāhmins* and non-*brāhmins*, but seldom did people of the lowest caste, the *sudra*, find themselves within the fold of the ‘*bhodoork* class category.’

***Bhodoork*: Class or a class-category?**

The *bhodoork*, however, was not a homogenous class in the Marxist sense by any means (Bhattacharya, 2005). Bhattacharya identifies three distinct sub-classes within the broader class-category of the *bhodoork*, which is consistent with Gramsci’s argument that several tiers existed within the group of organic intellectuals depending on the intrinsic social functions performed and positions held by each of the sub-groups. In Bengal, the first among the sub-groups of Bengali *bhodoork* was a group of wealthy people who were highly educated, many of whom got their education abroad in the disciplines of western arts and sciences, and whose primary source of wealth was from inherited land purchased by their forefathers in commercial enterprise. Bhattacharya calls this class of people the “new middle-class” or the “rentier class,” for although many of them worked at salaried jobs (usually in important government positions like the District Magistrate or the Collector of Revenues) with the Company and later with the Raj, almost none of them were financially dependent on their salaries, which were merely a supplementary source of income to the real income generated from the rent of the lands they owned. Unlike the *Bābus* who were mere patrons of art and culture, the new middle class did not only patronize the arts, but being both highly educated and in a position to afford time in pursuit of hobbies, many of them became producers of art and literature themselves and initiated the literary-cultural boom that historically came to be known as the nineteenth century ‘Bengali Renaissance.’ Some

prominent Bengali of this sub-group, among whom many were noted luminaries, authors, and social-reformers, created literary clubs and discussion circles, often with family members and close family friends, which were in essence the precursor of the ‘modern’ *āddā* today⁴⁴.

The second tier of the Bengali *bhodrolok* of nineteenth century was an equally educated and comfortably salaried group of middle class people, but whose chief distinction from the first group was that, despite owning small land holdings in villages, their main source of income was their salary and not the rent from their properties.

The third group, one that Bhattacharya (2005) calls the ‘*kerāni*’⁴⁵ class,’ was a modestly educated group of people who worked for the Company, and later for the Raj, as *kerāni* or petty clerks on measly wages, and who were often subjected to ridicule and contempt⁴⁶ in Bengali cultural texts and D/discourses (for example, see Nag, 1996). As Bhattacharya (2005) notes, all of these three groups of people came from a position where they all owned some amount of lands in villages and enjoyed a certain status and social recognition, at least back in their villages, if not in the city (Calcutta) where many of them had migrated in search of jobs. But unlike the renter class, by the mid-nineteenth century, the other two groups did not have any income from their lands (if they still owned any) to speak of. Therefore, by the 1850s all the three groups, but particularly the lower two groups, were entirely dependent on education and salaried jobs or *chākri*.

⁴⁴ I call these literary clubs precursors to the ‘modern’ *āddā* because practices similar to the *āddā* were in existence in the village *chandimandap* and in the *dāwā* of village homes in Bengal long before colonialism and functioned as public spheres integral to the traditional civil society of India. However, the role that the literary clubs played in creating a civil society in the late nineteenth century was distinct in their ambition and functions from the rural civil society, and was modeled in the image of the English civil society.

⁴⁵ A petty clerk

⁴⁶ Gramsci points out that the lower strata of intellectuals are often subject of jokes and witticisms both within and outside the group of intellectuals in society because of their most blatant display of *esprit de corps* towards the group which make them seem vain and conceited. Similar criticisms were often directed both at the *bāniā bābu* and *kerāni* because they were perceived to be the least educated among the *bhodrolok* intellectuals, and yet, or perhaps because of it, they seemed to display their intellectual status most blatantly which made them look vain and conceited.

By mid to late twentieth century, following independence and partition of the country in 1947, further socio-economic and political changes shifted and changed the class boundaries within the *bhodrolok* class category. Many among the ‘rentier class’ quickly shot into further public prominence either in governance or in industry as the only thing that had held this class back in colonial Bengal – their Indianness – was no longer an impediment for them in sovereign India. A section of the second group, which is the middle class in India today, assumed the roles of the new intelligentsia and professionals in post-independence Bengal, while another section of the same class entered the bureaucracy and controlled it from the grassroots level upwards. And what happened to our historically neglected *kerāni*? While some of them managed to hold on to their petty clerical jobs like Montu, a large section of the progeny of the *kerāni* could not find employment either due to lack of opportunities or because they were too proud of their *bhodrolok* status to work manual jobs, and did whatever they could for scraping an existence. Education and *chākri* still remained the only option for a respectable livelihood for this *kerāni* class, many among whom shied away from manual labor or other jobs below their *bhodrolok* standing and often enlisted as cadres in political parties like the boys in *আগনজ্ঞান* [The kin] (1968) in the hope of eventually obtaining a *chākri* or white-collar jobs, as more than just education was often needed for the same. A study of educated, lower middle-class youths in northern India by Jeffrey et al. (2008) reveals that “the ability of young men to benefit from education depended crucially on money, social resources, and cultural capital” (p.208), and it was really no different for the lower middle-class Bengali youths like Montu and his friends.

Bhattacharya (2005) further notes that the top layer of the Bengali intelligentsia often, at least to some extent, controlled the bureaucratic ‘favor economy’ of *supārish* (recommendation). This was perhaps one of the many ways of controlling economic resources as widespread

education and increasing urban migrations gave rise to fears of jobs being taken away (Bhattacharya, 2005). The exodus of refugees to West Bengal from the erstwhile East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) following the partition in 1947 and later again during the war for independence in 1971 that gave rise to the sovereign Bangladesh made this fear even more real. The first two decades after independence saw widespread bureaucratic nepotism and corruption that, coupled with increasing unemployment, gave rise to angst among the youth of the time. Bengali cinema of the time increasingly became contemporary texts that sought to capture the social realities of the period. Gooptu (2010) notes that the “contemporary prototypes – the *bhodrolok* loafer and *sikkhitā bekār* (educated unemployed), or the middle-class woman prostitute...attained an almost iconic signification in the films of the time” (p.172). Thus, in *তিন ভুবনের পারে* [Across three worlds] (1969) we meet Montu’s younger brother, Sudhir – a *sikkhitā bekār*, who, unlike Montu, had the required educational qualifications, but did not have the right social ‘connections’ required to obtain a job. In a poignant scene, Montu was shocked to learn that Sudhir was applying for the post of a *chāprāshi* (peon) – a job well below his educational qualification and his *bhodrolok* standing. Sudhir, however, tells Montu that he wasn’t hopeful of even getting the job of a peon as many educated *bhodrolok* like him had applied for that one post. In the end, it was Montu who, using his clout as local *ro’kbāj*, got Swarashi’s older brother, Bireshwar *Bābu*, to get Sudhir a job in his company where, we are told, Bireshwar *Bābu* was a big ‘officer.’ In return, a grateful Montu ran errands for Bireshwar *Bābu*, doing basically what Sudhir would have done as a *chāprāshi*, but only Montu did it unofficially in the name of returning favors and, therefore, managed to hold on to his *bhodrolok* status in the eye of the society.

Therefore, it was largely these modestly educated, unemployed youths from lower middle-class Bengali families who formed in Calcutta what Whyte (1993) in the context of

Boston termed as ‘street corner society,’ and populated the *ro’ks* in every neighborhood. This was, perhaps, largely because these unemployed youths had nothing better to do with all their free time as the character of Montu in *তিন ভুবনের পারে* [Across three worlds] (1969) symbolized, and the financial condition of their families were such that hanging out with friends outside was an escape from the harsh reality for many of them (again this was illustrated by the character of Montu in *তিন ভুবনের পারে* [Across three worlds], where he was shown to be constantly criticized at home by his father for wasting time in *āddā*, instead of being proactive about taking care of the family’s financial responsibilities as he should have, being the oldest son of the family).

This is congruent with Craig Jeffery’s (2010b) study of educated, unemployed middle class youths in Meerut in North India, where he observed that that the youths primarily took to hanging out at street corners, ‘doing’ *timepass* – a cultural practice which is, seemingly, not much different from *āddā*, as a form of compulsory ‘waiting’ enforced upon them by their unemployment. Similar sentiments were also expressed by the participants of the present study as well. However, it could also be argued that, at least, for some of these educated unemployed Bengali youths, *āddā*, especially when such *āddā* were held in places like the Coffee House or university campuses that were culturally known for the confluence of intellectuals, could have functioned as a symbolic reference to their aspirations for being counted by their peers as public intellectuals

***Āddā*: A collectivity of the *bhodrolok* intellectuals?**

In Bose’s (2010) description above, the ideal *āddā* seems to be an exclusive prerogative of the educated and economically solvent, urban *bhodroloks*, although Bose doesn’t quite say so

explicitly. In fact, in much of the writings on *āddā*, it is, seemingly, conceived of as a somewhat closed door gathering of friends and peers (although some commentators like Mitra (2010) write about random people occasionally showing up in their *āddās*) similar to the family-based *sabhā* or literary circles of the late 19th century high *bhodrolok* class noted by Bhattacharya (2005). Even if the *āddās* in question weren't literally held behind closed doors, they functioned as such in their exclusivity. Membership in some of these *āddās*, particularly those that had some notable members, was often perceived as a valuable social capital (Coleman, 1988), just as was the case with the 18th and 19th century Parisian *salons*, the 19th century English coffeehouses and blue-stocking clubs, and the 19th century German dining societies and *biergartens*⁴⁷. However, ironically, membership in such elite *āddās* was incumbent on one's already existing social connections, just as membership in the 19th century literary *sabhā*⁴⁸ were determined through friendship and family connections, and marked yet another distinction of respectable *āddās* from the street-corner *āddās*. This, however, does not mean that elite *āddās* had formal memberships, but just that 'friends' made *āddā* and not the other way round, although meeting someone new – a friend of a friend – in *āddā* every once in a while was not uncommon and the same was observed in the *āddās* of the student participants for this study.

According to Bose (2010), *āddā* is distinct from speeches, lectures, debates, meetings or parties; it is neither a club nor a *sabhā*, or anything similar to the high-society gathering of the Parisian salons, and yet it is definitely not a wayward congregation at street-corners either. Therefore, *āddā*, as described by Bose (2010) could be best defined as a 'collectivity'

⁴⁷ Translated into English as 'beer garden,' a *biergarten* is an open, garden-like space, usually attached to a local brewery, where people socialize over beers at shared tables.

⁴⁸ A Sanskrit loan word that literally means an assembly hall or a council hall as in a King's council hall or court, the word *sabhā* more generally refers to any assembly, congregation, or council.

(Bhattacharya, 2005). Bhattacharya (2005) distinguishes a ‘collectivity’ from an organization in that “the former need not subscribe to any structure or rules of operation.... Collectivities exist, if and only if, their *members coordinate their actions in view of the identity they believe themselves to share*” (pp. 68-69; emphasis added). Therefore, clearly, not just anybody could be a part of a collectivity. Even without any formal membership, such *āddās*, as imagined by Bose (2010) and Chattopadhyay (2010), were based on members’ class identity and excluded commoners who often hung out at street-corners and other such public places. On the other hand, by the same logic, the *āddās* of Montu and his friends at the *ro’k* in *তিন ভুবনের পারে* [Across three worlds] (1969), and those of Robi and Cheno at street corners in *আপনজন* [The kin] (1968), as well as those of the Bengali students I interviewed for this study, could also be considered collectivities, although “the identity [the members] believe themselves to share” and how they “coordinate their actions in view of the said identity” (Bhattacharya, 2005, pp. 68-69) were different in the latter cases, in comparison to the members of the elite *āddās* that Bose (2010) had in mind.

Dipesh Chakrabarty (1999) points out that the emergence of *āddā* onto the streets from the confines of the *bhodrolok*’s parlor in the late twentieth century turned *āddā* into a democratic⁴⁹ public culture in the sense that the elite *bhodrolok* lost their prerogative over *āddā* as an elite cultural practice, and along with it the symbolic distinction of modernity and high culture that *āddā* provided them with. Chakrabarty (1999) further points out that the emergence of *āddā* into public spaces like the coffeehouses, road-side tea shacks and the *ro’k* also meant the loss of a patron for *āddā*. This had important implications according to Chakrabarty (1999) because, just as with the Parisian *salons*, patronage of *baithaki āddā*⁵⁰ also served an exclusionary function of

⁴⁹ Despite Chakrabarty’s claim, *āddā* has never become truly democratic as class, caste and gender inequalities are still played out in complex ways in the context of *āddā* as we shall see in the course of this study.

⁵⁰ *āddā* in the house, literally in the *baithakkhānā* or the sitting room/lounge area of the upper middle-class households.

screening unwanted participants, thereby making each *āddā* exclusive and distinct. Emergence of *āddā* into the public domain, supported by active efforts and encouragement from burgeoning business establishments in the new capitalist economy such as cafés, tea bars, restaurants and eateries, etc. that wanted people to spend more and more time out of their homes (C.f., Robinson, 2014) meant that now just about anybody could participate in their own *āddās*, thereby, turning *āddā* into a plebeian sociability practice.

And while one cannot be absolutely certain for the lack of empirical research, it was likely that this was the time when the distinction between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ *āddās*, that is, *āddā* as the ‘intellectual-cultural practice par excellence’ and *āddā* as ‘a waste of time,’ first came to be. For the elite Bengali *bhოდ্রলোকস* with their relatively greater economic, social, and cultural capital, this was perhaps because of a perceived sense of loss of their prerogative and control over the cultural heritage of *āddā*, and along with it the loss of their social distinction and social prestige associated with the *baithaki āddā*, to the commoners for the first time. But for the non-elite Bengali *bhოდ্রলোকস* at the lower fringes of the middle-class spectrum (whom Bhattacharya calls the ‘*kerāni* class’), this could, perhaps, be because of the following two possible reasons. Firstly, due to increasing unemployment at the time, parents within this group, who, typically, had little economic resources to support their sons and thus, worried for their sons’ future, like Montu’s father in *তিন ভুবনের পারে* [Across three worlds] (1969), considered any time spent in anything other than an active pursuit after a job, a waste of time. And secondly, with no other social capital to speak of, but for their social status as ‘*sikhshito*’ (educated/well-mannered) and ‘*bhোদ্রো*’ (genteel/civilized), they might have feared that their sons’ association with lower-class youths at street-corner *āddās* may cause their social status to be questioned, and thereby, possibly further jeopardizing their sons’ employability and their daughters’ marriageability. Both of these

concerns of the lower middle-class, *bhodrolak* parents of the time were hinted at in the 1969 film, *তিন ভুবনের পারে* [Across three worlds].

It is interesting to note that the differentiation between the ‘good’ and the ‘bad’ *āddās* possibly emerged approximately around the same time for different reasons for different classes of Bengali adults within the broader *bhodrolak* class category, while many Bengali youths and students across different class backgrounds took to the so called ‘bad *āddā*’ at the *ro’k* and other such public places against their parents’ wishes, again for various reasons, including lack of better occupation and political adherence to contesting class positions against the Bengali *bhodrolak* class-category.

The social space of *ro’k* in the Bengali cultural imagination

References to the *ro’k*, as already noted above, are plenty in contemporary Bengali cultural texts – movies, music, theatre (plays) and literature, including novels, short stories, and vignettes, but mostly in memoirs written by many Bengali cultural luminaries. In one such memoir – in a seemingly ‘response’⁵¹ to criticisms against the Bengali *bhodrolaks’ baithaki āddās* by the Bengali communists, Nripendrkrishna Chattopadhyay (2010) wrote with unmistakable satire:

Quoting the Upanishad written by Marx⁵², the educated Bengali boys of today claim that *āddā* is a rotten feudal institution of the lazy rich people to kill time; there’s no place for it in the current work-oriented, progressive, industrial society. It is for this reason that today’s educated society has banished *āddā*, with *hookā*⁵³ and all, from the home and into the streets. Just as they had once

⁵¹ C.f., Bakhtin, 1981, 1986

⁵² The satire is unmistakable here. The *Upanishads* are quasi-religious, authoritative philosophical Sanskrit treatises that are often considered among the sacrosanct Hindu philosophical texts.

⁵³ A *hookah* is a traditional instrument for smoking tobacco, or sometimes cannabis. It comprises of a container at the top for burning charcoal, a stem through which the smoke is passed into a water basin at the bottom, and a pipe little above the

banished classical music and dance, along with the *ghungroo*⁵⁴ and *tablā*⁵⁵, from the home and had discarded it into the dark nights of the brothels ... it would be impossible to salvage *āddā* from the 'ro'k' and restore it to the [bhodrolok's] homes. Whatever little life-sap of *āddā* still remains would dry up in the cement of the 'ro'k.' (pp. 16-17)

Real *āddā* – the so-called cultured sociability practice par excellence of the educated, Bengali *bhodrolok* is then strongly contrasted with the *āddā* at the *ro'k* (see figure 8), that is, the den or the *āddā* (in the sense of a place), in the derogatory sense of the word, of the *chotolok* (i.e., the cultural 'other' of the *bhodrolok*) – lower-class people, who are, generally, considered to be conspicuously lacking in *sikhshā* in sharp contrast to the Bengali *bhodrolok* intellectuals.

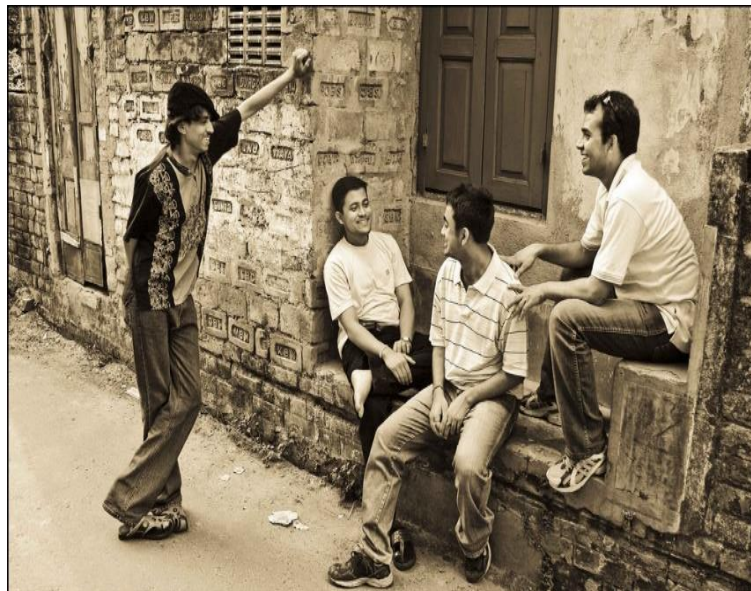


Figure 8. Young men giving *āddā* at a *ro'k* (Source: <http://aaddabuzz.blogspot.com/>)

water basin through which the smoke is inhaled after being filtered through the water. A hookah is often shared among several people.

⁵⁴ A *ghungroo* is one of many small metallic bells strung together to form a musical anklet tied to the feet of classical Indian dancers. *Ghungroos* serve to accentuate the rhythmic aspects of the dance and allow complex footwork to be heard by the audience

⁵⁵ A *tablā* is a percussion instrument originating from the Indian subcontinent, consisting of a pair of drums, used in traditional, classical, popular and folk music. It has been a particularly important instrument in Hindustani classical music since the 18th century, and remains in use in the Indian subcontinent.

Therefore, it is in this sense of the word that Sarashi, the female lead in the film *তিন ভুবনের পারে* [Across three worlds] (1969), initially refers to Montu, the little-educated, ‘angry young man’⁵⁶ protagonist in the movie, as *āddā shiromoni* (the kingpin of *āddā*), *ro’kbāj*, and *mātāl* (drunkard).

Bose (2010) and Chattopadhyay (2010), however, refuse to even call ‘the gatherings’ on the *ro’k* as *āddā*. Writing about the proper places where *āddā* might rightfully be held, Bose (2010) takes us from the inside of the *baithakkhānā*⁵⁷ to the balcony, the rooftop and even to the open *māth* (field)⁵⁸, but not for once to the *ro’ks* that Chattopadhyay (2005) claims were an integral part of the architectural design of the street-side facades of old Kolkata houses, reflective of the *dāwā* of the village homes. The choice of locations for *āddā* as enumerated by Bose then clearly speaks of a desire to identify with the class position of the English educated cultural elites, who in Thomas Babington Macaulay’s words, were: “a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect” (Macaulay, 1835, pp. 107-117).

Other writers analyzed for this dissertation describe their *āddās* in various buildings, including the coffeehouses of Calcutta, tea-shops, book-stores, back-offices of publishing companies, and even in the office of the national radio channel (Singh, 2010), but seldom in the streets, and never at the *ro’k*. Not only the *ro’k*, but Bose (2010) even distinguishes ‘real *āddā*’ from the congregations at the *dāwā* of the village homes and the *chandimandaps*⁴⁹, as noted

⁵⁶ The ‘angry young man’ used to be a popular trope in both Bengali and Hindi films in the decades between 1960s and 1980s.

⁵⁷ A drawing room, sitting room or a lounge, a *baithakkhānā* in traditional Bengali homes of the upper middle class is where guests are welcomed.

⁵⁸ Literally a field, *math* here likely implies ‘*Garh-er Māth*,’ or the field (*māth*) adjacent to the Fort (*Garh*) William’s, established by the British as headquarter of the East India Company in Calcutta. The field alongside Fort William’s was where the British employees of the Company, and later of the *Raj*, often went for a stroll in the evening, and was also frequented by the native *bābus* and *bhodroloks*. It was, therefore, a space not meant for natives of non-*bhodrolok* standing.

above, thereby framing *āddā*, reflective of Sen's (2010) definition, as an exclusively modern-urban phenomenon with undertones of the British coffeehouse culture and a mental-model of the English civil society.

In this light, it is interesting to note as an aside that the contempt with which the Bengali *bhodrolok* viewed the *āddā* culture of the *ro*'ks and the education of those who participated in such *āddās* bore an uncanny resemblance to the contempt that the colonizers had for the indigenous culture and knowledge of the native Indians:

I have never found one [...] who could deny that a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia. (Macaulay, 1835, pp. 107-117)

By the late 1960s, the *ro*'ks had come to be associated in the public imagination, not just with the little educated, jobless youths from the lower and lower middle-classes, but, with the escalation of political violence in the state, with political *goondā* (goon) and muscle-men as well. For instance, in the film, *আপনজন*[The kin] (1968), the protagonist, Robi, and his nemesis, Cheno, although apparently from different class and caste backgrounds, with varying levels of education, are precisely such muscle-men whose personal rivalry was consolidated in their working for rival politicians from parties on both sides of the center. The film shows both parties exploiting these unemployed youths with little education and social capital in working for them as local clouts for securing votes through violence and terrorism. The *ro*'ks, particularly those along the main street of any neighborhood, thus became strategic watch-posts for political control of territory, and a place to be avoided by the *bhodroloks* at any cost. This further shrunk the everyday, public spaces of civil sociability for the mild-mannered *bhodroloks*, who were

relegated to the confines of their drawing-rooms (*baithakkhānā*), restaurants, cabins⁵⁹, and coffeehouses, while the streets came to be feared and shunned by the *bhodro* society as the domain of the uneducated, lower class loafers.

This dialectic between the home and the street is amply illustrated in *তিন ভুবনের পারে* [Across three worlds] (1969), when Swarashi warns Montu, after his former friends from the *ro'k* pays him a social visit at their home, to never forget that those who hang out in the streets are never welcomed in a *bhodrolok*'s home. It was for this reason that Montu had to absolve himself of all connections with his former friends, besides enrolling himself in a college, in order to become a *bhodrolok* worthy of marrying Swarashi. From this point on in the film, as Montu takes his first step in what is portrayed as the 'right' direction from the *ro'k* towards the inside of his home, his former life at the *ro'k* is repeatedly referred to as his obnoxious past both by Montu and Swarashi. Swarashi's words, when she tells Montu: “তোমাকে বড় হতে হবে” [you will have to be big (successful)], “আড্ডা দেওয়া চলবে না” [you can't give *āddā*], echoes many parents and teachers' sentiments for their wards, including that of my friend's, with whose story I had started this chapter.

Contesting positions & contesting spaces

However, on the other hand, for some Bengali youth, particularly for the socialist minded, left-leaning youth of Calcutta – a city that was ruled by a communist government for over three decades between 1977 and 2011, the *ro'k* – which originally served as a nostalgic symbolic reference to the communal *dāwā* of the village homes for the uprooted urbanites

⁵⁹ Small and cheap eateries

(Chattopadhyay, 2005) – had become a contesting space against the cultural hegemony of the upper-class *bhodrolok* intellectuals, as also against those perceived to be pseudo-*bhodrolok* intellectuals. Thus, the *ro 'ks* simultaneously came to signify a space that was to be feared and despised by the people of refined taste and subdued *bhodro* (genteel) disposition, while being embraced by those who, on the other hand, did not apparently care much for their *bhodrolok* status in society – mostly socialist minded youths and students, and the communist intellectuals. This is adequately portrayed in a song and dance sequence in the opening scene of *তিন ভুবনের পারে* [Across three worlds] (1969) that culminates in an *āddā* at the *ro 'k* outside Montu's house. Glaring at a passing *brāhmin purohit* (priest)⁶⁰, who returns a contemptuous look at Montu and his young friends, Montu sings: “*jete jete kāro bhoy-e thomke dnārābo nā* (will not stop in my way for the fear of anybody)!” Although, since the turn towards salaried jobs from traditional professions in the mid-nineteenth century, the *purohits* or priests were financially no better off than the *kerāni* (petty clerk) that Montu was (Bhattacharya, 2005), yet this is, nevertheless, a significant scene in the film that underscores the contesting ideological position taken by Montu – a poor and little educated offspring of a *bhodrolok*, against his more revered, but typically morally corrupt, so-called fellow *bhodrolok*.

Again, it was from this same *ro 'k* that derogatory remarks aimed at Montu's love-interest in the film, Sarashi (who in this case represented the upper middle-class, educated, modern, working woman, who often traveled without male company) were initially hurled by Montu and his friends. In fact, the euphemism – ‘eve-teasing’ – for street harassment of passing women by many road-side Romeos like Montu and his friends in *তিন ভুবনের পারে* [Across three worlds]

⁶⁰ Literally, a priest, but here a symbol of the old social order and the hegemony of the higher castes as priests were traditionally higher caste *brāhmins*.

was/is associated with the *ro 'k*, although such street harassment of women are by no means limited to the *ro 'ks* anymore, if they ever were.

And while, street harassment cannot be termed as an act of taking a contesting position by any means, in the case of Montu in *তিন ভুবনের পারে* [Across three worlds] (1969), it, however, seemed that the usually otherwise civil and polite Montu misbehaved all the more with Sarashi when she turned down several of his advances, calling him '*chotolok*' and '*ro 'kbāj*' – which Montu interpreted as an offensive against him because of his social position and his life at the *ro 'k*. Thus, in this particular instance, Montu's defiant and deliberate misbehavior with Sarashi could be viewed as him taking on a symbolic contesting position that exaggeratedly embraced his low social status vis-a-vis the educated, upper middle-class Sarashi from the contesting space of the *ro 'k* which determined his social identity and worth in Sarashi's view.

The *ro 'k*, then, in the cultural imagination of the Bengali *bhodrolok*, symbolized an *āddā* (in the sense of a gathering space or perch) of the non-*bhodro*, uneducated, lower class youths, which made taking to the *ro 'k* a symbolic act of defiance for many *bhodrolok-ro 'kbājs* like Montu. Drinking alcohol, smoking cigarettes and *gānjā*, gambling, womanizing, harassing women, speaking and behaving in non-*bhodro* ways and other such vices were often conflated with spending time in *āddā* at the *ro 'ks* (although none of these were by any means solely confined to the *ro 'ks*, as is anybody's guess) and were equated with a non-*bhodro*, lowly way of life. However, on the other hand, indulging in some of these activities like smoking, drinking and speaking in a non-*bhodro* linguistic register in *āddās* at *ro 'ks* and street-corners by many youths, particularly the communist-minded youths, and radical *bhodroloks* of the time became a symbolic act of distancing oneself from the ethics and sentiments of the bourgeois *bhodrolok*. Aligning oneself with the non-*bhodrolok* class-position, particularly when coming from a *bhodro* lineage,

thus, became a form of romantic rebellion: a (socialist) contesting position and a different kind of performance of intellectualism⁶¹ – one that, perhaps, urged me to go make friends in the nearest slum as a teenager (see chapter 4).

However, it should be noted that just as in my case, such contesting positions do not expunge the realities of class. Despite his apparent cynicism towards the *bhodrolok*, it was evident in the film *তিন ভুবনের পারে* [Across three worlds] (1969) that Montu, nevertheless, aligned himself with the class location of the *bhodro*, even if with skepticism. For Montu, the *ro'kbāj-bhodrolok*, “there existed an awareness of difference with *other social groups* (Muslims, lower castes, etc.)” (Bhattacharya, 2005, p. 30; original emphasis) based on an ideology of education, just as it had been for the nineteenth century *bhodrolok*. This becomes rather evident in a scene from the film, *আপনজন* [The kin] (1968). The *bhodrolok-goondā* or the gentleman-goon protagonist, Robi, and his nemesis, Cheno, also a muscle-man but not quite so *bhodrolok* prototype as Robi, used to be old pals, who, we are told, fell out over a *bhodro*-girl. The girl in question was one whom both Cheno and Robi secretly admired. When Cheno, who, from the sound of his name, presumably comes from a lower caste background⁶², realized that the likes of him had no chance against the upper-caste (Robi, we are told in the film, was a *brāhmin* by caste), *bhodro* prototype Robi (who in the film, apparently, is not only the more educated of the two, but is always depicted as better dressed, in the western sense of being well dressed in shirts, trousers, belts and boots – symbolizing being western-educated), he goes and does a deliberately exaggerated display of his lack of *sikhshā* and refinement, and his non-*bhodro* ways (exemplified

⁶¹ This is also a trope noted among some students I interviewed for this dissertation.

⁶² The uncommon, odd-sounding name indicates his dubious class-caste background. On the other hand, Robi, which literally means the Sun, also alludes to the Noble laureate iconic Bengali intellectual, Rabindranath Tagore, who was known as Robi to family and friends. Names, particularly last names, are often, but not always, markers of caste and religion.

in his manner of dressing and talking, his choice of words, including use of profanities in the presence of a lady, gesticulation and a general language use that included, possibly deliberately, mispronouncing some words), before the girl while identifying himself as Robi's 'good friend'. Sure enough, the lady, who also, previously, secretly admired the seemingly '*bhodro*' Robi, immediately disassociated herself from all connections with him.

However, Bhattacharya (2005) warns us that such an awareness of differences, whether it is the difference that Montu perceives between him and the more educated, upper class Swarashi or the difference that Robi perceives between him and Cheno, who possibly belonged to a lower caste-class background, and vice-versa, "could not be called a class-consciousness in the strict sense" (p.30). What best could describe Montu's position, and that of Robi and Cheno, and the likes of them, is "[Eric Olin Wright's] concept of a contradictory class location, whereby the higher income group of what we have called a petty bourgeois class was in its class allegiance pulled upwards, while the middle and bottom were constantly pushed downward to make ends meet" (Bhattacharya, 2005, p.61).

As is evident thus far, the public D/discourses on *āddā* are contested. The cultural history of Bengali *āddā* too, like the public D/discourses on *āddā*, is not a singular, homogeneous history – it is plurivocal, multivoiced, and polyphonic in that numerous contradictory voices emanating from different socio-historical and ideological positions can be discerned within it (Bakhtin, 1981, 1986).

Russian scholar Mikhail M. Bakhtin explained that every utterance emanates from a unique ideological position of the speaker in the socio-historical context of the utterance (Bakhtin, 1981; Morris, 1994), and that the apparent contradictions inherent in our speeches are representative of the larger politico-historical contradictions existing in the society (Clark &

Holquist, 1984). In our everyday utterances, we, as bricoluers, recycle bits and pieces of different and, often opposing, D/discourses to construct our arguments in favor of our cultural dominants, which are “organizing themes” or “general guidelines in societies which formulate general dimensions and directions in which societies move, or which organize social reality ... [and] are taken for granted by participants and form the distinct character of the social reality of a society” (Robinson, 2014, p.6). Thus, in Bengali Public D/discourses: in our everyday conversations, in our songs and television serials (soaps), in our stories and urban legends about the famous and the infamous, in our movies, advertisements, and in our primers for school children (see Bandopadhyay, 1991), *āddā* is sometimes portrayed as good and sometimes as bad, and at other times it is simultaneously labeled as both within the same text or discourse.

Students in the Bengali cultural imagination

Lastly, for the purpose of this dissertation, we must understand how a student is viewed in the cultural imagination of the middle-class Bengali people, for it is students’ *āddā* that this dissertation is concerned with primarily. In our cultural imagination, a student does not quite fit into any of the above discussed class positions. Almost like a child, the student, irrespective of age (barring professional students, who, because they already have jobs, are considered professionals first, and students later), is viewed as an unfinished ‘epistemic subject’ (Sarangapani, 1999) in the process of ‘becoming’ through pursuit after knowledge. Robinson (2014) notes that “[t]he category of ‘youth’ emerged in modern times, largely as a result of prolonged schooling. It is understood as the phase between childhood and adulthood” (p.26). Therefore, studenthood is considered a transitory phase between childhood and adulthood. A

student at the college-university level is, therefore, viewed as more than a child but less than an adult; and since he or she is yet to step into the world of production, the student, despite coming from specific class backgrounds, is not defined by his or her class background.

This does not, however, mean that class ceases to have any effect on the young students' lives and careers, as the luxury of both money and time are needed for education, and often also for *āddā*. Neither do class and caste-related economic and cultural barriers (or promoters) cease to play a role in the students' lives and careers. However, theoretically, the possibilities are open for the students because they are not considered 'finalized,' to borrow a Bakhtinian term. The student is then a person in the making. It is, perhaps, for this reason that spending more than a reasonable amount of time in *āddā*, despite its intellectual nature as pointed out by Bose (2010), Chattopadhyay (2010), Das (2010), Ghosh (2010), Gupta (2010), Mitra (2010), Sen (2011) and Singh (2010), is not meant for students, since delayed employment signifies a delayed "transition into adulthood" (Robinson, 2014, p.27) for these young adults.

However, there's also another reason why student *āddā* often draws parents' criticism and disapproval. By now, it is clear that *sikhshā* and education are not synonymous in the Bengali culture. While formal education that one obtains in colleges and universities is necessary for the coveted *chākri*, *sikhshā* – that 'true education,' which is supposed to be the hallmark of the Bengali *bhodroloks*, goes well beyond mere schooling, and is primarily the responsibility of parents. Perhaps this is also what prompts many parents to doggedly police and micro-manage their college-going children's activities, since any accusation of the children's lack of *sikhshā*, irrespective of their age, reflects badly on their upbringing, as one participant in the study also observed. This further points to the possibility that adults often criticize young people for spending too much time in *āddā*, not only because they consider *āddā* as a distraction from

education, and, therefore, an impediment to obtaining *chākri*, but also because adults fear that their wards' association with bad company in *āddā* might bring shame upon the family.

It is, perhaps, for these reasons that, despite many references to *āddā* in Bengali literature as noted above, students' *āddā* gets seldom mentioned, although Gupta (2010) mentions he was initiated into *āddā* during his college/university years and it wouldn't be wrong to assume that it was the same for most of the other writers too.

Conclusion

Therefore, it could be said that just as *bhodrolok* is not a homogeneous category, so is *āddā* an umbrella term for varied nuanced cultural practices, both in reality and in its dissonant cultural receptions. Therefore, for the purpose of this dissertation, *āddā* is broadly defined as an *enjoyable, unrigorous, long, friendly conversation, where the primary objective of participation in the conversation is not business.*

Āddā, as a cultural concept, is inextricably linked with notions of class, caste, culture, gender, education, Bengaliness, and, of course, with the *bhodrolok-chotolok* dichotomy. During the late nineteenth century, a changing notion of Bengali nationalism and cultural identity catapulted *āddā* as one of the quintessential markers of the modern, intellectual Bengali people. *Āddā*, thus, became an arena where, and a vehicle through which, the educated, Bengali middle class could market their intellectual prowess, their erudition, their sense of aesthetics and high culture to the rest of the nation⁶³, and showcase their 'true' education or *sikhshā*, which is

⁶³ This idea of the Bengalis always being intellectually one-step ahead of the rest of the nation is succinctly encapsulated in a once popular slogan, ironically forwarded by a non-Bengali leader of the freedom movement – Gopal Krishna Ghkhale, and popularised by the Bengali intellectuals: “What Bengal thinks today, India thinks tomorrow.”

supposed to be more profound than merely reading a few books and passing some exams – an education that is integral to the cultural psyche of the English educated, Bengali *bhodorloks*. In essence, then, the ‘good’ or the ‘high’ *āddā* is not just a badge of public intellectuals, who participate in intellectual public discourses, it is, moreover, a distinctive symbolic marker of the cultural identity of the English educated, middle-class Bengali *bhodorloks*, who were, in many ways, still steeped in the tropes of the nineteenth century Bengali renaissance and the colonial modernity.

For the Bengali students, this presents a peculiar paradox. On one hand, *āddā* presents before the students, apart from pleasurable company of friends, one way of constructing their own cultural identity both as students (because *āddā* and student-life are like hand in glove) and as future Bengali intellectuals. However, on the other hand, by indulging in too much *āddā*, students risk being criticized by adults as being *āddābāj*, and might even experience some guilt, as one student-participant confessed to me during the study.

How students, today, negotiate this cultural paradox of *āddā* in their lives, or whether they even care much about *āddā* anymore, particularly in the wake of the phenomenal popularity of social networking sites, could only be answered by a detailed ethnographic study.

Therefore, chapter 2 provides the conceptual framework and the theoretical approaches to the study, and chapter 3 describes the ethnographic study I conducted between 2014 and 2017 at a public, state university, well known for its academics, as well as for its culture of student *āddā* and activism, in the state of West Bengal in India. Chapter 4 has two parts and serves two objectives. The first part is largely biographical and describes my personal experiences of *āddā* prior to the start of the research study as a way situating myself in the future study, as well as to make my positionalities in the study explicit to the reader. Through some vignettes and analysis

of my *āddā* experiences in my early life, this section of the chapter also attempts to introduce the reader to the key concerns of gender, class, and (mis)education or (*ā*)*sikshā* regarding the cultural practice and conceptualization of public *āddā*, particularly as it pertains to middle-class male students and youth, before these issues are taken up in greater detail in the following data chapters.

The second part of the chapter, similarly provides three (more detailed) vignettes of student and youth *āddās* in the university in an attempt to provide the reader a basic cultural understanding of such *āddās* in practice.

Chapters 5 and 6 present the research findings and their significance; and chapters 7 reiterates the need for valuing students' "funds of knowledge" (Moll et al., 1992; Moll, 1994; González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005; Moje et al., n.d.); discusses the research findings and their implications for further research, and proposes that *āddā* is a potential space for informal learning, which educators should take cognizance of for possible integration of students' informal learning with their formal curriculum and instruction, particularly for higher education, instead of shunning *āddā* as a "waste of time" for students and youths, as is the wont of many teachers today.

Thus, to conclude, in this chapter, I have reviewed what *āddā* is and how it is conceptualized in the Bengali cultural imagination. I have also pointed out the class and gender characteristics of the Bengali *āddā*, as well as its relation to the rhetoric of *sikshā* (education) and the *bhodroloks'* cultural position in the society on one hand and the *r'ok* and the *bhodrolok-chotolok* dichotomy on the other, which is reflected in the culturally dissonant reception of *āddā* as a distinctive symbolic marker of the cultural identity of the English educated, middle-class

Bengali men on one hand, and as a ‘waste of time’ for Bengali middle-class students and youths on the other.

I have also provided brief historical and cultural overviews of the Bengali *bhodrolok* class-category, as well as that of the Bengali students and their uneasy relationship with the social spaces of *āddās* at the *ro’ks* and street-corners. Lastly, I have pointed out the peculiar paradoxical position that the students, who are fond of *āddā*, are placed in by the contesting dissonant cultural D/discourses about Bengali *āddā*, and have suggested that my ethnographic study with some Bengali students and youths in a public, state university in Kolkata, which is well known for its academics, as well as for its culture of student *āddā* and activism, may shed some light on how contemporary students and youths negotiate this cultural paradox of *āddā* in their lives.

Chapter 2

Youth sociability and contemporary Bengali students' *āddā*: An ethnographic case study

Introduction

This chapter describes the conceptual framework and the theoretical approaches used in this dissertation to gain an insight into the *āddā* related sociability practices of young men and women in the said university in Kolkata, and how these students make sense of it all in and with their lives – whether they find *āddā* to be useful or “a waste of time” or both in different contexts, and why; how they view and respond to adults’ criticisms for “whiling away precious time;” how important *āddā* is to them and why, etc. The chapter then reviews the relevant academic literatures on similar youth sociability practices in India and abroad, and also literatures that look at the educational and learning potentials of youth cultural practices, typically in out-of-school settings. The chapter concludes by pointing out gaps in the corpus of literature, some of which the present study hopes to help fill to an extent.

Conceptual framework and theoretical approaches

Youth cultures and sociability practices often generate a lot of interests among adults, often only because they are little understood. While some accounts, particularly in academic circles, legitimately portray youth cultures, most popular adult D/discourses on youth are often little concerned about understanding either the youth themselves or their cultural practices, and as

Wortham (2011) points out, rather problematically oversimplify youth cultures. If we take such misinformed popular accounts of contemporary youth cultures at face value, Wortham (2011) cautions us, we may misunderstand our youth and treat them counterproductively. However, insightful accounts of youth cultures can help educators understand youth and work with them better. However, adults are often, Wortham (2011) tells us, unable to understand or appreciate youth cultures; and they “create and enforce educational scripts and standards, for instance, and construe these as appropriate ways to behave and reasonable goals to have” for youths (p. viii). However, youth don’t simply participate in activities that adults envision for them. Young people construe their own activities, often in ways that contradict adults’ accounts of them. Moreover, youth cultural and sociability practices, in desisting common norms and stereotypes envisioned for them by adults, and in their celebration of alternative goals and identities, often comprise of implicit accounts of the adult world. Thus, youth give accounts of adults, as adults give accounts of youth (see Wortham, 2011).

Wortham (2011) notes that schools typically reinforce unjust social hierarchies, but at the same time also provide youth with resources to challenge those hierarchies. Thus, the zone of contact between schools and youth cultures becomes significant both in terms of potential risks and rewards. There is risk if accounts of youth cultures lead educators to stereotype young people who refuse to reproduce mainstream ideals and practices. There is reward if educators can incorporate aspects of youth cultures that align with their educational goals (Wortham, 2011). Wortham (2011) further points out that youth cultures need not necessarily be antagonistic to educational institutions and practices. Alim (2011) suggests that educators can use the alternative literacy practices embedded in youth cultures to their advantage, while arguing that young people often take to pedagogies that they can identify with at personal levels. It would be productive if

educators could connect their pedagogy to youths' cultural ideals and practices, and position youth as producers of knowledge, and not as consumers of the curriculum. In fact, Wortham (2011) suggests that educators might learn from youth cultures - a thought that is echoed by Henry Giroux (2004). Rather than labeling youth as misguided, and youth cultures and sociability practices as a "waste of time", could educators possibly learn to work with youth cultures? This is one overarching question that my research seeks answers to through an ethnographic account of students in an Indian university, who participate in a particular form of South Asian youth sociability practice known as '*āddā*,' considered by many adults as a waste of time when (over) indulged in by students, even if otherwise *āddā* is culturally considered as productive.

I believe that not only 'student *āddās*' are not a waste of time as they provide the students with a host of cultural, social and personal resources, but that they could also be potentially educative (see chapter 4). Indeed, if we can't see beyond the time 'wasted' in 'student *āddā*,' it is only because our vision of education is narrow and myopic and our conception of pedagogy, being conflated with a means-to-an-end type schooling ever since Macaulay introduced English education in India in 1835 to produce a schooled native workforce to aid the colonizers rule over us more efficiently, has never been able to effectively break out of the confines of the classroom walls.

Thus, contrary to what many educators in India think, including my educator-friend with whose story I had started this journey (see chapter 1), the conceptual framework of my study relies on my beliefs that far from being a "waste of time," youth cultural and sociability practices like students' *āddā*, for instance, are potential mines for various pedagogical possibilities that are creative, critical, engaging and liberating at the same time, and that it is possible for conscientious educators to tap into such youth cultural resources to their pedagogical benefits, even in the

inflexible climes of formal schooling in India, if only they knew how to. Therefore, if only conscientious educators in India can be taught to envision education and pedagogy differently, and are informed about and supported in the application of ‘transdisciplinarity’ (Giroux, 2004a; see next section in this chapter) in their pedagogical practices by educational researchers invested in youth cultures through more and more empirical studies on youth cultures and sociability practices within educational contexts, it is possible for them to learn from and to incorporate aspects of youth cultures in their pedagogical philosophies and practices, irrespective of the settings they teach in. Thus, I hope that my research would help bridge this gap by providing some directions to educators in India who desire to include young people’s out-of-school cultural practices in their pedagogical worldview.

However, neither my vision, nor my efforts are novel in any way. There has been quite a bit of research on youth cultures and sociability practices within educational contexts in the last several decades, and more are being undertaken as I write this chapter; only not in India, unfortunately. Scholars in different areas elsewhere have illustrated young people’s noteworthy intellectual accomplishments in out-of-school settings that often starkly contradict their poor performances in schools, and have suggested alternative ways of viewing students’ potentials as able learners and doers in the world (see Hull & Schultz, 2001, p.575). Besides personal literacy practices and those that flourish in friendship or peer networks, scholars have noted the considerable literacy and language-based components that develop through different social activities (e.g., Cushman, 1998; Heath & McLaughlin, 1993; Moss, 1994; also see Hull & Schultz, 2001, p.576). Notable scholars (Dyson, 1987, 1989, 1993a, 1993b, 1997, 1999, 2003a, 2003b, 2007, 2008, 2010, 2013; Dyson & Geneshi, 2009; Moje, 2001, 2006; Moje et al., n.d., 2000, 2004b; Moje & Hinchman, 2004; Moje & Tysvaer, 2010; Moll 1992, 1994; Moll & Diaz,

1987; Moll et al., 1989, 1992; Moll & Greenberg, 1990) have demonstrated how students' socio-cultural worlds from outside of schools often mediate their classroom learning.

Drawing upon the concept of 'Funds of Knowledge' forwarded by Moll et al. (1992) and González, Moll, & Amanti (2005), Moje et al. (n.d., 2004b) show us how students carry their 'funds of knowledge' with them into classrooms, which then influence their school-based learning. Alvermann (2001), Mahiri (1994), and Moje (2000) have also shown us how some youths who struggle in school demonstrate high literacy skill outside school, although not in tasks that school literacy commonly demands (e.g., trading Pokemon cards, playing video games, or writing graffiti) [see Moje & Tysvaer (2010); p.7]. Dyson (1997, 1999, 2003a, 2003b) has documented how students rope in resources from their social worlds and popular culture into the classrooms. Dyson argues for a 'permeable curriculum' (1993a) that would enable educators to conceptualize such classrooms that continuously welcome the diverse resources that students bring in. While her research is situated physically within the classroom, yet Dyson's conceptual framework embraces young people's out-of-school lives and the literacy practices therein.

Thus, we are introduced to two ways of bridging the gap between students' home and school worlds. While scholars like Lee (2000), Moll (1992, 1994), Moll et al. (1989, 1992), Moll & González (1994) and Moll & Greenberg (1990) physically visit places outside school to learn about students' sociocultural resources, which they then bring back into the classroom, Dyson suggests educators make good use of the sociocultural resources and tools that students bring with them into the school from their social worlds outside. Scholars like Dyson, Lee, and Moll document "the necessity of attending to, building on, and incorporating the social, cultural, and linguistic resources that students bring to school, and offer some models of how to do so" (Hull & Schultz, 2001, p.593).

However, investigation of the third spaces between school and home/community, such as school playgrounds, cafeterias, *āddās*, etc., are underrepresented in the literature. While there is a considerable corpus of research on learning in after-school programs or structured, semi-structured and unstructured youth programs outside of schools like the Youth Alliance's 'Hang Out' that Teitle (2012) studied, and in churches or homes, yet learning in the spaces and times in-between the above-mentioned well-structured spaces and times remain under researched as if people do not learn during commute to the church or school – in the bus or on the streets, or during vacations or while shopping in a mall, or when hanging out or giving *āddā* in cafés or at street-corners. The general focus on research on education in certain spaces and during certain specific times such as in the classrooms or during Sunday mass in the church over and above other culturally less important times and spaces like during *āddā* or hangout or in the playgrounds or cafeterias needs to be questioned because like Giroux (2004), I believe that education, as a cultural process, is an organic continuum that cannot be compartmentalized in spatial terms. In other words, even though people might learn about different subjects and employ different learning processes in different spatial contexts, yet education as a whole of various contextual learnings is a continuous process and cannot be boxed off in spatial and temporal terms like 'college education,' 'church education,' 'playground education' or 'school (time) education' and 'after-school (time) education' as if these are entirely different kinds of education altogether with no connections to each other. More likely, despite differences, there are also continuities and spill-overs from one spatial or temporal context to another (for a detailed discussion of such spill-overs, see Dutta, 2015a).

Hull & Schultz (2001) in their review of literacy and learning in out-of-school contexts, provide an important caveat on this matter:

By emphasizing physical space (i.e., contexts outside the schoolhouse door) or time (i.e., after-school programs), we may ignore important conceptual dimensions that would more readily account for successful learning or its absence ... [and] the presence of school-like practice at home (e.g., Street & Street, 1991), or non-school-like activities in the formal classroom. (p. 577)

They further remind us that literacy and learning, indeed education itself, cannot be boarded off, “rather, one should expect to find, and should attempt to account for, movement from one context to the other (Hull & Schultz, 2001, p.577).

It is likely that several consecutive spatial overlaps, contact zones or third spaces between school and home, the community or the ‘hood’ exist, where youth partake in various educative practices, often during their leisure time – while playing, monkeying around, hanging out or ‘giving’ *āddā* with their peers, thereby, making these all equally important spaces to study, along with schools and homes.

Moreover, education as a whole of various contextual learnings is often mediated by the places where the learning takes place (Elfer, 2016; Feld & Basso, 1996; Greenwood, 2008; Gruenewald, 2003a, 2003b; Johnston-Goodstar, Schugurensky, 2006; Sobel, 2005; Stevenson, 2008; and Trinidad, & Teele, 2010). Each of these places, such as classrooms, homes, religious places of worship, and all the other places in between, promote their own unique brand of learning. Thus, the kind of literacy and learning that takes place in schools is different from the kind that takes place at homes, in churches or mosques, in the school playgrounds or the college canteens (caféterias) – each of which is important in understanding how young people interact with literacy practices, participate in literacy events, and get educated, so to speak, in diverse cultural contexts of their everyday lives. Each of these places, thus, constitutes a slice of contemporary youth’s learning lives – the whole of which constitute their continuous education. And given that learning in some of these in-between places, or third spaces, are underrepresented

in the corpus of academic literature on youth studies, more efforts need to be directed to the study of these places. As Hull & Schultz (2001) point out, “school has come to be such a particular, specialized institution, with its own particular brand of learning, that to set it in contrast with other institutions and other contexts for learning seems useful” (p.577; also see Miettinen, 1999). Moreover, some of these third spaces, like, for instance, school playgrounds and college canteens (caféterias) and common rooms are relatively easily accessible sites for practicing educator-researchers to study.

However, Giroux (2004a) also warns us against the fallacy of romanticizing out-of-school learning. By overemphasizing young people’s learning and literacy practices outside of school, we run the risk of ascribing more worth to them than is warranted, while also giving primacy, in a sort of ‘exception-proves-the-rule’ kind of way, to the notion that education belongs in schools, which isn’t true either. In any case, it is important for educators to seek ways to leverage students’ out-of-school identities, social practices, and literacies in the classrooms. For future directions in out-of-school research, Hull & Schultz (2001, 2002) raises some questions: How can educators teach in that zone of proximal development, where they could help extend students’ existing knowledge based on their knowing-in-the-world, including their in-school and out-of-school interests and learnings? How can we rethink curriculum and instruction so as to welcome and attract the variously able students who seem misfit in the common mold? And what can we take away in this regard from students’ out-of-school socio-cultural practices, like *āddā*, for instance? How can students’ out-of-school learning influence a rethinking of classrooms and curricula?

These are all important questions for every conscientious teacher and education researcher to ask of herself (See Hull & Schultz, 2001). And while these are not the specific

research questions that my study seeks answers to, yet they had always been there in my mind, occupying my thoughts and prompting my decisions at every step, as I carried out my research on student *āddā* in a university in Kolkata.

In the late 1900s, Hull & Schultz (2001) tell us, the National Institute of Education (NIE) in the United States of America had funded several studies to examine some of these issues. One of the findings from the research was that “children who have been socialized in diverse contexts come to school differentially prepared and positioned to respond to the demands of school [and] experience school differently; the result is success for some and failure for others” (Hull & Schultz, 2001, p.579). Some studies showed that schools promoted cultures based on a set of values and beliefs that frequently were not subscribed by the students and their communities – a postulate that has since then come to be known as ‘continuity-discontinuity theory’ (see Jacobs & Jordan, 1993). Heath (1982) argued that formal schooling is but a small part in the process of cultural transmission of ideas, values, and information that is education, thereby giving an early call for studying schools together with students’ community and cultural background (Hull & Schultz, 2001).

On the other hand, the New Literacy Studies (NLS), which is noteworthy for emphasizing the study of out-of-school literacies, often also focuses on the structural relationships between local events and broader cultural institutions and practices through the study of D/discourses. Thus, studies within the NLS tradition investigate literacies and D/discourses, with a particular emphasis on revealing, understanding, and addressing power relations. James Gee (1996) explains Discourses as “intimately related to the distribution of social power and hierarchical structure in society, which is why they are always and everywhere ideological” (p. 132). He further states that Discourses are “ways of behaving, interacting,

valuing, thinking, believing, speaking, and often reading and writing that are accepted as instantiations of particular roles (or 'types of people') by specific groups of people. Discourses are, thus, always and everywhere social and products of social histories" (1996, p. viii). While Gee's and Foucault's (1972) notions of 'Discourse,' and Bourdieu's (1977) coinage, 'habitus' are all quite similar, Hull & Schultz (2001), however, point out that "Gee's distinctive contribution has been to use the notion of Discourse to reframe understandings of literacy, especially in relation to identity" (p. 585). According to Gee, "Discourses are, in effect, an 'identity kit,' or a group of behaviors, activities, and beliefs that are recognizable by others," and which people employ to display their affiliation and membership in particular social groups (Hull & Schultz, 2001, p. 585). Referring to Maybin's book chapter on New Literacy Studies (2000), Hull & Schultz (2001) further point out that:

by virtue of training our gaze on the larger construct of Discourse and insisting that literacy is always about more than literacy, Gee's framework draws our attention away from a solitary focus on learning and language use in school settings and positions us to understand learning, literacy, and identity construction in and out of schools and across the life span. His discussion of Discourses provides, then, a frame for understanding the connections between literacy, culture, identity, and power. (p.585)

Another prominent NLS scholar, Brian Street has argued that unlike how schools have traditionally viewed literacy for years – a vision that has also severely limited our conceptions, literacy is not a set of neutral or technical skills, but is, rather, an ideological practice (Street, 1993a, 1993b, 1995; Street & Street, 1991). Street, thus, highlights the embedded or social nature of many literacies, of which the Western notions of schooling or academic literacy are but just one form (Hull & Schultz, 2001). Thus, by forwarding a notion of literacy connected to social practices and ideologies, social structures, and local belief systems, Street argues that literacy

cannot be studied in isolation from its historical, cultural, social, political, and economic contexts, both in school and out (Gee, 1996, 2000b).

Therefore, my theoretical approach aligns itself with that of the scholars in the NLS camp, particularly the two founding figures of NLS – James Gee and Brian Street. There are multiple literacies and these are always socially embedded. Therefore, literacies can be studied effectively only through their connections with culture, identity, social practices and structures, ideologies, local belief systems, and power. Thus, teachers need to find ways to bridge students' literacy practices inside the classrooms with those in their out-of-school social worlds because the future of literacy research lies in examining the relationships between school and non-school contexts (Hull & Schultz, 2001).

However, given the lack of flexibility of the Indian education system (both for students and teachers) and the vast syllabi of most college/university courses in India, which often lead to the 'too-much-to-cover-in-too-little-time' crises for teachers during each school-year, bridging students' out-of-school social worlds with their classroom literacy practices is easier said than done. Thus, some useful pedagogical questions for future research, indicated by Hull & Schultz (2001), include the following: How might teachers incorporate and leverage students' out-of-school interests, identities, social practices, and literacies in classrooms, while also extending their existing literacies? What should be the nature of the relationship between school literacies and out-of-school literacies? And how do our conceptions of pedagogy need to be altered for educators to be able to build bridges between students' learning in their out-of-school social worlds and their classroom literacy practices?

The problem with pedagogy

My conceptual framework on literacy and education suggests that neither is organically limited to schools. In this section, drawing on the literature on public pedagogy (Biesta, 2012; Giroux, 2000, 2003, 2004a, and 2004b; Sandlin et al., 2011, and 2017; and Schuermans, Loopmans, & Vandenabeele, 2012), I shall, similarly, attempt to debunk the common notion that pedagogy is school-based.

Contrary to the popular public notion that pedagogy is limited to schools, public pedagogy focuses on educational scholarship ‘beyond formal schooling,’ including ‘cultural education, public space, popular culture and political struggle’ (The international centre for public pedagogy [ICPUP], n.d.). More specifically, public pedagogy is concerned with the following broad areas of educational research: “(a) citizenship within and beyond schools, (b) popular culture and everyday life, (c) informal institutions and public spaces, (d) dominant cultural discourses, and (e) public intellectualism and social activism” (Sandlin et al., 2011, p.338).

Giroux (2004a) notes that pedagogy is seldom considered a “part of a larger attempt to explain how learning takes place outside of schools or what it means to assess the political significance of understanding the broader educational force of culture” (p.60-61). Giroux (2004a) finds this *a priori* assumption that classrooms are the only sites for any relevant research on pedagogy problematic. While Giroux (2004a) also notes the importance of the efforts of critical educational theorists (some of whom have been discussed in the previous section of this chapter) for connecting pedagogy to lived experiences, histories, ideologies and D/discourses of students’ out-of-school social worlds, which they bring with them into classrooms, yet, he points out, that this also suggest that “pedagogy is primarily about schools and, by implication, that the

intersection of cultural studies and pedagogy has little to do with theorizing the role pedagogy might play in linking learning to social change outside of traditional sites of schooling” (p. 61).

In other words, what I read Giroux (2004a) to be saying, although he doesn’t quite actually state it, is that it is all good for educators to strive to incorporate and leverage students’ out-of-school, sociocultural experiences, interests, learning, ideologies, and literacies in classrooms but why do we always have to choose classrooms as the sites for the assimilation of the potentials of students’ out-of-school settings with educators’ pedagogical practices? Why can’t we take the classrooms outside into students’ social worlds out there instead of bringing the outside indoors? That this is quite feasible was proved to an extent by an experience that I was fortunate to have witnessed during my field work in an Indian university in Kolkata, where during a several-months-long student agitation against the university administration (*#hokolorob*; see chapter 3 for details of the movement) – one in which many teachers had also participated, students and teachers held classes in the open, outside the classrooms as a form of protest (see figure 9). And while Giroux doesn’t mean literally holding classes outside classrooms, but only that pedagogy and the roles and responsibilities of educators aren’t limited just to the classrooms, yet this experience that I had had during my field research, quite literally, goes to prove Giroux’s point that it is possible to conceive of pedagogy as a part of education outside of classrooms.

However, this does not happen often. I have written extensively elsewhere (Dutta, 2015a) from my life-experiences as a student in the same university, to which I returned years later as a researcher, about the opportunities of “linking learning to social change outside of traditional sites of schooling” (Giroux, 2004a, p. 61) that are often missed by educators.



Figure 9. A Facebook post by a student depicting students attending classes in a hallway.

As Giroux (2004a) points out, there's more to pedagogy than mere "social construction of knowledge, values, and experiences; it is also a performative practice embodied in the lived interactions among educators, audiences, texts, and institutional formations" (p. 61), much like *āddā* is a performative practice as several Bengali commentators on *āddā* have pointed out (see Bose, 2010; Chattopadhyay, 2010; Das, 2010; Ghosh, 2010).

Thus, considering that "learning takes place across a spectrum of social practices and settings" (p.61), Giroux (2004a), citing Raymond Williams, argues that "pedagogy is no longer restricted to what goes on in schools, but becomes a defining principle of a wide ranging set of cultural apparatuses engaged in what Raymond Williams has called 'permanent education'" (p.63) – a term that resonates well with the Bengali cultural notion of '*sikhshā*' (see chapter 1):

What [permanent education] valuably stresses is the educational force of our whole social and cultural experience. It is therefore concerned, not only with continuing education, of a formal or informal kind, but with what the whole environment, its institutions and relationships, actively and profoundly teaches... [Permanent education also refers to] the field in which our ideas of the world, of ourselves and of our possibilities, are most widely and often most powerfully formed and disseminated... (Williams, 1967, cited in Giroux, 2004a, p.63).

Giroux (2004a) notes that “for educators, this suggests that pedagogy is not [just] an *a priori* set of methods that simply needs to be uncovered and then applied regardless of the contexts in which one teaches but is instead the outcome of numerous deliberations and struggles between different groups over how contexts are made and remade, often within unequal relations of power” (p.65). That pedagogy is always contextual rightly points to linking the knowledge that is taught to the experiences students bring to their classroom encounters *a la* Alvermann (2001), Aoki (1986/1991), Dyson (1989, 1993a, 1993b, 1997, 1999, 2003a, 2003b, 2007, 2008, 2010, 2013), González, Moll, & Amanti (2005), Moje (2000, 2001), Moje et al. (n.d., 2000, 2004b), Moje & Tysvaer (2010), Moll (1994), Moll et al. (1992), and Moll & Greenberg (1990).

Thus, it is important for educators to recognize students’ context-dependent learning rooted in their socio-cultural experiences and their “relationships to popular culture and its terrain of pleasure, including those cultural industries that are often dismissed as producing mere entertainment” (Giroux, 2004a, p. 66).

Giroux (2004a) points out that while the cultural resources that students bring in with them into the classrooms may not be entirely unproblematic, nevertheless, educators should recognize them as important. Thus, educators ought to be ready and willing to engage, although critically, with students’ existing cultural resources and acknowledge the pedagogical importance of these cultural resources for establishing a sense of identity, place, and history for the students. Giroux (2004a) further points out that the cultural resources which the students bring into the

classrooms allow educators to learn from the youth, while also incorporating these cultural resources in their pedagogical practices for not just building currency with their students, but also to make schooling seem socioculturally relevant to the students, who are, otherwise, often, plagued by ennui engendered by curricula that are far removed from students' social realities.

However, as noted above, Giroux (2004a) also cautions teachers against romanticizing the relevance of out-of-school resources that students bring to the classrooms and limiting their teaching to such resources only, but he rather suggests that “educators need to ... make knowledge meaningful for students in order to make it critical and transformative” (p. 66) for them by paying attention to the larger cultural and political contexts of their life experiences in and outside classrooms. In this connection, it is worth mentioning here that the noted Russian scholar of philosophy of education, Alexander M. Sidorkin forwarded a theory of curricular ennui or boredom in a paper published in 2004, in which he argued that contrary to popular belief that schooling generates relatable knowledge in pupils, schools often make students produce works (such as reports, worksheets, coloring books, clay figurines, essays, exams, etc.) that are ‘useless’ in terms of being relatable to students’ lived experiences.⁶⁴ The result, Sidorkin points out, is a sense of alienation and ennui in students towards the curriculum and schooling in general. Thus, as Giroux (2004a) points out, educators need to find a way of connecting “knowledge to everyday life, [...] schools and universities to broader public spheres, and rigorous theoretical work to affective investments and pleasures that students use in mediating their relationship to others and the larger world ... outside of the officially sanctioned boundaries of knowledge and the

⁶⁴ To clarify, the problem doesn't lie with the particular works produced in schools per se, but with how these works are often conceptualized and executed (or allowed) to connect (or not connect) with students' lived experiences.

established disciplines that sanction them” (p.66). And the way forward is through infusing cultural studies and transdisciplinarity in teachers’ pedagogical practices.

According to Giroux (2004), informed by the worldview of scholars (some of whom have been mentioned above) who view literacy as multiple and situated rather than singular and fixed, the transdisciplinary pedagogy “endorses the relational nature of knowledge, inveighing against any presupposition that knowledge, events, and issues are either fixed or should be studied in isolation, while stressing both historical relations and broader social formations, meanings, and possibilities” (p. 68). And while it is true that teachers are often constrained by academic disciplines and curricula, yet “transdisciplinary tools” provide opportunities to critique established disciplines and their narrow domains, while also establishing “connections that are often hidden, forgotten, or willfully ignored” (Giroux, 2004a, p.68).

Giroux (2004a) sees this as a challenge – one that strives for education “to have a purchase on people’s everyday lives and struggles,” and he suggests that “one element of this struggle could take the form of resisting attacks on existing public spheres, such as the schools, while creating new spaces in clubs, neighborhoods, bookstores, trade unions, alternative media sites, and other places where dialogue and critical exchanges become possible” (p. 75). However, the challenge of creating such public spaces “where it becomes possible not only to shift the way people think about the moment, but potentially to energize them to do something differently in that moment” (Giroux, 2004a, p.77) might often require educators to look outside their classrooms, and for those teaching in the Indian subcontinent, at the least, I believe that *āddā* provides one pedagogical route, among others, to such an end (see figure 10).



Figure 10. Students having a brief evening *āddā* over tea with a professor in the university.

Youth cultural studies

Youth culture is a much researched area in social and humanistic sciences. Feixa and Nofre (2012) broadly define youth cultures as “the way[s] in which young people’s social experiences are expressed collectively through the construction of differentiating lifestyles, mainly in their leisure time, or in interstitial spaces in the institutional life” (p.1). I largely subscribe to this definition of youth cultures, except that I also hold that ‘youth culture’ is never a singular, homogenized entity and thus should always be pluralized – a view that Feixa and Nofre (2012) too mention. In concurrence with Giroux (2004), I also believe that cultures, in general, provide spaces for production of meanings, agencies, identities, and values through social interactions, negotiations and struggles, leading to “new democratic transformations,” although “always within various degrees of iniquitous power relations” (p. 60). Thus, Giroux (2004a) notes that cultures are sites of both contestations and utopian possibilities, where meanings, identities,

values and agencies are not necessarily given, but need to be wrested out from systems of cultural control. Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson's 1975 book, *Resistance Through Rituals*, was the first major work in youth cultural studies to have forcefully pointed out that contrary to the then popular notion, class played an important role youth cultures, besides intergenerational differences; that youth cultures, as Feixa and Nofre (2012) point out, weren't "homogeneous interclass mixture[s]," but were rather domains of "ritual resistance" by "subaltern classes of young people" against the "systems of cultural control imposed by the power" (p. 6).

Studies show that youth cultures flourish in many places – virtual and real, among which educational institutions like schools, colleges, and universities are notable, but are comparatively under-researched. Feixa and Nofre (2012) note that in 1929, "Robert and Helen Lynd ... observed the emergence of a college culture in their classical urban ethnography of Middletown," in which they concluded that "high school had become the centre of young people's social life," offering not only an "academic culture, but also a space for sociability" (p.3). Thus, citing scholars like Robert and Helen Lynd and Talcott Parsons, Feixa and Nofre (2012) note the emergence of "a 'new leisure class' personalized in the young people" as early as in 1929, who tended to "share more with their peers than ... with their parents" and who, by virtue of being enrolled in educational institutions as students, not only distanced themselves from labour, but also from class structures (p. 3) – a thought that, as I noted in Chapter 1, is also echoed in Sarangapani (1999) with reference to Indian students. However, in 1929, Feixa and Nofre (2012) note that these studies of youth cultures of college-going 'young people,' as could, perhaps, be expected, were focused primarily on college boys, whose cultural identities, in contrast to the 'street-corner boys' (see Whyte, 1993 [1943]; also, Willis, 1978) were constructed primarily at schools and related spaces such as 'frat parties' and Super Bowl tailgating events. Whyte's classic

ethnography (1943) of Italian-American youths in a slum in the North End of Boston contained a section that ethnographically contrasted the lives of the ‘corner boys,’ revolving around street corners, with that of the ‘college boys,’ who aspired for greater things in life via the route of college education. On the other hand, Paul Willis’ 1978 book, *Profane Culture*, documented “the ‘anti-academy culture’ of working-class young people, who preferred to abandon school and stay in the streets, where they socialized in masculinity and manual labour skills, values that prepare them for assuming the tasks proper to their social class” (Feixa and Nofre, 2012, p. 6).

Thus, while, youth cultures have been readily studied both inside and outside of schools, Feixa and Nofre (2012) point out that until very recently there has been an inordinate focus on researching delinquent and diverted youth cultures, or special cases (such as, for instance, youth gangs, Goths, Emos, Hippies, Teds, Mods, Rockers, motor-bike boys, Skinheads, alcohol and substance abusers, street-corner boys, etc.) than on the conventional and the ordinary, besides an inordinate focus on working class youth than on the middle, and on boys than on girls.

Additionally, Feixa and Nofre (2012) note that the absence of adults’ views in research on youth cultures is another significant breach, because, despite the theoretical importance that is extended to parental cultures, youth cultural studies seldom examine adults’ notions about youth cultural practices, thereby relegating the crucial relationships between generations to mere assertions, when: “[a] global analysis about youth must be capable of explaining, not only the diversion and the rejection, but also the convention and the consent” (Murdock and McCron, 1983 [1975], p. 205, quoted in Feixa and Nofre, 2012, p. 7).

However, Feixa and Nofre (2012) also note that more recent works on youth cultures have attempted to rectify the biases of the “criminalist and functionalist paradigms” in youth cultural studies by focusing on youth cultural practices that “are not necessarily forms of protest”

in a host of social contexts, with the intention of replacing “the ‘heroic’ tradition of cultural studies (resistant working-class subcultures, opposing bourgeois countercultures) with a less romantic and more empirical approach (inspired in Bourdieu’s theories of distinction, Maffesoli’s neotribalism, McRobbie’s feminist criticism, Goffman’s dramaturgical approach, Beck’s post-political reflections and Castells’ informationalism)” (p.7; see also Leave et al., 1992).

Literature review

There have been plenty of studies on youth sociability practices, of which quite a few also have educational implications. However, when it comes to South Asian, particularly, Indian contexts, such studies are few and far between, and perhaps goes to show the urgent need for Indian scholars and educators like me to start grappling with the issues of youth cultural practices and their relevance for education. Therefore, in this section of the chapter, I shall attempt to introduce some research that are similar to mine, and has, thus, directly or indirectly, influenced my work. I shall also attempt to point out the similarities and dissimilarities between these researches and my work, as also what I see as gaps in these literatures, some of which, I hope, my study would help fill to a modest extent.

Hangout

Very similar to my work, but in a western context and focusing on younger kids, is Teitle’s (2012) unpublished Ph.D dissertation, titled *Theorizing hang out: Unstructured youth programs and the politics of representation*, after the Youth Action Alliance’s unstructured after-

school program for fourteen to eighteen-year-olds of the same name that she studies. Through participant-observation, archival documents, and interviews and using poststructuralist and posthuman theory, particularly a Deleuze and Guattarian lens, Teitle (2012) takes a non-dialectic approach for re-thinking the unstructured time and space of the ‘Hang Out,’ and the equally unstructured, unsanctioned and apparently confusing and purposeless activities of the kids within it rhizoanalytically (Teitle, 2012). Teitle (2012) effectively frames her research within the broader contemporary culture of audit, “geographical privatization,” and “annihilation of public space” (p.13) for hanging out in the United States of America, all of which are unnamed but not so uncommon in the Indian context either.

Originally going in with the intention to “analyze youth engagements only in relation to recognizable processes or the creation of products (artwork, music, crafts)” (p.66), Teitle (2012) says she was initially befuddled by the activities of the ‘Hang Out’ kids, who she noted, started different projects, often but half-heartedly and rarely completed them, thereby, “challenging and turning on its head what it means to be ‘productive’” (p.33); yet she found no dearth of energy, emotion or enthusiasm in them:

Many of the youth that I observed were not finishing art projects; they might sketch on notebooks or their skin rather than choosing to create a project. The recording studio was often full, but I didn’t know how to account for messing around on guitars, or dancing to synthesized music on the stereo. It soon seemed like Hang Out was more loose threads than neat endings, a time and space full of energy, movement, and emotion, but without always having specific products or recordable processes to show for it. Further, I was intrigued by something that I didn’t have language to describe, something that I could only call “rhythm” or “flows of energy” that happened during the YAA Hang Out time. (pp.48-49)

Eschewing the “[t]raditional notions of productivity based in the representational scheme of symbolic meaning making” (p.49), Teitle (2012), therefore, embarked on a search for the elusive meaning of ‘Hang Out,’ only to come up with numerous intensive and affective moments

with no trajectory or neat endings: “Moments [that] seemed to grow and develop from unexpected places and at unpredictable times,” unlike the linearity of time in most classrooms (p.25). Teitle (2012) further observed that:

[t]hese Hang Out moments intensified and developed multiple connections [but] it was impossible [...] to predict what set these moments into action and difficult to explain the activity to anyone who had not experienced Hang Out. (p.67)

Teitle (2012) says she found her foothold in rhizoanalysis, which, as a research method and a theoretical lens, “doesn’t seek neat endings, but rather must live in the productivity of middles, the tangles and new charges that erupt from interactions” (p.68). Thus, Teitle (2012) explains that “rather than looking for specific activities (or trying to divine the “meanings” that adolescents were making from them), [she] tried to flesh-out these moments with sensory details [so as] to develop a sense of how it feels to hang out” (p.67). In the end, not unlike for *āddā*, Teitle (2012) notes that for everything, all the productivity of the unstructured space and time of the Hang Out, as also its attraction for the youth, lies in its “maneuverability and openness towards multiple potentials” and in its creation of affects (p.33).

There’s much similarity between *āddā* and ‘Hang Out.’ Like ‘Hang Out’ (Teitle, 2012), *āddā*, too, is mostly comprised of apparently confusing and purposeless activities and numerous intensive and affective moments with no fixed trajectory or neat endings. Not unlike the kids in the ‘Hang Out,’ the students in *āddā* often also enthusiastically produce music, art work, tell stories, organize events or participate in political movements, but do not always have specific products or documented processes to account for their ‘productive’ utilization of time; and, mostly, in my observation, they don’t much care for it either. There are often long periods of lull in *āddās*, when not much happen, when there are little interactions and little or no visible productivity going on within the group and the students just sit around engrossed with their

respective smart phones or gazing at the sky silently; but suddenly someone just says something or starts singing out loud and within a blink the entire space is transformed into a collectivity of charged, young bodies throbbing with energy and emotions. Like ‘Hang Out,’ it would be indeed very difficult to explain *āddā* to someone who hasn’t ever experienced it. Therefore, although I don’t employ rhizomanalysis in my research, yet, like Teitle (2012), instead of seeking neat endings and attempting to come up with grand theories that explain it all, I have also endeavored to describe *āddā* in detail as the best I could possibly do to give a sense of *āddā* for those who have never experienced it.

However, for all the similarities, there are also some major differences between ‘Hang Out’ and *āddā*. For one, the cultural history of the ‘Hang Out’ in USA doesn’t quite have as much nuanced discursive underpinnings as *āddā*. On one hand, the moral panic over kids hanging out in USA, as noted by Teitle (2012), is somewhat similar to the moral panic over kids, particularly those from lower socio-economic backgrounds, giving *āddā* in public places, which is ultimately the source of the moral panic that over-indulgence in *āddā* by the ‘better kids’ would ultimately leave them no better off than the street kids (that is, the fear that untimely over-indulgence in *āddā* would cause the educated kids from middle and upper middle-class backgrounds to lose out in the competition of being ‘somebody’ by obtaining a good job and eventually become a ‘nobody’ like the street kids, who are thought of as having nothing better to do than give *āddā* all day long). However, on the other hand, unlike hanging out, giving *āddā*, in essence, is not only viewed positively, but is also positively associated with the D/discourses of Bengali modernity and cultural nationalism. And, moreover, perhaps because of this, the sheer number of references to *āddā* in Bengali cultural texts and public discourses probably far overshadows the everyday discursive engagement with the cultural practice of hanging out in the United States of America

or in other western countries. Thus, there is an evident cultural dissonance regarding the value of *āddā*, unlike the practice of hanging out, which is, generally, not viewed in a positive light except for by scholars like Teitle (2012). This has important ramifications for how the Bengali students negotiate the conflicting D/discourses on *āddā* and justify their participation in it – a notion that I have tried to trace throughout this dissertation.

Secondly, unlike the students *āddā* in Kolkata, the particular ‘Hang Out’ that Teitle (2012) studies, being a youth program for younger kids, even if a radical one, is a monitored space, despite the fact that, as Teitle (2012) notes, kids come in there volitionally and freely engage in activities that are neither structured, nor necessarily sanctioned by adults. This is observed in the fact that the kids, as Teitle (2012) notes, are often signed in and out by the youth workers at ‘Hang Out’ because the kids wouldn’t do it themselves, and in Teitle’s (2012) description of a particular incident where a kid’s use of the f-word draws a response from a nearby youth worker, causing the kid to retract his use of the profane word. Although, this is a minor difference, yet the presence of an authority figure like that of a youth worker or a teacher can often have a surveillance effect on the kids’ behaviours and attitudes like Teitle (2012) notes about her own presence at the ‘Hang Out’ during her fieldwork:

What I didn’t understand then was that my very presence brought a surveillance that I couldn’t shake. It didn’t matter if I wanted to show all of the great stuff about hanging out at YAA; my body told a different story. (p.19)

This was also perhaps because these were 14 to 18 year-old kids and the age difference between them and the researcher was significant. On the other hand, although I had my own challenges of being able to relate to the students I studied, and, in turn, being relatable to them, the students in my study were all of legal age, and the age difference between the oldest of them and I was 4 years. Moreover, although mostly housed inside a gated university campus with

security guards, these *āddās* were unmonitored free zones for students and outsider youth alike and a few attempts by the university authority to install CCTV cameras or post guards near major students *āddās* were foiled by vociferous protests by the students, with even those who didn't hang out in the campus regularly joining in. The youth in my study thought of these *āddās* as their "own spaces," as I have been told on numerous occasions in different contexts by several of the young people that I spoke to, and they didn't consider themselves accountable to anyone besides their own community of peers, which roughly included outside friends and fellow students, some research scholars (some of whom also taught classes) and former students of the university. As I was a former student of the university and some of the older students knew me from before, therefore, despite some initial challenges, it was relatively easy for me to get integrated with the youth in their *āddās*.

Tangled up in school

Another study that influenced my work to a large extent in terms of research methodology and conceptual framework, is Nespor's (1997) ethnography, *Tangled up in school*, in which, as Eisenhart (2001) points out, Nespor takes a slightly different approach to school ethnography than is usual. In his own words:

School ethnography is a familiar genre, but what I do with it in this book is a little unusual. Instead of treating the school as a container filled with teacher cultures, student subgroups, classroom instruction, and administrative micropolitics, I look at one school . . . as an intersection in social space, a knot in a web of practices that stretch into complex systems beginning and ending outside the school. Instead of looking at educational settings . . . as having clear boundaries and identifiable contents, I look at them as extensive in space and time, fluid in form and content; as intersections of multiple networks shaping cities, communities, schools, pedagogies, and teacher and student practices. . . . I

want to give school its due, but not on its own terms—to treat it not as the focus of study but as a point of entry . . . to the study of economic, cultural, and political relations shaping curriculum, teaching and kids’ experiences. (1997, p. xiii) [Also see Eisenhart, 2001, p.23].

Like Nespor does in his ethnography of Thurber Elementary in Virginia, for my study of Bengali students’ *āddā*, I look at my research site – this one university in Calcutta – “as an intersection in social space, a knot in a web of practices that stretch into complex systems beginning and ending outside the school.” Thus, my study of students’ *āddā* culture, although physically set in this one university in Kolkata, extends far beyond the university campus both spatially and temporally. *Āddā*, which serves as a third space of sociability between home and the classrooms for the students, thus, often begins and ends long before and after classes does, in places inside and outside the university campus. And, of course, the cultural D/discourses and material conditions that shape the practice of student *āddā*, are parts of complex systems that extend beyond the physical boundaries of the university campus. The university, then, not unlike the Thurber Elementary in Virginia, serves as an entry point into the cultural practice of Bengali students’ *āddā*, just as the school served as an entry point to Nespor’s research.

Nespor, however, does look inside the classroom also, but stresses the move of the ethnographic gaze from inside the classrooms to the outside. My focus, on the other hand, is exclusively on the surrounding spaces outside the classrooms as, although set in a university, my study cannot strictly be classified as ‘school ethnography’. Unlike Nespor, it is not my intention to study school culture, rather, I exclusively concentrate on a particular cultural phenomenon that is often witnessed among students in the Indian state of West Bengal – a form of youth sociability practice known as *āddā*, which, although may happen inside classrooms too, in the absence of a teacher, typically takes place outside classrooms. However, although differently focused, the

primary point of my research aligns well with the point that Nespor seems to have tried to make in his book – which is that educators need to look outside the classroom in order to better appreciate and understand their roles inside the classrooms.

The company she keeps

Valerie Hey's (1997) study of teenaged girls, *The company she keeps: An ethnography of girls' friendship*, although not much concerned about the educational implications of the girls' peer sociability practices, is an elaborate ethnographic study of girls' daily lives in and around school. Hey raises questions regarding our assumptions about the niceness and friendliness of the girls' behavior with one another in their friendships. Richards (2011) writes, "Hey's book well illustrates the uses of ethnographic methods in the detailed study of apparently familiar and ordinary features of young people's lives. [Thus,] ethnography becomes a method of study applicable to the social settings in which the ethnographer may herself have been formed" (p. 11; see also Heath, 1983). As mentioned above, not being primarily focused on the educational implications of the girls' peer sociability practices, besides being rooted in Western cultural contexts and social structures, the study is not much similar to mine. However, where it did help my work was with the research methodology and the conceptual framework of my study by steering its focus towards an apparently very familiar and commonplace cultural practice of young people's lives in Calcutta - the *āddā*.

Having discussed some influential works somewhat along the lines of mine, but in the Western context, let me now turn to some research done in the Indian context that have similarly influenced my study.

Café culture

In this age of globalization and neoliberalism, youth cultural practices often transcend the national boundaries to create such complex cultural hybrids that are constituted of components both rooted in the local histories and circulating in global cultural forms. Tereza Plath Robinson's (2014) ethnography of young, middle class people's café culture in Pune is one such study that attempts to locate the global in the local. More specifically, Robinson (2014) illustrates how young middle-class Puneites, who subscribed to the 'café culture,' "transcended the local while domesticating the global" (p.183) in their mundane, everyday lives.

Again, though not focused on any educational implications of the young middle-class Puneites' sociability practices within the café culture (although she does offer one chapter on education) Robinson's (2014) book, *Café culture in Pune: Being young and middle class in urban India*, is a valuable addition to the research literature on youth studies in India.

The six chapters of the book each deals with different aspects of the lives of young middle-class Puneites, including clothing, education, friendships, romantic relationships, and family life. In a similar vein as Craig Jeffrey's ethnography on young middle-class Jat and Dalit men in Meerut's educational institutions, Ritty Lukose's (2009) work on college students in Kerala, Jamie Cross's (2014) research on young working-class men in Andhra Pradesh's Special Economic Zones and Nicholas Nisbett's (2009) work on young men in Bangalore's internet cafés, Robinson frames Pune's coffee shops and night clubs as spaces of public sociability, where identities, relationships, aspirations, and ideas are constructed, negotiated, and subverted by youth in novel ways.

The book leaves its mark in several areas, but I shall only discuss a few of them here that has a bearing to my research. First, the fact that Robinson's chose to study café chains like 'Café Coffee Day' and Barista that are immensely popular among the youth in India is significant because these are among the most visible symbols of India's current phase of modernity. Like, in Pune, these café chains are extremely popular with the young crowd in Kolkata as well and many young college and university students, including quite a few of my research participants too, particularly young women, often frequented these cafés, while there were quite a few others who admitted that they didn't much like going to these cafés because of their impersonal, glitzy ambience. While I don't particularly focus on the *āddās* that often takes place in cafés because of the methodological limitations that the existence of so many scores of cafés, big and small, in Kolkata would have posed for the binding of my case, nevertheless, my research of the students' *āddā* at this one university, or the case that I look at, extends beyond the temporal and spatial boundaries of the university campus when I discuss *āddās* in cafés with my participants, and takes me to some of these cafés in the city – at least theoretically.

Much of the actual activities of the young middle-class Puneites in these cafés, as described by Robinson (2014), such as gossiping, smoking, talking about women, sharing food, exchanging items of clothing and accessories, caring and expressing camaraderie, etc., are no different from the Bengali students' *āddā* activities in these cafés and elsewhere too, except that in Pune, what these youngsters do in the cafés could perhaps be identified by them as 'hanging out,' 'timepass,' or by some other such term, but not as *āddā*. This is, however, not a matter of a simple difference in linguistic register only. In many ways, the *āddā* culture of Bengal is a discursive construct: frequent references to *āddā* can be found in Bengali songs, literature, films and even in advertisements. Many small cafés and eateries in Kolkata (and in the rest of West

Bengal) often attempt to attract young crowd with references to the *āddā* metaphor, and some of these establishments even include the word ‘*āddā*,’ in their names, often combining it with other English or Hindi words to give a cosmopolitan ring to the name, for instance, Chai-Adda, Adda Break, and Café Adda (of which there are several) are just three more famous ones that I personally know of (see figure 11). Thus, unlike Kolkata, what Pune lacks is this discursive cultural environment for *āddā*, which is also what that makes this notion of student *āddā* as a waste of time that I attempt to look into so ironic.

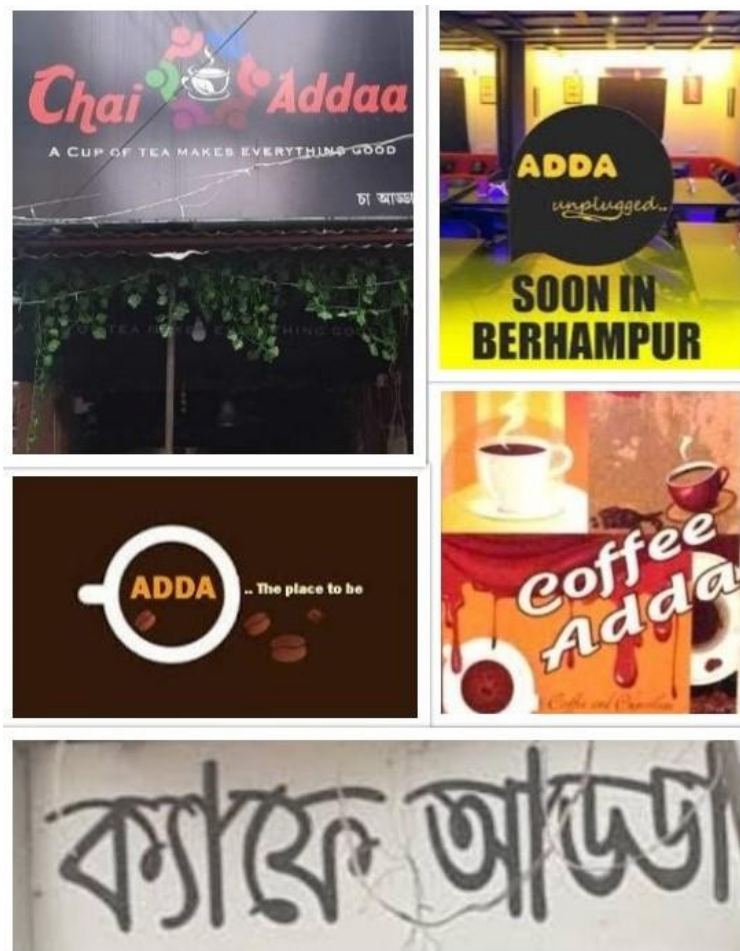


Figure 11. A collage of pictures of billboards, adverts and storefronts promoting businesses through the use of the *āddā* metaphor (Source: Google images)

Another noteworthy point about the book is its setting in Pune, which, one reviewer of the book, Rahul Advani (2016), notes, “has been projected by many, much like Bangalore, as a model of development for the rest of India to follow, and so it is interesting to see how the city plays into the urban middle-class youth story” (p.927). As mentioned above, in the two-fold sampling in case study researches, the first and foremost is sampling the most appropriate case to investigate. The most appropriate case, in this regard, would be one that could potentially offer the most nuanced understanding of the phenomenon under study. So for example, Robinson’s study could have been set in any urban centre in India, say in New Delhi, Calcutta or Patna, where too one could find a similar café culture and plenty of café-going, middle-class young crowd, but the choice of Pune – it being, as mentioned above, a model of development in globalizing India – adds a more nuanced and symbolic dimension to the study. Similarly, my study of Bengali students’ *āddā* could have been set in any provincial university in the state of West Bengal in India, and I did, in fact, interview some Bengali students of a suburban university in a particular district of West Bengal, some 400 kms North of Calcutta, but given the association of the city of Calcutta (Kolkata) – the political capital, and also widely regarded as the cultural capital of the state of West Bengal – with the documented cultural history of *āddā* since the early 19th century, Kolkata seemed a better choice to me. In the same vein, the study could have been set in any of the three universities located in Kolkata, but I chose this particular university as my research site because of its reputation for both student culture, including students’ *āddā*, and academic culture, besides it being the only university in the city to boast of a residential campus, i.e., a university campus with student hostels (dorms) within its premises, which, in my opinion, boosts the cultural sociability practices of students, including student *āddā*.

Lastly, the most important contribution of the book, arguably, is that, when much of the literature on young people in India has been male-centric, Robinson (2014) doesn't focus solely on young men, but also on young women, who in many ways share the "café culture" space with young men as equals because of their class status. This is important for my study as well because, although there has been almost no academic study on the *āddā* culture in India, far less on students' *āddā*, yet most references to *āddā* in popular culture and in the corpus of non-academic literature, including fiction, creative non-fiction, memoirs and personal essays, are quite male-centric. In fact, during interviews, some of my young women participants pointed to the gendered social and cultural sanctions of public *āddā* that makes it almost impossible for them to give *āddā* freely – the way they want to – in public except for in the privatized (and commercialized) public spaces of cafés, bars, pubs, discs, night clubs, etc., and within their college or university campuses (see chapter 5), thereby, suggesting that not only the references to *āddā* in cultural texts and discourses, but the actual cultural practice of *āddā* is also plagued by male-centrism.

However, in way of criticism of Robinson, Advani (2016) points out that, "the constant references to certain practices in the book as 'middle class,' lying 'between the elite and the poor,' are somewhat problematic considering the sheer size of, and diversity within India's middle class, where those with just enough capital to be considered middle class can be seen as inhabiting completely different worlds from those who are not yet quite rich enough to be considered upper class" (p.927).

The middle-class is a highly contested non-homogeneous social category, at least in India, where class-caste-religion often intersect to give rise to complex social situations. People, who roughly belong to the same economic class, often possess a disparate degree of socio-economic advantages due to the varying social and cultural capitals they possess. For instance, in

my study on Bengali students' *āddā*, middle-class students from rural and urban backgrounds, respectively, exhibit different attitudes towards students' *āddā* perceptibly because of the different cultural capital that each group of students possesses (see chapter 5), although both groups participate in students' *āddā* in their own ways.

Thus, although, Robinson's research is similar to my study and have also influenced it in several ways, the major differences between our works are that Robinson's study is broadly about the middle-class youths' sociability practices in India, seen primarily through the lens of economic class, while I have endeavored to study middle-class Bengali youths' *āddā* practices through the cultural lens of education or *sikhshā*. Even though Robinson talks about education too in her book, yet she doesn't approach her research primarily from an educational perspective unlike my study. Thus, while some of Robinson's young participants are students, many are not. Rather, she focuses on how these (mostly) educated, young, middle-class Puneites straddle tradition and modernity at the same time in a rapidly globalizing urban Indian scenario.

Timepass

Another important work is Craig Jeffrey's (2010) *Timepass*, where he forwards a nuanced argument about how lower middle-class Jat (middle-caste Hindu) men from the provincial town of Meerut in northern India negotiate their experiences of 'surplus time' as unemployed youth. Jeffrey focuses on Jat, Dalit, and Muslim students in two Meerut colleges, some of whom have had lavish parental attention and heavy educational investment bestowed on them, while others did not.

Jeffrey presents nuanced and insightful arguments on waiting, youth, unemployment and politics, along with a detailed discussion of the methodology of his research spanning roughly fifteen years between the early 1990s in rural Meerut district and 2005 in Meerut city.

Using a sociological analysis of class within a Bourdieuan framework, Jeffrey attempts to understand a fascinating array of various forms of waiting — explicitly purposeful, seemingly purposeless, creative and mischievous, reactionary and self-interested. Unpacking these forms of passing time, or ‘timepass’ in Indian English, Jeffrey provides a rebuttal of the ‘India Shining’ narratives, while analyzing India’s postcolonial status as a society in a long-term mode of waiting. Who among Indians are waiting endlessly? What processes have led them into such limbo? And how do they negotiate these experiences and spaces of limbo in a society saturated with visions, doctrines, and policies of development? Jeffrey’s book seeks some specific answers to such questions.

The book describes the various activities of young male students in Meerut while ‘waiting,’ their participation in collective student protests, and the involvement of some students in what Jeffrey calls ‘improvised politics’ as a stop-gap career option. Jeffrey notes that to combat the combined threats of reduced state support for agriculture under neoliberal reforms and the increased Dalit power manifested by a steep increase in competition for jobs and education when the Dalit presence in rural public schools could not be ignored anymore, the Jats⁶⁵ pursued English-medium private education (page 66) as a strategy to retain the Jats’ social distinction, apart from cultivating contacts and lobbying at the bureaucratic levels in the state. With returns from agriculture being uncertain, Jeffrey notes that Jat parents took to purposeful ‘waiting’ for

⁶⁵ The jats are an influential group of people of Hindu, Muslim and Sikh faiths, native to the northern parts of the Indian sub-continent, whose traditional occupation was (and still, to a large extent, is) peasantry.

long-term returns from their children's higher education as a crucial strategy to secure their future caste and class privileges. As the demand for privatized education grew as a result of such strategies, in chapter three, Jeffrey captures the overwhelming feelings of temporal anxiety, failure, and disillusionment among young men with accumulated degrees but no job or marriage prospect to reproduce the received notions of masculinity, career, and adulthood. Jeffrey illustrates how a severe shortage of salaried government jobs by the mid-2000s had turned seemingly purposeless waiting into a predominant feature of young people's public life in Meerut city, and further offers a detailed description of the youth's many ways of doing 'timepass.'

However, Jeffrey cautions that timepass is not a passive form of waiting, but rather he shows that young men actively craft differentiated responses to waiting. For instance, Jeffrey notes that the young men's pervasive presence, defiant confidence, camaraderie, and aggression posed a threat to women's safety in the urban public sphere. Jeffrey observes that 'timepass' creates spaces that allow these young men to articulate their sense of being 'left behind', while also enabling them to transgress some normative boundaries (e.g. inter-caste friendship and sharing of food, beverages and cigarettes) but reinforce others (e.g., male control over public spaces) at the same time. An overwhelming majority of these young men increasingly found themselves in the limbo-like position of 'waiting' and making 'timepass,' while any possibility for them to obtain a stable and decently-paying job slowly slipped away as the years passed. Therefore, in addition to a little studying, these youths also engaged in a variety of activities ranging from informally meeting, gossiping and jesting at tea-stalls to what is popularly known as 'eve-teasing' (i.e. leering at young women and sexually harassing them), getting involved in university politics and mobilizing other youth around issues in higher education, and so forth. Perhaps for some of these young men, this was a way of coping with the sheer absurdity of a largely inadequate educational

system, and, in the case of street-harassment of women, an expression of their misplaced frustration for being unable to perform according to the locally prevalent ideals of masculinity (like in the case of Montu in the film *তিন ভুবনের পারে* [Across three worlds], alluded to above).

However, besides the interpersonal expressions of defiance, frustration and angst, in chapter four, Jeffrey notes some of the other outcomes of ‘timepass’ – positive outcomes such as collaborative, creative student protest led by young men in 2004 and 2005. Jeffrey observes that the students drew on skills taught in school (e.g. writing letters of complaint to officials), while mobilizing the camaraderie cultivated in ‘timepass’ into collective political action to forward strong public critiques of the privatization of education in Meerut.

Thus, there are many similarities and parallelisms in themes and historicism between Jeffrey’s book and my research. For instance, Jeffrey’s young participants – mostly young male students of two colleges in Meerut – spend their time during college hours and afterward outside classrooms, at cross-roads and tea shops, in a seemingly purposeless waiting. However, Jeffrey shows us that what seems like purposeless ‘timepass’ or a ‘waste of time’ is, in reality, neither purposeless, nor passive. Rather, ‘timepass’ is portrayed as explicitly purposeful, creative and mischievous, reactionary and self-interested. Jeffrey shows us that in addition to a little studying, these students in Meerut engaged in a variety of other activities ranging from informally meeting, gossiping and jesting at the tea stall to sexually harassing women on the streets, and also participated in university politics, etc.

Not only are these activities of the students in Jeffrey’s study very similar to the activities of many middle-class Bengali youths in their *āddās*, but they often also elicit similar public reactions as well. For instance, like ‘timepass,’ *āddā* too, is often considered seemingly purposeless, and particularly when it comes to student *āddās*, a waste of time (see figure 12). And

just like *timepass*, my research reveals that *āddā* is far from a purposeless, waste of time – at least, not for the students, who use these spaces of *āddā*, just as Jeffrey’s young men used their spaces of ‘timepass,’ to creatively (and, often, very cleverly) craft and articulate differentiated responses regarding their social and cultural identities, both to themselves and to the world. And in the process of doing so, they utilize both the resources and the cultural capital obtained through schooling, as well as those cultivated in *āddā* (or in ‘timepass’), including their mutual camaraderie.

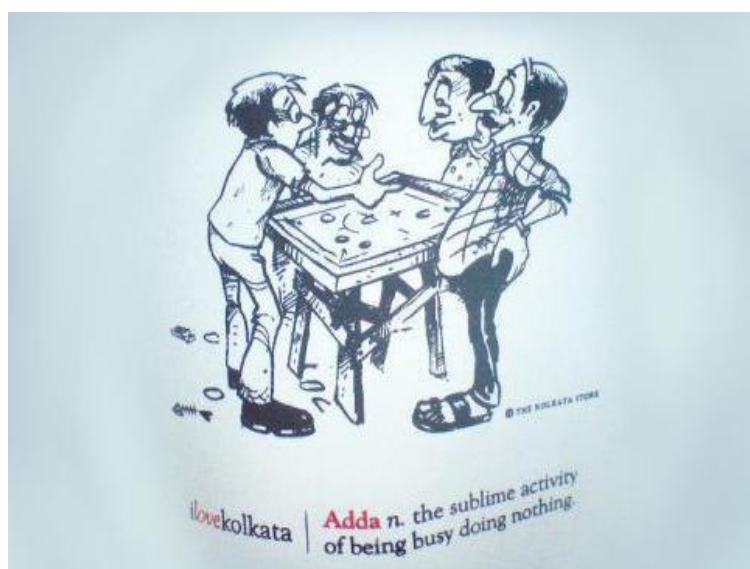


Figure 12. A cartoon where *āddā* is defined as “doing nothing” (Source: Google images)

However, the visible activities of Jeffrey’s young men in ‘timepass’ – the sexual harassment of women, the gossiping and loitering at street corners and in tea-shops resulted in ‘timepass’ to be generally viewed as a public nuisance to be shunned and, perhaps, also feared, just as similar activities in the *āddās* of the allegedly lower-class, semi-educated (that is, those who are school and college drop-outs, as well as those who are literate but unschooled) youths at the *ro’ks* and street corners of Kolkata from the late twentieth century onward was possibly

responsible for the genesis of the notion of ‘bad *āddās*’ or *āddās* that are a waste of time, and, generally, resulted in youth *āddās* to be viewed with suspicion till date (see chapter 1).

Again, this notion of ‘*āddā* as a waste of time’ for the middle-class, educated Bengali youths and students, who are yet to find a job or a stable career, was influenced in no mean measure by the entry of the lower and the lower middle-class youths into the public education system in the twentieth century, thereby, resulting in an increased competition for middle and upper middle-class youth in obtaining jobs, particularly after the refugee exodus from Bangladesh into India after 1971 (see chapter 1), just like Jeffrey notes that the increased presence of Dalit students in rural public schools in Meerut district of Uttar Pradesh resulted in an increased competition for jobs and education for the Jats students, who scrambled to pursue English-medium, private education to maintain the Jats’ distinction in society.

Therefore, in a way, our research objectives are quite similar. While Jeffrey sought answers to how his young students negotiated the experiences and spaces of waiting in a limbo in a society that projected visions and metaphors of a rapid development, my research attempts to understand how the Bengali, middle-class students and youths in my study negotiated the discursive cultural dissonance regarding *āddā* as a valuable intangible cultural heritage, on one hand, and, on the other hand, as a purposeless waste of valuable time.

However, while somewhat similar sentiments about feelings of temporal anxiety, failure, and disillusionment that Jeffrey notes among the young men in Meerut with no job or marriage prospect, were echoed by a section of the students I followed, yet, unlike the students in Jeffrey’s book, I did not note a sense of being ‘left behind’ in my research participants. In fact, unlike ‘timepass’ with Jeffrey’s young men in Meerut, the students in my study did not consider *āddā* as a form of waiting of any kind. While both are ways of spending surplus time, yet there is a vast

difference between how ‘timepass’ and *āddā* are conceptualized by the students who participate in these two types of youth sociability practices respectively.

Unlike the students in Meerut, those in Kolkata, generally, understand *āddā* not as a way of whiling time, but rather as a welcome diversion from work/study and other obligations for refreshing their minds in socially amicable, jocular, and sometimes silly or serious, but always creative and interesting ways with friends. This is, again, perhaps because Meerut too, like Pune, lacks the discursive cultural environment for *āddā* in the Bengali society.

Liberalization’s children

Ritty A. Lukose’s (2009) *Liberalization’s children* attempts to highlight some important aspects of the Indian society in contemporary times. Her ethnography examines the different ways in which non-elite college students in Kerala, like Robinson’s (2014) young men and women in Pune, understand and mediate the local, and the global. The fact that Lukose (2009) chose to carry out her research in the state of Kerala, like Robinson’s (2014) choice to research café culture in Pune, is also significant because Kerala has time and again been claimed as a model state of left-inspired social development, boasting of a hundred per cent literacy rate and a large number of socially conscious people. Thus, while on one hand, Keralites are steeped in their traditions and cultural values that have been passed on to them for generations, yet on the other hand, many Keralites, particularly the youth, routinely venture off shores, particularly to the Persian Gulf, for work, where they often also settle down, though maintaining a strong contact and bond with their home state.

By thoroughly studying some crucial aspects of young people's lives, such as fashion, romance, student politics, and education, Lukose (2009) attempts to show us how gender, caste, and class, as well as colonial and post-colonial legacies of culture and power, affect the ways in which students mediate their roles as citizens and consumers in Kerala. Significantly, Lukose (2009) also touches upon the aspects of student mentality, gender biases and sensibilities, while painting some thought provoking pictures of a nation strife with debates on privatization, new models of education, women aspiring to choose their husbands, as well as a new range of modern lifestyle choices tied to both globalization and consumerism.

Although, Lukose's (2009) research concerns itself with students and education, yet her work is significantly different from mine in focus. While my work focuses on the values of *āddā* for the students within an educational milieu of competitive, high-stakes testing, where the sole objective of schooling seems to be scoring well in exams, and eventually obtaining a high-paying job, Lukose's (2009) research is a study of Indian modernity and globalization, nationalism and citizenship as mediated by young students. Lukose (2009) focuses on how students negotiate the local and the global and mediate between the traditional and the modern within a cultural environment suffused with certain ideas of modernity and tradition generated by mass-media, particularly Bollywood movies and television serials, and a growing consumer culture that has the young people in the state differentially incorporated into the structures and aspirational logics of globalization.

Provincializing Europe

Dipesh Chakrabarty's (2000) book, *Provincializing Europe*, is essentially a theoretical work on the meanings of history, politics, modernity and change in India, and as such the work doesn't have much direct conceptual, theoretical or methodological bearing on my study, except that the book contains the only chapter-length, academic essay on *āddā* that I could find after an extensive literature survey, and which, therefore, warrants a mention here.

Chapter seven of the book takes a historical look at *āddā*, describing its democratic and plebian origins in the villages of Bengal; its subsequent migration to the city of Calcutta in the colonial period and its catapulting into the new urban spaces of a modern civil society for the (mostly) English educated, middle-class Bengali men of the early twentieth-century; the further democratic turn that *āddā* took in the late twentieth-century when *āddā* emerged into the public streets and coffee houses from the exclusivity of the parlour or the *baithakkhānā*-space of the Bengali *bhdrolok* and the consequent unease and feelings of nostalgia that it generated for a perceived loss of *āddā* and Bengali cultural hegemony in the face of the homogenizing tendencies of a capitalist modernity.

Conclusion

Thus, in this chapter, I have attempted to clarify the conceptual framework and theoretical approaches of my study, as well as what I understand to mean by literacy, education, pedagogy, and youth cultures, while also attempting to theoretically position my research within the ethnographic and case study methodologies. I have also reviewed research literatures that are

similar to my study, whether theoretically or methodologically, while also pointing out what my study hopes to achieve differently. In the next chapter, I describe the research site and the methodological tools and strategies employed, while also describing my research questions.

Chapter 3

Methods and methodology

Introduction

The purpose of my research as mentioned in chapter 1 is to understand a particular sociability practice – known as *āddā* – of contemporary Bengali middle-class students and youths at a state public university in Kolkata, well known both for its academic and campus culture. The sociability practice of *āddā* is by no means limited to either students or youths in particular, but cultural D/discourses on *āddā* seems to tie the practice quite strongly with male youths and students, particularly on account of the amount of ‘free’ time at the disposal of these young men, yet to be bogged down by the responsibilities of running a family or earning a livelihood.

Cultural D/discourses on *āddā* are far from univocal; *āddā* as a cultural sociability practice is both eulogized and criticized by Bengalis. For instance, on one hand it has been touted as a unique intangible cultural heritage of the Bengali people, but on the other hand it has been dubbed as a cultural practice showcasing the laziness and herd mentality of the lazy Bengalis (Nirad C. Choudhary cited in Chakrabarty, 1999; Chaudhury, 1951/1968).

However, when it comes to students and youths, things get murkier. When it comes to students and youths, who are yet to be suitably engaged in earning a livelihood for themselves and their families (if they have one of their own), *āddā* often comes to be considered as a ‘waste of time,’ even if otherwise believed to be valuable and enriching cultural heritage; and in all of these, the students and youths’ voices hardly ever get heard.

My research, as an ethnographic case study, therefore, focuses on hearing and highlighting the voices of some of the Bengali students and youths who regularly partake in the cultural practice of *āddā* at a well-known university in Kolkata. It further attempts to understand the students and youth's own reasoning (with the understanding that such reasoning, if any, would still be laced with the received cultural D/discourses on *āddā*) for participating in *āddā*, how such decisions are arrived at by the students and youths; if and how such decisions are influenced by socio-economic structures, gender roles, ideologies and cultural mores, the place and social functions of *āddā*, if any, in the lives of these students and youths; and, finally, how the students and youths as both producers and consumers of cultural D/discourses negotiate the dissonant cultural D/discourses on *āddā* as a valuable intangible cultural heritage and a waste of valuable time.

My ethnographic case study, therefore, attempts to locate the cultural position of *āddā*, and to identify its meaning and social functions in the lives of contemporary Bengali university students and youths in Kolkata in this age of neoliberalism. In doing so it utilizes a wide range of Indian, European and North American secondary sources, including but not limited to archival documents, newspaper articles, blogs, memoirs and other literary pieces, songs and movies, besides empirical ethnographic data collected on site between 2014 and 2018. This is particularly relevant, since much of the cultural texts on *āddā* identify it as a dying cultural art form (Chakrabarty, 2000) on the account of rapid modernization in the wake of neoliberalism that has left people with little time to socialize, particularly in person, as in *āddās*, but, on the other hand, the same neoliberalization has been credited with the phenomenal proliferation of a host of commercialized spaces of public socialization like bars, pubs, cafés, discos, *chāi*-bars and *sheeshā*-bars targeted at and appropriated by the urban youths (Robinson, 2014).

The study, therefore, focuses on understanding how students negotiate and make sense of the dissonance between the received D/discourses on *āddā* as a ‘waste of time’ and *āddā* as a social-leisure-activity-in-decline, which is creative, intellectual, and which, even if it doesn’t have a point to it, is nevertheless not pointless for some, including many of the youths as well.

Additionally, as a sub focus, my research attempts to take cognizance of any tropes of the 19th century cultural elitism and sexism that might still lace these students and youths’ conceptualization of *āddā* today. However, in my attempt to understand the role and meaning of the cultural practice of *āddā* in the lives of contemporary Bengali students and youths, it is not my intention to try to produce a unified narrative, nor is it possible to do so without the risk of glossing over, in the process, certain alternate perspectives and voices that may exist. Rather, by using poststructuralist lenses as the theoretical framework informing the study, I hope to represent multiple disjointed perspectives of the students and youths being studied, and, possibly, the tensions between these different perspectives, as well as the differences between the students and youths’ perspectives in general and that of the adults, accessed through interviews and the cultural discourses on *āddā* – whether written or oral.

Therefore, with respect to my research questions for the current study, I shall, in the next few sections in this chapter, describe the city of Calcutta (now Kolkata) – the capital of the state of West Bengal in India, and its *āddā* culture, as well as the state public university in south Kolkata where this particular study was carried out. I shall also endeavor to acquaint the readers with the my research questions, the methods and methodology and the student and youth participants of the study.

Research questions

As mentioned before, my research sought answers to the following four major questions and two sub questions:

1. How do students conceptualize *āddā* or what do they understand *āddā* to be?
 - a. What value do students attribute to *āddā* in their lives (assuming they do)?
 - b. Are the social functions served by *āddā* in students' lives (and their understanding of it) still laced with larger social issues of class, caste and gender hegemony and cultural elitism as they were in the 19th century?
2. What roles or social functions does *āddā* serve in these students' lives?
3. How do students simultaneously both as producers and recipients/audience of cultural D/discourses negotiate, resolve, and/or make sense of the discursive dissonance between *āddā* as a waste of time and *āddā* as a valuable cultural practice that is claimed as intellectual and uniquely Bengali?
4. What could a study of student *āddā* reveal about contemporary youth sociability practices and how could educators benefit from such knowledge?

With the above mentioned research questions in mind, in the following sections of this chapter, I shall attempt to describe the study and its processes, including a detailed description of the methodology and the methods employed in seeking answers to the research questions above, the site of the study – the university and its different places of *āddā*, and the participants in the study.

Ethnographic case studies

In this section I shall discuss ethnography and case study as research methodologies, and distinguish between the two, before discussing how the two methodologies can be combined (as I did in my study) and why I call my research an ethnographic case study.

What is case study research?

Case studies are defined in various ways in the literature. For instance, Gerring (2011/2013) explains that a ‘case study’ might variously mean: research that is holistic and comprehensive, (usually, but not always) qualitative and non-survey based; comprises of a relatively small sample size; relies on ‘thick descriptions’ (for qualitative case studies) [see Geertz, 1973a]; utilizes (usually) “ethnographic, non-clinical, non-experimental, participant-observation, process tracing, historical, textual, or field research based methodologies;” relies on “real-life” evidences obtained primarily through direct observations and interviews; and “investigates the properties of a single observation [or a] single phenomenon, instance, or example” (n.p). He further observes: “A case study may be understood as the intensive study of a single case [or] may incorporate several cases... [however, the] fewer cases there are, and the more intensively they are studied, the more a work merits the appellation case study” (Gerring, 2011/2013, n.p).

However, one key feature of case study research that several scholars emphasize is the demarcation of the specificity or the boundedness of the case being studied. Thus, Flyvbjerg (2011), argues that the individual cases could be researched “in a number of ways, for instance

qualitatively or quantitatively, analytically or hermeneutically, or by mixed methods,” but this is not a determinant of a case study research; “the demarcation of the unit’s boundaries is” (p. 314).

Similarly, Merriam (1998) explained that the “single most defining characteristic of case study research lies in delimiting the object of study: the case” (p. 27), and further summarized case study research as a way of gaining an understanding of the situation, where the process of inquiry rather than outcome is of more interest to the researcher.

Again, Brown (2008), who notes case study as a “significant qualitative strategy or tradition along with phenomenology, ethnography, biography, and grounded theory” in research methodology (p.2), cites Merriam (1998) in arguing that: “[t]he case is a unit, entity, or phenomenon with defined boundaries that the researcher can demarcate or ‘fence in,’ and therefore, can also determine what will not be studied [...] It may be the limit on the number of people to be interviewed, a finite time frame for observations, or the instance of some issue, concern, or hypothesis. The researcher is challenged to fully understand and articulate the unit under study” (p.3).

Stake (2008), who is one of the leading figures associated with case study research, argues that “as a form of research, case study is defined by interest in individual cases, not by the methods of inquiry used” (p. 134). Thus, according to Stake (1994), a case study is not a methodological choice but a choice of what is to be studied, by whatever methods that we choose to study the case. Thus, Stake (2008) explains: “not everything is a case [...] the case is a specific One [...] the case is a ‘bounded system’” (p. 135; see also Fals Borda, 1998). White et al. (2009), too, citing Stake (2005), suggest that “the key feature of case study [is] its boundedness and specificity” (p. 20).

Thus, the boundedness of the object of a study or its “casing,” to use Charles Ragin’s (1992, p. 217) celebrated coinage, is decisive for defining it as a case study research (Stake, 1988, 2008) as “[t]he drawing of boundaries for the individual unit of study decides what gets to count as case and what becomes context to the case” (Flyvbjerg, 2011, p. 301).

Therefore, drawing on the definitions of case study forwarded by Merriam (1998), Brown (2008), Stake (2008), White et al. (2009) and Flyvbjerg (2011), my research on the *āddās* of the contemporary middle-class Bengali students and youths in one university in Kolkata is a case study based on the specificity and boundedness of my research interests. To be more specific, even though *āddā* is a phenomenon that is, theoretically, neither age, class or place restrictive, nor is it restricted to a specific historical time, yet my study is specifically concerned only with middle-class Bengali youths’ *āddā* in one particular university in Kolkata in recent times – which, according to the definitions of case study research forwarded by the scholars mentioned above, makes it a study of a particular case of Bengali *āddā*, among many possible studies on Bengali *āddās*.

Several scholars have suggested different ways to bind cases by space, context, and time. For instance, Baxter and Jack (2008), citing scholars like Miles & Huberman (1994), Stake (1995), and Creswell (2003), have suggested three ways to bind a case: (a) by time and place; (b) time and activity; and (c) by definition and context (See also Njie & Asimiran, 2014). For my dissertation research, I chose to bind my case ‘by time and place’ as well as ‘by time and activity,’ that is, by focusing on student *āddā* (both a place and an activity) at a particular university in Kolkata (place) in recent times (time).

Citing Stake (2010), Njie & Asimiran (2014) point out that the qualitative research trajectory, in general, does not concern itself as much with “cause and effect explanations” as it

does with “the revelation of meaning buried in the nature of reality as understood and interpreted by people [i.e., with] how people add up or make sense of reality combined with their underlying suppositions that determine their behaviour” (p.35). In other words, qualitative research focuses on “natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret phenomena, in terms of the meanings [that] people bring to them” (Njie & Asimiran, 2014, p. 35). As such, qualitative research is purposive (as opposed to objective) and requires:

[a particular] direction which is mainly decided by the specific aim and type of study one chooses to conduct to arrive at a result [and the] case study is one such direction which is prompted by the need to thrust deep into a specific unit, person, [event, process], program or institution for a greater understanding which would not have been possible through other means. (Njie & Asimiran, 2014, p. 36)

Thus, the focus of a case study, through its multiple data collection methods, is a comprehensive and holistic understanding of a singular, situated entity, whether comprised of a single unit among many or a group of units effectively functioning as one, anchored in lived experiences.

Therefore, my research, as stated above, seeks a comprehensive and holistic understanding of contemporary middle-class Bengali students and youths’ *āddās* in one particular university in Kolkata. There are many kinds of Bengali *āddās* that differ from each other in terms of the specific *āddā*-activities owing to the location of the *āddā* and the participants’ age, sex, education, special interests, class position and occupation, and even contemporary middle-class Bengali students and youths’ *āddās* may vary considerably depending on, among other things, the location of such *āddās*, for example, *āddās* on the *ro’ks* or at street-corners, *āddās* in cafés and pubs, *āddās* in coffeehouses, *āddās* in public parks or *āddās* in college and university campuses. However, my research, through its multiple data collection methods, focuses solely on

understanding how contemporary middle-class Bengali students and youths who give *āddā* in one particular university campus in Kolkata interpret their participation in *āddā* in the university with respect to the general cultural D/discourses on Bengali *āddā*, and particularly students and youths' *āddās*.

Additionally, to clarify, the different *āddās* of the students and youths that I studied in the particular university campus in Kolkata, which was my field of research, also differed considerably from each other. However, for the purpose of my case study, I considered these different *āddās* of the students and youths in the particular university campus in Kolkata as a group of units effectively functioning as one, anchored in the shared lived experiences of the middle-class Bengali students and youths who gave *āddā* in this university campus. However, beyond noting and trying to understand the specific *āddās* of the Bengali students and youths in this particular university campus, in all their complexities, my research does not attempt to generalize about contemporary middle-class Bengali students and youths' *āddā*.

Data collection and sample size in case study

Although, Brown (2008) cites Merriam (1998) to argue that case study research does not focus on any particular data collection method, but rather “on [a] holistic description and explanation” of the case by whichever method necessary (p. 3), yet, as Njie & Asimiran (2014) point out, data collection, in general, with disregard for any specific method, is of paramount importance in case study research as “the richness and depth” in which a case is understood depends on “the craft and effectiveness of the data collection method in uncovering relevant details” (p.37). Njie & Asimiran (2014) point out that researchers like Yin (1994); Stake (1995);

and Leedy & Ormrod (2005) identify six primary methods of data collection in case study research: “Direct observation; Interview; Documents; Archival Records; Physical Artifacts and Participant observation,” of which, any one or all of them “could be used depending on the relevance and nature of the case” (p. .37). However, Merriam (1998), though, has argued that interviews are the commonest source of data in case study research.

Generally speaking, qualitative research does not consider sample size to be an important factor, and sampling, within the qualitative research paradigm – particularly, in case study research, typically, depends on the kind of information that the researcher hopes to obtain and on the people, documents or the area(s) that she finds most suitable to obtain the information from. Unlike qualitative research, quantitative research often mostly depend on random sampling technique for retaining objectivity; and although, as Schreiber & Asner-Self (2011) explain, random sampling is not a pariah in qualitative research either, however, random sampling is often considered not the ideal sampling technique in such type of research as some other aspects of the sampling process like, for instance, obtaining rich, experiential data are regarded to be potentially more important than random selection. Thus, Njie & Asimiran (2014) explain that qualitative research often focuses “on the sample that gives the best and the most in-depth information that the researcher seeks and since a careful selection of where information is best gotten often yields more information relevant to unearthing the questions that are asked in qualitative research, purposive sampling and the relevant number(s) involved are much more revered within this paradigm” (p. 38). However, unlike in other types of qualitative research, in case study research, there are two levels of sampling inherent in the design – the selection of the case to be studied and the sampling of the people within the case. Regarding sampling of people, Brown (2008)

observes that it “may be purposeful – typical, unique, maximum variation, convenience, snowball, chain, network, or theoretical, each with its own utilities and benefits (p. 3).

What kind of case study?

Stake (1995) classifies case study research into three types or categories: intrinsic, instrumental and multiple case studies. A case study research can be considered intrinsic when it focuses intensely on a sole unit, that is, the case under study, and relies entirely on the living account of those ‘living the case’ or are intrinsic to it (Stake, 2008). Stake elucidates:

Intrinsic case study is resorted to when one wants better understanding of a particular case and is within all its particularity and ordinariness a case of interest. The researcher thus suppresses other curiosities and focuses primarily on the stories and accounts of those “living the case” to be teased out. The purpose is not to come to understand some abstract construct or generic phenomenon, such as literacy or teenage drug use or what a school principal does. The purpose is not theory building although at other times the researcher may do Just that.

Therefore, an intrinsic case study is undertaken when a researcher has an intrinsic interest in the case under study, such as, for example, a particular child, a particular group of students, a particular event, a particular school, or curriculum (Stake, 2008, pp. 136-137). The purpose of an intrinsic case study “is not to represent the world, but to represent the case” (Stake, 2008, p. 156).

Thus, following Stake (1995, 2008), my research is an intrinsic case study as it does not strive for theorizing or generalizing contemporary middle-class Bengali students and youths’ *āddās*, but focuses on understanding how contemporary middle-class Bengali students and youths in one university in Kolkata makes sense of their *āddās* with respect to the dissonant cultural D/discourses (Gee, 1999, 2015) regarding youth *āddās*.

Thus, while the case is a singular unit, Stake (2008) notes that “it has subsections (e.g., production, marketing, sales departments), groups (e.g., students, teachers, parents), occasions (e.g., workdays, holidays, days near holidays), [and] a concatenation of domains – many so complex that at best they can only be sampled” (p.141). Therefore, for my research too, I studied and interviewed different groups of people (e.g., students, teachers, parents), who were all intrinsic to the case I researched.

Lastly, not unlike “the bulk of case study work,” that Stake (2008) notes, “is done by individuals who have intrinsic interest in the case and little interest in the advance of science” (pp. 140-141), my intention too, as stated above, was not to theorize or generalize about middle-class Bengali students and youths’ *āddās*, and as such I did not attempt look much beyond the site of my study, this one university campus in Kolkata and the *āddās* that took place there.

However, Yin (1984) and Brown (2008) also note that while the scope of a case study is usually limited for the reason that a case is typically bounded, and the findings of a case study research can rarely be generalized, yet a case study, when done well, is capable of providing rich and significant insights into events and behaviors under observation, thereby, contributing “uniquely to our knowledge of individual, organizational, social, and political phenomena” (Yin, 1984, p. 14), and it is my hope that my research on contemporary middle-class Bengali students and youths’ *āddās*, although focused at one university in Kolkata with no attempts at generalization or theory building, would likewise provide “rich and significant insights” into the world of contemporary Bengali middle-class youth *āddās*, thereby contributing to a better understanding of Bengali middle-class youth *āddās* in general.

Case study research design and the role of the researcher

Regarding the design of a case study research, Stake (2008) observed that:

[A] case study, like research of all kinds, has [a] conceptual structure. It is usually organized around a small number of research questions. These are not just information questions, such as "Who influenced her career choice;" or "What was the impact of his teaching?" They are issues or thematic lines, such as "In what ways did the change in hiring policy require a change in performance standards;" or "Did the addiction therapy, originally developed for male clients, need reconceptualization for women?" (Stake, 2008, p. 142)

Stake argues that one cannot possibly know at the outset what issues, perceptions, and theories would be pertinent for a particular case study research and that although researchers often can't help but approach case study research with some *a priori* notions of what events, problems, and relationships might be important for the study, yet typically they are often surprised by the turn of events during the research when they discover that what they had thought would be important are really of little consequence (Stake, 2008, p. 144).

Brown (2008) notes that Stake (1995), therefore, considered the most important role of the case study researcher to be that of an interpreter. "His vision of this role was not as the discoverer of an external reality, but as the builder of a clearer view of the phenomenon under study through explanation and descriptions" (Brown, 2008, pp. 6-7). Speaking of the roles, responsibilities and the power of the researcher, Stake comments that the researcher, being the one who writes up the case report, controls what gets told, and therefore, is learned about the case. The researcher, therefore, in Stake's opinion, has certain power over the informants, whether she likes it or not. Moreover, it is a power that she can't help but exercise as a researcher. Stake notes that even when, being empathic and respectful of each informant's realities, the researcher would like to tell the whole story, she cannot because "the whole Therefore story

exceeds anyone's knowing, anyone's telling.” Therefore, inevitably “less will be reported than was learned,” and the case report would invariably always be the case’s own story, but narrated with the researcher’s dressing. (Stake, 2008, p.144).

Stake acknowledged that a case could be studied qualitatively or quantitatively, analytically or holistically, through measures or by interpretation, but the crucial determining factor of a case research remains that the case is a bounded system with certain features inside those boundaries. While this approach grants a certain leeway to researchers for embracing methodological openness and paradigmatic freedom, it is “beholden upon the inquirer to logically justify their philosophical position, research design and include a coherent argument for inclusion of varying research methods” (Luck et al., 2005, p. 107). Thus, Brown (2008) points out that it is the obligation of the researcher to ensure that depending on the “intention of the investigation,” a case study methodology is the appropriate strategy to employ (p.9). To reduce the possibility of misinterpretation and redundancy of information collected, researchers employ various procedures, among which, for qualitative casework, Stake (2008) notes, the one most common is ‘triangulation’ (see also Denzin, 1989; Goetz & LeCompte, 1984).

Thus, according to Stake, the major procedural responsibilities of a qualitative case researcher are:

1. Bounding the case, conceptualizing the object of study;
2. Selecting phenomena, themes, or issues-that is, the research questions-to emphasize;
3. Seeking patterns of data to develop the issues;
4. Triangulating key observations and bases for interpretation;
5. Selecting alternative interpretation to pursue;
6. Developing assertions or generalizations about the case.

Stake further notes that “except for the first of these, the steps are similar to those taken by other qualitative researchers” (Stake, 2008, p. 155).

Ethnography vs. case study

When it comes to interpretive qualitative case study research and ethnography, the demarcation is often fuzzy. For instance, both are ways of doing in-depth qualitative research, both give importance to context and strive for gaining a holistic and comprehensive understanding of the situation under study by relying on observations, experiential knowledge, and ‘thick descriptions’ from emic perspectives. Often, even, same methods of data collection and construct of validity – namely participant observation, interviews, triangulation, etc., are used both for interpretive qualitative case study research and ethnographic research. Indeed, there are clearly many overlaps between the two research perspectives and they both can also often be effectively combined, as I hope to illustrate with my research. As such, in attempting to understand ethnography for what it is, I have often found the following illustrative lines by Denzin (1997) helpful:

The ethnographer's tale is always allegorical, a symbolic tale, and a parable that is not just a record of human experience. This tale is a means of experience and a method of empowerment for the reader. It IS a vehicle for readers to discover moral truths about themselves. (Denzin, 1997, p. 284)

What I understand Denzin to be implying in this passage is that one of the chief concerns of ethnography is to attempt to transport the reader directly to the research scene through the thick descriptions of the ethnographic writing. While both case study and ethnography employ thick descriptions in pursuit of a deep, contextual understanding of the object of study, only

ethnography is explicitly concerned with making the subjective ground realities palpable for the readers. Thus, ethnography is about telling a credible, rigorous, and authentic story that attempts to make the voices of the people in their own local context heard through a narration that typically relies on verbatim quotations and a “thick” description of events. It is an ordinary, everyday story told through the perspectives of the local people as they go about their daily lives in their own communities. The ethnographer doesn’t presume to be an objective narrator, but, rather, tells the tale of the observed behaviors through an appropriate, interpretive cultural lens, while ensuring that the behaviors, as narrated, are placed in a culturally relevant and meaningful context. Fetterman (2010) notes that “ethnography is thus both a research method and a product, typically a written text” (p.1).

As discussed earlier, the ethnographer is interested in understanding and describing a social and cultural scene from the emic or insiders’ perspective. She is, thus, both a storyteller and a social scientist; and the closer the reader of an ethnography comes to understanding the native’s point of view, the better the story and the better the science (Fetterman, 2010, p.2).

Acknowledging that there are some differences between case study research and ethnography, particularly in their genesis, Willis (2007) points out that case studies are, nevertheless, more similar to ethnography than dissimilar. Willis (2007) describes ethnography as “an umbrella term for fieldwork, interviewing, and other means of gathering data in authentic (e.g., real-world) environments ... [that] puts the researcher in the settings that he or she wants to study. The research is conducted in the natural environment rather than in an artificially contrived setting” (p. 237). Thus, Willis, seems to suggest that ethnography is more a way of carrying out a research than identifying and defining *what is* to be researched, which is the theoretical focus of a case study. In other words, despite much similarities and overlaps, theoretically, *a case study*

focuses on what needs to be studied and why, whereas the focus of ethnography is on how it should be studied and how the final written product (the ethnography) should read. Therefore, as such, while both case study research and ethnography are bounded from the perspective of feasibility, yet, unlike case study research, ethnography is not quite so explicitly concerned with the binding of the phenomenon under research, precisely because it is less concerned with what to study than with how to study it. It is also for the same reason that, while an interpretive qualitative case study researcher doesn't attempt to take an objective stand, an ethnographer actually actively strives to make her subjective stance both transparent and explicit to the reader. However, it is also quite possible for any interpretive research study to employ ethnographic methods without producing an ethnography as the end product of the research, and it is in this sense that my study of contemporary Bengali middle-class students and youths' *āddās* in one university campus in Kolkata is an ethnographic case study without being an ethnography per se.

Fetterman (2010) notes that the signature element of any ethnographic research design is fieldwork, which is essentially exploratory in nature. Fetterman suggests that information gathering in ethnographic research needs to be carried out inductively, even when the ethnographer might have some specific hypotheses to test in the field. Thus, typically, in an ethnographic study, more hypotheses are generated than concrete findings. An ethnographer often, but not always, begins with a survey period to learn the basics, following which, in the post-survey phase, "the ethnographer identifies significant themes, problems, or gaps in the basic understanding of the place or program" (Fetterman, 2010, p. 8), which is how my research progressed from two meticulously-planned pilot studies with Pennsylvania State University's Bengali graduate students and their *āddās* at State College in Pennsylvania, USA to a four-year long period of observing the *āddās* of Bengali students and youths in one university in Kolkata

that was also my *alma mater*. Moreover, in line with ethnographic studies, my research produces more hypotheses than concrete answers about middle-class Bengali students and youths' *āddās*.

Why and how I used ethnographic case study for my research.

An ethnographic case study research is well-suited for an in-depth and holistic understanding of the socially constructed institution of youth *āddā* within the organizational culture of higher education in West Bengal. An ethnographic case study would allow me to study the “bounded system” (see Creswell, 1998) or the case of student *āddā* at a particular university in Kolkata, the capital city of the state of West Bengal in India, utilizing informative and contextual data to interpret my findings about this phenomenon. It is my hope that my research would lead to a more comprehensive understanding of how young Bengali students – at least, some of them – negotiate the cultural dissonance regarding students' *āddā* that is prevalent in the cultural D/discourses in West Bengal, and provide effective information, particularly for the benefit of educators, regarding the meaning and educational potentials of *āddā* for these students that could not have been collected by any other means. My study could be described as an intrinsic ethnographic case study because my objective is to focus on the individual students involved, their respective worldviews, and their insights into the issue of student *āddā*, rather than on any possibility for generalization and identification of improved practices in education.

I used several criteria for sampling my informants for the study. First, I drew informants from populations representing multiple perspectives (Meyer, 2001, p. 337) in terms of socio-economic statuses, gender, generation, social standing, and relation and exposure to students and youths' *āddās*.

According to Glick et al. (1990) cited by Meyer (2001), using multiple informants for a study has an important advantage in that the validity of any information provided by the informants can be cross-checked against those provided by other informants. Moreover, the validity of the data used by the researcher can be enhanced by resolving the discrepancies among different informants' reports. Hence, I also sourced multiple informants for my data from within each perspective (Meyer, 2001, p. 337).

Secondly, I focused on key informants who were expected to be knowledgeable about students and youths' *āddās*. In line with the explorative nature of my study, the goal of my interviews with students and youths (i.e., youths who gave *āddā* with the students, but weren't students themselves, for example, college drop-outs or ex-students), research scholars, teachers and parents regarding students and youths' *āddās* was to understand the perspective of the interviewees and to comprehend why and how they arrived at these specific perspectives. In meeting this goal, King (1994) recommends that one needs to have "a low degree of structure imposed on the interviewer, a preponderance of open questions, a focus on specific situations and action sequences in the world of the interviewee rather than abstractions and general opinions" (p.15). In view of these recommendations, the collection of primary data in this study was based primarily on semi-structured open-ended interviews (see interview prompts in Appendix B) and direct observations of the students and youths' *āddās* in the university that I both took part in as a participant and observed as a researcher.

Meyer (2001) notes that a major strength of direct observation is that it is unobtrusive, and combined with other methods, it produces rigor. Thus, "when the researcher has access to group processes, direct observation can illuminate the discrepancies between what people said in the interviews and casual conversations and what they actually do" (Meyer, 2001, pp. 339-340;

see also Pettigrew 1990), which is what I noted in my research when participants defined *āddās* in a particular way in interviews, but performed it differently in reality.

Citing Waddington (1994), Meyer (2001) notes that there are four ways in which an observer may gather data:

(1) the complete participant who operates covertly, concealing any intention to observe the setting; (2) the participant-as-observer, who forms relationships and participates in activities, but makes no secret of his or her intentions to observe events; (3) the observer-as-participant, who maintains only superficial contact with the people being studied; and (4) the complete observer, who merely stands back and eavesdrops on the proceedings. (p.340)

In this study, I used both the second and third ways of observing the *āddās* of the students and youths, but the second mode, on which much of the ethnographic research is based, was my primary mode of observation. A basic and long-standing criticism of the participant-as-observer mode of observation, and as such of ethnographic research, in general, is that the researcher is in danger of losing objectivity, which can be defined as the relative neutrality and reasonable freedom from unacknowledged research biases (Miles & Huberman 1994), and of becoming too involved with the organization, the people, and the process (Meyer, 2001, p. 344).

According to King (1994), however, “qualitative research, in seeking to describe and make sense of the world, does not require researchers to strive for objectivity and distance themselves from research participants. Indeed, to do so would make good qualitative research impossible, as the interviewer’s sensitivity to subjective aspects of his or her relationship with the interviewee is an essential part of the research process” (p. 31). This does not, however, imply that the issue of possible research bias can be wished away. It is important that the findings of the research are not simply the product of the researcher’s prejudices and prior experiences, and Meyer (2001) suggests that one way to guard against such biases is for the researcher to explicitly

recognize his or her presuppositions and to make a conscious effort to set these aside in the analysis. “Furthermore, rival conclusions should be considered” (Meyer, 2001, p. 344; see also Miles and Huberman 1994). As such, I attempted to reduce possible subjective biases in my study by consciously searching for negative evidences and by interviewing outliers (Miles and Huberman, 1994; see also Meyer, 2001).

Finally, another important issue in assessing the objectivity of a study is whether or not other researchers can trace the interpretations made in the study, or what, in other words, is called intersubjectivity. To counter this issue, Meyer (2001) cites Miles and Huberman (1994) in suggesting that:

(1) The study’s general methods and procedures should be described in detail, (2) one should be able to follow the process of analysis, (3) conclusions should be explicitly linked with exhibits of displayed data, and (4) the data from the study should be made available for reanalysis by others. (p.345)

In response to these requirements, I have described the study and the data collection procedures in detail in the following sections of this chapter. Further, I have cited the primary data extensively in the dissertation in the form of quotations and extracts from interviews and the documents analyzed to support and illustrate my interpretations of the data; and because the study was written in English, where necessary, I have also included the Bengali text in footnotes or in parentheses, wherever necessary. Moreover, I have made my research tools such as questionnaires, interview protocols, etc., available in separate appendices.

Kolkata (Calcutta)

My research was designed to be an ethnographic case study of the *āddā* culture of Bengali youths and students at a well-known university in the city of Kolkata in West Bengal. There are several reasons why Kolkata seemed to me to be the right place, indeed the only place to carry out my research. Apart from the important fact that both the city and the university where the research was carried out are my cultural backgrounds, thereby, making me a cultural insider, which has important implications for the study, the cultural history of the modern *āddā* from its genesis to its purported recent decline is inextricably linked with the socio-cultural history of the city over the years from the period of early colonialism to recent developments in modernism.

While, *āddā*, by no means, is restricted to Kolkata, or even to Bengal, yet *āddā* is quite often noted as a high point of the city's culture to the extent that the *āddā* of "intellectuals and students [...]" at the College Street branch of the Indian Coffee House in Kolkata, said to be once frequented by well-known Bengali intellectuals and literati such as "Satyajit Ray, Amartya Sen, Mrinal Sen [...] Aparna Sen, Ritwik Ghatak, Narayan Gangopadhyay, Sunil Gangopadhyay, Sanjeev Chattopadhyay, Samaresh Majumdar, Subhash Mukhopadhyay and Sakti Chattopadhyay," among others, find a venerable mention even in the website of the Government of West Bengal's tourism department ("Indian Coffee House").

Widely regarded as the cultural capital of India for historical reasons delineated below, Kolkata to date boasts of a culture of education and intellectualism that is popularly thought to be unparalleled by any other Indian city – a fact that has important bearings for my study. As amply described in the introduction to the study in Chapter 1, the distinguishing hallmark of the modern Bengali *āddā* – one that differentiated the 'authentic *āddā*' or the 'good *āddā*' from its mongrel

variations – is the very erudite and intellectual nature of discussions in such *āddās*. And Kolkata being a hub of education and the epicenter of intellectual cultural traditions in eastern India, modern Bengali *āddā* and the city work like hand in glove.

In case study research, one studies cases that are either perceived to be typical or atypical of the culture under study because they shed light either on what are commonly accepted as constituent practices of the culture or on those that are considered as deviant practices pushing the horizon of expectations from within the cultural boundaries. In the case of my research, it was the former as Kolkata is popularly considered to be the seat of modern intellectual *āddā* of the Anglophile Bengali *bhოდ্রলোকস*.

Situated where once three villages (Sutanuti, Kalikata, and Gobindapur) stood, Calcutta or Kolkata, as it is now known, having been rechristened in 2001, is a metropolitan city or a mega city, as they are called these days, of about 4.5 million inhabitants⁶⁶ in the state of West Bengal in India. Spread approximately north to south on the eastern bank of the Hooghly river – a distributary of the ‘holy river Ganga,’ or the Ganges, the city is situated in eastern India, in what is known as the lower Gangetic delta, with a metropolitan area of 1,886.67 sq. km (728.45 sq. mi).

One of the three major presidencies – Calcutta, Bombay, and Madras – under the East India Company’s rule by the mid-eighteenth century, Calcutta was chosen as the headquarters of the East India Company and, consequently, as the capital of British India in 1772. Under the rule of the East India Company, and later under the British Raj, Calcutta was the capital of British

⁶⁶ According to the 2011 Census data

India until 1911, when because of its perceived geographical disadvantages and a growing spirit of nationalism in Bengal, the capital was shifted from Calcutta to New Delhi.

Being the first colonial capital of British India had a profound effect on the socio-cultural and political milieu of the city. It was during this period that Calcutta is said to have evolved as the hub of modern science, education, culture, and politics that it is known for today. As noted above, Calcutta was also a major center of India's struggle for independence; and till date it is known as a hotbed of contemporary politics. As the heart of the Bengali Renaissance in the 19th- and early 20th-centuries, and as a religiously and ethnically diverse center of culture in Bengal and India, Kolkata has well-known local traditions in theatre, art, film, music and literature as well.

Kolkata can be broadly divided into north, central and southern regions, roughly corresponding to the three villages that preceded the city. North Kolkata, the oldest part of the city and the erstwhile 'Black Town' or the 'Native Town,' has a long history of *āddā*: it was here that the modern Bengali *baithaki āddā* of the native *bhodrolok bābus* had originated. Central Kolkata, once known as the 'White Town' during the colonial period, has been historically indifferent to the Bengali *āddā* culture until after independence in 1947. As a 'White Town' prior to independence, Central Kolkata has no notable history of *āddā*; it is only recently, after emerging as the central business district of Independent Kolkata that pockets of *āddā*, mostly during lunch and after hours, and on Sundays and other holidays, have emerged at numerous cafés and eateries that presently dot the area.

Roughly corresponding to the former village known as Gobindapur, the southern part of Kolkata was gradually developed after India became independent in 1947. During India's partition in 1947, and again during Bangladesh's War for Independence in 1971, Kolkata was

flooded with refugees from across the national border with Bangladesh. Most of these refugees to the city settled down in colonies in and around the then scantily populated and underdeveloped southern Kolkata. Gradually, the slums of the refugee colonies were replaced by modern upscale neighborhoods, comprising mostly of high-rise apartment buildings, which, unlike the residential buildings of North Kolkata, lacked in *ro'ks* and often also in *baithakkhānās*. Therefore, at a time before the proliferation of cafés and other such commercialized spaces of socialization, it was said that South Kolkata conspicuously lacked in *āddā* culture. However, today, what South Kolkata lacked in *ro'ks* and *baithakkhānās*, it has more than made up for in parks, lakes, cafés, food joints and eateries, bars and restaurants, and one major university that I went to, spent numerous hours ‘giving *āddā*’ in, and which, thereafter, I chose, for these very aforementioned reasons, as my research site.

The university

The history of the university in Kolkata, that I chose as my research site is inextricably weaved with the latter part of India’s freedom movement. The partition of Bengal, popularly known as *Banga Bhanga* (Bengali: বঙ্গভঙ্গ) or the ‘breaking of (unified) Bengal’ was initiated by the then Viceroy of Bengal, Lord Curzon, on 7th July, 1905. As part of the British colonizer’s policy of ‘divide and rule,’ Bengal was partitioned on 16th October, 1905 along religious lines into a largely Muslim eastern area named as ‘Eastern Bengal and Assam’ that comprised of the region of present day Bangladesh and the state of Assam in India with Dacca (now in Bangladesh) as the capital and a largely Hindu western area named as ‘Bengal,’ comprising of the present day provinces of West Bengal, Bihar and Orissa in India with Calcutta as the capital. The

result was that besides a political crisis along religious lines, the partition also created a few socio-economic crises. For instance, in almost a Catch-22 like situation, the partition of Bengal in 1905 found most of the factories and mills in the province of Bengal, while the majority sources of raw materials needed for the functioning of these factories were partitioned into the erstwhile province of Eastern Bengal and Assam. Similarly, the populace of the province of 'Eastern Bengal and Assam' found most of the educational institutions, including the lone university of the erstwhile unified province of Bengal (the Dhaka University in Bangladesh was established in 1921), the University of Calcutta, established in 1857, partitioned away from them into the province of Bengal (now known as the State of West Bengal in India).

In response to the partition, the Indian National Congress (INC), led by M.K Gandhi, initiated the *Swadeshi* movement (now rechristened as the 'Make in India' campaign), along with a Boycott movement from the Town Hall in Calcutta in August, 1905 that included, besides production of goods for local consumption locally, boycotting of all British products, services, benefits, and institutions; formation of committees and politico-cultural groups; rallying, propaganda and stepping up of diplomatic and political pressures, etc. The spirit of the movement proliferated among all classes of the Indian society and extended to literature, culture, education, sciences and technology, resulting in re-unification of Bengal in 1911. Bengal was divided anew in 1947, this time as a part of the division of the country into the independent nations of India and Pakistan.

Academic reputation of the university

As a part of the effort to challenge the British hegemony in all spheres of Indians' lives - social, cultural, political, financial, but particularly, educational, and to garner the emergent nationalist spirit into a new form of resistance through an Indianized education system, an education council was formed in 1906 by some notable educationists and students who broke away from the University of Calcutta. The effort was liberally supported with money, land, expertise and scholarship by several notable Indians, including the Nobel laureate Indian poet, Rabindranath Tagore, who later founded another university in Bengal, some 400 km from the city of Calcutta, based on his ideals of an alternative education system. The chief purpose of the council was to provide higher education to the native populace along national lines and under national control. Later, almost a decade after independence, the council was legislated into a fully-functional, multi-disciplinary, semi-autonomous⁶⁷, secular public university by the state and the central governments concurrently.

Since then the university has come to be known as a foremost Indian university, accredited as a 'centre for potential excellence' with a 5-star rating by the University Grants Commission of India (UGC), offering a variety of degree, diploma and certificate courses in the streams of technology, humanities, management and sciences out of its two campuses in the city of Kolkata for approximately 8738 odd students, split between day-scholars (commuter students) and student boarders (hostelite students) in its two campuses. Considered usually within the top 20 universities in India, the university has been ranked 5th among all Indian universities by the National Institute of Ranking Framework in the year 2017 and 84th among top 200 Asian

⁶⁷ The university became fully autonomous in March, 2018.

Universities by Times Higher Education Asia University Ranking the year before. In West Bengal particularly, the university is generally considered one of the top universities to go to, and, consequently, the competition to get in is typically steep as students from all over West Bengal and even from other parts of India apply for admissions each year.

Diversity in the student body and cultures of the university

The student body of the university – typically a little shy of 10,000 students, is reasonably diverse. While the majority of students are Bengali, yet most of the 23 districts of the state of West Bengal, spread over an area of 88,752 square kilometers or 34,267 square miles, are, usually, adequately represented in the university each year, thereby making the student body regionally quite diverse. In fact, despite being located in the city of Kolkata, the university has fewer students from the city and district of Kolkata as compared to students from other districts of the state of West Bengal.

Additionally, some couple of hundreds of students or so from the other states of India take admission to the university each year – usually in the Faculty of Engineering and Technology that admits the most number of students, followed by the faculties of Arts and the Science respectively. There is, usually, also a sizable population of students in the university from the seven states of the North Eastern Region (NER) of India, and the university typically also admits a handful of foreign students – including students of Indian origin, holding foreign passports, almost every year. As of 2017, the final year of my stay at the university for collecting data, there were about 40-odd foreign students from 15 different countries, but mostly from East

European countries, enrolled in different courses in the university – some in short term certificate or diploma courses, and others in full-term degree courses of two years’ or longer duration.

In terms of socio-economic backgrounds too, the student populace of the university is quite diverse. While there wasn’t any statistical record of the socio-economic backgrounds of the student population available with the university, the participants in my study, recruited through a snowball sampling method, reflected a wide range in terms of their family’s socio-economic statuses (see Table 1 on page 163).

While, without exception, all of the participants of my study claimed to belong to middle to upper middle-class family backgrounds – perhaps, on account of their education (or *sikhshā*, which, as I have noted elsewhere in this dissertation, is still considered a greater marker of class status than economic capital), there were a few participants who seemed to be situated on the far ends of the economic scale of the middle-class spectrum as it is understood in this part of the world. For example, one participant (who dropped out of the study after one interview due to time constraints) said that his father was a priest in a temple, who lived in a small room next to the temple arranged for by the temple’s board of trustees and subsisted on tips, grains and fruits offered by the devotees. Another participant’s father had a small “fix it” shop for all kind of small household electronic gadgets. He ran the shop alone and lived in a small rented room in the suburbia on the northern fringes of Kolkata with his two kids. A third participant’s father was a small paddy farmer in a village in a district of West Bengal, six hours away from Kolkata, where he lived with his wife and two children. His fourth and youngest child, the participant in my study and a doctoral student of Chemistry in the university, told me that none of his two older brothers and sister studied beyond high school because the family couldn’t afford the expenses and that he too couldn’t have come this far but for the continuous government scholarships he received on

account of being meritorious since he graduated high school with record marks. Thus, while on one hand, there was this student whose family couldn't afford to pay even the very reasonable, subsidized tuition fees of public institutions of higher education in India (approximately between \$15 - \$50 per annum) for their children, on the other hand there was a student who owned two cars (of which, one was Indian made and the other was foreign made) and an extremely expensive foreign-made motorbike – the base price for the cheapest model of which is approximately \$10800, solely for his personal use, and whose father, I was told, was a small-scale industrialist. There was yet another student-participant in my study, whose family wasn't quite as wealthy as that of the other student, yet was wealthy enough to live in one of the most premium real-estate properties in the city; his father being a well-acclaimed doctor. Yet all of these students – the farmer's son, the industrialist's son and the doctor's son – claimed that they belonged to the middle class.

On the other hand, besides its academic reputation and diverse student population, as noted above, the university is also well known for its rich and diverse student culture, including a strong culture of student politics and socio-political campaigns, for which the university often finds itself in the news almost once every year. Indeed, during the course of my fieldwork at the university between 2014 and 2017, I witnessed and eventually got drawn into three major student movements, including one (popularly known as *#hokkolorob*⁶⁸ on social media) that lasted for several months and ended with the ousting of the Vice Chancellor, whom the students were protesting against for failing to address their grievances regarding an alleged incidence of sexual harassment of a female student inside the campus but, more importantly, for having a group of

⁶⁸ A phrase from a popular Bengali song by a Bangladeshi singer, *hok kolorob* can be roughly translated into English as “let there be clamour!”

agitating students forcefully dispersed, beaten and removed from the campus at night by calling in the police.

So strong were the sentiments of the students for the sanctity of the campus as their “own space” that even the student boarders (resident students), some of whom were accused of the alleged crime against the female student, and their friends and supporters also joined hands with the protesting students, despite their own internal differences regarding the alleged crime. Thousands of students of the university took to the streets, braving torrential monsoon rain in the month of July, and were joined by students from other colleges, as well as by alumni (including me), teachers, research scholars, parents of current students of the university, and the general public in large numbers⁶⁹ (see figures 13 and 14). The massive support that this particular movement garnered from mostly middle and lower middle-class Calcuttans reflects their esteem for the university and its students, besides, of course, the organizational capability of the student leadership.



Figure 13. Students march in the rain to meet the Governor (Source: Headlines Today)

⁶⁹ According to various news-paper reports, the turnout at the protest march was estimated to be between 50000 and 200000 people.



Figure 14. Students hold up posters during the march (Source: Headlines Today)

During this time, the university campus was abuzz only with discussions about the on-going movement, with ideas for the next course of actions being forwarded, debated, and refuted or championed animatedly by the dozen each day in almost every regular *āddās* in the university, as they were in the several general body meetings of the students each day. Even several alumni of the university, across different age groups, who had not set foot in the university campus in ages – often because they were busy with their lives or because they now lived in different cities or countries, returned to lend their support to the movement and formed impromptu *āddās* in the university campus with other former students from their times, who, likewise, came to express their solidarity with the agitating current students of the university. Many of them, including some who were my former batch-mates, told me that the on-going student movement afforded them an opportunity for an informal reunion with former fellow students from the university.

I, on the other hand, went around observing, as well as participating in, the various *āddās* in the campus during this period, which led me to believe that the university's culture of student

āddā, and the consequent attachment for the place (the university campus) that it helped generate for the current and former students of the university, who called the university their “home” and the student body, their “family” (see figure 15), as well as for those who were never students of the university but, nevertheless, hung out in the university campus giving *āddā*, had a fair contribution to the popularity and success of the *#hokkolorob* movement – an idea, which, when I proposed in a symposium on *āddā* organised by the Anthropological Society of India in 2015, was strongly opposed by most Bengali (adult) panelists on no particular ground, leading me to suspect that many Bengali adults were uncomfortable about the idea of students and youths’ *āddās*.

However, it should also be noted at the same time that alongside the support and admiration, the very liberal student culture of the university, including a tradition of ultra-left orientation in student politics in the university and a conspicuous campus-culture of unrati ed substance use by students, involving mostly drinking alcohol and smoking weed, often drew considerable flak both from people within and outside the university. Neither are all agitations of the students of the university received well by the general public. For instance, shortly after the culmination of the *#hokkolorob* movement, a large group of students of the university initiated two separate public demonstrations. For one of the demonstrations, which the students named after the *#hokkolorob* movement as *hokchumbon* (“let there be kissing”), hordes of young men and women students – mostly from the Arts Faculty – assembled in front of the local police station at the crossing of two very busy streets a short distance from the university. Thereafter, blocking all traffic, the students, irrespective of gender, proceeded to kiss each other *en masse* in full public view for the good part of an hour to protest against the societal and political moral

policing of the youths' sexualities, while holding up placards with slogans written in Bengali and Hindi that challenged the State and sectarian outfits to stop them if they could.



Figure 15. A poster published by the students during the *#hokkolorob* movement.

In the other demonstration, called *#PadsAgainstPatriarchy*, the students hung up numerous sanitary pads with sensitizing messages like “menstruation is not a ‘disease,’ nor is it ‘dirty’” written on them with sharpies all over the university campus (see figure 16). Both these

above mentioned demonstrations were severely criticized by the public and the press, and in the case of the latter, the university administration had the sanitary napkins removed promptly.

Even the extremely popular *#hokkolorob* movement, despite a lot of public support, garnered some criticism, mostly on social media, that slammed the students for rowdiness, for disrespecting the Bengali tradition of respecting one's teachers (in this case, the Vice-Chancellor of the university, whom the students were protesting against), and for indulging in politics, drugs and *āddā*, instead of focusing on their studies.

In a particular instance, following some Facebook posts by me in favor of the *#hokkolorob* movement, I was attacked on Facebook by a fellow Bengali academic I once knew – a self-proclaimed positivist based out of a university in USA, who accused me not only of “corrupting” the objectivity of my research (which I had never claimed) by participating in a movement of the students I was studying, but also of further ruining the lives and careers of the students by inciting them to rebel against the university and the state government for my own academic gains, and threatened to write to my department head and my advisor. While I did not reply to any of his incriminatory public posts on my Facebook wall, except to tell him that he was free to communicate with my department or my advisor, my friends, acquaintances and current and former students of the university in favor of the on-going student movement in the university did with a gusto that ultimately quieted him down.

Thus, although the vibrant campus-culture of the university is often a strong attraction for potential students (as it was for me eighteen years ago) who want to go here no less for the cultural experience, as for the academic reputation of the university or for any other reasons, I also personally know four parents outside the ambit of my research, who did not want their children to go to this university for the fear of them becoming wayward.



Figure 16. A student holds up a pad with a message during #PadsAgainstPatriarchy.

The students of the university, however, seemed mostly nonchalant in the face of public criticisms of the university's student culture – some of which, at least, seemed to be politically motivated, and brushed them away as instances of “sour grapes syndrome,”⁷⁰ as indeed a certain student-supporter of the *#hokkolorob* movement did in response to a Facebook post by a prominent youth leader of the ruling party in West Bengal, that criticized the *#hokkolorob* movement as a knee-jerk reaction of a bunch of junkies who wanted to oust the Vice-Chancellor because he had put a stop to the students' drinking alcohol and smoking *gānjā* in the university

⁷⁰ This particular comment against a prominent youth politician, who is also a Member of Parliament, by the concerned student was also shared by many other students, and reflects a certain conceit on the part of the students for their superior education and merit, which again goes to show that education is still largely valued as a cultural capital above all else in the Bengali cultural worldview.

campus: “*Mod, gānjā, charas bondho, tāi ki protibāder gondho?* [Do I smell protest because alcohol, *gānjā* and *charas* have been stopped?]

Besides its reputation for academics, student politics, and socio-political campaigns, the university is popularly considered a forerunner among other universities in the state of West Bengal, as well as those in the rest of India, in the cultural front as well. Three cultural fests in a year aside – one for each of the Faculties of Arts, Sciences, and Engineering, each named ‘*Sanskriti*’ (culture), the students organize and participate in numerous cultural events every year in the university’s main campus, including book fairs, art and film festivals, musical events and jam-sessions, photography contests, literary events, bake sales, handicraft sales, symposiums, street-corner skits, etc. And in doing so, the students often draw inspiration from the rich and diverse cultural heritage of the student populace of the university. For example, the students of the engineering faculty organized a *Chau* dance (of the Purulia district) in the four-day long ‘Sanskriti 2016’ of the engineering faculty to honour the cultural heritage of the students from the district of Purulia in West Bengal and several such regional cultural themes are showcased from time to time in the numerous cultural events organized by the students of the university each year.

Nevertheless, the student culture of the university is often criticized by a large section of the non-Bengali student body for a mainstream Bengal-centric, and indeed often, a Kolkata-centric bias, as, for example, North-East Indian cultures have never been represented in any of the cultural events in the university in the remembered past, despite the fact that a sizable portion of the student body of the university for many years comes from the North-Eastern regions of India, including the northern regions of West Bengal. Similarly, I and a non-politically affiliated student organization in the arts faculty that I had helped establish when I was a final year student of the university have for long been critically vocal against the university administration’s apparent

insensitivity towards the university's differently-abled students and the students enrolled in night courses – like, for instances, the administration's apathy in assisting blind students to find 'writers' during examinations, the lack of braille books in the libraries, the closing of the libraries and the switching off of the elevators at 5 P.M even though night courses ran till 9 P.M (Dutta, 2015a), and the lack of wheel-chair accessibility to most buildings in the university.

Another structural impediment – one that's particularly relevant for the present study as it inherently restricts the university's resident women students' participation in *āddā* is the university's rule that requires the resident women students (apparently, for their own safety and security) to be back in their hostels (dorms) before 10 P.M, whereas there were no corresponding 'in-time' for the resident men students of the university.

Site of the study

As already mentioned above, the university I chose for my study operated out of two campuses in the city. One of them, the older, main campus dating back to 1922, according to local history (Prof. Bhaskar Gupta, personal communication, 2018), is located in the southern fringes of Kolkata in an area of approximately 61 acres. It houses the faculties of Engineering and Technology, Arts and the Sciences, and the management program is housed in a separate building right outside the boundary wall of the Arts block in the northern end of the campus, whereas the newer, smaller campus in the northern part of the city housed only some newer engineering and technology programs that couldn't find a place in the main campus due to space crunch. For my ethnography, I focused solely on the older, main campus of the university: not just because of the greater diversity of programs, and hence of students, it offered, but also as much because of its

larger and more spatially diverse campus area that afforded the students with a greater choice in terms of places to hold their *āddās* at as per their dispositions, and, therefore, afforded me the opportunity to study diverse kinds of student *āddās* – each tied to a particular place in the campus and affected by it; because, as a former student of the university once told me, “each *āddā* [in the university] is unique in its characteristics by virtue of where it is held” (Orpheus, personal communication, 2014).

Moreover, of the two campuses of the university, only the older, main campus was partly residential – housing eight boys’ hostels and one girls’ hostel within the university campus and one boys’ hostel outside the university campus, about 100 meters away.

Down memory lane: A walk through the campus

As I stepped into the university campus through the gate of the arts faculty on the northern end of the campus on a snugly-cold winter afternoon in January, 2014, after about seven long years, the biggest challenge I was faced with was figuring out how and where to start my fieldwork. As an ethnographer, it has been my constant endeavor to penetrate as deep into the heart of the matter as possible by peeling off layers of meanings. In order to gain a deep understanding of the student culture of *āddā* in the university, it was necessary for me to spend as much time in the field with the participants and interview as many informants as possible. It was with this intention of understanding the field well that I chose this particular university as my research site. I went to this university for five years between 2000 and 2005, and somewhat understood the place and its culture. However, a lot had also changed in the years between then and my return to the university – this time as a research student of a foreign university. Having

been a student of the university, and being fond of *āddā* myself, I already knew some of the perennial places of student *āddā* in the campus – the three major canteens and a few other places. I also knew that each of the three major canteens attracted somewhat different crowds of *āddābāj*⁷¹ students – each with different tastes and dispositions, and sometimes even coming from different socio-cultural backgrounds, as each of these canteens catered to separate niché clientele in the university to remain in competition. Therefore, these three major canteens seemed to be natural places to start. However, I knew that there were also other places in the university, besides these canteens, where regular student *āddās* were held. And I suspected – rightly, as it turned out – that some newer places of *āddā* might have been discovered by the students since the days when I used to ‘give’ *āddā* in the campus as a student. The time by my wristwatch – 4 o’clock – was ripe for *āddās* as classes in most departments in the university got over by 3:45 PM. I decided to take a walk around the length and breadth of the university to see what I could spot.

Spread over approximately 61 acres, the university is longer than it is wide. On its Western boundary, stretched along the main road for three bus stops, there are four entrances to the university and another one on the Southern boundary along a side road that branches off of the main road and ends at a station of Kolkata’s South-Suburban Railways.

I had entered the university through one of the entrances on the North-Western side – one that led directly into the arts faculty. Directly to my right, next to the guard room and the student-cheapstore-cum-photocopy-center (I remembered that during my time there as a student, it used to be a PCO booth, as mobile phones were still a rarity then), was the Arts Faculty Students’ Union (AFSU) room. During my days, it used to be a great, good place of *āddā*, especially in the

⁷¹ Someone who is fond of *āddā* and participates in *āddās* frequently.

evenings till well into the night but the *āddās* there were usually centered around political discussions and strategies, and only students who were either members, supporters or were in good terms with the members and supporters of the student organization elected to office went to those *āddās*.

The 'parking lot'

Moving on, I reached the Undergraduate Arts (UG Arts) building – a longish, four storied, reversed U-shaped building with two wings. Although popularly known as the UG Arts building, one of the two wings of the building housed undergraduate science departments and laboratories, while the other wing housed three major humanities departments and the office of the Dean of Arts Faculty. There was a squarish open space outside, fitted between the two protruding wings of the building on the East and West-side, the connecting block of the building on the North and the lane leading into the university from the main gate on the South. During my time in the university, it used to house a large, cylindrical brick-and-mortar drinking-water tank, with a sink fitted with taps running around it, and used to be unkempt with tall grasses, bushes and garbage strewn everywhere. It used to be where students went for a drink, and to pee when they felt too lazy to walk inside and use a proper lavatory or, in the evenings, when the building used to be locked.

Currently, I observed, it had been turned into a parking zone with paved concrete surface, on which someone – perhaps a student or a group of students – had painted a huge graffito of what seemed like Lord Shiva⁷² and some abstract geometric shapes. The color of the graffito was

⁷² Lord Shiva is popularly believed to be a smoker of weed

faded, suggesting it to be at least a few weeks to a few months old. The water tank was gone. Instead, now, along the western side of the rectangular parking lot, there was a long colonnaded shade meant for providing covered parking for the cars of important university officials like the Dean of the Arts Faculty, and along the eastern side, there was a line of short, cylindrical brick-and-mortar structures, with a large pits in the middle – likely meant for planting of saplings originally, but which now functioned as a convenient dump for empty alcohol bottles – of which there were tens of scores. Post sundown, when most of the cars that usually filled the parking zone (referred to as the “Parking Lot” by the students) during the day are gone, students and youths – both young men and women – gathered around these several pits in their evening *āddās*, typically accompanied with smoking (cigarettes, *bidis*⁷³ and/or weed) and drinking of tea or alcohol (see figure 17).



Figure 5. Students passing a chillum around in an *āddā*

⁷³ An indigenous, cheap, small hand-rolled cigarettes filled with unprocessed tobacco and wrapped and tied with a string in *kendu/tendu* or *temburni* leaves (*Diospyros melanoxylon*) - a plant native to Asia.

Typically, the evening *āddā* started with a few students in separate groups of twos or threes with tea and cigarettes or *bidis* (see figure 18), and gradually moved on to alcohol and weed as more people arrived and the groups coalesced, particularly after 8 P.M when the evening classes got over (although I’ve never seen any evening scholar join these *āddā*) and prohibition on loitering in the university campus, except for in the “parking lot,” was enforced.

Been shooed away from their *āddās* elsewhere in the campus by the night guards sharp at eight every evening, the students either left for home, took their *āddā* to the hostels or outside the campus, or to the ‘parking lot’ where they could continue (usually) unhindered by the guards till at least about midnight, and sometimes even well past midnight too. When I inquired of some of the guards why this was so, I was told it was because the university was too big (and the security staff were too few in number) to be constantly monitored, especially at night. “The students could do anything,” said one guard (personal communication, 2014). Therefore, localizing students’ *āddā* to the “parking lot” near the main entrance, where there is a guard room with 24-hour security was one way of containing any possible deviant activity.

The eight-o’clock loitering ban coupled with its convenient location near the only entrance to the university that remained operational all day and night (because this particular entrance was used by the resident students and staff of the university), made the ‘parking lot’ one of the primary sites of student *āddā* in the campus, especially at night (see figure 19); and for the same reason, the ‘parking lot’ became one of my primary sites for collecting data.

I had spent many hours, in fact, almost every evening, including Sundays, for the first two years of my data collection, and a little less frequently in the ensuing years, here at the ‘parking lot,’ participating in everything that the students did because I wanted to understand their experience of *āddā* by emulating their lifestyle – of which *āddā* was an integral part – as

closely as possible. Many of the *āddās* that I had taken part in as a participant-observer were held here, as also several of the focus group and individual interviews (see figure 20).



Figure 18. An early-evening student *āddā* at the 'parking lot.'



Figure 19. The 'parking lot' is one of the primary sites of student *āddās* in the campus.



Figure 20. Participant observation in an *āddā* at the 'parking lot.'

The 'Viewpoint'

Contending in popularity with the 'parking lot,' at least for the students of the arts and the science faculties, was what the students called the 'Viewpoint.' Named after a Delhi-based, small publisher and bookseller company that had opened shop at this very spot in the campus for a while, the 'viewpoint' was a large, partially roofed, porch like structure to a long and wide, three storied, white building that was constructed a few years after I had graduated with a Masters from the university, and now houses several classrooms, an indoor auditorium, the Ph.D. cell, and offices for various research projects undertaken by the different departments of the university. Two sets of steps, one on the covered side and the other on the open side, led to the porch. In the unroofed part of the porch on the far right-hand side of one standing facing the porch, there was, next to the steps, a serpentine ramp that started at the ground-level on the far end of the porch, away from the road that ran in front of the building, and windingly led all the way up to the far end of the porch where it met the facade of the building. And right there, where the balustraded

ramp (which was used by the students to lounge on throughout the day and part of the evening until being shooed away at 8 PM by the night guards) led onto the porch, was a longish room which was the bookstore⁷⁴ that the porch got its name from. The ‘Viewpoint’ was the popular day-time *āddā*-venue (see figure 21).



Figure 21. Day-time student *āddās* at the 'Viewpoint.'

On the opposite side of the narrow road that ran in front of the ‘viewpoint,’ was a popular outdoor, open-style, take-away food joint, popularly known as Milan’s Canteen after the name of the proprietor. It was one of the two canteens located in the vicinity of both the arts and science faculties, which were located next to each other on the northern side of the campus. The canteen was extremely popular among students, and besides the students of the arts and the science faculties, it also drew a good number of engineering faculty students, who had to traverse the

⁷⁴ The book store folded up approximately mid-way through my research at the university, but for as long as it was operational, some students gave *āddā* inside the bookstore as well, and the rather amiable, young manager, who played the *sitar* and was fond of classical *Hindustani* and western music, joined them whenever he had some time to spare from managing the sales counter.

entire length of the university to get to the canteen on the northern side of the campus from the engineering faculty that was located on the far southern end. The canteen itself was a popular site of *āddā* (see figure 22), and was usually always full of people lounging about the long concrete slab that ran along the length of the yard in front on one side and on the small wooden benches behind the canteen, throughout the day till about 7 PM when the canteen downed its shutters; and even then mostly one could find a handful of shadowy figures still continuing with their *āddā* in the gradually deepening darkness after the canteen had closed for the day.



Figure 22. A morning *āddā* at Milan's Canteen.

Together the 'Milan's Canteen' and the 'Viewpoint' were visibly the busiest and the most vibrant part of the university campus with the crowd shifting and merging between the two venues seamlessly throughout the day. The 'Viewpoint' also served as the most popular venue for many of the different events that one or the other groups of students seemed to organize every other day, whether it was a bake sale, a movie screening, a jam session, display of photographs from photography competitions, *nukkād nātak* (street-corner skits), commemoration of 21st

February as the *Bhāshā Dibas* (World Mother Language Day), or a political convention (see figures 23, 24, and 25). During student movements in the campus, particularly in the Arts Faculty, the 'Viewpoint' also served as the common assembly point from where the united students took out processions, accompanied with creative slogans that were shouted out loud in unison or where the students reconvened after processions to chalk out the next day's course of action in General Body meetings.



Figure 6. A skit being performed at the 'Viewpoint.'



Figure 247. A poster-show at the 'Viewpoint.'



Figure 25. A students' convention being held at the 'Viewpoint.'

The canteens

The next *āddā* site that I visited was also located close to the arts and the science faculties – a large, indoor canteen⁷⁵ known as the ‘AC canteen. It was located in a large hall in the ground floor of a two storied building that housed offices of different clubs like the Drama Club, the Literary Society, the Quiz Club, and a practice room for the university’s table tennis team that could be reached through a door in the back or through the canteen. On one end of the longish hallroom, were the food and the cash counters next to each other and the rest of the hall was arranged with rows of long tables, with benches on either side. On either side of the front entrance to the canteen on the West, were two small desks – one each by the only two windows to the hall only through which, other than the door, light entered the darkened room in late afternoons. The desks each had two to three chairs around them, and I was told that these two desks were informally known as “birds’ perch” in Bengali, meaning “lovers spot,” and I could see why. These two desks were the only ones that received some direct sunlight through the windows. The rest of the hall room was dark, even though several tubelights remained lit throughout the day, and if you happened to sit at one of the tables near the far end, you could smell the stench of urine from the attached single, unisex lavatory on the far northern corner. The room remained poorly lit throughout the day, which was rather soothing during the harsh summers, although one wished the old ceiling fans could spin a tad bit faster or that there really was an AC in the ‘AC Canteen’. But the canteen, which, by the way, was one of the two subsidized canteens in the university and was, consequently, considerably cheaper than the other

⁷⁵ A cheap eatery for the students or employees of any institution.

canteens, had gotten its name for an altogether different reason that had nothing to do with temperature regulation.

My initial observation on the first couple of visits to the ‘AC Canteen’ – something I had never noticed when I used to visit the canteen earlier as a student – was that the young men and women who usually flocked here, seemed a little different in their demeanor when compared to most young men and women who gave *āddā* at the ‘Viewpoint’ and at Milan’s Canteen. It was difficult to put a finger on what it was initially, but after several visits and talking to some of the students who hung out there fairly regularly, I arrived at the primary conclusion that these youths at the ‘AC Canteen’ dressed and talked differently than the regulars at the ‘Viewpoint.’ And what I mean by that is the young men and women of the ‘AC Canteen’ typically dressed more plainly and generally spoke less in English as compared to the youths who hung out at the ‘Viewpoint,’ and while there were exceptions in both cases, yet the young men and women of the ‘AC Canteen’ appeared less “hep” at first look than the youths at the ‘Viewpoint.’

Next, there was another canteen near the engineering faculty, opposite to the Central Library, which was also a popular place for *āddā*. Like Milan’s Canteen, this too was an open-style, take-away joint. There was a stretch of level ground next to the canteen, adjoining the big playground, where the canteen owner – a man in his late-sixties, universally known as ‘Nathu *dā*’ had set up approximately half a dozen garden umbrellas. Underneath these umbrellas were round plastic tables with plastic chairs around them for seating. Besides these makeshift seating arrangements, there was a narrow, long ledge about half a foot wide and a meter long, jutting off the wire fencing to the adjoining playground, and a few trees with rectangular concrete surrounds to sit on. The canteen served breakfast, lunch and snacks and remained open from nine in the morning to eight in the evening. Being located opposite the Central Library, the canteen drew a

mixed crowd but during the day and early evenings mostly students from the Engineering Faculty hung out here.

The students' hostels and other common places of *āddā*

The university campus housed several gender-segregated hostels (dorms) for its students. Approximately 622 resident women students lived in the women's hostel, which comprised of four blocks within a single, gated hostel premise inside the campus, compared to approximately 1254 men students who lived in nine separate hostel buildings for men, of which eight were located inside the university campus, including one exclusively for the research students, and one was located outside the campus (source: university website).

The hostels were popular places of *āddā* in the late evenings, particularly for the resident students, but also for several commuter students who had friends living in the hostels. As part of my research, I participated in the *āddās* of the students in three of the men's hostels inside the campus on several occasions and further interviewed some resident students of two of the men's hostels, also inside the campus. It helped that at the time I lived inside the campus in the official quarter of my mother, who was a professor in the university.

There were also a few other places of *āddā* that I did not explore quite as much: for instance, the '*jheel pār*,' or the 'lake-side.' The *jheel*, or the lake, in question – of which there were a few – being the one next to the women's hostel premise, this spot, popularly known among the students as '*jheel pār*,' was really a long stretch of canopied back road between the playground on the right and a longish lake on the left, bordering the eastern boundary wall of the university. The concrete surrounds to a line of tall trees at regular intervals along the stretch of the

backroad on the western side, bordering the playground, provided young heterosexual couples a place to sit in some privacy with their backs to the road. Sometimes, a few couples would sit on the same tree surround with only a few inches of space in-between. Gradually, over time, as they got to know each other well, the couples sometimes would sit together and give *āddā*, especially if the women were ‘hostelites,’ because, as one student told me, “there are only so many students in the girls’ hostel” (Payel, personal communication, 2014). However, because of the personal nature of these *āddās*, I chose to leave these out of the purview of my study.

Similarly, there was a small *āddā* at a rather secluded spot beside a lily pond near the arts faculty known as the ‘Mushroom Park’ because of the mushroom-shaped concrete decorations there that the students used to sit on. Due to the seclusion of the place, students mostly used the spot to smoke pot during day time when smoking pot elsewhere in the campus bore the risk of being conspicuous. Again, I chose to leave out the *āddā* at the Mushroom Park from the purview of the study because the primary reason why students gathered here was to smoke pot and not to give *āddā*.

However, before taking a call on which *āddās* to focus on, I did participate in each of these different *āddās* for several days, with the exception of the lovers’ *āddā* at the *Jheel Pār* and the *āddās* in the girls’ hostel, to which I could not gain entry.

Gaining entry

Even with *āddā* everywhere all around me in the university campus, two of my initial challenges, when I started my fieldwork was figuring out where to start and how to gain entry into the *āddā*-worlds of the students and youths who regularly hung out at the university campus.

As a former student of the university, and being fond of *āddā* myself, I already knew quite a bit about the prominent places of *āddā* in the campus. However, much had changed since I graduated in 2005. Therefore, I decided to start by ‘doing a recce’⁷⁶ of the campus, randomly visiting different *āddās* during the day in order to identify the ones that I should study, and also to see if any new places of *āddā* might have sprung up since I last gave *āddā* in the campus as a student.

Although, the students in most of these *āddās* were gracious enough to promise me help when I told them about my research, and some of them even showed genuine interest in my study, barraging me with an immediate flood of questions, yet I could sense an abyss between them and me. There is a world of difference between merely hanging out and ‘giving *āddā*’, because the latter meant co-inhabiting the socio-cultural world of one’s fellow *āddā* mates. My interaction with these students initially were at best formal and not at all *āddā*-like, and at worst, I just sat there with them in their *āddā*, asking occasional questions and scribbling notes in my pocket Moleskin, all the while feeling like a superficial appendage to their *āddā* – at best to be tolerated and at worst to be ignored.

A couple of early interviews that I did with these students echoed all that I had read about *āddā* – all the stereotypes and generalizations. It didn’t seem like I was hearing the true voices of the students as I had expected. Rather, it felt like someone was reading out loud to me all the known discourses on *āddā* from all these books I had read or was simply summarizing all that I already knew about *āddā* from my readings, and by virtue of being a cultural insider. I quickly realized that I needed a change of plan, as this strategy clearly wasn’t working.

⁷⁶ A phrase that I picked up from the students, which meant exploration

I got a lucky break when suddenly one afternoon I met DOS (pseudonym)⁷⁷ at the ‘Viewpoint’. At the time a recent pass-out, DOS had joined our department as a freshman in 2006, when, having graduated my master’s degree course from the department only the year before, and having working a night shift in the editorial section of a local newspaper, I still often hung out in the campus during the day, before I started work in the evenings. I learned that DOS was still a regular at various *āddās* on campus, particularly at the ‘Viewpoint’ and the ‘Parking Lot’, and that along with him were a couple of other old fellas, also my juniors, whom, I realized, I knew from my college days. I also learned that some of my contemporaries, whom I had lost touch with, also visited the campus from time to time for *āddā*, usually later in the evening because they worked full-time jobs. When I disclosed the purpose of my visit to DOS, he seemed excited on hearing what it was that I was researching. He not only immediately volunteered to be one of my participants, but also promised to help me recruit others. Thus, I had my first participant, quite accidentally.

Participants

Thereafter, I started to hang out with DOS and his friends at the ‘Viewpoint’ every day from noon (that is when *āddā* seemingly to started gathering steam after a couple of morning classes from 10:20 AM onward) till way into the night, and sometimes even past midnight, participating in everything they did, which I would later write up in my notebook. It was through

⁷⁷ The participant in question chose the particular pseudonym because not only did it sound similar to his last (family) name, but also because he viewed his role in his *āddā* to be similar to the Microsoft Disk Operating System (or D.O.S, in short), which, as he explained to me, is still the primary operating system (one that actually makes the Windows computers run) hidden behind the sleek, but DOS-dependent Graphic User Interface (GUI) of the latest Microsoft Windows operating systems.

DOS that I came to know several other regulars at the ‘Viewpoint,’ at ‘Milan’s Canteen,’ and at the ‘Parking Lot’ in the next few weeks. Through them again, in a sort of snowball effect, I came to know about others in some of the other places of *āddā* on the campus as well. I told the purpose of my being there upfront to whomever I met – that I would be studying each of them collectively and individually, although I would protect their identities in any publication resulting from the study (and nobody objected, rather they showed great interest and curiosity towards my study). However, other than DOS, who sort of recruited himself as one of my participants, I took my time recruiting participants for my study as I wanted to hang out with these students for some time in order to identify who among them might prove most interesting to study.

In identifying these participants, the sole criterion I had in mind was diversity: gender; affiliation to the university; socio-economic backgrounds (including rural and urban upbringing; employment; social ‘successes’ and social ‘failures’); students with good grades, who were, therefore, considered ‘good’ students and others who were not considered ‘good’ students on account of their grades; popularity within the university; politically active students and those who generally shied away from student politics; etc.

Most of the *āddās* that I had participated in during my research were mixed *āddās* in terms of gender (although the composition of many of the *āddās* were dominantly male, and as the day waned, the number of women participants in most of the *āddās* I participated in gradually dwindled, thereby, pointing towards a gendered temporal access to public *āddā* that I shall discuss later in chapter 5) and some were all-male *āddās*.

Finally, after several months of hanging out with these students in their *āddā* sessions in different places in the university day and night, during which time I collected field notes as a participant observer with prior oral permissions of the students involved, I zeroed in on seventeen

students as potential participants for the study to have individual ethnographic interviews with. I approached each of these seventeen potential participants individually and apprised them about my study, explaining them in as much detail as possible what I expected of them and what they could, in return, expect of me. I told them that I would interview them individually about their *āddā* activities and would ask them about their opinions and sentiments about their *āddā* activities, the response they received about their *āddā* activities from their parents, teachers and other adults in their lives and their sentiments towards such responses, their sentiments for student *āddā* in general and that for the *āddā* activities of other students they knew in the university campus, their life stories and history of *āddā* activities, and any such relevant questions relating to their *āddā* activities or their public life at the university or beyond, as may be deemed worthwhile by me during my conversations with them. I also told them that following the initial interview, which would be audio-taped, there would be follow up interviews, which would also be audio-taped; and that their identities would be protected through pseudonyms in any publications resulting from the study. I explained them their rights, including the right to not answer any question posed to them and/or to opt out of the study at any point, without any explanations whatsoever. I repeated the same information to each of my participants before each interview. I sought their permission to follow them closely and be a part of all their public activities in the university campus, and, if needed, outside the campus too, and to record or take notes, as deemed necessary by me, of their everyday activities, including their *āddā* activities, inside and outside the university campus.

None of the youths I had approached to participate in my study seemed reluctant or averse to the proposal. On the contrary, many seemed excited to tell me all about their *āddā* activities, and the “exciting” new things that they are doing or had planned. However, in course

of time, one of the youths couldn't live up to the required time commitment and eventually dropped out of the study, and another youth – a former classmate of mine and a regular at several *āddās* at the university at the time, left the country before I could formally interview him. Thus, in the end, I was left with fifteen youth participants, aged between 19 and 32 years (see Table 1 below).

Table 1. Demographic information of research participants

Sl. No.	Participant's pseudonym	Age	Sex	Class background	Parents' occupation
	<i>Category: Students & Youths</i>				
1	DOS (former UG & PG student)	30	M	Middle Class	Mother: Homemaker Father: Service ⁷⁸
2	P.G (current PG student)	23	F	Middle Class	Mother: Homemaker Father: Business
3	R.C (current UG student)	19	F	Middle Class	Mother: Homemaker Father: Service
4	K.K (former PG student)	26	F	Middle Class	Mother: Service Father: Service
5	Sane (former UG & PG student)	27	M	Middle Class	Mother: Service Father: Service
6	Piku (former UG student)	23	M	Middle Class	Mother: Deceased Father: Business (Runs a small fix-it shop)
7	Tirtha (non-student)	29	M	Middle Class	Mother: Homemaker Father: Retired pension holder
8	Tiyash (current UG student)	21	F	Middle Class	Mother: Homemaker Father: Deceased
9	Ayesha (non-student)	21	F	Middle Class	Mother: Small Business Father: Service
10	Juri (current PG student)	25	F	Lower Middle Class	Mother: Homemaker Father: Farming
11	S.D (former UG student)	25	M	Middle Class	Mother: Homemaker Father: Acclaimed Surgeon

⁷⁸ 'Service' is a generic term used in India for any desk (clerical) job in an office, whether in the public or the private sectors.

12	Neel (non-student)	29	M	Middle Class	Mother: Homemaker Father: Service
13	Dev (non-student)	21	M	Middle Class	Mother: Homemaker Father: Small Business
14	Piyali (current UG student)	20	F	Middle Class	Mother: School Teacher Father: Service
15	Kamalika (current UG student)	20	F	Middle Class	Mother: Homemaker Father: Govt. Service
	<i>Category: Research Scholars</i>				<i>Parents' occupation</i>
16	K (doctoral student in arts)	31	M	Middle Class	Mother: Homemaker Father: Service
17	S (doctoral student in arts)	32	M	Middle Class	Mother: Homemaker Father: Deceased
18	D (doctoral student in arts)	31	F	Middle Class	Mother: Homemaker Father: Service
19	Joyeeta (doctoral student in science)	26	F	Middle Class	Mother: Homemaker Father: Govt. Service
20	Rohit (doctoral student in science)	27	M	Middle Class	Mother: Homemaker Father: Farmer
	<i>Category: Parents</i>				<i>Occupation</i>
21	Mr. B	-	M	Information not available	Service in Bank
22	Mr. S (along with Mrs. S)	-	M	Information not available	Information not available
23	Mrs. L	44	F	Information not available	Librarian
	<i>Category: Teachers</i>				<i>Occupation</i>
24	Prof. S	42	M	Upper Middle Class	Teaching
25	Prof. S.G	42	F	Upper Middle Class	Teaching/Journalism

Besides the students and youths (including former students and the so-called “outsiders” who never studied in the university, but nevertheless hung out regularly in the university campus), who regularly participated in *āddā* activities in the university campus, I also interviewed (using similar interview protocols) two parents, whose children go to the university

as students, and one parent, whose daughter had just appeared in the entrance examination of the university but whose result had not been declared at the time of the interview, one teacher and a former teacher, who was still associated with the university as a guest faculty member, and five Ph.D. students or research scholars (who are generally considered more teachers than students), aged between 26 and 32 years, who were regulars at *āddā*s in the university campus, in order to seek out any intergenerational differences in how *āddā* is conceptualized by contemporary Bengali people in general; and how adults view *āddā* as practiced by their wards and students. By interviewing students, teachers and parents about their views on *āddā* separately, I hoped to unveil, for the purpose of further analysis, interesting intergenerational differences and cognitive dissonances regarding the value of *āddā* – or the lack of it, particularly since parents and teachers are generally known to be critical of youths' overindulgence in *āddā*.

Two of the three parents whom I had interviewed were recruited rather randomly during the admissions season (late June to early August) of the university in the first year of my field research in 2014. This is the time of the year when throngs of hopeful parents visit the university campus to inquire about their wards' admission prospects and they often speak with existing students in the hope of learning more about the university and its various programs.

It was one such hot afternoon in late June, during the admission season of 2014, when I used to regularly hang out in the university collecting data, that a man, seemingly in his mid-fifties, mistaking me for a student, approached me in the university campus with some queries regarding her daughter's admission in an undergraduate program in the Arts Faculty. I told the man – Mr. B – that I wasn't a student, and directed him to a few students who I knew could help him with his queries. A week or so later, I bumped into Mr. B again in the university. He told me that his daughter had taken the admission test for the program she wished to join and that he had

come to inquire when the results for the same would be published. It was a hot afternoon and Mr. B wanted some iced-tea. So, I took him to a nearby canteen, where we soon started chatting about the university and its various programs, the students and the campus culture, my research at the university, etc. One thing led to another and soon Mr. B and I were having an engaged *āddā* about *āddā*. After a while, I realized that our *āddā* had already unknowingly turned into an informal interview, with me asking Mr. B questions about his opinions on youth *āddā* in general, and about student *āddā* in the university in particular. At that point, I turned on my recording devices, with Mr. B's verbal permission, and whipped out my 'Livescribe' notebook to record his opinions. For the record, I again asked him some of the questions that I had already put to him, and continued from there with the informal interview for another hour or so, which proved quite productive.

The second parent I interviewed – Mr. S – was also recruited during the admission season of 2014, in the month of July. Mr. S, accompanied by Mrs. S, already had a daughter in the university (which, of course, I wasn't aware of until I had spoken to them) and had come to get his second daughter enrolled⁷⁹. The admission process at the university is a lengthy one, involving several phases – to complete all of which usually takes several hours, including wait time. Their younger daughter had gone inside the Dean's office to formalize her enrollment in the university and Mr. and Mrs. S were waiting for her outside under the shade of a tree, when I noticed them. Seeing them waiting for someone, I casually approached them and struck up a conversation. I briefed them both about my research and asked them if I may interview them on record for my research. Both Mr. and Mrs. S agreed and I proceeded to interview them both for

⁷⁹ It turned out that I happened to know their first daughter quite well through DOS, and had even approached her earlier to participate in my study, which she had consented to, but after interviewing Mr. and Mrs. S, I decided to leave both their daughters out of the purview of the study

the next one and a half hour under the shade of the tree. Mr. S turned out to be very friendly and quite sporting; and he had quite a lot to share on the questions I asked them. However, Mrs. S, although she seemed to be listening to everything being said quite attentively, nodding in the affirmative from time to time to the things her husband said, spoke very little herself; and her husband answered most of the questions that I posed to her, while she nodded to indicate that she agreed with what he said.

I knew the third parent, Mrs. L, and her older daughter, who was in 2016 in her 2nd year (sophomore year) at the university, through family connections. The mother, who was less than ten years older to me and was a former student of my mother in the same university, was quite close to me. At the time she was quite troubled about her daughter's over indulgence in *āddā*, despite her good grades, and her “drinking and smoking (marijuana) problem,” as she had put it (personal communication, 2016). On learning about my research, she approached me and volunteered to share her “story” as a parent with me. I interviewed her twice – once, in person in the year 2016, when her older daughter was still a student of the university, and a second time, recently, in early 2018, after I learned that her older daughter has moved to a different state after graduating with a plum job. The second interview was conducted over a long-distance telephone call as I, too, had moved out of West Bengal with a job by then. As with the S family above, I left Mrs. L's girl out of the purview of my study.

Both the teacher and the former teacher (presently married to each other) I interviewed are former undergraduate and graduate students of the university; and both were research scholars in my department during the entire period that I was a student there. Hence, not only did I know them both well, but they both were also my teachers, mentors and friends at the same time, having taught me in class as research scholars and having hung out and partied with me and my

friends after class hours. Naturally, both their names came to my mind first when I decided to interview some teachers for my research. Besides them, I had also approached a third teacher from a neighboring department at the university, and he had consented too, but a formal interview could not take place due to several reasons.

Lastly, the five Ph. D. students or research scholars that I interviewed for the research were all my junior students at the undergraduate and graduate levels in the university and were already known to me before the start of my research. Hence, they all readily agreed to be participants in my study, the soon as I approached them with my proposal. It would have, however, been really interesting, if I could have gotten to interview the research scholar, a year junior to me in the same department, and the teacher friend of mine, who was my classmate at the university, whose mutual Facebook conversation (see Chapter 1) had gotten me interested in this topic in the first place, but it could not happen for several reasons.

Thus, the total number of participants interviewed for the study was 25. This included 15 students and youth, 3 parents, 2 teachers, and 5 PhD students/scholars. However, it should also be noted here that the 15 student and youth participants charted above are only the ones whom I have had a chance to observe in their *āddās* extensively (that is, at least, on more than five different occasions), as well as interview more than once. Besides these 15 student and youth participants, there were many more, whom I had observed in their *āddās* (with their permission, of course), but couldn't get around to interview them or whom I had informally interviewed but couldn't observe in their *āddās*. Particularly, there was one youth whom I had observed in his *āddās* extensively, but could only manage one interview with him due to his time commitments elsewhere. In some ways, these unofficial participants had also contributed much to my understanding of the study and I am thankful to all of them for their individual contributions and

help, but for the sake of parity with the other participants of the study, I could not officially include them in my list of participants.

Data collection

Data collection methods were various including field notes, questionnaires/surveys, consultation of primary and other secondary sources, and interviews (individual and focused groups). I took detailed notes as a participant observer for about nine months. In addition, I conducted in-depth ethnographic interviews of the 15 student/youth participants, along with any necessary follow-up interviews with them initially for clarification. I conducted a second round of follow-up interviews with the participants, after I had transcribed the interviews, completed some data analysis and had obtained a preliminary understanding of the data that I had so far collected. In the event that I wanted more clarification from some of them on their responses to certain questions or needed them to elaborate on some of their responses, I interviewed them a third time. I also interviewed all the five “adult” participants (parents and teachers) at least once; and all interviews were conducted in English and Bengali.

It seemed to me that the data from the two rounds of in-depth ethnographic interviews with the student and youth participants, coupled with my field notes from the many hours of participant observation during my numerous *āddā*-sessions with the students and youths at the university, which continued till early 2017, even after the interviews were all done, were enough to allow me to reach some level of nuanced and sophisticated understanding of the Bengali youths’ *āddā* at this university.

The initial set of interviews were conducted in person during my stay in India in 2014. Most of the second set of follow-up interviews were also conducted in person between late 2015 and mid-to-late 2016; and a few remaining interviews were conducted early in 2017 after I had finished transcribing, translating, and coding the initial set of interviews, and had gained a preliminary understanding of my data. The interviews with the students and youths who hung out at the university, each of which lasted anywhere between 45 and 160 minutes, were conducted in different public places in the university campus as per the convenience of the participants. A few individual interviews were conducted in my mother's official residential quarter in the university campus that I had been living in during the course of my study; one personal interview was conducted on the rooftop of the building that housed my mother's residential quarter in the campus; and only one personal follow-up interview was conducted outside the university campus on the rooftop of an apartment building in South Kolkata, where the participant in question, at the time of the interview, was temporarily sharing an apartment with his girlfriend and a male friend, who owned the apartment.

Apart from the initial and follow-up individual ethnographic interviews with the students and youths who regularly hung out in the university campus, I also conducted two initial focused group interviews in the campus with two mixed groups of day-scholars and two more focused group interviews later in one of the men's hostels in the campus. All of the interviews were audio-taped using multiple recording devices, viz., a semi-professional audio recorder with a noise-canceling recording feature, purchased for the purpose; my iPhone with a lapel microphone attached to the clothing of the interviewee; and my 'Livescribe' digital pen with a built-in microphone and recorder that I also used for taking simultaneous digital and analog notes with during the interviews. All of the interview recordings, as well as the back-ups of the recordings,

were transferred to a secured external hard-disk drive attached to a password protected personal computer for safe storage.

All of the interviews were manually transcribed by me using *Transcribe*, a computer program used for transcribing audio, and thereafter translated (where required) into English by me. The interview transcripts were stored in the same secured location as the interview recordings. After being transcribed and translated, the interview transcripts were thematically coded manually by me.

Additionally, I always kept a notebook with me, wherein I jotted down my thoughts and observation in the form of field notes while conducting interviews or when following-up on interviews, during participant observations and casual discussions with participants. I also jotted down my thoughts and observations while listening to the taped interviews; while preparing transcripts, or translating them; and while reading and analyzing secondary sources. I used special dot-paper notebooks and a 'Livescribe' digital recording pen for taking notes. The pen made immediate digital copies of all the analog notes written by me, which were initially stored in the pen's internal memory and were, later, transferred as PDF files to the same personal computer for secure storage, along with the interview transcripts, with backups in a secure external hard disk drive. Thus, I retained, for further analysis, two copies - analog and digital - of every note that I jotted down during my field research.

I used informal, semi-structured, and open-ended interviews (see Appendix B for sample interview protocols), carried out in a friendly, conversational style, much like an *āddā*, in open public spaces of the interviewees' choice – each of which lasted anywhere between 45 minutes to

about 2 hours and 40 minutes, field-notes from 286 participant observation sessions⁸⁰, with the participants engaged in their *āddā* activities – each of which lasted anywhere between a little over an hour and four to five hours at a stretch, with much of the *āddā* happening in batches, and analysis of secondary sources as my primary research methods.

The interviews helped me to understand the role that *āddā* played in the negotiation of students' cultural identities as Bengali youths and/or as college students, who were yet to be suitably employed. Additionally, the interviews were complemented by short questionnaire surveys with students, not restricted to the students of the university or the participants in the study, for gathering statistical figures and to add to the process of triangulation in data collection. I expected that these questionnaire surveys would reveal patterns in students' conceptualization and practice of *āddā* that, in turn, would help me in framing my questions for the interviews with the participants. With that expectation, the questionnaire survey was mostly done early in the first year of my field study, before the interviews were conducted and, in the majority of the instances, even before the participants for the study were recruited. In some cases, where a participant was identified and recruited comparatively later than the others, I had him or her fill out the questionnaire form before the interview. The questionnaire survey (see sample questionnaire draft in appendix A) was also useful for gathering secondary statistical data like, for example, the average number of hours per day spent in *āddā* by the youths in the survey sample, their age and family income, etc., because such representative numbers do not exist currently. I had also included a question in the questionnaire asking the participant if he or she would be interested in

⁸⁰ There were some sessions that I participated in but didn't take notes

participating in the study further and if so, whether he or she would consent to being interviewed in connection to the study.

DOS, my first participant, who was by nature a great organizer, had all along proved himself invaluable during the data collection phase of my study. I wanted to have the questionnaire circulated among a wider body of students in the university – beyond the students whom, at that point, I had either already recruited or was hoping to recruit for individual interviews, and the students I hung out with as a participant observer. However, I did not quite have that kind of a reach among the students of the university at the time, and that was where DOS stepped in. He not only helped me circulate the questionnaires among the students of the university, whom he knew well, but also, with help from his friends, in two other colleges in the vicinity that are affiliated to the University of Calcutta. And later, he further helped me collect the filled out questionnaires from the students. Again, it was DOS who talked me into accompanying him and a couple of his friends from the university on a three-day trip to Bolpur in late 2014, where the *Shāntiniketan Visyavidyālaya* – a university founded by the Bengali Nobel laureate poet, Rabindranath Tagore on the ideals of an alternative education system is located. Once there, he actively befriended students there, with help from his existing friends among them, and organized several focused group and individual interviews for me with the students there during our three-day stay at Bolpur.

In this endeavor, Professor Debashish Bhattacharya – a professor at *Visva-Bhārati Visyavidyālaya* and a friend of my mother – had also helped. The interviews with the students of *Visva-Bhārati Visyavidyālaya* at *Shāntiniketan* (Bolpur) were conducted using the same protocol that I used for my interviews with the students in my university back home, and were both audio and video taped (with the intention of creating a short documentary film out of the raw footage in

future – again an idea that DOS had suggested). And although, due to the fact that these were some random interviews with a few students and two guards at the *Visva-Bhārati Visyavidyālaya* in Bolpur, where I was unable to follow up on these interviews or study the participants in their *āddā* activities for any considerable duration or even get to know the participants well (practices that are all incongruent with an ethnographic study such as this), I did not admit them as primary data for the study. Yet, as secondary data, these interviews and some of the personal interactions that I had had with the students there in their night-time *āddās*, have helped me immensely with framing my interview questions for the participants in my university back home. In short, I used the secondary interview data collected during my brief stay at Bolpur as a foil against the primary empirical data that I collected at the university in Kolkata that was my research site.

Since, as stated above, an understanding of the historical trajectory of the Bengali *āddā* from 19th century onward was also necessary for understanding the contemporary Bengali students and youths' *āddā*, and since direct observation was not possible in this case, analysis of secondary sources like books, magazines and films was used for the purpose of understanding the cultural history of Bengali *āddā*. These secondary sources included a rich body of literary-personal writings (often in the form of memoirs) on *āddā*, sections of Bengali novels that describe *āddā* as a part of the setting or the milieu of the times in which the novel is set in, scenes from Bengali movies that similarly depict scenes of *āddā* for creating an atmosphere, documentaries on *āddā* like, for instance, *Adda: Calcutta, Kolkata* (2011), newspaper articles and features stories on *āddā* or on related topics, cartoons and blog posts on *āddā* or on Bengali culture, etc., that I came across while conducting my research.

Conclusion

Thus, having described the methodology and the methods employed in seeking answers to my research questions above, the participants of the study, and the site of the study – the university and its different places of *āddā*, I shall, in the next chapter, describe and analyze some of my experiences of *āddā*, both from my childhood and during my field research at the university.

Chapter 4

My experiences of *āddā*.

Introduction

This chapter is largely biographical and describes my personal experiences of *āddā* through vignettes and analysis as a way of making my positionalities in the research study explicit, as also to ease the reader into the major findings of the study in the following chapters by providing relevant background information about my lived-experiences of *āddā* that have, undoubtedly, influenced my methodological decisions and my interpretive stance in the study.

PART I

Early exposure to *āddā*

I had always been interested in *āddā* as far as I can remember. Quite a few major events in my life were also directly or indirectly influenced by my experiences of *āddā*. Until I my thirteenth year, I lived with my mother in a rented apartment in a government housing project known as the ‘Kalindi Housing Estate’ in North Calcutta. The housing estate, which was quite sprawling with seven playgrounds and three large ponds, was my childhood stomping ground that I still look back on fondly. At Kalindi, while everybody knew everybody else, at least by name, kids of different age-groups hung out separately in their own peer-circles, typically segregated by

gender. Our group of friends comprised of roughly 15-20 kids from the housing estate, who were all roughly my age; and barring Manu (see chapter 1), who hung out and played with us from time to time (typically when her father was away), there was no other girl in our play-group. In fact, except for Manu, I never had any girl friends outside of school, and I suppose it was true for all the other boys in our play-group.

While, every evening between 4 to 6 P.M and between 11 A.M and 1 P.M on Sundays and during summer and winter vacations, we, the younger kids of the housing estate, played various outdoor sports and local games like six-a-side street football (soccer), under-arm cricket, field hockey, hide-and-seek (peek-a-boo), catch-me-if-you-can (or, *chonwā-chunwi*), *pittu*, ‘land-and-water’ (or, *kumir-dyāngā*), hop-scotch (or, *ekkā-dokkā*), *dānguli* (or, *gilli-dāndā* in Hindi), *lāttu* (or, battling tops game), and marbles, the older kids of the housing estate – high-school and college-going young men in their late teens and early twenties – sat and gave *āddā* in smaller groups at an observable distance from where we played.

Sometimes there would be brief exchanges between us and the older kids, whom we held in much awe, like when a wayward ball from our game would tumble across to where they would be seated, giving *āddā*, and they would confiscate our ball and would ask us some questions or make us spell some difficult-to-spell words before they would give us our ball back. Perhaps because we were too young then to give *āddā*, the older housing boys’ practice of giving *āddā* till late evenings seemed fascinatingly adult-like to me. The very association of *āddā* to being an adult was what that made *āddā* seem attractive for me. It was like, big boys⁸¹ gave *āddā* and were allowed to be out till late, while kids like us played games and returned home before sundown.

⁸¹ Looking back, I realize that, at the time, I (and perhaps all of us) identified *āddā* with young men because we didn’t see young women around us giving *āddā* publicly or staying out late. Perhaps it took me until I went to college myself to

My first *āddā*

Reaching back into the archives of memory, I recall that I first gave *āddā* with some of the housing-estate kids of my group in the year 1990 or 1991, when I was ten or eleven. It was winter vacation time, when we enjoyed playing mid-day cricket in the mild winter sunshine at a local field on most mornings. However, this particular morning was cloudy and cold after an untimely rain the night before, and the turnout in the field was poor. Six or seven of us boys had gathered in a local playground around noon – about an hour later than usual. Manu – the only girl in our play-group, who not only loved playing cricket with us, but was also the top scorer among us with the bat, was missing; so was Raja – the only one among us who owned the two cricket bats we played with and in whose absence no game of cricket was possible. So the 6 or 7 of us with only a ball and a set of wickets didn't know what to do with the time allotted to us to play. We played catch with the ball for a while but very soon lost interest in it. We, then, tried playing *pittu* for a while, but we were too few in number for the game to become engaging for us. In the end, someone in the group suggested exploring an abandoned (gated) building project nearby.

We had all seen this abandoned half-constructed, roof-less structure, overgrown with moss and foliage from the outside but have never been inside it. The proposal reeked of adventure to our young minds and so we all agreed. But once we climbed over the gate (which was the only real adventure), there wasn't really much to explore inside the partially constructed building. Therefore, once we went over the rather limited area inside and identified the different half-constructed spaces as the intended kitchen, bedroom, bathroom, and living room areas, there

realize that most young women gave *āddā* too, just perhaps always not as publicly as young men did. This pattern was corroborated (as well as challenged) by my study (see chapter 5).

wasn't much left for us to do inside the half-constructed building but to find a dry spot under a partially constructed roof-like structure to sit and talk.

I don't remember much of what we talked about, except how this place was going to be our hideout from then on and how adventurous it felt. I also remember sharing a story I had read about two young boys named Naku and Gama in a forest after a plane crash (Majumdar, 1983). We discussed the story a bit, talking about how it would have been helpful for the boys if they had a gun like Jojo's.

Jojo was one of us present there and he owned an air rifle that his parents allowed him to play with and take out to play without the bullets. We coxed him to get it from his home, which was just a stone's throw away, just to add to our feel of adventurism. When he got the air-rifle, we imagined ourselves as pirates and sang a Tagore song – “*Sankocher biwhalatā nijeri opomān, sankater kolpnāte hoyo nā mriyomān*” [Being bewildered (or consumed) by hesitations is an insult to one's self; do not let yourself be downcast by the thoughts of troubles ahead], which had nothing to do with either pirates or guns, but included a line – “*Dhormo jobe sonkho robe koribe āohbhān, nirob hoye nomro hoye pon koriyo prān*” [when duty calls to the sound of conches, silently and humbly put your life on the line] – that I, at least, connected with at some level and, for some reason, holding the air-rifle in my hands while singing that particular line made it feel more real and gave me goosebumps.

I don't know how it was for the others, but I remember that after I told the others present about how I felt singing that line holding the air-rifle, we sang the song several times over with each of us taking turns in holding the air-rifle in our hands while we sang the song, particularly that stanza about responding to the call of duty. I also remember that before we left for our respective homes, we debated if we should sign a pact with our blood to not disclose the location

of our hideout in this very prominently public unfinished construction project like the Mark Twain's characters Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn did after they witnessed Injun Joe (possibly) murder Doc Robinson in the 10th chapter of Twain's (1881) novel, the *Adventures of Tom Sawyer*.

The above experience may seem juvenile – and we were, indeed, kids then, but looking back on the experience, I see a lot going on there – a lot of literacy connections being made (apart from the obvious ones) and a lot of literate competencies being demonstrated without our realization of them at the time. For instance, the sense of adventure that we experienced in sneaking into the abandoned building project and thinking of it as “our hideout” reflect our understanding and identification of the genre of adventure stories, where hideouts and sneaking into abandoned building abound.

Our identification of our little adventure with the genre of adventure stories led us to narrate and discuss specific adventure stories that we had read or heard, which then led us to a discussion of guns (that it would have been helpful if Naku and Gama had a gun like Jojo's) and that, in turn, led us to the identification of a specific sub-genre of adventure stories – pirate stories (we imagined ourselves as pirates).

And while I cannot be absolutely certain about what was going on with the Tagore song and why it seemed to us to be just the song for the occasion, I suspect it had to do with the fact that the song contains a line that instructs everyone to protect the weak and avenge the wrongdoers and we were a group of young boys, high on a sense of imagined adventure, with an air-rifle without bullets and newly discovered ‘secret’ place to call our hideout.

Moreover, I also think that we performed patriotism through the singing of this particular song in our *āddā* – firstly, because, the rhetoric of the “broader educational force of culture”

(Giroux, 2004a, p.60-61; see chapter 2) teaches everyone of us that carrying out our ethical obligations and moral duties (including, protecting the weak and avenging evil) is a patriotic act; and to put our lives on the line in doing so is supremely patriotic.

Secondly, Rabindranath Tagore, in the book *Geetabitan*, had organized and classified his numerous songs by subject into six *parjāys* (group, order or class) – *Pujā* (offerings), *Swadesh* (Patriotic), *Prem* (Love), *Prokriti* (Nature), *Bichitro* (Amazing) and *Ānushthānik* (Ceremonial) (Ganguly & Biswas, 2008). The particular song in question above belongs in the *Swadesh* (Patriotic) *parjāy*, thereby making it a patriotic song by genre. Of course, none of us could have known this then, but I am guessing that all of us must have heard the song being publicly played on occasions celebratory of the ideas of nation, nationalism and patriotism (like, for instance, on the occasions of Independence Day, Republic Day, Gandhi *Jayanti*, etc) and thus made the connection.

This again goes to show how we, even as children, demonstrated our complex understanding of relationships between ideas (protecting the weak and avenging wrongs as a service to the nation; fulfilling one's ethical responsibilities and moral duties, and putting one's life on the line in doing so as a patriotic act), artefacts (gun) and resources (having a hideout and a gang) and made multiple literacy connections, while giving it a twist of our own (like considering signing a blood pact – not because we had witnessed a murder and feared for our safety, but because we had a hideout for some sort of an imaginary mission to protect⁸²) through our *āddā* in this particular instance. Thus, this also illustrates how *āddā* often has an educative worth – not

⁸² I also think that we wanted to keep our 'hideout' a secret partly also because we realized it as an *āddā*, and knowing that *āddā* was an illicit pleasure for us at our age, we didn't want our parents to find out. This was corroborated by an incident when a few more *āddās* later at the same 'hideout,' a boy whom we had recently brought to the 'hideout,' told his parents, who, then, telephoned some of the other boys' parents and told them. The result was that all of the boys, whose parents received a call, were told to stick to only playing during playtime.

only did we learn from each other through the shared values, opinions, questions and narratives, we also learned and reaffirmed our previous formal and informal learning through the performativity of *āddā*.

This brings us to the question whether or not, the particular incidence narrated above could be termed as *āddā*. As I have endeavored to illustrate in the preceeding chapters, *āddā* is difficult to define owing to its lack of any specific parameters that makes *āddā* interpretive for every group of participants.

Sen (2011) notes that *āddā* is typically defined by participants through “certain indexical references” (p. 527) and through a process of ‘collution’ – “where members of a particular social order cooperate” (p.529). Sen points out that collution is of utmost importance in indexical definition of *āddā* because if all the participants of an *āddā* do not concur (that ‘this’ is what *āddā* is), then indexicality as a way of defining *āddā* does not work. In other words, in Sen’s (2011) observation, participants of an *āddā* often unanimously point to an example of *āddā* in practice (as in, *this* is *āddā*) as a way of defining *āddā*, like two participants in Sen’s (2011) study did:

Certain indexical references are made and understood among adda participants. My two participants in the meta-adda begin their conversation with questions like, “what is adda about?” In response this person gets a reply from one of the participants in the meta-adda who claims that the entire conversation I recorded [is *āddā*]. He says, “This is adda” [emphasis added]. The use of the word ‘this’ is indexical, shows the cultural understanding among the two members... [p.528]

Sen’s (2011) observations are corroborated by my research findings too, wherein most participants attempted to define *āddā* indexically by pointing to their own *āddā*-activities or to the activities at certain iconic places culturally associated with the practice of *āddā* like the Coffee House in College Street (see chapter 5).

On being pressed to define *āddā* non-indexically, the only other parameter that my research participants commonly came up with was that *āddā* involved intellectual discussions (which is again corroborated by a reading of the literature on *āddā*) – which wasn't very helpful either because intellectuality is just as variedly interpreted and understood as *āddā* is for all practical purposes.

However, intellectuality as personal trait is not typically ascribed to children, which might prompt some people to dismiss the above-mentioned instance as *āddā* on account of its perceived non-intellectual juvenileness, just as questions are often raised against women's and lower-class people's *āddā* on account of their intellectual worth (see chapter 5). I, on the other hand, would counter such a hypothetical stance on two grounds: firstly, if the complex literacy competencies demonstrated by us in the incidence narrated above is not intellectual, then I don't know what is; and, secondly, because our juvenile *āddā* was not the least different in form from the acknowledged adult *āddās*, as I shall demonstrate later with vignettes from the *āddās* I observed at the university as a participant-observer. But before that I would like to narrate some more personal *āddā* experiences.

Learning in *āddā* with the slumdogs⁸³

The housing estate that I grew up in, with its mostly middle-class and upper middle-class residents, was flanked by two *bustis* (slums) on either side. The house we lived in then being located on one edge of the housing estate, from where technically one of the two slums began, I

⁸³ Defined by the Macmillan online dictionary as a very poor and underprivileged person, especially a child, who lives in a slum (a poor and crowded area of a city where people live in very bad conditions), the word was popularized by a 2008 (released commercially in 2009) British movie filmed in India.

had a good indirect exposure of the life in the slum. I often had the opportunity of witnessing the slum kids in their various *āddā* activities and games. What I loved about the little of these kids' lives that I could witness, and simultaneously hated about mine, was that, unlike for me, school (if they even went to one) didn't seem to constitute a major, or even an important, part of their lives.

I hated going to school with all my heart. Firstly, I hated waking up early for my morning school (especially during winters). Secondly, I found school mostly boring and did not have many friends in school. I didn't like most of the subjects either (or the teachers who taught them) – for instance, I simply abhorred math and chemistry as I did not understand anything of them; history had too many dates to be memorized and I wasn't particularly good with memorizing; in geography, the Andes and the Alps that we studied did not interest me as I could not relate with either the climate or the culture of the places; in English, the stories were nice but grammar was cumbersome and at the sixth grade, I did not quite follow Tennyson's poetry or Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice* written in a kind of English that I had never encountered outside of the said texts.

So I longed for what then seemed to me as the 'simple life' of the slum kids, where one didn't compulsorily have to go to school and even if they had to, they could go at 11 A.M and be back by 1 P.M to enjoy the rest of the day as one wanted to – climbing trees, swinging from branches, swimming in the local pond or simply hanging out, chatting with friends, playing marbles, shooting catapults and just generally having crazy, fun times with friends throughout the day. In other words, the other primary attraction of *āddā* for me, besides that it symbolized adulthood, was that *āddā* as an activity lacked the rigid structures that school symbolized for me.

Making friends in the *busti*

I first made friends in the slums on the last day of the *Durgā pujo* in our housing estate, in the year 1992, a few months after turning twelve. It was a splendid autumn evening, and with the last few rolls of sticks on the *dhāks* (drums) for the season, the *Durgā* idol was being readied for immersion with some last ceremonial rites being performed. As is customary, the goddess *Durgā*'s weapons, made out of non-biodegradeable tin, had been removed and stowed in a corner of the *mandap*⁸⁴ before the immersion for later disposal or sale. I wasn't aware that the weapons had any resale value for the next year's *pujā*, but wanting one of them as a personal memento, I was hanging around the *mandap* looking for an opportune moment to steal some of them. Truth be told, being allowed on to the *mandap* as a resident kid of the housing estate, I had many opportunities to steal the weapons lying in the corner of the *mandap* but I lacked guts. That's when I met these three boys of approximately my age, from one of the slums, who, not being allowed on to the actual *mandap* or anywhere visibly near it, were surreptitiously hanging around in the shadows behind the *mandap*, looking for an opportunity to steal the weapons just like I was, only except they wanted to make some money by selling off the weapons, as I learned later.

To cut a long story short, with some help from me and using my access to the *mandap* as a housing estate kid, the slum kids managed to steal all of the tin weapons belonging to the *Durgā* idol; and not only did they give me a cut from the loot in the form of a single weapon of my choosing, but, thereafter, they also became my friends. Through these three kids, I got to know other boys from the slums and soon I was hanging out with them (often bunking⁸⁵ school),

⁸⁴ A makeshift place of worship and offering to a deity.

⁸⁵ To bunk school is to skip school; to run away from school. For most upper-middle-class Indian school students, whose movements are typically always closely monitored by adults (parents, teachers, school officials, etc), it is often easier said than done and often require elaborate planning and quite a bit of skill. Although for me, personally, bunking school was

participating in their *āddās* (where, as far as I can remember, we mostly talked about current Hindi films and other practical stuff of little or no consequences to adults like pigeon rearing and natural remedies for exposure to Indian stinging nettles, locally known as *bichuti pātā*), as well as participating in all the other ‘cool’ things they did as a part of their daily living (but were new to me) like going for a swim in the local pond or climbing trees to pick guavas.

Being ostracized by the housing-estate kids

Hanging out with the slumdogs had its costs. I soon realized that my friends from the housing estate – the boys I had my first *āddā* with – were avoiding me. When I confronted some of them on this issue, a few of them told me that their parents had flagged me as a “bad boy” on account of my association with the slum kids and forbade them to associate with me for the fear of them becoming wayward like me. Some of the housing kids even refused to come near me as if like I had been contaminated or something by my exposure to the slum kids. In fact, at the age of twelve, I was actually invited for lunch by one of my friends’ parents, only to be politely asked in my friend’s absence and over cold, leftover mutton and rice, to refrain from contacting him in the future because, he being a bright kid, his parents, I was told, had high hopes from him – which his parents thought was obviously being compromised by his association with me. I was so wounded that even though my friend later apologized to me on his parents’ behalf, I never contacted him again and till date it is a scar that I carry with me.

relatively easier since I commuted to school alone, for many upper-middle-class Indian school students, including many of my school buddies, who were sent to school either in their family vehicles or in school-buses, it wasn't as easy. For instance, a school bus would often pick up a child from his/her doorstep and would deliver him/her straight inside the gated school campus from where getting out before school ends would require climbing trees and jumping over walls, etc.

The above vignette, thus, illustrates the Bengali middle-class parental mindset about miseducation (Dewey, 1938/1997) in *āddā*, particularly in relation to the career goals and social reputation of their male children. Thus, the parents of the housing-estate boys were not only worried about their children's possible miseducation (Dewey, 1938/1997) through *āddā*, but they were particularly worried about how such miseducation might adversely affect their gardes, and, going forward, their possibility of having a desired career as I was told in not as many words by the boy's parents who had invited me to lunch. And, indeed, as my next vignette would illustrate, *āddā* does have both educational and miseducational potentials, but so do many other cultural practices like watching TV or browsing the Internet.

My education and miseducation in *āddās* with the slumdogs

However, in all fairness to the parents of the housing-estate kids, who were paranoid that I might pass on to their kids some of the bad practices (or miseducation) that I might have learned in my *āddās* with the slum kids, I have to admit that I did smoke my first *beedi* at the age of twelve in an *āddā* in the slum; and I have been a smoker since – something that I am not proud of. However, I could have picked up smoking from any number of places – maybe later, if not then – because the majority of the housing-estate kids (who didn't hang out in the slums like me) are also smokers now.

Moreover, besides starting to smoke and bunk school, which could be construed as miseducation (Dewey, 1938/1997) directly related to my participation in *āddās* in the slums, I learned a whole lot of other things too – for instance, at the cost of almost drowning once, I learned to swim (or, at least, to stay afloat long enough to be rescued in the event of an accidental

falling into water). I also learned tricks like how to build a makeshift raft with *kachuripānā* ('common water hyacinth'), how to make whistles out of *bakul* seeds (seeds of medlar), how to identify wild berries that are poisonous, how one should bend one's legs for impact and roll over on the ground to prevent injuries when jumping from a height of over two-stories, how to build and use a catapult – and that guava-tree branches make the best catapults because they are strong yet pliable, or that *thānkuni pātā* or leaves of *Centella asiatica*, when crushed and applied to a wound, helps stop bleeding and is a natural anti-septic: all common indigenous knowledge that my uprooted urban, middle-class upbringing dependent on Western science and medicines did not allow me to learn till then. And even though I would never be quizzed on such knowledge and I would likely never have to put any of it to use, yet, I cannot say that I am any worse off for learning these things than not learning them.

However, the most important lesson that I took away from all of this was one in humanity: that the people who earn less than us and live in slums – those who work for us in our homes as domestic labours or as manual labours in far-away factories, aren't particularly any different from us; that they are not particularly any better, worse, lazier, more wayward or less educated than the rest of us. Thanks to this lesson, till this date, despite some awkward moments from time to time resulting from class differences, I still make friends relatively easily among the working class – for instance, drivers, janitors and security personnel working in the university I guest-teach in currently or the local fruit-seller, a rikshaw-puller, a garage owner, and an iron-smith in my present neighbourhood in Kolkata.

Experiencing *āddā* at the university as an outsider and as an insider.

In 1993, when I was thirteen, my mother took up a teaching position in a university in South Calcutta. By this time, my reputation in my old neighborhood had been irreparably sullied as the boy who went about giving *āddā* in the slums and I was only hanging out with the slum kids, partly by choice and partly out of compulsion as the housing-estate kids refused to associate with me, at least publicly. So in the same year we moved to a neighborhood near the university that would later become my *alma mater* and my research site.

I first witnessed student *āddā* in the university as a seventh-grade student, when I would visit my mother in the university. Music always seemed to be a big part of the *āddā* culture of the university. The mental image that I retain from those early days of witnessing student *āddā* at the university is small groups of student scattered throughout the campus – seated on the ground, on steps leading to buildings, on benches and plastic chairs in front of the several canteens, chatting, arguing, singing, or strumming on guitars or ukuleles. I was fascinated and decided immediately that I had to study here – for nothing else, but unrestricted access to the campus *āddās*. Twenty-one years later, when I returned to the campus as a researcher of student *āddās*, many of the students I spoke to told me that they chose the university for the very same reasons as I did so many years ago.

In the year 2000, having lived my dream, I formally joined the university as a student and went there for five consecutive years for both my graduation and post-graduation degrees. Since 2001, when my mother was allotted a quarter inside the university campus, I started living in the campus and lived there continuously till 2006, when I moved away with a job and later relocated to the US in 2008. In the period between 2000 and 2006, I participated in innumerable *āddās* in

the university campus, which I shall not elaborate on here because I have written about some of my experiences from this period elsewhere (see Dutta, 2015a).

When I returned as a researcher in November, 2013 and started my fieldwork in 2014, my mother still had the quarter although she lived in an apartment purchased by her elsewhere. For the first two years of my field-research from 2014 till 2016, which is when my mother retired and had to rescind the quarter, I lived and worked from this quarter inside the university.

PART II

Experiences of campus *āddā* as a researcher

In an attempt to give a low down on the campus *āddās* in the university where I carried out my research between 2014 and 2017, in this section of the chapter, I shall provide three vignettes from the pages of my research notebook of *āddās* that I witnessed as a participant-observer.

Vignette 1: Intertextuality (UG Arts building, August 28, 2014)

At 3:30 P.M today I was seated on the ‘ledge’ (the seat of a balcony wall) at the 2nd floor of the UG Arts building, where a 2nd year (sophomore) class of Comparative Literature was currently underway. The other two classrooms on the floor were empty. Three heterosexual couples were seated a few steps apart on the back stairwell at the far end of the rectangular wing of the building that housed the department of Comparative Literature. The back stairwell, where

the couples were seated, is popularly known among the students as the ‘stairway to heaven’ after a 1971 Led Zeppelin song by the same name because the stairwell was famous as a place where students often ‘cosied up’ to their partners in the evenings.

To my left, with his back against the wall between the two vacant classrooms, sat UD, scribbling something in a notebook, while he waited for his girlfriend, Tiyaash, to finish her class next door. I, too, was waiting for the class to get over and for the *āddā* that I was there to observe to begin.

Twenty-five minutes later, at 3:55 PM, the class finally got over and the students started tumbling out of the classroom. There was some commotion for a little while as the students spoke to each other before dispersing. Some of the students went home and some went elsewhere, while the remaining six students (two young men – Diptanu and Subho; and four young women – Tiyaash, Piyaali, Kamalika and Pooja) gathered around UD on the floor to begin their evening *āddā* for the day that would continue uninterrupted till 8 P.M, when the guards would arrive like every other day to shoo us out of the building. I also climbed down from my seat on the ledge of the balcony with my notebook, my recorder and a pen in my hand to join the students in their *āddā*. The time was 4:15 by my wristwatch and we were eight of us altogether. I handed some cash for a round of tea and two packets of cigarette for everyone to the young woman (Pooja) seated next to me, who ran downstairs to get the cigarettes and to ask the *chāiwallā* at the gate to bring us some tea, while the rest of us started the *āddā*.

“I have written a new play based partly on *Rhinocéros*⁸⁶ and partly on *Tasher Desh*.⁸⁷”

Announced UD.

Kewl [cool, pronounced with an affected accent]

Hebby toh [Heavy - as in great, awesome]

Shonā [Read it out]

Māmā! [Literally, maternal uncle in Bengali, but as a slang it means cool]

Por, por [Read (it), read (it)]

Thus, came the response from all sides.

[All the students in this particular group had some interest in playacting and thus, often discussed plays and theatre, as also films, in their *āddās*. I have noticed that students often, though not always, form *āddās* around some common interests like music, playacting, card-playing, politics, etc. This observation is also reflected in the literature on *āddā*, particularly in the memoirs, for instance, Bose (2010) and Chattopadhyay (2010) both mention that *āddās* are typically based on common interests and similarity of thoughts and values. This, of course, does not mean that there aren't differences of opinion in *āddās*, nor that the discussions in a particular *āddā* are always centered around the common interest of the group, as the rest of this vignette shall illustrate.]

UD cleared his throat, opened the notebook in his hand at a particular page and started reading out from it. The reading was interrupted approximately twenty minutes in, when Shyamal

⁸⁶ A 1959 French play by the Romanian-French playwright, Eugène Ionesco, that was also a curricular text, at least, in the undergraduate course in Comparative Literature in the university.

⁸⁷ A 1933 Bengali dance-drama written by Rabindranath Tagore, that was also a curricular text in the undergraduate course in Bangla Literature in the university, of which UD was a student.

(the guy who had a tea stall just outside the university gate) brought us our tea. Immediately, the discussion shifted to other topics (like tea) and small talk.

“*Lebu bolish ni, bnārā?* [Did you not ask him (Shyamal) for lemon (tea), you dick?]

Said Tiyaash to Pooja, taking a sip from the small teaglass in her hand.

“*Nā, lāl bolechi. Jānbo ki kore, bokāchodā⁸⁸, tui lebu khābi? Bolechili?* [No, I had asked him for red (black tea). How would I know, asshole, that you wanted lemon (tea)? Did you tell me (before I went to order)?]” Pooja retorted.

“But *āmi toh lebu-i khāi!* [But I only drink lemon (tea)!]” Tiyaash tried to argue feebly.

At this point, the discussion had completely shifted to the topic of tea:

Diptanu: *Shyāmal er ei bāl⁸⁹ er chā. Chā e jol meshāy nā jol e chā meshāy?* [This fucking tea of Shyamal’s. Does he mix water in his tea or tea in water?⁹⁰]

Subho (to Diptanu): *Jol ei chā meshāy, gāndu⁹¹* [It is tea that is typically mixed in water, idiot – what he means is tea leaves (or tea bags) are dropped in water]

Kamalika (to Subho): *Bāl, otā ke meshāno bole nā; chā toh solid. Dudh e jol meshāy (bā Shyāmal hole jol e dud)* [Asshole, it’s not called mixing; tea (leaves) are solid. You mix water in milk (or, in the case of Shyamal, milk in water)]

Subho (to Kamalika): *Tui bāl, keno jol e chini meshāy nā? Chini o toh solid.* [You are the asshole; why don’t we mix sugar in water? Sugar is also solid.]

⁸⁸ This Bengali profane word is often literally translated by young people as “foolish fucker” (*bokā* = foolish; *chodā* = fucker) and is commonly used in almost every context, much like the word “fucking” is used in English. However, ‘foolish fucker’ does not linguistically make sense. Moreover, the word *choda* is likely of Hindi origin, where *chodna* (v) means ‘to fuck.’ I am of the opinion that *bokāchodā* is likely a contraction of “*bāhu ka chodā*,” which, in Hindi, would mean someone who gets fucked by his wife, instead of the other way round. In other words, *bāhu kā chodā* (or *bokāchodā*) means a man who is not ‘man’ enough. Therefore, in this text, I have roughly translated *bokāchodā* mostly as ‘asshole.’

⁸⁹ The word originally in the source language, Hindi, simply means hair or fur (for animals). Borrowed from Hindi, in the Bengali context it is considered a profanity and literally means pubic hair. As such, metaphorically the word is used in Bengali context as a profane adjective (sometimes also as a noun) for someone or something who/that is rotten, bad, terrible or generally below expectation. For the sake of simplicity, I have translated the word in this text as ‘fucking,’ despite the wide range of meanings of the word in English, as the word ‘fucking,’ among other things, is also sometimes used to describe something that is not good enough for one’s liking. When used as a noun for a person, I have translated it as ‘asshole’ – again, for convenience’s sake.

⁹⁰ The question, here, is obviously rhetorical. Such type of questions is a common rhetorical expression in Bengali.

⁹¹ A profane word, which means idiot or stupid.

Piyali (to Subho): *Jol e abār ke chini meshāy?* [Who mixes sugar in water?]

Subho (to Piyali): *Oi ār ki, keu jodi loo lāgle nun-chini'r jol khāy nā?* Electorite *er* substitute. [Oh, you know! When someone's caught in a loo⁹², don't they drink water mixed with salt and sugar as a substitute for electorites?]

UD (to Subho): Electorite *noy re, bāl*. Electral. [It's not electorite, asshole. Electral⁹³]

Subho (to UD): *Oi holo. Jāhā bāhānno*⁹⁴ – [The same thing.]

UD: Technically, *kintu*, there's a difference. *Jol e nun, chini meshe; chā pātā kintu meshe nā* – [Technically, however, there's a difference. Salt and sugar mix (dissolve) in water, but tea leaves don't –]

Piyali: *Chā pātā! Shyāmōl nāki chā pātā byābohār korbe. Gunro bol*. [Tea leaves! You think Shyamal uses tea leaves? More like (tea) dust]⁹⁵

UD (to Piyali): *Oi holo, pātā, gunro jāihok setā jol e meshe nā. Tāi jonnyo chā chānkte hoy*. Ar there's a difference between *chā* and *chā pātā*. [It's the same thing; leaves or dust – they don't mix (dissolve) in water. Which is why we filter it through a sieve. Besides, there's a difference between tea (the beverage) and tea leaves (the ingredient)].

Piyali (to UD): *Gunro!* [(tea) dust]

UD (to Piyali): *Bāl, bokāchodā!* [Profanities addressed at Piyali]

Piyali: Ha ha ha [laughs out loud]

Pooja: Actually, *āmrā sobāi i bhul bolchi kintu; otā meshāno hobe nā – jhālmuri meshāy kimbā dudh e jol meshāy* – mixing – *kintu chini jol e* – I think *shobdo tā golāno hobe – kimbā ghāntā*⁹⁶. [Actually, we are all wrong; it's not mixing really]

⁹² The Loo is a strong, dusty, gusty, hot and dry summer wind from the west which blows over the western Indo-Gangetic Plain region of North India and Pakistan. It is especially strong in the months of May and June. Due to its very high temperatures, exposure to it often leads to fatal heatstrokes. ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Loo_\(wind\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Loo_(wind))).

⁹³ Brand name of a popular ORS (Oral Rehydration Salts) available in India.

⁹⁴ An incomplete reference to a popular Bengali adage – *jāhā bāhānno, tāhāi tippānno*, which can be best translated into English as the popular phrase – “the same difference.” Literally, though, the Bengali adage means 52 (the number) is the same as 53 (the number).

⁹⁵ Tea leaves produce superior quality tea, and are way more expensive than tea dust (the residual dust collected from the sorting of tea leaves), which is what street-side tea vendors like Shyāmāl use to cut down on cost and to keep the price of their tea low. To give a rough comparison, tea dust typically cost less than INR 100 (\$1.44) per KG as opposed to typically over INR 1000 (\$14.36) for a KG of tea leaves; and street-side vendors like Shyamāl typically charge customers INR 5 (\$0.07) for a cup of tea as opposed to roughly INR 90 (\$1.29) for a cup of tea in a restaurant.

⁹⁶ The Bengali word literally means to *mélange* or to mix, but metaphorically the word has another meaning – to confuse or to be confused, which is why, I think, Diptanu was puzzled in the next line about the use of the word in this context [i.e., while Pooja meant it literally, Diptanu perhaps understood it metaphorically, thereby causing confusion for Diptanu].

– we mix jhalmuri⁹⁷ or we mix water in milk – mixing – but sugar in water – I think the word is dissolving – or *mélange*, maybe.

Diptanu: *Dher, ghāntā ki kore hobe?* [Come on, how could it be *mélange*/confused? (see footnote #105)]

Tiyash: *Uff! Torā chup korbi?* [Would you guys stop?]

Piyali: But she has a point though. *Chā ei jol meshāy borong* [Rather, water is mixed with tea].

Tiyash: *Thām nā, joto fāltu* – [Stop it. All rubbish –]

Diptanu (to Tiyash): *But etāi toh āddā* – Senior *er* topic [But this is *āddā* – Senior’s (Senior is my nickname in the university) topic]

R.D (to Diptanu): What is (*āddā*)?

Diptanu (to me): *Ei je* meaningless *kothā bārtā*. [All this meaningless talking]

R.D (to Diptanu): Meaningless?

Diptanu (to me): Meaningless mane, not meaningless but *oi ār ki – okājer kothā*. [Meaningless as in, not meaningless but you know – unproductive talk]

Pooja: *Sārādīn ki, bāl, sudhu kājer kothāi bolbo?* [Should we fucking just talk productive throughout the day or what?]

Tiyash: *Āmrā ār kājer kothā kototuku boli?* [We don’t talk productive much anyways, do we now?]

(Everybody laughs)

Kamalika: Senior *kintu* note *niyei jācche* continuously, *khosh khosh kore*. Senior, *chā khāo*. [But look, Senior is continuously taking copious notes. Senior, have your tea]

Tiyash: Research, *bhāi*. [It’s called research, bro]

R.D: *Ekdōm*. [Exactly]

⁹⁷ Puffed rice mixed with spices and other ingredients – a typical street-food, consumed mainly as a snack.

Subho: Senior, *tumi ei idea tā pele ki kore? Etā ki tumi nijei beheccho?* [Senior, how did you arrive at this (research) idea (of studying āddā)? Did you choose it yourself?]

UD (sarcastically): *Nā, USA te Ritam dā ke bole debe āddā niye kāj korte* – [Like they would ask Ritam da to work on āddā in USA]⁹⁸

Subho: *Boltei pāre, okhāne ki Bāngālī professor nei?* [Why not? Aren't there any Bengali professors (in USA)?]

Kamalika (to Pooja): *=Ektā cigarette de nā.* [Give me a cigarette, please.]

Tiyash: *=Chār nā, nātok tā shunbo. UD por nā.* [Leave it! I want to hear the script. UD, why don't you read?]

UD: *Hyā, dnārā chā tā kheyē nei.* [Yes. Let me just finish my tea]

Piyali: Ha ha, *jol hoye gecche.* [Ha ha, it has turned into water (meaning, it has turned cold)]⁹⁹

Tiyash: *Lāl jol* [Red water (alcohol)]¹⁰⁰

(Everybody laughs)

Piyali: *Sotti māiri! Anekdin boshā hoy nā.* Senior, Monk *khāwāo nā?* [Really! It has been so long (since we drank). Senior, why don't you treat us to (Old) Monk (popular brand of rum)?]

R.D: *Ājke, ekhon?* [What, now?]

Piyali: *Kālke, kālke?* [Tomorrow?]

R.D: *Ācchā, se dekhā jābe.* UD, *porbi?* [Okay, we will see about that. UD, are you going to read?]

UD: *Hyā, hyā.* [Yes, yes]

⁹⁸ The underlying assumption here being, none but the Bengalis understand what *āddā* truly is. This is also roughly the opinion expressed by Bose (2010).

⁹⁹ The Bengali expression for edibles, especially hot beverages, turning cold is to say that it has turned into water as water is typically conceptualised as a cold beverage.

¹⁰⁰ The joke here is that in Bengali “*lāl jol*” (literally, red water) is a veiled reference to alcohol due to its reddish hue and black tea (tea without milk) is also commonly referred to as “*lāl chā*” (literally, red tea), again due to its reddish hue. Therefore, when red (black) tea (“*lāl chā*”) turns cold (i.e., turns into water as per the common Bengali expression), it becomes red water or “*lāl jol*” (alcohol).

Tiyash: Dialogue *gulo kintu, bhāi, āro* polished *hoyā dorkār*. [The dialogues need to be more polished, bro]

UD: *Ārre, etā* first draft. *Ekhono ānek kāj bāki*. Sets *gulo* conceptualize *korte hobe* – *Chanchal, khānkir chele tā kothāy, bokāchodā?* [Oh, this is just a first draft. A lot of work is still needed (on this). The sets need to be conceptualized too – Where’s that fucking son of a bitch, Chanchal?]

Tiyash: Class *kore ni. Dekh hoyto* A. Lal *er sāthe hyājācche*. A. Lal *er ghorer dulāl!!* [He didn’t attend the class. Maybe he is just talking shit with (Prof.) A. Lal again, being (Prof.) A. Lal’s pet, that he is.]¹⁰¹

(People laugh)

Tiyash: Get it? *Ālāl er ghorer dulāl?* [Get it? Alal er ghorer dulal (the name of an early Bengali novel, published in 1857; see footnote 110)?]

UD: *Hyā re, bnārā, oto gāndu noi keu āmrā* [Yes, dickhead, we aren’t quite that stupid]

Diptanu (to Tiyash): *Chorom!* [It (Tiyash’s joke) is awesome!]

Tiyash: *Ārre jonotā hebby gāndu. Birokto lāge. Māne*, joke *bole bujhiye dewār moton painful kichu hoy nā* simply. The other day, *āmi ektā joke bollām – māl gulo, māne ki bolbo* – I was like – [What can I say? People, generally, are very stupid. It’s irritating, actually. I mean, simply, nothing could be more painful than having to explain a joke that you’ve just cracked. The other day, I shared a joke – and those idiots were like – what can I say – I was like –]

UD (Sarcastically): *Bujhechi, bujhechi tui hebby āntel joke mārish, ei toh. Omni bār kheye gāche uthe porecche*. [Oh, we got it. What you’re trying to say is that you crack super intellectual jokes (that people don’t get), aren’t you? Our appreciation (of her A. Lal joke) got to her head.]

¹⁰¹ Prof. A. Lal is a noted scholar and theatre critic, who teaches Drama in the Department of English in the university. He also works closely with the students on many theatrical productions both inside and outside the university. As such students interested in drama are often found lounging in his office room (*ghar*). Tiyash claims that Chanchal is a *dulāl* (literally a son, but the word also implies a loved one or a pet) of Prof. A. Lal and is likely to be found in the professor’s room (*ghar*) when he is not to be found in class or in *āddā*. As such, Tiyash calls him “A. Lal *er ghorer dulāl*” or the pet [student of A. Lal], who is always to be found in A. Lal’s room [Literally, “the pet of A. Lal’s room”]. However, there’s a clever pun here as A. Lal sounds similar to the Bengali word, *ālāl*, which means a rich person. Most of the Bengali words used here also have other meanings too. For instance, *ghar*, besides a room, can also mean family or lineage and *dulāl*, as mentioned before, also means son or boy. Therefore, the sentence – A. Lal *er ghorer dulāl* (or, the pet in A. Lal’s room), sounds similar to *Ālāl er ghorer dulāl* (or, a rich man’s boy), which is the name of an 1857 Bengali novel by Peary Chand Mitra (pen name: Tekchand Thakur) that is an assigned reading in the undergraduate course in Comparative Literature in the university.

Tiyash (in mock anger): *Bokāchodā! Tumi bāler nātok lekho, bujhecho? Etokekho toh chā niye bhānt*¹⁰² *khānā tumi-i mārccchile – sonā!* [Asshole! You write shitty plays; do you understand? All this is while, it was you who was giving us bullshit lectures about tea – Okay, read now]¹⁰³

R.D (to Tiyash): Ha ha ha. But it was a great example of intertextuality

Tiyash (to R.D): *Setā ābār ki bāl?* [now what's that, you asshole? Or, what the fuck is that now?]¹⁰⁴

UD (to Tiyash): Intertextuality *jānish nā*, CL *porchish?* *Ār Senior ke bāl bolchish?* [You don't know what intertextuality is and you call yourself a student of CL (Comparative Literature)? And you say, Senior is the asshole here?]¹⁰⁵

Tiyash: *Ārre*, Senior *toh* darling [Oh, come on, Senior is a darling]¹⁰⁶

R.D: Intertextuality is like references to other texts within –

Diptanu: =*Māne* text *er bhetore* text [Meaning a text within a text]

R.D: Not exactly. What you mean is a story within a story structure –

Kamalika: =Yes, like Russian dolls

R.D: Exactly. Intertextuality is, on the other hand –

Tiyash: *Māne ektā* text *er bhetore ektā onyo* text *ke refer korā hocche* to make a point. [It means a particular text being referred within another text in order to make a point]

UD: =*Hyā* [yes]. Or to extend the story or provide a context

Tiyash: =Without actually narrating the entire context *jemon* Tennyson *er* Ulyssys *kobitā tā* refers to the Battle of Troy and Odysseus' journey back home –

¹⁰² A Bengali slang for statements or beliefs that are false, insincere, jocular or does not make sense. I have roughly translated it as bullshit.

¹⁰³ The implication here is that UD had cut Tiyash short on her story about how people often don't get her jokes because he was getting impatient to read out the rest of his play. Therefore, Tiyash reminded him that for so long he himself was wasting time by giving bullshit lectures about tea.

¹⁰⁴ This sentence, depending on the intended punctuation, which wasn't quite obvious in this case, could be translated either way.

¹⁰⁵ UD's response suggests that he interpreted Tiyash's previous comment to mean that she was referring to me as an asshole (even if, jokingly).

¹⁰⁶ Tiyash's response, on the other hand suggest: a) she did refer to me as an asshole jokingly, but only because she loved me and knew I wouldn't mind or b) she did not use the word *bāl* to refer to me, but to the concept of 'intertextuality,' and UD interpreted her sentence incorrectly.

[Without actually narrating the entire context like (Alfred) Tennyson's poem, Ulysses refers to the Battle of Troy and Odysseus' journey back home –]

Pooja: =Iliad and Odyssey

R.D (to Tiyaash): =Exactly! *Ei toh bujhish toh* [Exactly! You do understand (what intertextuality is)]

Tiyaash: =Without knowing the back story, *pāthok puro golpo tā dhorte pārbe nā* [Without knowing the back story, the reader won't understand the story in its context]

R.D: Yes

Kamalika: =Yes, yes

Tiyaash: It would be just another story of a bunch of sailors

Kamalika: Just another story of sea travel

Piyali: *Kintu etā ke ki text bolbo? Māne toh text māne toh jā pāth korā hoy* [But can we call this (Tiyaash's A. Lal joke) a text? I mean a text is something that is read]

UD: *Hyā*, but *pāth māne toh pāth pāth noy – pāth māne* – [Yes, but reading does not mean 'reading' reading (reading does not mean literally reading) – reading means –]

R.D: =Interpretation

UD: *Hyā*, interpret *korā – setā ki torā ki suneo interpret korish nā? Māne ei je āmi porcchi nātok tā* – [yes, to interpret – don't we also interpret when we listen to something? I mean, take for example, this play that I was reading out to you all –]

Tiyaash: Oral tradition

Kamalika: Oral text

UD: Exactly, oral text. *Etāo toh setāi* – oral text [Exactly, oral text. This (Tiyaash's A. Lal joke or UD's reading from his play) is no different – (it's also an oral text)]

Subho (impatiently): *Ācchā, ebār nātok tāy ferā jāk?* [Alright, can we now return to the play?]

UD: *Hyā, koto dur porechilām?* [Yes, how far had I read?]

Vignette 2: An evening spent in campus *āddā* (Parking Lot, January 17, 2015)

This evening I met ‘the Swan’ (a name by which this colorful former classmate of mine was popularly known among the students in the campus at the time) in front of Milan's canteen in the university around 5:30. He told me about his dilemma of being torn in his affection between two girls, one of whom is an undergraduate 2nd year student of Comparative Literature in the university by the name Tiyaash. As we walked towards Gate 4 of the university together, we saw Tiyaash seated with her boyfriend, UD, and two others, who seemed to be students, at the round seating area (known as 'bedi') in front of the UG Arts building. The Swan and Tiyaash spoke briefly, before he left. Before leaving, he asked Tiyaash to swing by the 'Viewpoint,' where, he said, he and some others were planning on jamming. I decided to stay for a while. I went and sat next to UD, who was dressed in a *punjābi* (a traditional, long *kurtā*-type top worn by men) and a pair of denims, with a *chādar* (a long piece of cloth) wrapped around his upper torso. He had some stapled sheets of printed pages in his hand and told me that it was a script for a play that they were preparing for a departmental event, which hoped to be able to stage at a later date for a wider audience in one of the university auditoriums. Tiyaash was smoking a cigarette and the guy seated next to her was having a conversation with the girl seated across from her. All of a sudden, Tiyaash broke out into a folk song. She has a beautiful husky voice. She sang a few lines of the song, then stopped and said something that I didn't really catch about what made her think of that particular song to her friend seated next to her, before resuming singing again. Her singing was interrupted twice as two different groups of students passing by stopped to have a conversation

with people seated at the bedi. But eventually small talks gave way to silence as Tiyash resumed her singing and sang one song after another – baul, jhumur, Lalon geeti, adhunik, and Rabindrasangeet – egged on and encouraged by the little group of listeners, who also made several requests for songs of their likings. In the mean time, the little group had grown in strength – RBC, a professor in the English department had joined the audience and sat beside Tiyash, listening to her quietly. Passers by occasionally paused to hear Tiyash sing part of a song before going on their ways. Some waited until she finished the current song. One of the girls in the audience, who was later introduced to me as Torsa, a UG 1 student, requested Tiyash to sing a couple of songs the lyrics of which she didn't know fully. UD helped her with the lyrics whenever she stumbled. At one point, UD asked her to sing a song written by him and set to music by her. While Tiyash looked in her smart phone for the lyrics, UD too searched for the lyrics in his phone. After finding the lyrics in her phone and singing the song, Tiyash narrated how, one evening, UD had written the song spontaneously in under 20 minutes and how she having read it, immediately knew what the tune should be.

It was all in all a musical evening. As Tiyash sang, Torsa and the other guy joined in from time to time. Soon a group of students – a young woman and two young men – arrived. They seemed to be friends with the students seated at the bedi. As soon as this new group arrived, the students at the bedi, particularly Tiyash, grabbed hold of the young woman, whom they called Sruti, and dragging her towards the bedi, insisted that she sang a few songs. It appeared from what they said that Sruti was a particularly excellent singer and everybody wanted to hear her sing. Sruti humbly fended off the requests for a while but eventually relented. She was indeed an excellent singer and sang quite a few folk songs and Rabindrasangeet with Tiyash joining in with her on some songs. Thereafter, Tiyash and Sruti sang alternatively and sometimes together, with

some of the others joining in occasionally. At one point, while singing what appeared to be a particularly difficult song, Tiyaash paused where the song takes a very high scale, and looking at looked at Sruti, said to her: "*bokāchodā, āmi ki etā ekā tulbo nāki?*" [Asshole, do you want me to sing this alone?]. Hearing which, Sruti joined in immediately. One of the guys who had arrived with Sruti also sang some beautiful songs, one of which was a song by Kabir Suman that seemed to be a particular favorite with the audience. After the song, the group briefly talked about Kabir Suman's songs and UD spoke about a student (who was not present) who was a huge fan of Kabir Suman. In the midst of all this, RBC had quietly left and was replaced by the Swan, who had returned shortly after Sruti and her friends arrived. As he now sat quietly at the spot next to Tiyaash, I could faintly smell alcohol on his breath.

Shortly afterwards, a young woman, who seemed quite high, and was seated perched on the railing a short way from us suddenly blacked out and fell unconscious on the ground like a log. Men and women (including all of us seated on the *bedi*) rushed in from every direction and gathered around her; and that was the end of that particular *āddā* for the night. While I moved on to a different *āddā* at the parking lot, UD left for home to study for his final exam of the semester next morning, and Tiyaash and the Swan conversed softly amongst themselves at the *bedi*, where another group of youths, comprising of male and female students, ex-students, research students and non-students, had, by this time, replaced the earlier group of students at the *bedi*. I glanced at my watch. It was 8:30. An hour later I saw the Swan walk away with Tiyaash towards the gate of the university. The *āddās* at the parking lot was in full swing by then and it was here that the Swan returned 15 minutes later, having seen Tiyaash off. He was grinning from ear to ear. "We kissed!" He announced to me.

There were five different groups of young men and women, comprising of students and ex-students, clustered at different parts of the parking lot. As I stepped onto the parking lot, I saw a mixed-gender group of four ex-students and research scholars lounging on the stoop-like structure under the first tree to my right, giving *āddā* and smoking reefers. One research scholar, who was also an artist was doodling in his sketchbook, seemingly oblivious to his surroundings. Seeing me, another research scholar waved and I waved back, but I didn't join their *āddā* because my relationship with one of the ex-students in the group was a little strained.

On the stoop under the next tree sat a group of five young men, of whom two were students of the university and three were regulars at *āddās* in the campus, but didn't go here as students, drinking rum out of an empty plastic bottle of packaged water. I went and hung out with them for a little while. They were primarily discussing the upcoming 5th season of the popular TV series – Game of Thrones, slated to be premiered in April. Since, I never watched GOT, I couldn't well follow their discussions and soon left, looking for a different *āddā* to join.

Skiping a tree from them, on the stoops under two trees sat a group of seven young men (students and ex-students) drinking rum facing each other. Music blared from one of their laptops. On top of their music I could hear them debating about Chelsea and Manchester United. To the left of this group, on the ground sat a large group of sixteen students and non-students, of whom three were young women, smoking pot. I noticed the young woman who had blacked out earlier seated on the ground, a few meters away, leaning against a tree with her legs stretched out in front of her, while her girlfriend tended her.

The last group of six students sat in a rough circle on the ground at the centre of the parking lot. Four of them, three boys and a girl, were playing 29 (card game), while the other two, both boys, squatted next to the girl, pouring over her hand. They both watched her play and

ocassionally suggested her which card to play. Ocassionally, I noticed one of the two boys prevent her from playing an apparently wrong card, playing the right card for her himself instead. There were another three or four young men present at the parking lot, including myself and the Swan, who roamed about from group to group.

At around quarter to ten, four security guards, led by the head *dārowān* (gatekeeper or security guard), Singh *ji*, arrived and asked the students to leave. Most of the students simply got up and obediently stepped out of the perimeter of the parking lot and stood by the railing of the pond, less than a metre away from the parking lot, waiting for the guards to perform their duty and leave. One research scholar, who had arrived just a few minutes before the guards, and was hanging out with the first group of ex-students and research scholars when the guards arrived and ordered everyone to leave, refused to budge. "*Etā ĀMĀR UNIVERSITY, ĀMI JĀBO NĀ*" [this is MY UNIVERSITY; I WON'T LEAVE], he told the guards loudly enough for everyone present to hear. Being a former student of the university for five years (and, thereafter, a current research scholar for over two years), during which time he was also a prominent student leader, he knew all the guards personally (and vice-versa) and was, in fact, quite pally with some of them. Therefore, it wasn't really a confrontational situation, yet his words seemed to have a certain edge.

To lighten the situation, I joked about Singh *ji*¹⁰⁷, even in his old age, being strong enough to carry him (the research scholar, who was quite heavily built) off on his shoulders. There were some more jocular exchanges between the youths and the guards, but the guards still insisted that we left. One of the younger guards put his arm around my shoulders in a confidential

¹⁰⁷ An expression denoting respect.

manner, and lowering his voice slightly, asked me to convince the youth to clear out from the place momentarily – until they (the guards) left, having officially done their job. "*Āpni eder bolun; āmrā chole jāi, tārpōr āpnārā eshe bosun nā*" [tell them; let us go away and then you can come back again, no problem], he said to me.

Finally, KJ, the dissenting research scholar, urged on by the other youths waiting to return to their spots after the the guards left, partially relented by agreeing to go pee behind the bushes at the far end of the parking lot, next to the UG Arts building. His logic being that by doing so he would have (almost) effectively done the guards' bidding of clearing out of the place, and the guards could leave having done their job of vacating the students from the parking lot; but he was adamant on not stepping out of the perimeter of the parking lot. As we both went to pee at the corner of the parking lot, the guards left and the students returned. Soon the *āddās* were back in full swing again, as were the drinking and smoking and the songs and music.

Having called it a night around 10:30 P.M., when I was about to kick-start my motorbike for the short ride back home, another research scholar and a former student of Comparative Literature came up to me for a last brief chat. He was reeling under the influence of alcohol and I had to hold him by his arm to keep him from swaying. As we talked, he poured forth his frustrations about the state of affairs in the department and about the ignorance of the students he taught as part of his responsibilities as a research scholar in the department. He blamed the semester system of education and the poor "pedigree"¹⁰⁸ of the current cohort of teachers and research scholars [I assumed he kept himself out of that bracket] in the department for the abysmal lack of knowledge of the students of the department about key theorists and fundamental

¹⁰⁸ A word that he used.

concepts of the discipline: "*Erā konodino Nietzsche-r nām shone ni, jāno?* Dialectical Materialism *ki bolte pārlo nā keu. PG 2 er student! Bhābte pāro?*" [They've never heard of Nietzsche. Did you know that? None could tell what's dialectical materialism and they are PG 2nd year students. Can you imagine that?]

Vignette 3: A musical evening in an *āddā* (Viewpoint, November 3, 2015)

As I pulled up in front of Milan's canteen, the downed shutters already told me that I was late. The canteen typically closes at around 7:15 and the *āddās* at the Viewpoint, across the road from Milan's Canteen typically starts to get exciting from sundown, which in the wintery month of November, when days become short, would have been around 5:30. A glance at my wristwatch told me it was 7:45 PM – the *āddās* must have been in full swing for a good couple of hours now. As I stepped out of the car wondering what all I might have missed, sound of a male voice singing to the accompaniment of guitar(s) wafted across the road to me. I locked my car and hurried across directly to the source of the sound. It was 'the Swan' playing the guitar and singing a song he had written (really, a Bengali adaptation of Billy Joel's *She's always a woman*) for his then girlfriend, Tiyash, who sat next to him on the ground with her arms wrapped around him. Three other young women – Piyali, Kamalika and another young woman (Srotoswini), whom I had not met before, and a young man, Krishanu (who was a regular at the various *āddās* in the university campus, despite not being a student of the university) sat around. As I made a space for myself to sit among them (as this was where the action seemed to be), I could smell the alcohol in their breath. As soon as I sat down, Tiyash handed me a bottle of coke (punched with rum), from which I took a swig, before passing it on. The Swan, finished his song and

immediately received requests for further songs from the women present (barring Tiyash, who seemed to be moderating the requests from the Swan's female fans present). The Swan sang four more songs one after the other, before putting down the guitar and picking up the bottle.

Thereafter, the *āddā* turned into small talk and personal chit-chats about other students not present. Kamalika, Piyali and Tiyash talked among themselves about classes and teachers, particularly one teacher they all drooled over. The Swan interjected that the teacher in question might be good looking, but he wasn't particularly a great teacher unlike a former teacher in the department who had left before Kamalika, Piyali and Tiyash had joined the department as students. The three young women didn't pay much heed to his comment, and Tiyash retorted: "So what, he [the current teacher in question] is cool."

Krishanu picked up the guitar and started strumming softly – he is still a novice, and the Swan, generously offered him some tips, while Srotoswini sat silently, listening to everyone else.

A few minutes later, Tiyash and the Swan left hand in hand for what the Swan declared was going to be a "romantic walk around the campus." As soon as the two of them left, Kamalika, who was Tiyash's best friend, announced knowingly: "Romantic walk around the campus, my ass! They are just going to go to some corner and have a quickie. I can always tell when Tiyash is horny!"

To which, Piyali said: "but whatever! They do make a good couple – really cute!"

"And they are both musicians and love music!" I said, trying to defend my friend a bit.

Kamilaka possibly read my mind, and said: "Oh, shit! Senior, *tumi bole debe nā toh?* [Oh, shit! Senior, you won't snich, right?]"

To which, I laughed and responded: "No no, don't you worry. Researcher-participant privilege, right?"

“You know, I want the best for her and for her sake I want this to work; but I don’t think it will because he’s not her type. And Tiyaash is not exactly how she seems, you know?” Kamalika explained; and for the first time, Srotoswini spoke: “I didn’t really like him; he’s too – too overbearing.”

At this point, Krishanu abruptly stood up with the guitar in his hand and without speaking a word to any of us, walked right over to the other major *āddā* in full swing at the far corner of the Viewpoint, next to the bookstore.

I followed him with my eyes. The other *āddā* he went to comprised of nine young men and four young women – some of whom were students like CD and TJ, some were former students like DOS, Satyaki and Bedo, and some were non-students, including local celebrities like Teertho and Lagnajita. The youths all seemed pretty inebriated and high, as was typical for this hour of the night. I glanced at my wristwatch – it was 8:40: the guards are gonna be here any moment now to shoo us away.

Ten minutes later, the guards had still not arrived. Srotoswini had left quietly and Tiyaash and the Swan hadn’t returned. Kamalika, Piyali and I were talking about *āddā*, while in the other big *āddā* at the far corner, Teertho was strumming on his *dotārā*¹⁰⁹ and Krishanu on the guitar; DOS was sleeping on the floor, next to a dog that was also sleeping, Bedo was cuddling his girlfriend, and Lagnajita was discussing something with a young man a short distance apart from the rest, and the others were drinking, smoking (cigarette, reefers and pot) and talking among themselves.

¹⁰⁹ The *dotārā* is a two, four, or sometimes five-stringed (folk) musical instrument, originating from the Indian subcontinent, resembling a sarod.

Suddenly, out of nowhere, a young woman in the group broke out in a popular and catchy folk song – ‘*sohāg chānd bodoni dhoni, nācho toh dekhi.*’ In a snap, there was a change in the mood around the place. Bedo joined in the singing, Teertho started playing the tune on his *dotārā*, accompanied by Krishanu on the guitar and Piku on his flute, DOS woke up as the sleeping dog started barking, and the young woman, who had initially started singing, now started dancing, while the rest of us present, clapped to the rhythm. As soon as the song ended, Bedo spontaneously started singing, ‘*Hare Krishna, Hare Rama*’ – a quasi-religious song with a catchy tune, and everyone present at the Viewpoint, including myself, gathered around. Suddenly, DOS, who had woken up seemingly invigorated from his brief alcohol induced slumber, started jumping up and down at a spot to the rhythm of the song. Immediately, everyone else, barring Teertho, Krishanu and Piku, who were playing the tune in their respective instruments, started singing the song out loud and jumping up and down in unison to the rhythm of the song for the next ten minutes or so. During this whole time, while singing out loud and jumping up and down at a spot to the rhythm of the music, I noticed that the crowd had started to grow in number as besides all of us, who were present at the Viewpoint at the time, several random young men and at least one young woman, who was a 1st year (freshman) student of the Comparative Literature department, arrived from nowhere and started singing and jumping with us; and I suppose that is the attraction of catchy tunes.

Conclusion

Thus, having introduced the reader to some examples of student and youth *āddās* in practice at the university, as well as to some of my early *āddā* experiences, while pointing out the

issues of class and gender as they play out in the context of middle-class Bengali *āddās*, I would now like to move on to a more detailed discussion of class and gender in Bengali *āddās*, in general, in the next chapter, based on the data obtained from the study of the campus *āddās*.

Chapter 5

Our *āddā*, their *āddā*: Negotiations of class and gender identities in middle-class Bengali youth *āddās*.

Introduction

In this chapter, I would try to understand how culturally charged ideas of class and gender lace the contemporary conceptualizations of the modern Bengali youths' *āddās*; how a certain classed and gendered notion of intellectuality is employed to define and understand *āddā* in the Bengali cultural imagination, and how young Bengali students and youths – both young men and women – negotiate these discursively received ideas – refuting or reproducing them in their day to day practice of giving *āddā* in the university campus and elsewhere. I also discuss how certain broader notions of class, gender, intellectuality and *sikhshā* or education, work to sanction or restrict (censor) young people's – particularly young women's – access to convivial, public sociability practices like *āddā* in classed and gendered ways; and how the young students negotiate these too, whether successfully or not.

***Āddā* is for all, but not all *āddās* are made the same**

Āddā welcomes all – it is for everybody (DOS, 30, 2015)

Āddā is for all, but, you know, not all *āddās* are made the same? I give *āddā*, but prefer it to be in the hostel – among – with people I know, and understand. On my way to the department, I often see these (Arts) students giving *āddā* at the Viewpoint – smoking *gānjā*, drinking alcohol – in broad daylight too – and playing cards, singing, guitar – talking – talking in English – singing and playing

the guitar – girls too – Sometimes I have this feeling – it appears so cool that – sometimes, I wish – wish that I could join them, you know? Be a part of it all, but – I have obligations towards my research, my lab during the day – and – and – I am a village boy – I have much responsibility – here girls wear such revealing dresses – speaks fluent English – do alcohol and *gānjā* – I fear – I am scared if I mightn't lose my way. (Rohit, 27, 2015)

Most accounts of *āddā* claim that it is for everybody – that *āddā* welcomes all irrespective of class, creed, caste, gender, or position; that everybody is equal in an *āddā* and are treated as equals (or at least, should be in ideal situations). At the surface, this rings true because *āddā* happens between friends, and in friendship such social denominators as class, caste, gender usually do not matter much, at least at the surface level. However, this does not mean that class, caste or gender differences and discriminations magically disappear and cease to exist in friendships. Very often, where friendship and *āddā* form across class, caste and gender divides, awareness of such differences run as undercurrents as in the case of the young men of Meerut in Jeffrey's study (2010a, 2010b) where Jat and Dalit men shared food and cigarettes, thereby cutting across class-caste barriers but their constant awareness of the differences was reflected variously in the men's D/discourses and actions, for instance, when the Jat men tried to uphold the Jat social domination along caste lines. More often, though, such differences result in separate groups of friends and separate *āddās*.

Twenty-seven-year old Rohit (pseudonym), a Ph.D. student in Chemistry at the university and a participant in this study, painted a picture of the different worlds of *āddā* at the university in the above excerpt from an interview. Rohit is the fourth and the youngest child (after two brothers and a sister) of a smallholder farmer in a village approximately 160 or so kilometres away from Kolkata and is the first in his family to have moved to Kolkata for higher studies. His father and eldest brother still grow crops in the small farmland that his family owns in the village, his sister

is married and his second brother runs a small shop of his own. After his schooling from a local Bengali-medium school near his village, Rohit, who had always been good in studies, moved to Kolkata to pursue his undergraduate and graduate studies from the elite Presidency College (now, Presidency University), before moving to this university with a University Grants Commission (UGC) scholarship to pursue his doctoral study in Chemistry. Rohit, who is also an avid reader of Bengali literature and is a theatre enthusiast, whose interest in theatre grew from watching *jātrā* in his native village, identified himself as middle-class and lived in a hostel inside the university campus during the course of my field-study.

On his way to his lab each morning, Rohit had to pass the ‘Viewpoint’ – one of the most vibrant paces of *āddā* in the campus (see Chapter 3). During his interview with me, Rohit expressed the simultaneous feelings of attraction and alienation that he experiences on seeing “these (Arts) students giving *āddā* at the Viewpoint.” Interestingly, much of the same features of these *āddās* that make Rohit wish he could be a part of them also scare him of the possibility of losing his way. There seemed to be both discernible awe and criticism in his tone for the boys and girls of the Viewpoint *āddās*. Among the things that he mentioned caught his attention in these *āddās* were consumption of alcohol and *gānjā* in broad daylight by both boys and girls (he emphasizes that girls too participated in drinking alcohol and smoking *gānjā*, besides the fact that these were all done in broad daylight in full public view); students singing and playing the guitar – he particularly emphasizes women playing the guitar (“singing and playing the guitar ... girls too ...”), playing cards and speaking English fluently; and the revealing dresses of women students.

Rohit himself was a regular cigarette smoker and a fairly regular drinker as well. On an average, he drank twice to thrice a week in the late evenings, after returning from his lab, in his

room or in one of his friends' room in the hostel. His hostel being hardly 10 meters from where I lived on the campus at the time, I was a frequent gatecrasher in many of their little 'parties' in the hostel late at night – when anywhere between 6 to 10 of us young men would crowd into a tiny 8 by 6 feet hostel room with a couple of bottles of Old Monk and spend the evening drinking and giving *āddā*, while listening to popular music and watching YouTube videos on Rohit's or one of his friends' laptop. As a matter of fact, the night I formally interviewed Rohit in his hostel room, audio-taping his responses to my questions, he had arranged for drinks and snacks for me and a few of his friends, whom he had especially invited to witness the interview. Although not very frequently, Rohit sometimes also smoked *gānjā* on special occasions like during Block Day celebrations¹¹⁰ at his hostel. Even if Rohit didn't, he had friends in the hostel who regularly smoked *gānjā*, including one young man who believed that smoking *gānjā* and drinking a gallon of milk daily aided in muscle growth. Rohit's girlfriend, Joyeeta, who studied with him in the same department and lived in a women's paying guest facility¹¹¹ near the university, too liked to drink and smoke cigarettes occasionally, but never openly in the public. Only sometimes when she was with Rohit in the university, did I see her take a few quick drags from Rohit's cigarette, surreptitiously hiding behind buildings or trees. Occasionally when some of us made plans in her presence to drink at Rohit's hostel (dorm) later in the day, she would complain that had women been allowed into the men's hostels (dorms), she could have joined us for drinks in the privacy of Rohit's hostel (dorm) room. On one such occasion, during a cultural fest at the university when

¹¹⁰ Every hostel in the university are comprised of several blocks (of buildings). Students residing in each block celebrate a day every year as their 'block day,' when they have special menu and cultural programs and sports throughout the day and residents of other blocks and hostels are typically invited.

¹¹¹ Paying guests rent beds or rooms in a family house, and the rent includes food and all utilities. They are treated like guests of the host family, except that they pay a rent for the services at the end of the month. Typically, in Indian culture, money for hospitality is not accepted from guests, which explains the curious nomenclature of 'paying guests' – i.e., guests who pay.

The Indian Ocean (an internationally popular Indian fusion band) was scheduled to perform at the university's Open Air Theatre (OAT) next to Rohit's hostel building in the evening, Rohit, some of his friends from the hostel and I had planned to drink on the rooftop of the hostel from where one had a clear aerial view of the stage inside the OAT. Since all of us wanted to both drink and watch the live performance and since alcohol was prohibited inside the OAT, we figured (as did many others) that the hostel's roof would be the perfect place for us to drink and watch the performance too, minus the crowd of thousands of students and outsiders inside the OAT that the open-to-all performance by one of the most popular bands of South Asia was assured to draw. As such, all arrangements for the especial evening were accordingly made, when Joyeeta, who had earlier decided to give the performance a miss, called Rohit to inform that having changed her mind, she and a girlfriend were waiting in the OAT for him to join them. They wanted to watch the performance together with Rohit, and perhaps wanted to drink too. As a result, even if a little unwillingly, Rohit and his friends ran out to purchase bottles of Coke, mixed the litre of rum in three Coke bottles and smuggled it inside the OAT as soft drinks to Joyeeta and her girlfriend.

Thus, clearly, it wasn't students (even girls) smoking *gānjā* and drinking alcohol, but students (particularly young women) smoking *gānjā* and drinking regularly in public, in "broad daylight" was perhaps what struck a discord in Rohit's middle-class sensibilities, which dictates that indulgence in such socially deviant activities, particularly when participated in by women, be hidden from the public eye, least they offend the public sentiment. Middle-class women's public smoking and drinking, for reasons I shall attempt to discuss in greater detail in a later section, seemed to particularly offend the middle-class public sentiment and drew the most flak from the public. Consequently, many middle-class young women like Joyeeta, who, unlike their male counterparts like Rohit, could neither indulge in smoking and drinking in public, nor in their

homes or hostel or paying guest accommodations, surreptitiously indulged in such forbidden pleasures occasionally only in the university campus (and sometimes in some commercialized spaces of public sociability like bars and restaurants); while some others like the middle-class young women at the Viewpoint indulged openly within the university campus, without a care for who saw them (although most of them would likely not act so rebelliously outside of the university campus).

Therefore, people like the young men and women from the Viewpoint *āddās* drew both admiration and criticism from young men like Rohit for their defiant attitude towards such culturally non-sanctioned activities – admiration because they dared to do what students like Rohit perhaps secretly desired, but couldn't bring themselves to do, and criticism because they actually did it. Interestingly, allegations of such base actions as public consumption of alcohol was historically pinned on to the lower-class people, who, it is believed, lacked the refined sensibilities (*sikhshā*) of the Bengali middle class. However, in this case, what was really very interesting was that, without exception, all of the young men and women from the various *āddās* at the Viewpoint, including one young man who drove a Triumph motorbike to his *āddā* at the university and had two expensive sedans at home, identified themselves as middle-class, just as did all the young men I interviewed or spoke to in Rohit's hostel. In fact, all of my participants and most of the students and youths I spoke to (barring one or two) during my field research, self-reported their class background to be middle class. This resonates with an extensive country-wide BBC study (Biswas, 2017) that found most Indians (almost half of the respondents – between 40% and 60% of the total population – across two dozen states and across all ages and all income and social groups) in cities and towns claimed to belong to the middle class as compared to people living in villages.

Defining the middle class is tricky anywhere, but in India it is perhaps worse. For one, the size of India's middle class has been a matter of perennial debate. There is no established and agreed upon set of criteria that could be used to define the middle-class in India, and consequently the estimates on the size of the Indian middle-class often vary widely. According to a BBC report by India correspondent, Soutik Biswas (Biswas, 2017), depending on the criteria the calculations are based on, economists estimate between 10 and 30% of Indians are middle class. An US country study on India (Heitzman& Worden, 1995) indicates that the size of the Indian middle class seems to be increasing rapidly. The BBC article, which similarly notes the swelling size of the Indian middle-class over the last few decades, offers a possible startling explanation for this trend: the numbers are misleading and the majority of the India's middle-class are actually poor. Economists, having further classified the middle-class into the lower middle (living on \$2-\$4 per person per day on average) and the upper middle (living on \$6-10 per person per day on average), argue that it is the lower middle-class that has fueled the increase in numbers. A large number of people who are engaged in jobs like farming and construction that the poor have traditionally done, now constitute more than two-thirds of the Indian middle class, thanks to India's rapidly expanding economy since the 1980s according to both the US and the BBC studies. Similar observations are made by Jeffrey (2010a) with respect to the Jat farmers in North India, who, riding on the wave of India's neoliberal economy, sought to consolidate the Jat hegemony in other diverse professions, rather than stick to their traditional occupation of cultivation as before. Thus. Jeffrey notes that from 1980 onwards, as the economy gradually opened up and children's education came to be valued more and more as an investment for the entire family, many Jat parents invested heavily – both in terms of time and money – in one or several of their (typically male) children's higher education, much like Rohit's farmer father, who

also must have invested time and money on Rohit's education. From the time Rohit was in junior school till he graduated with a Ph.D. recently, they have also waited seemingly endlessly like the Jat parents Jeffrey describes in his book. As an aside, it is well worth noting here that for students like Rohit and for parents like his, who have been waiting a very long time – decades, actually – for some tangible, perceptible change to take place in their, and their family's life, time, perhaps, assumes heightened essence and generates the fear of losing one's track as Rohit mentioned in the interview.

Thus, understandably, while Rohit sometimes may have felt enticed to join the students at the Viewpoint when he saw them drinking, smoking, singing and playing the guitar on his way to the lab to slog for the rest of the day, he, like the traveler in Robert Frost's famous poem, who was still waiting to arrive at a major destination of his life, likely had reminded himself each time of the promises he had to keep and the miles he had to go before he sleeps (Frost, 1923/1971).

The US study notes that unprecedented liberalization and opening up of the economy in the 1980s and 1990s have resulted in the emergence of what eminent journalist Suman Dubey calls a "new vanguard" increasingly dictating India's political and economic direction. This group, which is India's new middle class – in which people like Rohit might be included, is mobile, driven, consumer-oriented, and, to some extent, forward-looking. Hard to define precisely, it is not a single stratum of society, but straddles town and countryside, making its voice heard everywhere and encompasses prosperous farmers, white-collar workers, business people, military personnel, and myriad others – all actively striving toward a prosperous life. Ownership of cars, televisions, and other consumer goods, reasonable earnings, substantial savings, and educated children (often fluent in English) typify this diverse group, many of whom have ties to family and friends living abroad, and might have, themselves, traveled or lived abroad briefly.

The middle class is bracketed on either side by the upper and lower echelons: around 1 percent of the population that includes industrialists, former maharajas, and top executives, who are owners of large properties, members of exclusive clubs, and vacationers in foreign lands, and some 45 percent of the population that includes ordinary farmers, tradespeople, artisans, and workers, who live in inadequate homes without adequate food, work for pittance, have undereducated and often sickly children, and are the victims of numerous social inequities. Thus, the BBC study finds that India's new middle class, which, according to professor Anirudh Krishna of Duke University, has swelled in number only because it has included a vast number of the near-poor and still-vulnerable people, is vulnerable to falling back into poverty in the event of an economic shock. The study claims that being middle-class is in itself a "status marker," and also notes the "aspirational element to [the] middle-class," reflected in a growing consumer culture, as also noted by Ritty Lukose in her study (2008) of young, middle-class Keralites, that increasingly includes consumption of public spaces of sociability as illustrated by Robinson's (2014) study of young, middle-class Puneites.

However, despite the swelling in numbers of India's middle-class, another study by *The Economist* (India's missing middle class, 2018) observes that jobs that have conventionally provided middle-class incomes are drying up. The study quotes Goldman Sachs' estimates that at most 27 million households in India at just 2% of the population make over \$11,000 a year. Of those, 10 million are government employees and managers at state-owned firms, where jobs have been disappearing at the rate of about 100,000 a year since 2000. The remaining 17 million are white-collar professionals, a lot of whom work in the information-technology sector, which is retrenching amid technological upheaval and threats of protectionism. In general, salaries at large companies have been stagnant for years and recruitment is dropping.

This would put the vast group of people whom the BBC study terms as the lower middle-class – those like Rohit, who have set foot on the ladder of social mobility but haven't quite been able to secure a strong foothold yet, in a rather precarious position, where they possibly have to live in a constant fear of slipping. It is this fear of slipping, in the face of a steep competition from cross-border migrants and scarcity of well-paying jobs as education also became more widespread in the decades immediately following Independence that might have contributed to middle-class parents' concerns over their children's over-indulgence in *āddā*, and could possibly have been yet another contributing factor towards the growth of a prevalent cultural skepticism for youth *āddās* over the last several decades.

The hostel in which Rohit lived was one of the eight boys' hostels inside the university campus and housed only graduate students on a twin-sharing¹¹² basis. The average cost of living in the hostel (food and lodging) was 5,800 INR (approximately \$83) per month for each student. For most of the student in the hostel, this money came out of their scholarships; only a handful of students in the hostel received any money from their families for their sustenance. When someone fell short, the students often borrowed money from each other, which they returned in monthly installments. This was not simply because the students came from poor families that couldn't afford to pay for their education cost – while for a handful of the student boarders this might have been the case, but for most others it was seemingly because taking money from the family for personal expenses was culturally considered deplorable and unmanly for most of these young men coming from rural and semi-urban backgrounds. In contrast, many of the day-scholars depended entirely on their parents to fund all of their expenses, and seemed to think nothing of it.

¹¹² Two adults in one room

The boardership in the university's hostels was allotted to the students primarily based on need, which was determined by the twin factors of the students' family income (including any scholarship that the student might have) and the distance of their homes from the university. Thus, hostel boardership was not an accurate measure of the students' socio-economic statuses, as the students who lived in the hostels often came from varying income groups depending on the distance of their homes from the university. Additionally, where students came from families engaged in the unorganized or semi-organized sectors such as farming, tourism and transportation, weaving, artisanship, real estate or small businesses, the family income was what a local councilor or a *panchāyat* leader wrote down on a piece of paper and often did not reflect the actual family income, which in any case often varied widely from year to year. However, whether they hailed from villages, suburban towns or smaller cities, the one thing that was common for all the hostelites was that none of them came from a metropolitan city like Kolkata. Thus, most of these hostel boys lacked the 'polish' or cultural sophistication of a metropolitan city life that many of the day scholars, born and brought up in educated, middle-class households in Kolkata possessed. In other words, the hostel boys did not share the habitus of the day scholars and often also lacked in some of the cultural capital that the metropolitan commuter students possessed. For instance, almost all of the young men in the hostels, being schooled in non-metropolitan areas of the state, where there aren't very many good English-medium schools, weren't fluent in spoken English and often stood in awe of those among their fellow students who could speak English fluently – a sentiment that was reflected in the brief excerpt of an interview with Rohit above, where he twice mentioned that the young men and women who regularly gave *āddā* at the Viewpoint talked among them in English ("talking - talking in English" in line 4 and "here girls... speaks fluent English" in line 7). This is because fluency in English is still considered one

of the biggest cultural capital and asset for upward mobility in life; it is also, as noted above, considered as one of the markers of one's middle-class status.

Moreover, most of the hostelites reflected a different attitude to time, money and education in comparison to most of the commuter students who hung out at the Viewpoint. Thus, for instance, while many of the commuter students, men and women, even including quite a few who did not come from financially very well-to-do family backgrounds, spoke of concepts like YOLO¹¹³ with respect to spending time in *āddā*; of education being for the sake of learning and not as a means towards an end, even referring to popular Bollywood flicks like Aamir Khan's *3 Idiots* (2009) as a case in point; of their dreams of not working, but freelancing or busking to travel the world; or of splurging whatever they earn in search of new experiences rather than saving up for a rainy day.

For instance, Sane (27, male; pseudonym), the first of two children of middle-class working parents, told me that he knew his calling was in creative writing and that he wanted to devote his life in giving "pleasure and joy to others" (Sane, personal interview, 2015) with his words. Despite holding an undergraduate degree in Computer Science Engineering and a post-graduate degree in Comparative Literature, he didn't want to work jobs. With only an insurance policy taken out in his name by his banker mother that would give him ₹8,000 (\$115.28) every month after he turned 40 to fall back on in case things went south with his career plans, he preferred to devote his time in research, learning and the pursuit of creative writing. Thus, he would enroll himself from time to time in such short diploma or certificate courses offered by the university that might catch his fancy like Buddhist Philosophy, without any specific plan or

¹¹³ An acronym for You Only Live Once that emphasizes living in the present moment (and enjoying it to the fullest) as opposed to a distant future.

intention of using them in his career trajectory other than widening his knowledge base, which he said is always helpful for a writer.

This is, therefore, different from the case of the young men in Meerut, who, as Jeffrey (2010a) notes, went about collecting degrees and diplomas to supplement and diversify their qualifications in the hope of increasing their employability, while still waiting to become gainfully employed. Unlike these young men of Meerut, Sane, who didn't wish to work in a conventional job, had no particular plans of using any of his multiple degrees and certifications in any way for obtaining employment. Rather, when asked how he hoped to utilize his education, he said poetically, quoting Rabindranath Tagore in Bengali: "*Jiboner dhan kichui jāy nā felā*" [no life experience is ever wasted] (Tagore, 1914/2016).

Being entrepreneurial, Sane teamed up with his *āddā* friends at the Viewpoint to start their own not-for-profit desktop publishing cooperative that eventually published three volumes of poetry by Sane, along with other volumes by several other members of the cooperative in its six years of operation till the 2017. Besides poetry, Sane also wrote songs, stories and plays that he and his friends then got filmed and recorded, before publishing them as music videos and audio pod-casts on his YouTube channel.

Another young man from the same *āddā* – let us call him Tirtha, who came from a middle-class family of four, including his parents and a college-going younger sister, that subsisted primarily on his father's meagre pension and lived in a rented house, told me that having worked for 5-6 years and not having particularly liked the experience, he has vowed to himself to never work a job again. Rather, he has taught himself the use of DTP¹¹⁴ software from

¹¹⁴ Desk-top publishing

the Internet and wants to work as a freelancer. He also had plans to popularize his YouTube channel (where he uploads traditional Bengali folk songs, mostly recorded live by him) to an extent that he could retire on the income generated from the traffic to his YouTube channel via Google's AdSense.

Lastly, I would like to mention Piku – again the elder of two children of a single father who runs a small shop, who told me that his life-goals were to become a successful musician and to travel the world busking. To that end, he dropped out of his undergraduate degree course in the university in his final year to pursue music on his own and spent a fortune to obtain a branded, but broken C-Flute at a deal from Paris, which he later fixed himself. In an interview, he later explained to me that he dropped out of university because his undergraduate course in literature had stopped being meaningful to him for his life-goals (see chapter 6).

In contrast to some of the commuter students' rather ambitious life-plans that threw caution to the winds, most of the hostelites seemed to tread rather cautiously when it came to their lives and careers. Thus, there was a discernible difference in habitus between the hostelites and the commuter students in terms of how they viewed time and the kind of life-styles they each valued. While, most of the hostelites, reflecting the aspirational aspect of the middle-class mentioned in the BBC report, wanted their lives to change for the better in terms of stability, financial security, and purchasing power, and viewed time as an opportunity to be utilized for affecting such positive changes in their lives in the future, young men like Sane, Tirtha, and Piku, being also from the middle-class and not particularly from well-to-do financial backgrounds, seemed happy to continue with their present Bohemian lifestyle, at least for now; and time for them, seemingly *sans* any exchange value, was meant to be experienced, not utilized.

Thus, when I questioned Sane about his future plans in terms of financial security, he said that in a world where Governments are formed only for five-year terms, the fact that he had recently secured an UGC scholarship that would see him through the next 5 years of his life was enough planning for financial security and that he didn't just yet know beyond that (Sane, personal interview, 2015). In contrast, in almost every *āddā* that we had together, Rohit would tell us about his plan to retire to a life of simple luxury and leisure in a commune-like farmhouse with nine others of his chosen friends, who would chip in equal measure towards their retirement home somewhere in the natural splendor of rural West Bengal.

Although, meant half-jokingly, Rohit's elaborately chalked out life-plans as opposed to Sane's 5-year-long slots of incremental vision illustrate their different philosophies of living, and of life itself. Indeed, it is a vision and philosophy akin to Rohit's, which many middle-class parents have for their children, that is what, possibly, makes their children's over-indulgence in *āddā* seem like a waste of time to middle-class parents, despite the cultural worth that is, otherwise commonly, ascribed to *āddā*.

Again, when Rohit spoke of women students in the *āddās* at the Viewpoint who wore revealing dresses, one could discern both a sense of awe and criticism in his utterance. As could perhaps be expected in a men's hostel, pornography and sex talk, often bordering on misogyny, was common and occupied a large part of the social life of the boarders in Rohit's hostel. Students shared sexually coloured (often offensive) jokes in *āddās* and in audio-visual WhatsApp messages to each other. Few boarders were well known as hoarders of the latest pornography available on the Internet – often of some celebrity or celebrity lookalikes, and every now and then

students would crowd into one such boarders' rooms to drink and watch pornography together¹¹⁵. Many of the student-boarders I knew, barring Rohit though, had pictures of scantily-clad actresses and women models set up as homescreens on their personal computers and mobile phones (some even had posters of semi-naked women pasted on the walls of their hostel rooms), but to have pictures of a half-naked woman on the screens of one's devices (or hanging from the walls of one's hostel room) and to actually sit and give *āddā* with young women dressed in revealing clothes as if nothing's the matter, are completely different things for many of these young men of the university hostels – many of whom admitted that despite having had several relationships with women, they have never quite personally known any woman who would walk down the streets with them in “hot pants and a spaghetti top” (Jishu, 2015). While one student said that he would actually be “quite uncomfortable and jealous” if his girlfriend went out with him in a reveling attire (Sabyasachi, 2015), another student from the same hostel, reflecting the Madonna-Whore Dichotomy (MWD) (Bareket et al., 2018), once told me that as a general rule of thumb, “one should ideally date a girl in miniskirts, if he can; but marry someone who wears *sālwār-kāmeez*” (Raktim, personal communication, 2015).

Thus, while images of nubile, sexy and bold women constituted a large part of their social lives (and perhaps also of their fantasies) shared with their male friends, for most of these twenty-something young men, it is a world of fantasy that they think they don't realistically belong in. Thus, while they would very much have liked to be a part of a world like this, yet they knew that they weren't equipped to handle it. Consequently, when some of them like Rohit

¹¹⁵ This seemed like another kind of *āddā*, because even though the objective was to watch pornography, the real enjoyment seemed to be obtained from the cracking commentaries (about the nature of sex, the expressions on the actors' faces, about filming pornographies and camera angles, etc) that the students made while watching porn. A student in one such group once told me that no other race but for the Bengalis would turn a porn show into a debate about camera angles.

happened to catch a glimpse of such a world in a local *āddā* (such as at the Viewpoint) near them, they found it to be simultaneously both unrealistically cool and likely immoral and too good to be true – like the proverbial sour grapes from Aesop’s oft-quoted fable.

Thus, such differences in opinions and worldviews between the hostelites and day-scholars (commuter students)¹¹⁶ in the university as illustrated above cannot be explained by a recourse to a theory of class difference as both group of students largely belonged to that diversely vast population in India – known as the Indian middle-class. What can, then, perhaps explain these differences are the French philosopher, Pierre Bourdieu’s inter-related concepts of field, habitus, and social and cultural capital that varied between the said two group of students, who were socialized differently even within the same social and economic class backgrounds, causing them to view their social worlds and their identities within their social worlds differently.

Within their social worlds, then, how the students and youths viewed themselves and how they wanted others to view them, often seemed to dictate the *āddās* they joined or didn’t join, just as, simultaneously, their class-caste and gender identities also often seemed to determine the cultural sanctions and censorships of certain *āddā*-related activities, temporalities and spatialities, and what and how much value, if any at all, is culturally attributed to their *āddās*. Thus, Rohit preferred to give *āddā* with his friends in the hostel with whom he shared his habitus and worldview – who all being young men like him, coming from similar rural or suburban backgrounds, thought and behaved like he did, and whom Rohit, therefore, thought he knew and understood better.

¹¹⁶ This is, of course, a generalization for theory building based on the limited interactions I had with both day scholars and hostelites during my field-study and, by no means, intends to imply that either the day scholars or the hostelites all thought alike.

The classed and gendered nature of the Bengali *āddā*

Is there a word synonymous to *āddā* in any other language of the world? Even without being a linguist/polyglot, I can say that there isn't, because the temperament of *āddā* does not exist in any other country. Even if the spirit does exist, a congenial atmosphere/ambience does not. People in other countries give speeches, crack jokes, participate in debates, have fun all night long, but do not 'give' *āddā*. (Bose, 2010, p.11)

The cultural history of public socialization of the Bengali people, since recorded time, has always been classed and gendered (as I suspect it was everywhere else too, for every other culture as); and were often manifested in cultural texts, social discourses, and cultural practices and sites, including places that were symbolically gender-and-class segregated. Thus, come evening, the menfolk in Bengal's villages would gather at the *chandimandap* or in other such culturally appropriate public places of male socialization, where women couldn't congregate as per social norms; and the women socialized at such places where men normally wouldn't gather like, for instance, in the kitchen area or at the *dāwā* of the village homes when women gathered there in the evenings or at riverside (or pondside) when village women of different ages went to the river (or, to the pond) to fetch water, wash clothes and/or bathe themselves *en masse*¹¹⁷ (see figure 26).

In literature, Rabindranath Tagore, in his biography – *ছেনেবেলা* (Tagore, 1921/1989), wrote about the congregations of the family employees in parts of the palatial Tagore estate that wasn't frequented by family members, except for the little Rabi. Similarly, Leela Majumdar, in her autobiography, *Pākdandi* (1986/2007), wrote about the socialization of the servants that were

¹¹⁷ A cultural practice well known as '*jalke chal*,' or "let's go to (fetch) water," which finds mention in numerous romantic works of the period as a time when the village women socialized with each other, poured out their hearts to each other and even to the river, exchanged messages, and even had surreptitious meetings with their lovers.

starkly contrasted with the socialization of the family and friends; and Buddhadeb Basu's contrasting of the *baithaki āddā*, where "fragrant golden coloured tea," accompanied by tasty food, is served by the lady of the house (the hostess) "in thin, white [bone china?] cups," from "the lackadaisical [and] shameless, bare-bodied gatherings on the *dāwā*" has already been noted in chapter 1.



Figure 26. *Jalke chal*: the gendered practice of rural women fetching water *en masse* from a local pond or river (here, accompanied by a lone man) [Source: shutterstock.com]

In popular movies there are many more references to such classed and gendered cultural practices of public socialization, including *āddā*: *সাতের চুয়াত্তর* [Seventy-four and a half] (1953), *আপনজন* [The kin] (1968), *তিন ভুবনের পাড়ে* [Across three worlds] (1969), *প্রতিদ্বন্দ্বি* [The competitor] (1970a), *অরণ্যের দিনরাত্রি* [The days and nights of the forest] (1970b), *এখনই* [Right now] (1971), *পিকনিক* [Picnic] (1972), *চার মূর্তি* [Four guys] (1978), *আগন্তুক* [The guest] (1991), *আবার অরণ্যে* [Once more, in the forest] (2003), *টেনি দা* [Teni dā] (2011), *Adda: Calcutta, Kolkata* (2011), etc., just to name a few. Thus, for instance, barring *Adda: Calcutta, Kolkata*, we don't find a reflection of public socialization of the working class people and barring *Adda: Calcutta*,

Kolkata, *অরণ্যের দিনরাত্রি* [The days and nights of the forest] (1970b), *আগন্তুক* [The guest] (1991), *আবার অরণ্যে* [Once more, in the forest] (2003) and *Bong Connection* (2006), we don't see any woman participating in any *āddā*. And even in some of the movies where we do find women participating in *āddās*, such as, *অরণ্যের দিনরাত্রি* [The days and nights of the forest] (1970b), *আগন্তুক* [The guest] (1991), *আবার অরণ্যে* [Once more, in the forest] (2003), and *Bong Connection* (2006), the *āddās* either take place in homes (i.e., not in public places) or in the presence of some male family members, relatives or acquaintances similar to a parental figure – that is, *āddās* under supervision of male family members, unlike *āddās* with just friends.

In literature (fiction and non-fiction), too, except for some notable exceptions of all-women *āddās* as in Ahana Biswas' (2009) memoir, *মেয়েদের হস্টেল জীবনঃ অন্দের কথামালা*. [Hostel life of women: Insider's discussion], Bani Basu's (1998/2012) Bengali novel, *মেয়েলী আড্ডার হাল-চাল* [The state of womanly *āddās*], and Kavita Singh's (2010) personal essay, *আকাশবাণীর আসরে* [In the gathering at *Ākāshbāni*], I have not come across many mentions of women who participate in public *āddās*, particularly with male friends.

Nipendra Krishna Chattyopadhyay (2010), notes, even if with apparent criticism, while, at the same time, comparing an ideal *āddā* with a beautiful lady, that “perhaps the greatest natural enemies of *āddā* are women” [p.25; Rough translation from the original Bengali by me]. He further observes:

A major characteristic flaw of *āddā* is that *āddā* is an outright male world ... although a flaw, yet this is also the lifeline of *āddā* ... an *āddā* cannot survive if there's a woman within ten feet of it ... every married woman hates *āddā* with a passion ... she is the one who has to keep up late into the night waiting for her husband to come home from *āddā* On their way back home from *āddā*, every husband has to mentally prepare himself for the inevitable question that awaits him when he returns – “finally finished with your *āddā*?” (Pp.31-32)

Thus, this clearly illustrates the gendered world of Bengali *āddā*: while men either host *āddās* in their homes or participate in *āddā* elsewhere, the women either serve tea and refreshments to the guests [Bose (2010) mentions that ideally, having relieved the servants, the lady of the house should serve the guests herself in order to maintain the status of the *āddā* (p.14)] or wait up for their husbands to return home (possibly to serve him a late dinner).

Reminiscent of Nipendra Krishna Chattyopadhyay's (2010) words that "an *āddā* cannot survive if there's a woman within ten feet of it (p.31), in several of these above mentioned films, the focus shifts from *āddā* to something else, most typically to romance, with the introduction of the female lead in the story. Effectively, in other words, the *āddā* ends for the male protagonist in the films with the arrival of 'the woman' in his life, as he has to choose between the convivial company of his male friends in *āddā* and the possibility of a future conjugal life with the woman he loves. Thus, for example, in *তিন ভুবনের পারে* [Across three worlds] (1969), Montu, the protagonist, leaves his old *āddā* at the *ro'k* of his parental house and disassociates himself from his former *āddā*-mates on the urging of his newly wedded wife, Soroshi, as he, figuratively, tās a step inside their new family home as a married *bhodrolok* (see chapter 1). Thus, most Bengali movies and other cultural texts seem to suggest that *āddā* is a middle-class male homo-social space, where women don't normatively belong.

Like gender, the classed nature of Bengali *āddā* in popular perception of the educated, middle class Bengali gentlemen, or *bhodrolok*, as they are known, also becomes immediately apparent in Bose's (2010) memoir where, as noted above, in stark contrast to "the lackadaisical [and] shameless, bare-bodied gatherings on the *dāwā*" (p.12), or on the *ro'k* for that matter, of the implied lower class people, he describes the ideal *āddā* in the living room of the *bhodrolok* patron, where the guests (usually men) are served with fragrant, golden coloured tea and snacks

in possibly expensive bone-china crockeries by the lady of the house (See chapter 1 and above).

And although Bose (2010), in the same memoir, mentions that a proper *āddā* should have a proportionate mix of men and women, yet the gender stereotyping with respect to *āddā* slips out through the cracks:

Āddā does not work only with men or only with women. In a gathering of men, the discussion invariably veers along the line of talk about work or else it crosses the limits of good taste. When only women gather, no one can prevent the inevitable discussions of family matters and children, and of *sāri* and jewelry. *Āddā* thrives in the intermixing of men and women ... women lend their compassion, charm and orderliness to *āddā*, while men bring to it the untamed passion of a bohemian heart. (Bose, 2010, p.14)

Thus, it becomes immediately apparent even from a rudimentary discourse analysis of Bengali cultural texts on *āddā*, some of which are mentioned above, that in the popular cultural imagination of the Bengali people, *āddā* is an exclusively Bengali middle-class male homosocial space and an intellectual leisure activity¹¹⁸, in which women and people of other classes and races are, at best, misfits. It also appears that just like in the case of literature and other arts, including films, music, etc., there exists, at least, in popular perception, the concept of a high and a low *āddā*, with the high *āddā* being, above all, intellectual, tasteful and cultured, and the low *āddā* being material, uncultured and crass, largely in terms of the kind of discussions and activities that happen in each of these different types of *āddās*. In other words, the high *āddās* are considered educative, where as the low *āddās* are considered miseducative or not educative at all. Often, the low *āddā*, that is, if it is at all counted as *āddā* in the first place, is equated with culturally marginalized people from lower socio-economic and educational backgrounds, as also often with women, irrespective of their class or educational backgrounds. Thus, in the quotation above,

¹¹⁸ *Āddā* can mean both a space and an activity (See chapter 1)

Buddhadeb Bose (2010) writes that “when only women gather, no one can prevent the inevitable discussions of family and children, and of *sāri* and jewelry” (although he also mentions that when men gather, the discussion often becomes distasteful) (p.14); and perhaps this is why Bose refers to such congregations of women as gatherings¹¹⁹ in Bengali, and not as *āddā*. Thus, Bose’s (2010) comment point to the elevated social status of the *āddās* of the educated, middle-class Bengali men in the cultural imagination.

What is also interesting to note here is that the dominant perception of high-*āddā* in the cultural texts and D/discourses, seemingly, not only excluded women and the people of lower socio-economic and educational backgrounds, but often also the upper class, as well as all other races too, irrespective of class, caste or educational backgrounds. And the reason for it, at least for Bose (2010), seems to be that, except for the middle-class, Bengali *bhodroloks*, everyone else – people of all other classes and races – either lacked the necessary cultural capital (namely, wit, intellect, sense of humor, gift of the gab and *sikhshā*) or lacked a feel for the game or the *āddā*-habitus: all the necessary skills and qualities, knowledge, style, taste, and aesthetics, ingrained habits and disposition (and Buddhadeb Basu includes the climate in the list, as well) to do justice to *āddā* proper. Thus, for Bose (2010), while some people partied, gave speeches, drank all night, cracked jokes and others talked only about *sāri*, jewelry or children, or just gathered at some convenient place to while away time lackadaisically, *āddā* was seemingly only for the educated, middle-class Bengali *bhodroloks*.

However, as Dispesch Chakrabarty (2000) notes, among the many changes that modernity brought, the loss of the exclusivity of *āddā* (with the descent of *āddā* from the *bhodrolok*’s parlor

¹¹⁹ Bose uses the Bengali words, ‘*jotola*’ (n. an aimless, sporadic gathering) and ‘*ekotro howa*’ (v. to congregate, gather).

to the public streets) for the educated middle-class Bengali *bhodoroks* was one. Thus, with the emergence of *āddā* on to the streets, potentially anybody could join an *āddā* or create their own *āddās*. However, ironically, this plebianization of *āddā* was also what made it more widespread and visible than before. *Āddā*, thus, thrived in modernity, particularly for the young people in the city, with the eventual arrival of several *cafés*, pubs, bars and eateries in the social scene of Kolkata. Thus, the question that remains to be asked, then, is if and how does such cultural biases and historical overtures mediate the contemporary, middle class Bengali students' *āddās* in the public sphere?

Sāri or gāri (car)? Gendered classification of āddā.

Female Student-3: *Āddā* mane Coffee house–e just *Ānandabāzār Patrikā* mere political tarko – [*Āddā* means beating *Ānandabāzār Patrikā*¹²⁰ (against the table) and debating politics at the Coffee House]

Female Student-1: That's called Bengali culture.

Female Student-2: Exactly – bang on the table and shout – [Laughs]

[Focus group interview with five undergraduate students of the university, 2013]

As mentioned before, most of the *āddās* that I had participated in during my research were mixed *āddās* in terms of gender (although the composition of many of the *āddās* were dominantly male, and as the day waned, the number of women participants in most of the *āddās* I participated in gradually dwindled, thereby, pointing towards a gendered temporal access to

¹²⁰ A leading Bengali newspaper and a symbolic icon of Bengali middle-class intellectual modernism.

public *āddā* that I shall discuss later in this chapter) and some were all-male *āddās*¹²¹. The range of topics that came up in these various *āddās* that I took part in over this period of time varied extensively and included all major aspects of the young participants' lives, including academics, career, sex, mis/adventures, gossips, jokes, drinking stories, card games, sports, music, cinema, politics, partners, friends, university life, teachers and other students, drugs, art, and life-style, including material status symbols like cars, motorbikes, mobile phones, and, of course, fashion, although, interestingly, never particularly about *sāri* or jewelry (perhaps because *sāris* and jewelries did not function as the primary status symbols for the present group of youths who participated in this study?)¹²². Also, in the numerous *āddās* that I participated in, no particular topic, however broad it might be, hogged the discussion during an entire *āddā* session. Of course, there were times when something current or imminent and important to the majority of *āddā* participants, like politics – during the state assembly elections or the university's student union elections, or cricket – when Kolkata Knight Riders played the final in the season's Indian Premiere League, dominated the *āddā* discussions, yet, nevertheless, every now and then some other topic of discussion would sneak in. In fact, it is rather unrealistic to assume that discussion on any one or two particular topics, be it “*sāri* and jewelry,” women and sex, or cricket and politics¹²³, could be sustained throughout the duration of a typical *āddā* session that normally lasted on the higher side of three to four hours. Nor did any particular *āddā* that I attended seemed to me to be any more or less intellectual than the others. Of course, there were certain *āddā* sessions or, more appropriately, some parts of certain *āddā* sessions that drew me in

¹²¹ I was unfortunate to not to have been able to observe any all-women *āddās*, perhaps because such *āddās* are few and far between and when such *āddās* do take place, they are rather exclusive.

¹²² Strangely, in my observation, religion never came up in these *āddā* discussions of the students and youths at the university.

¹²³ Just like *sāri* and jewelry were thought of the primary topics of discussion in women's *āddās*, women, sex, cricket, and politics are similarly often considered the staples of all-male *āddās*.

intellectually more than the others because the discussions therein personally resonated with me – and I suspect it was the same for all other *āddā* participants as well, and sometimes there were heated debates over some contentious topics or discussions about books or studies, particularly before an exam, while at other times there would be just gossips, music, chit-chats or card games: yet, I cannot say I didn't learn something or the other from almost each *āddā* that I had attended. What I took away from each of these *āddā* sessions were varied and, of course, after my personal interests, but, personally, I did learn something – be it a word that was new for me, like, for instance, 'recce,' or about the newest Internet singing sensation – '*Dhinchak Pooja*.' Whether any of these learnings could be termed as intellectual, or specifically what kind of *āddā* discussions warrants to be termed intellectual and why, is, of course, a matter of a different debate.

Nevertheless, even though none of the *āddās* that I had attended during field research, without exception, were about *sāri* and jewelry, as noted above, yet this theme of '*sāri* and jewelry,' suggestively as the primary and perhaps the sole topic of discussion in '*meyeli āddā*,' or girlish *āddā*, was brought up several times by six male participants and one woman participant during personal interviews, where the said participants equated discussions of '*sāri* and jewelry' with '*meyeli āddā*,' or girlish *āddā*, suggestive of being inferior or low as an *āddā* because discussions of '*sāri* and jewelry' are culturally perceived to be unintellectual and materialistic, and perhaps also silly, immature and juvenile, as the epithet 'girlish' connotes. As a corollary, then, it seemed that women were assumed to be generally of stunted intellectual growth: materialistic, immature, infantile, unintellectual and generally uninterested in deeper discussions than '*sāri* and jewelry.' Interestingly, such opinions were always offered regarding other people's *āddās*, and not once about one's own *āddā*. While for the male participants, this is

understandable, but the female participant too seemed to attempt to distance herself from *meyeli āddās*, as illustrated below:

R.D: So, do you consider *āddā* to be worth your time or a waste of your time?

P.G.: Oh, absolutely! So much information can be gotten from *āddā* –

[...]

R.D: Okay, so are all *āddās* informative? Or would you say that some *āddās* are actually a waste of time?

P.G.: Yes, yes – there are – like *āddās* where they drink and talk of useless stuff or girls' *āddās* of *sāri* and jewelry – those are useless.

R.D: That's interesting. Could you tell me more about the “*āddās* of *sāri* and jewelry?”

P.G.: You know? Those girlish *āddās* of *sāri* and jewelry? When women get together for *āddā*–

R.D: I see. So, since you are a woman too, do you participate in such *āddās* of *sāri* and jewelry?

P.G.: No no, I don't like –

R.D: So, what do you talk about in your *āddās*?

P.G.: Oh, everything – whatever comes to mind–.

R.D: Umm hmm?

P.G.: Like – sometimes – music – favorite singers or about fests – what's going on in the department or class like who said or did what – boyfriends [giggles] – sometimes we talk about what we are going to do after graduation – things like that – cinema –

R.D: So, you've never attended or, at least, personally experienced any *āddā* of *sāri* and jewelry?

P.G.: Umm [pause], no [long pause] – once at the last reunion in the department, everyone mostly wore *sāri* – you know, all the girls, like each time? And Sangita (pseudonym) *didī* wore a beautiful *jāmdāni sāri* and everyone was like “such a beautiful *sāri*!” “Where did you buy it from?” “How much does it cost” – and

all– passing comments, you know? “You are looking so beautiful,” “the guys are all going bananas over you,” etc–

R.D: Then?

P.G.: Then when we went out for some tea and coffee at the canteen after a while – me, Sangita *didi*, Pubali, Mrityika, Ananya *didi* and Sanchari (all pseudonyms) – I think it was Pubali, who started again – you know, how kiddish she can be at times? [Looks at me for approval] She was like: “Please, please, tell me where did you buy it from – I want one like this for myself” So, Sangita *didi* told us it belonged to her mother and we all briefly talked about how mothers always had the best collection of *sāris* and whose mother had which *sāri* and how possessive they are about them and all that for a while – but only that one time –

[P.G., 23-year-old woman; personal interview, 2015; emphasis added]

The above excerpt from my interview with P.G., a 23-year old woman from middle-class background and a recent graduate from the university at the time, suggest that the participant equated “*āddās* of *sāri* and jewelry” (line #7) with “*āddās* where they drink” (line #6) and considered both “useless” (line #7) and a waste of time in terms of being informative or intellectual.

Robinson (2014) notes that in Indian society, consumption of alcohol was traditionally associated either with the wayward and westernized upper class’ elite lifestyle of excess or with “bad morals of the poor.” (p. 73). Thus, both class and gender come into play in complex ways in the identification of *āddās* that are culturally considered useful, and those that are not. And while P.G. didn’t particularly name the “*āddās* where they drink” (line #6) by specifying the gender or class of the participants, yet she mentioned that *āddās* where *sāri* and jewelry are discussed are “girls’ *āddā*” (line #7), or, more specifically, “girlish *āddā*” (line #10). Thus, by labeling certain so-called unintellectual topics of discussion such as discussions of ‘*sāri* and jewelry’ and certain ways of speaking in *āddās* as “girlish,” gender is ascribed in a pejorative way to speech itself, irrespective of the sex of the interlocutors. Thus, in other words, it then becomes theoretically

possible for men to have a *meyeli* or girlish *āddā* if the conversation verges on certain topics of discussion such as *sāri* and jewelry or imitates certain ways of speaking, including certain para-linguistic components of speech that are culturally associated with women.

It is important to mention here that while the Bengali adjective ‘*meyeli*’ could also be used to mean feminine – and it is in this sense that Bengali author, Bani Basu uses the word in her book *মেয়েলী আড্ডার হাল চান* [The state of womanly *āddās*] (1998/2012) to set such *āddās* apart from regular *āddās*, which, by default, has a masculine connotation, illustrated by the fact that such *āddās* do not normally require a gender adjective unlike ‘*meyeli āddās*,’ yet in the cultural texts and discourses dominated by male voices, ‘*meyeli*’ mostly pejoratively implies shallow and infantile characteristics in a person. Thus, just as most men do not wish to be perceived as feminine, being perceived as ‘*meyeli*’ isn’t perhaps particularly desirable to many women either, which was possibly why P.G., despite being a woman, attempted to distance herself from such *āddās*, saying that barring once briefly, when she was accidentally caught in an *āddā* about *sāri* and jewelry, she never participated in such *āddās* because she doesn’t like them – and this she noted quite strongly in line #14: “No no, I don’t like –”

Thus, her attempt to distance herself from *āddās* about *sāri* and jewelry could be read as her desire to not be perceived as girlish and, thus, unintellectual, infantile or materialistic – all of which the adjective *meyeli* seems to stand for in this context. Also, her use of the possessive pronoun “girls” and adjective “girlish” in lines #7 and #10 respectively, when referring to *āddās* about *sāri* and jewelry specifically, is interesting to note because she had mostly otherwise used the Bengali word for “woman” (*mohilā*) elsewhere in the interview, including once (in line #10) immediately after she uses the term ‘girlish’ to designate women’s *āddās* where *sāri* and jewelry are discussed (also in line #10).

While, it is a peculiarity of the Bengali language that the only non-phrasal, single-word gender adjective available in the Bengali language for anything related to women is “*meyeli*” or “girlish” (as opposed to the corresponding, slightly stilted, non-phrasal or single-word adjective for anything related to men being “*purushāli*” or “manly,” and not “boyish”), yet P.G.’s choice of descriptors for referring to women’s *āddā*, especially when it seemed that she didn’t hold such *āddās* in particularly high regard on account of the discussion that she believed ensued in such *āddās*, cannot be solely blamed on the limitations of the Bengali language – for, although the epithet, “*meyeli*,” is the one most commonly used in such cases – pointing towards a deep rooted gender bias in the very core of the Bengali culture and language that subtly equates women’s conviviality with either frivolous infantility or unintellectual materialism, for a conscious commentator, there are other ways of referring to women’s *āddā*. Furthermore, the fact that P.G. (while looking at me, seemingly, for approval) called her classmate, Pubali, “kiddish” (line #33) for bringing up the topic of *sāris* for a second time in their *āddā* by asking Sangita, a senior student, about the *sāri* she had worn – almost as if Pubali was a little child obsessed with some pretty but inconsequential ‘thing’ (like a *sāri*, in this case), reiterates the dominant social Discourse about women being infantile by nature.

Thus, reminiscent of Buddhadeb Bose’s sentiments and those of some other Bengali commentators of the late 20th century, at least some middle-class Bengali students, whether consciously or not, still seemingly associated women’s *āddās* symbolically with discussions of *sāri* and jewelry, which were considered unintellectual, uninformative, juvenile, and generally useless talk. Thus, in social D/discourses ‘*sāri* and jewelry’ functioned as a placeholder for things that women talk about that men have no interest in and consider frivolous and unimportant. This further reflects the popular perception that educated, middle-class Bengali men and their *āddās*

were intellectual, while traditionally feminine discussion topics (and even women themselves) were unintellectual.

However, not all of my research participants agreed to the view that women's *āddā* were unintellectual, or, for that matter, men's *āddā* were necessarily intellectual. When asked specifically to comment on the seemingly widely accepted view about the so-called 'girlish *āddā* about *sāri* and jewelry,' another woman participant retorted, with apparent sarcasm:

If we (women) discuss *sāri*, they (men) discuss *gāri* [cars]. What is the big difference between the two – if discussions about *sāri* are not intellectual, can discussion about *gāri* be considered intellectual? [K.K., 26-year-old woman, personal communication, 2016]

Interestingly, a male participant too, in a separate interview, had offered a similar example of *āddās* that are a waste of time as those *āddās* where “guys talk about their fathers' cars” (DOS, interview, 2015). This view that men's *āddās* are also often not as intellectual as they are made to sound finds support in Bani Basu's (1998/2012) equally stereotypical argument that the primary reason why male-*āddās* cannot function with women around is because the presence of women restricts the steamy discussions that are staples of such *āddās*, and not because women are somehow incapable of talking about anything but '*sāri* and jewelry,' or about their children. However, at the same time, it is quite interesting to note that while certain *āddās* of men are considered unintellectual (typically, the *āddās* of under-educated working class men, but sometimes also of upper class men – rich and educated, but lacking in culture and *sikshā*), and thus, useless and a waste of time, they are seldom considered infantile, unlike most *āddās* of women.

Therefore, firstly, it seemed that not unlike in the literature and other cultural texts on *āddā*, in popular perception too, Bengali *āddā*, or at least the high Bengali *āddā*, is largely

understood as a distinct speech-genre distinguished from all other forms of talk solely by the intellectual nature of the discussions that transpire therein, where intellectuality was largely understood as discussions on politics and the arts (see Sen, 2011).

The cultural markers of intellectuality that are still used to symbolically understand the Bengali *āddā* are reflected by the group of women students quoted above, who, when asked what *āddā* meant to them, defined it as political debates at the Coffee House with *Ānandabāzār Patrikā* in hand, while calling it the quintessence of Bengali culture. Thus, the students used the two most iconic symbols of the middle-class, Bengali *bhodorok*'s intellectuality in defining *āddā*: The Coffee House, widely accepted as the Mecca of Bengali intellectual public *āddā* for being known as a once-upon-a-time hang out of the who's who of the Bengali intellectual world, and the *Ānandabāzār Patrikā*, a leading Bengali newspaper dating back to 1922, that uses the tagline – “*porte hoy! noile pichiye porte hoy!*” (Needs to be read! Else falling behind cannot be helped), apparently aimed at the Bengali middle-class *bhodorok*'s secret fear of falling behind in the race to be seen as a progressive intellectual in social circles (or *āddās*).

Also noteworthy is that the symbolic markers of intellectuality used here to define *āddā* – The Coffee House and *Ānandabāzār Patrikā*, themselves, in a circular manner, utilize veiled references to the discursive association between intellectual discussions and the Bengali *āddā* to function as symbolic markers of intellectuality. For the Coffee House symbolizes intellectuality because it once housed *āddās* of notable Bengali intellectuals like Satyajit Ray, Kamal Kumar Mazumdar, etc. On the other hand, the tag-line of the *Ānandabāzār Patrikā* also works apparently because of the discursive association between intellectual discussions related to politics and current affairs – or news, in other words, and the Bengali *āddā*, where no educated, cultured Bengali *bhodorok* would appreciate being caught napping for not having read the latest news in

the pages of the *Ānandabāzār Patrikā*. Therefore, notions of Bengali high culture, *āddā*, and intellectual discussions were dovetailed in the definition of *āddā* offered by the students.

Secondly, it appears that discussions of material possessions like *sāri*, *gāri* or jewelry are generally construed as unintellectual and unworthy of the high Bengali *āddā*, although in my experience during field-study at the university, smart phones and applications were routinely discussed in *āddās* among other things, even if *sāri*, *gāri* or jewelry weren't. However, this discursive positioning of superficial materialism dialectically against refined intellectuality of the Bengali middle-class, at least in theory, thus, entangles class, gender, education and intellectuality in complex ways and is reflective of a time in the social history of the Bengali people, when education, morals, and a white-collar profession, and not riches, were the principal, if not the only markers of the Bengali middle-class men, and women's education wasn't quite as popular as today. A time, when, reflective of the philosophy of plain living and high thinking, the Bengali middle-class *bhოდ্রলোক* were defined and distinguished from other classes, both higher and lower, not by material possessions but by such cultural capital as intellect, knowledge, modern western education and by his traditional *sikhshā*, where *sikhshā*, generally translated into English as education, really differs from education in that, much like habitus, *sikhshā* was considered to be the value education, taste and disposition reflective of the class characters of the Bengali middle-class (see chapter 1), without which education and wealth were believed to be wasted on a person. Thus, as a Bengali student on Quora.com wrote, “[a] real intellectual person will be humble in nature, down-to-earth, think for the broader cause of the society and not give much value to material gains” (<https://www.quora.com/Who-are-the-Bengali-Antels-exactly>), so it was believed (and is, perhaps, still believed) that boasting of one's possessions, and even of one's education or accomplishments – material or intellectual, was distasteful and against the *sikhshā* of the middle-

class Bengali *bhodroloks*. Therefore, the materialistic talk of the rich, as well as those of middle-class women, were equated with the drunken babble of the poor, uneducated, lower-class people, and both were summarily discarded as not worthy of the Bengali, middle-class *bhodroloks*' intellectual *āddās* in public sphere.

This complex cultural entanglement of class, gender, education and intellectuality is embodied by a group of people, mostly young adult students, pejoratively known as '*āntel*' – a Bengali derivative of the French '*intellectuel/intellectuelle*' (pronounced: aan-tel-lek-tu-el) used to designate someone thought of as a fake intellectual. The Urban Dictionary defines '*āntel*' as someone who is "letf¹²⁴ intellectual, pseudo-intellectual, disconnected due to perceived superiority" and gives the following example for usage: "[h]e is a major antel, he carries [S]artre with him all the time" (<https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=antel>).

Generally thought of as pretentious, the *āntels*, who typically do not self-identify as such, often attempt to flaunt their intellectuality through their somewhat alternative or less common fusional, traditional-modern dressing style of an Indian *kurtā*, known as *punjābi* in Bengali, over a pair of denims, their shabby and unkempt appearance and certain behavioral habits like smoking *beedis* (usually smoked by working-class people for being cheap) or cheap strong cigarettes, toting *jholās* (traditional sling bags made of cloth derived from the ancient practice of carrying valuables wrapped in a single, large piece of cloth, knotted and slung over the shoulders while traveling) or carrying books in hands, under arm-pits or in any manner such that they are visible. Thus, another Bengali commentator on Quora.com provides some identifiers for *āntels* as follows:

¹²⁴ Letf (pronounced: let-ef) is when someone fakes something for attention like when a right-handed person pretends to be left-handed.

1. Skinny figure. 2. Smokers usually cheap ones 3. A handicraft shoulder bag called *jhola*. 4. Usually motor mouth, can scream other voices down. 5. Prefers earthen pot tea/*bhan'r cha*. 6. An unshapely loose fit dull kurta called *punjabi* locally. (<https://www.quora.com/Who-are-the-Bengali-Antels-exactly>)

Thus, *āntels* are examples of being (middle-class) radical intellectuals (many *āntels* are typically left-leaning individuals) done wrongly. It is their immoderation or excess in attempting to be seen as intellectuals that comes across as obnoxiously pretentious and distasteful, and, as noted above, contrary to the Bengali middle-class' *sikhshā*. However, their attempt to be seen as intellectuals, barring the excesses, can be read in terms of the above noted dialectic between intellectuality and materialism. Thus, most of the markers of an *āntel* – from the shabby, unkempt appearance to behavioral habits like smoking *beedis* (or cheap cigarettes), drinking tea in earthen cups from road-side tea-shacks, and toting *jhola*s – circuitously also symbolize the middle-class' intellectuality through a performative, embodied distancing of the self from the prevalent materialistic cultural practices related to grooming, fashion, trends and consumerism. And although, the word '*āntel*' is typically reserved for men, yet there are also women who are considered *āntels* for much the same reasons. These *āntel*-women (often also called '*nyākā*' or pretentious) also often dress like their male-counterparts (i.e., in *kurtā/punjābi* and jeans, without any makeup or jewelries; and many of them often also sport cropped hairs like men) and exhibit similar behavioral habits. Whether *āntel* or not, intellectual women, particularly scholars, are in general often culturally visualized as non-feminine in appearance, particularly in terms of fashion, make-up and dressing up, thereby, conflating femininity with being dolled up, materialistic, and, perhaps, also with being unintellectual. It also, of course, raises the question that whether it is the markers of femininity or materialism that are culturally considered more unintellectual, and which, therefore, the *āntel* among women attempt to distance themselves more from? In either

case, the underlying cultural idea about women seems to be that women are generally unintellectual by nature – whether for being materialistic or for being feminine. The real question is, since intellectuality seemed to define the middle-class, whether this idea that women are essentially unintellectual, then, ironically, discursively de-classes middle-class Bengali women?

Thus, while not everybody agrees and my limited empirical research didn't corroborate it, yet it seemed that the very idea of the Bengali *āddā* was steeped in stereotypical gender and class biases, with the most sweeping generalizations (possibly influenced by cultural texts and D/discourses) being about women's *āddās* that are thought of as petty, unintellectual discussions about 'sāri and jewelry,' and 'children,' and, hence, at best, as a type of low and inferior *āddā* and, at worst, as not intellectual enough to be counted as *āddā* at all. Thus, the discursive non-recognition of women's public socialization as *āddā* on account of their perceived inability for intellectual contributions in social discussions is one way of limiting women's access to the male world of *āddā*, as well as yet another way of limiting women's involvement and participation in the public life.

Social sanctions and censorships of *āddā* activities

There are primarily two reasons why *āddā* is culturally conceived of as an exclusive male world of convivial sociability in the Bengali cultural imagination: a) *āddās* mostly take place in public (male) spaces, for instance, in open streets or in the living room or *baithakkhānā* of a patriarch (that is, the spatiality of *āddā*, which shall be discussed in the next section), and b) many *āddās* often involve activities that are considered inappropriate, unsuitable or risky – as much socially as physically – for women.

The range of activities in an *āddā* can be varied and may include singing and dancing (see figure 27), debating, arguing and fighting (see figure 28), gossiping, chit-chatting and storytelling, and consumption of food and beverages (like tea, coffee or aerated drinks) and other controlled substances (like alcohol, tobacco, marijuana, *hashish*, crack cocaine, etc.). All of these activities could be, and often are, ancillary parts of different *āddās* – based on which, *āddās* are also often classified as good or bad, and appropriate or inappropriate for the potential participant(s) in question, especially if she is a woman.



Figure 27. Students dancing in an *āddā*



Figure 28. Two young men engaged in a mock-fight in an *āddā*.

Some of these *āddā* activities such as singing, dancing or gossiping in *āddās* are considered relatively gender-neutral activities in the sense that people of either gender can partake in these activities without eyebrows being raised, although sometimes dancing (depending on the genre of the dance) or gossiping, are culturally considered to be typically more feminine. On the other hand, some ancillary *āddā* activities are considered to be primarily masculine cultural practices, such as consumption of cigarettes, alcohol, *hookā* or *seeshā*, marijuana or *gānjā*, and other controlled substances. This is, of course, not to suggest that in practice women do not participate in these non-sanctioned *āddā* activities; many of my women participants enjoyed drinking and smoking cigarettes, *gānjā* or *seeshā* with their friends, including male friends (see figure 29). Nor does it suggest that men's participation in such activities were necessarily sanctioned, but just that men's participation in such 'illicit' and, thus, censored activities were culturally less frowned upon than women's participation in the same activities.



Figure 29. A young woman smoking pot in an *āddā* with three young men.

Speaking about the middle class youths who frequented the cafés in Pune, Robinson (2014) writes that while “smoking [and drinking] was [generally] condemned by parents and wider society” (p.72) as culturally stigmatized activities “associated with a morally bad lifestyle” of the poor and a perverse influence of the West on the rich, upper-class people (p.73), yet, when indulged in, “it was generally considered a male activity” (p.72). This is perhaps because transgression, disobedience and defiance are culturally associated with masculine excesses and are often even culturally valued to the extent of being secretly patronized, as opposed to submissiveness, timidity and obedience that are considered feminine traits as illustrated by ‘a pussy’ or ‘pussy’ being an urban slang for a timid person, especially a man. Moreover, while marijuana¹²⁵ is an illegal drug in India, and consumption of alcohol is generally culturally frowned upon by the Indian middle-class society as Robinson (2014) notes, yet drinking and smoking up (smoking marijuana), despite “*āddās* where [people] drink and talk useless stuff” being considered a waste of time, are, ironically, often culturally associated with intellectual creativity¹²⁶ in middle-class men – symbolized by urban legends about, for one instance, the celebrated Bengali poet, Sakti Chattopadhyay, who was just as well-known for his alcoholism as he was for his poetries.

Similarly, smoking cigarettes by (middle-class) men is often culturally associated with intellectuality and a subdued masculinity. This is quite clearly illustrated not only by the illustrations and images of celebrated public intellectuals such as authors, film-makers, cerebral actors, politicians, advocates, etc., who often appeared with cigarettes in posters, advertisements (until a recent ban in 2003), inserts, book-blurbs, and in insets in books, periodicals and

¹²⁵ Marijuana is legal in some states in India, like, for instance, in Orissa, but not in West Bengal.

¹²⁶ Contrasted with crafty or street-smart creativity as in *jugaad* (see Jeffrey, 2010a)

newspapers, but also by the several intellectual literary (male) characters, particularly detective heroes like ‘Prodosh Chandra Mitra,’ aka ‘Pradosh C. Mitter’ (an Anglicized name that he often uses) aka ‘*Felu dā*’ (Satyajit Ray), ‘Bomkyesh Bakshi’ (Sharadindu Bandopadhyay), and ‘Kiriti Roy’ (Dr. Niharranjan Gupta) who smoked cigarettes or the pipe, just like Sherlock Holmes (Sir Arthur Conan Doyle) smoked the pipe and Hercule Poirot (Agatha Christie) smoked cigarettes (but, interestingly, another literary detective character by Agatha Christie – the amateur consulting lady detective, Miss Marple – didn’t smoke!) in European sleuth literature. *Felu da* – the extremely popular, middle-class, gentleman, detective character by author and Oscar-winning celebrated Bengali filmmaker, Satyajit Ray, is a particular case in point. The character of *Felu da*, who stood 6 feet 2 inches tall, practiced yoga and was a voracious reader, carried a Colt .22 but considered his intellect a greater weapon against seasoned criminals, was portrayed not only as an unapologetic smoker in over 35 published stories and novels, and several films targeted primarily at a teenaged audience, but smoking was explicitly shown as a stimulus for his high-level intellectual processes for crime solving and otherwise too. Thus, he is portrayed to be smoking while he is generally reading; while he is lost in deep thoughts; while he is poured over some puzzle, clue or evidence in trying to make sense of them for some ongoing investigation or when he is seen puzzling over some turn of events that don’t quite seem to make sense to him for a particular case. On such typical cerebral occasions that presents itself several times in almost every *Felu da* story or movie, when he needs to tap into his ‘brain-power,’ or *mogojāsto*¹²⁷ in Bengali, *Felu dā* instinctively reaches for his pack of filter-less Charminar¹²⁸ cigarettes for stimulation. Thus, “*buddhir gorāy dhonyā dewā*,” roughly translated as stoking one’s intellect

¹²⁷ Literally, the ‘brain-weapon’

¹²⁸ A brand of cheap, strong cigarettes without filters that suggests masculinity.

with (cigarette) smoke – a popular Bengali phrase that is often erroneously attributed to *Felu dā*, just like the phrase, “Elementary, my dear Watson” was, for decades, erroneously attributed to Sherlock Holmes – neatly sums up the perceived connection between intellectual activity and men who smoke in the cultural imagination of the Bengali people.

It is then no strange coincidence that even if drinking or smoking up (or consumption of other controlled substances) are not, cigarette smoking is quite the staple of most contemporary middle-class Bengali *āddās*, and has actually come to be seen as a particular symbolic marker of intellectual Bengali *āddā* – so much so that *āddā* seems hardly conceivable without smoking. Thus, when asked what they meant or understood *āddā* to be; or how would they describe *āddā*; or even when generally talking about *āddā*, most participants mentioned cigarettes or smoking – often several times, along with other things like tea, gossip, and card games, etc. Interestingly, during interviews, more women participants than men mentioned cigarettes and smoking when asked to explain what they meant by or how they understood *āddā*; and while this one observation alone is insufficient to arrive at any conclusion, yet it is a striking observation and raises the question whether, *āddā* and smoking both being generally perceived as commonplace male activities, women note the association between the two more readily than men, who, arguably, participate in both activities more often than women.

However, many male students, while admitting that smoking and drinking (even smoking up) were quite common in students’ *āddās*, were defensive in admitting the possibility of anything more than just a coincidental association between *āddā* and consumption of controlled substances, maintaining that the two doesn’t have any organic connection and that any perceived connection were the result of the Bengali middle-class’ pre-conceived cultural notions about public *āddā*:

Āddā means – middle-class people have few scratches [pre-conceived notions or ideas?] in their mind – it has [to be] – on a *ro'k* – [with] people having *chā* and cigarette – and immediately [it is assumed that] and they're talking all shits – [DOS, personal interview, 2015]

DOS explained that it's because of these pre-etched “scratches” in people's mind that drinking and smoking were often unnecessarily connected with *āddā* in the cultural imagination, when, in reality, there are many *āddās* where people don't smoke or drink. While Dos is right in that almost as many *āddās* (if not more) do not involve drinking or smoking up as those that do, yet during my field research at the university and in my personal experience, I don't recall coming across a single *āddā* where the majority of male participants did not smoke cigarettes. However, what was more interesting was the defensiveness of the male students in admitting more than a mere coincidental association between *āddā* and consumption of controlled substances, even relatively innocuous and more commonplace act of consumption as cigarette smoking, compared to women who readily accepted a symbolic connection between *āddā* and smoking cigarettes: “*āddā dite gele cigarette toh chāi-i* (One needs cigarettes to give *āddā*)” (Piyali, personal interview, 2015) or “*āddā* is where you sit down with friends and talk, smoke, play cards” (Kamalika, personal interview, 2015). That young men seemed more conservative and defensive than young women in admitting the common practice of consumption of controlled substances in *āddās*, raises the question that if this was sort of a knee-jerk defense mechanism against the popular cultural perception that linked young men with such permissible cultural deviations that were, nevertheless, considered bad, like smoking cigarettes and drinking alcohol (and possibly, with worse transgressions) in *āddās*.

However, such permissible deviations with respect to drinking alcohol and smoking cigarettes are allowed by the Bengali middle-class society, even if grudgingly, only to the

educated, middle-class men (perhaps because whatever moral corruption they might symbolize, is justifiable if it helps in stoking the latent intellectual creativity in middle-class Bengali men and can possibly give the Bengali *bhodrolok* class the next intellectual icon to rave about?). Thus, when it comes to the lower-class people and women, these very same acts of consumption as smoking and drinking – thought of as catalysts of creativity and intellectuality in middle-class Bengali men – become causes for concern and moral panic. Which raises the question that if it is only because intellectuality is not something culturally expected from women and lower-class people; because women and lower-class people are culturally perceived to be fundamentally the un-cerebral type, that smoking and drinking by women and lower-class people cannot possibly be explained or justified by anything except for “morally bad lifestyle” choices (Robinson, 2014)?

This hypocrisy of the Bengali middle-class society was pointed out to me by DOS in a comment where he stated that middle-class and-upper-class men who drank and smoked in their *āddās* in their comfortable 4th floor room (suggesting a distance from ground realities?), furnished with “sofas” and ‘carpets,” often frowned and shook their heads in disapproval at working class people playing card games, smoking *beedis* and drinking (or not) at their roadside *āddās*:

See – basically *āddā* is – it’s not that a particular class of people do it – *āddā* is from bottom level A to top level A – Today, if a businessman gives *āddā*, so does a rickshaw puller – And yes – so does someone who is in-between [the two classes, i.e., middle class] – who from 5 to – I mean, who works a job from 10 to 5 – now these three levels they don't merge together – people come in come out from there – these three levels don't merge together – so – don't you think – a people – a boy – who – a man who used to give *āddā* – or gives *āddā* in his 4th floor room – where he has sofas and carpet in his room – where friends have been invited to smoke and drink together – where people are listening to music being played [while smoking and drinking] – and *āddā* happens simultaneously – when he's coming out [of his room] – coming out [of his room], when he sees that on the other side of the street four rickshaw pullers seated in a circle – they are – talking amongst themselves – just seated there – playing cards – talking –

doing *āddā* – drinking, or maybe not – just sitting there – smoking beedis – it will seem to him that – because he will never stoop down to their level to observe – he would never see – but these two levels are basically the same – today my communication process – my – umm – is different – yours too – their process is different – and that is why [he says] “look, all they do is smoke beedi-cigarettes all day!” – but you do the same all day sitting upstairs – inside your – just that you’re more polished – (DOS, personal interview, 2015)

However, even if wayward middle-class young men and lower-class people could get away with such transgressions with only a disapproving look and a shake of the head, it seemed that when it came to middle-class young women, a need to ‘correct’ them was perhaps often felt by the middle-class (whose acting agents were again, of course, men). This was possibly because smoking and drinking by women were not only associated with “morally bad lifestyles,” but also often with sexual transgressions [which is perhaps why most of the attacking posts online against the *#hokkolorob* movement focused on smoking, drinking and sexual transgressions of the women students of the university]; and, as a US country study on India notes, the middle-class in India being also generally from relatively higher castes, sought to control the sexuality of their women more stringently than the lower castes as a way of maintaining high status (Heitzman & Worden, 1995).

Therefore, middle-class women who partook in such culturally non-sanctioned activities like smoking or drinking in public, unlike middle-class men, often had to face the brunt of societal moral policing. Thus, Robinson (2014) mentions Shiv Sena men demolishing a night club in Pune and attacking “women in bars in several cities in southern Maharashtra and in Bangalore” (p.74). In a similar vein, Ayesha (pseudonym) – a young woman who was a fairly regular participant in one of the *āddā* groups I observed during my field-study in the university – being heckled and assaulted by local goons affiliated to the ruling party in West Bengal for smoking cigarettes in shorts with her boyfriend at a public place near her residence around 10 P.M made

the local news in 2016. Ayesha later gave a public statement in social media claiming that none of this would have happened, in her opinion, if she wasn't a woman. Several women participants I interviewed mentioned that there are certain innocuous activities such as drinking, smoking, kissing or cuddling, peeing, hanging out in certain places after a certain time or just even hanging out in certain public places that men can often get away with "because they are men" (Ayesha, personal communication, 2016), but women can't.

Perhaps, this was why several women participants in my study admitted to smoking only in the campus and in its vicinity (because it was safer?) and mentioned that the sight of a young woman smoking doesn't draw quite as much attention and stares inside the campus as it does outside. Sane even went on to claim that ONLY in this university campus do women get the freedom to smoke, without having a dozen people staring at them (which was the primary reason why, in his opinion, the *āddās* in this particular university was very different from *āddās* everywhere else, including several other elite universities). While it wasn't possible for me to validate his claim, but for what it was worth, during the several months of field research and observations, it seemed that women smoking, drinking and even smoking up was quite commonplace in the university campus – which, of course, does not imply that patriarchy, misogyny and male-chauvinism were routed from the university, as Juri, a women's rights activist and a participant in my study, pointed out to me:

It's not that the campus was altogether a different place than the one that we live in – where women are given the respect [they deserve] – [where there is] no male-chauvinism or misogyny – the society inside the campus is a part of the wider society and is just as misogynistic as the world outside – remember the root cause of the #Hokkolorob movement¹²⁹? [...] It's just that people here are

¹²⁹ A five-month long series of student protests in the university in 2014-15 against police brutality on a peaceful student demonstration demanding an investigation into an alleged molestation of a female student in campus, who was allegedly dragged into one of the boys' hostels in the campus – along with her male friend – and was molested (while her friend was

usually less openly misogynistic than they are outside – because – because – the culture here [in the university campus] – is like – men – they think – think – before saying or doing something – but in the inside it’s just the same – (Juri, 25, female; personal interview, 2015)

On the other hand, quite a few women participants also mentioned that they were not addicted to smoking and, therefore, they smoked only in the campus, whether with their friends in *āddās* and sometime when they are on their own – “because it is fun” (R.C, personal interview, 2015) or “just like that, [because] when someone passes the counter [to you] – and you’re like: ‘what the heck?’ – [so] even if you don’t smoke habitually [you smoke]” (Piyali, personal interview, 2015). Which raises the question what might prompt a non-habitual smoker to smoke in the university, particularly during *āddā*? Was it because of the almost inseparable symbolic association between cigarette smoking and intellectual *āddās* that prompted Piyali to exclaim, “*āddā dite gele cigarette toh chāi-i* (One needs cigarettes to give *āddā*)”? Or could it be the result of an urge to fit into a masculine world of convivial sociability that depended on certain collective, self-expressive social practices or what Willis (1982) termed as ‘cultural production’ or the “collective use and explorations of received symbolic, ideological and cultural resources to explain, make sense of and positively respond to inherited structural and material conditions” (p.112)? Or perhaps smoking can be seen as an attempt at space-making in *āddās* where an *āddā* is understood as a space to share a smoke with friends like Kamalika mentioned, “*āddā* is where you sit down with friends and talk, smoke, play cards.” Or maybe it was because university *āddās*, or at least the *āddās* in this university, provided the middle-class young women with a space where they could temporarily deviate from gender norms, which probably also explains why far more number of women claimed to be “occasional” smokers than men in the first place.

beaten up), when, around 10 P.M. that night, with all the nearby women’s facilities being locked, she went looking for a place to relieve herself in the bushes by an abandoned structure near the boys’ hostel.

While no conclusive answers to these questions could be arrived at in this study, yet these seemed to be important questions to be raised, especially considering that cigarette smoking seemed to be a prominent cultural aspect of the Bengali middle-class youth's *āddās* at the university.

Besides drinking, smoking and sexual liaisons, other culturally non-sanctioned or frowned upon *āddā* activities of the youth, particularly in the road-side *āddās* – possibly because such public youth *āddās* are largely dominated by young men – often included profuse use of profanities and sexual harassment of women on the streets. This finds corroboration in the literature on youth street culture, as also in some of the cultural texts analyzed for this study. For instance, Jeffrey (2010a, 2010b) notes that in a manner resonating with Walter Benjamin's (1982) description of the Parisian *flâneur* – “a middle-class wanderer who judiciously and impassively samples the city's delights” (Jeffrey, 2010b, p.475), young male students in Meerut “projected an image of themselves as leisured observers of multiple ‘scenes’ laid out for their amusement and titillation across campus and urban space,” which included “young women, objectified as ‘goods’ (*māl*)” (2010a, p.99).

On the other hand, in the 1968 film, *তিন ভুবনের পারে* [Across three worlds], the opening scene culminates in a road-side *āddā* on the *ro'k* of the male protagonist's house, from where the female protagonist is greeted on her first appearance in the film with derogatory remarks and ‘cat calls,’ and in another recent Bengali film, *স্থানীয় সংবাদ* [Local news] (2009), young men at a street-corner *āddā* in a neighbourhood in south Kolkata were shown taunting passing young women from the same neighbourhood. Besides films, occasional cultural references to such rowdy, male *āddās* could be found in popular songs too. For instance, in Nachiketa Chakraborty's once chart-buster song, titled *Nilānjonā – I* (seemingly named after the singer-songwriter's unrequited love-

interest) in the album, *Jibanmukhi Firey Elo* [Jibanmukhi Is Back] (1993), there's a stanza that speaks of an *āddā* at a neighbourhood *ro'k* in Kolkata:

*Sondhā ghonāto jokhon pāṛāy pāṛāy,
Ro'k thāktō bhore joto bokhāte chonrāy.
Hindi gāner koli,
Soddō sekhā gālā-gāli,
Ekgheye hoye jeto somoy somoy.*

[When evening gathered in all the 'hoods
The ro'ks would be all filled with wayward boys
A couple of lines of Hindi (filmy) songs¹³⁰
Some newly learned abusive words –
All seemed boring to them after a while]

Clearly, then, the song points to the cultural *machismo* (or, *mardāngi* in Hindi) or the distinctive (aggressive) masculinities that are fashioned in such spaces as young men's road-side *āddās*, which is also noted in other works on the cultures of hanging out (e.g., Chakrabarty, 1999; Jeffrey, 2010a and 2010b; Nisbett, 2007; Simone, 2005; Weiss, 2009). For instance, Jeffrey (2010a, 2010b) notes a certain “hypermasculine bravado,” involving various sexual liaisons performed as ‘timepass’ and ‘eve-teasing’ (a euphemism for sexual harassment) in countering boredom that “characterized young men's practices at tea stalls and street corners” (2010b, p.476) in Meerut. This observation by Jeffrey assumes particular significance in the light of another of his observations that unemployed young men in the global South – such as those who usually hang out in public places or give *āddā* – often find themselves “incapable of moving into gendered age-based categories, especially male adulthood” (2010b, p.468), symbolized by secure employment and marriage, where, for men, the former is typically a requirement for the latter.

¹³⁰ Hindi film songs were once considered intellectually, artistically, musically and creatively substandard in comparison to modern Bengali songs and *Rabindrasangeet* or Rabindranath Tagore's songs. Filmy songs were, therefore, considered a symbol of bad taste and lack of *siksha* or education.

Therefore, it raises questions on the character of any woman who hangs out in such company and in such environments as described above. This is, perhaps, why a woman is so rarely seen hanging out in such open public *āddās*, particularly in the street-side ones, besides that it might not be particularly palatable for many young women to participate in *āddās* where other young women like them are routinely discussed in objectified terms as Sudakshina (pseudonym) – a friend and not a formal participant in the study – mentioned from her days of student *āddās* in a different university campus, where she and her mostly male friends, including her boyfriend at the time, routinely discussed other girl-students’ “arse” in their *āddās*, comparing them with each other’s, including hers:

The boys would often talk about the arse of a woman seated at the table in front, or a passing woman and discuss whether the arse was more pear-shaped or round and full like a pumpkin – or heart-shaped – Have you ever realized before that the heart-shape that we draw [makes a heart shape with her hands] have no actual resemblance with the human heart at all, but some heavy-built women’s butts look strikingly similar from behind [laughs]? I had never thought of it until he [the boyfriend] pointed it out to me in the canteen one day, showing me Sreejita’s [pseudonym for a leading Bengali film actress who went to college with Sudakshina] arse when we were all hanging out together – and that’s when I saw what he meant – oh, we laughed so much that day we had tears in our eyes – now, every time I see her on screen, I am reminded of that conversation we had – though she has slimmed a lot since then, but her arse is still heart-shaped [laughs] (Sudakshina, personal communication, 2015).

Thus, this points out the dominantly masculine, homosocial space (see Lipman-Blumen, 1976; Sedgwick, 1985/2015) of the typical middle-class Bengali youth *āddās* in public places, wherein most woman may, justifiably, feel uncomfortable as Sudakshina pointed out to me:

Now, personally I don’t mind – I know it’s objectification of a woman’s body and all that, but meant only as good fun – I am bi-curious and personally, I think that the female body is a wondrous creation of the creative forces of Nature – because, I don’t believe in God – So beautiful – I don’t mind – In fact, personally, I like staring at women’s body and I don’t mind talking about female body parts – But I understand that there might be women – Quite a lot of them, actually, who might feel uncomfortable by such discussions [in *āddās*] – I don’t

blame them; they were reared as such. (Sudakshina, personal communication, 2015)

Consequently, a woman may, hypothetically, avoid participating in such open public *āddās* or she may participate and performatively embrace the cultural hypermasculine bravado of the homosocial spaces of public *āddās* through her speech acts and other non-verbal performative activities like smoking, drinking, swearing, picking fights, spitting, staggering like when one is high or generally being inordinately boisterous – all of which were observed to have transpired too many times on different occasions in several different *āddās* in the university campus during the course of this study – in order to fit into the masculine cultural world of public youth *āddās* by subverting the middle-class norms of femininity.

In her book, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Judith Butler (1990/1999), argued that gender is a kind of improvised performance; it is socially constructed through commonplace speech acts and nonverbal communication that are improvised by social actors in order to define and maintain identities. According to Butler, no universal concept of gender exists and the performative gender categories are perpetually open to interpretations and resignifications. Thus, the young Bengali women who often act up in public *āddās* can be said to be performatively ‘troubling’ gender in a Butlerian sense.

Thus, particularly since profanities, swearing and un-parliamentary language use in *āddās* were typically misogynist in nature and were mostly targeted at women (whether present at the moment or not) by men for producing an affect of masculine bravado as noted by Jeffrey (2010), and corroborated by Bengali cultural texts on *āddā*, women who habitually swore and used profanities in *āddās* can, thus, be seen as metaphorically turning the tables on patriarchy.

Gendered social sanctions and censorships of the *āddā* spatiality.

Spatiality, which is a combination of “all conditions and practices of individual and social life that are linked to [the] relative position[s] of individuals and groups with regard to one another” (Pumain, 2014), is also an important factor in understanding the gendered and classed nature of the Bengali *āddā* – for instance, how the Viewpoint was interpreted by the hostelite students as a space for a different form of *āddā*, both in terms of classed and gendered activities, than the ones they are used to has already been alluded to earlier in this chapter.

In social or humanistic geography, a space is an abstract entity wherein people can be, whereas a place is physical, grounded, and often also refers to a space invested with meaning through human interactions and experiences, and an awareness of that meaning. In other words, a place is a meaningful space like, for instance, ‘home.’ Robinson (2014), paraphrasing Doreen Massey (1994), wrote that space was not a fixed entity but an ever-changing process that depended on contexts to potentially unfold into “a certain place, which comes into being through the interaction of certain people in a particular space” (p.78). This is perhaps best exemplified by the spaces of the *rowāk* (or *ro’k*, in short) in the cultural history of the Bengali *āddā*. As Dipesh Chakrabarty (1999) notes, when *āddā* first came to the city with the village to city migrations during the early colonial period, *ro’ks* – stoop-like structures attached to city homes that, Swati Bhattacharya argues, are reminiscences of the *dāwā* of the village homes left behind – were the natural site of all *āddās* for people of all ages. However, since the period immediately following independence, when wide-spread unemployment and economic recession resulted in angry, frustrated youths taking over the spaces of the *ro’ks* in the neighbourhood to hang out (for want

of anything better to do) for the major part of the day, the *ro'ks* have come to be viewed as spaces for Bengali middle-class men to steer clear of.

Research (Pumain, 2014; Robinson, 2014; Massey, 1994) shows that both spaces and places influence people's habitus or cultural competence for ways of being in the (social) world (Robinson, 2014). Thus, Robinson (2014) notes that for young Puneites, *cafés* provided a much-needed space that wasn't quite to be found in any other place – a space “out of the reach of parental control” (p.44), wherein, these youths could redefine what it meant to be young and middle class in post-liberalization India, precisely because such spaces differed considerably from the spaces of their homes. In a similar vein, one participant of my study said that one needs *āddā* because one needs friends, and friends are not to be found at home (Sane, personal interview, 2015).

Thus, *cafés* are ‘places’ where these middle class young adults “could be sure to be amongst themselves” (p.48), without the risk of a parent walking in on them. Had there been a risk of a parent walking in, Robinson (2014) writes, the youths would have perhaps behaved differently – as in, they would have likely not cuddled, smoked, drank or even been there. Similarly, the space of *āddā* often influenced certain (verbal and non-verbal) *āddā* activities by the youth participants along class and gender lines, just as the *āddā* activities of the youths helped define the spaces of *āddā* in the cultural imagination. For instance, the few times that I had given *āddā* on a *ro'k*, I had caught myself each time being uncharacteristically boisterous and swearing like a *rokbāj*, to use a culturally appropriate simile – perhaps in a subconscious attempt to fit into certain culturally dominant notions of *āddās* on the *ro'ks*.

Again, to give another example, during my field study at the university, I have often observed women students coming to the university bursting for their first smoke of the day. The

cigarette packets would come out of the bags immediately as they stepped under the arch of the university gate. In contrast, men students often entered the university with an already-lit cigarette in hand or mouth. Thus, as mentioned before, although not officially, yet the university provided these youths, particularly young women, who could not or did not smoke outside, a space to enjoy a few cigarettes. Again, the university also received a lot of flak for the same, particularly from parents. I have often heard many parents citing students' (particularly women students') open indulgence in smoking and drinking in the campus, as a reason for not desiring to send their children here.

Thus, each *āddā* is different but, generally speaking, just like the *cafés* did for the young Puneites, *āddā* provided the Bengali youths a space to be themselves – a space, where they could talk, drink, cuddle, smoke or form sexual liaisons, among other things. However, on the other hand, it was these very same *āddā* activities of the Bengali youth that also caused certain open public spaces (like the *ro'k*, for instance) culturally associated with young people's *āddā* to be viewed in certain specifically classed and gendered ways, which, as noted before, made it culturally inappropriate for young, middle-class women to hang out in such places.

However, it seemed that not just the open public spaces of youth *āddās*, but most spaces of *āddā* were configured to somewhat restrict or limit young women's access to *āddās*. For instance, Buddhadeb Bose's (2010) description of an ideal *baithaki āddā*, where the primary role of the hostess or the 'lady of the house,' even if she participated in the *āddā* every now and then, was to serve and attend to the other (male) *āddā* participants, has already been noted. And while Bose was silent about the role of any other possible women participants (as guests) in such *baithaki āddās*, experience of being in several such *āddās* tells me that typically most women in such *āddās* voluntarily align their roles with that of the hostess – helping her in serving and

attending to the male participants; and, in the process, the women often form their own separate *āddās* in and around the kitchen space. The family home, too, is, thus, divided into gender segregated spaces of sociability that maps onto socially construed gender roles: kitchen-and-dining space for women who serve men and study and living room spaces for men who are served by women (see figure 30).



Figure 30. A young Bengali woman in USA participates in an *āddā* from the kitchen, while cooking dinner for her husband and his male friends.

Thus, for instance, in Anjan Dutt's popular film, *The Bong Connection* (2006), there's a sequence where Apu, a fresh Bengali immigrant to Texas, USA, is invited to an *āddā*-cum-house-party at the residence of a Bengali family living in the neighbourhood. Besides Apu, several other Bongs were also invited as the objective of the party was to introduce Apu to the Bong community of the town. The scene begins with a shot of Apu lounging in the living room with other, older, Bengali male expatriates, who were shown getting drunk and pining nostalgic about a life they have left behind in India. Women's voices could be heard in the background but we don't see any woman participating in the primary *āddā*. The next shot takes us to the far end of the living room, adjacent to the open kitchen, where we find some women gathered behind a

serving counter in the kitchen (see figure 31), talking amongst themselves: from where a woman, with a plate in hand, walks up to her husband, who is seated on a couch, busy in *āddā*, and insist that he must try a fish dish that she had found particularly palatable (see figure 32).



Figure 31. Women participating in an *āddā* from the kitchen as shown in the film, *The Bong connection*.



Figure 328. A woman serving food (fish) to men engaged in an *āddā* in the film, *The Bong connection*.

The following shot takes us to the balcony, where two young Bengali men, each with a glass of drink in hand, are shown to be engaged in a drunken argument and a third man arrives to mitigate the fight; yet, we don't see any woman there either. The next shot takes us back to the kitchen, where we again meet the women – some of them discussing the brand of the gold jewelry (see figure 33) one of them was wearing, and another woman calls out to a man seated on a couch in the living room, busy in the *āddā*, to sing a particular song that he sings well, before he gets too sloshed to sing. Thus, even though this was in North America, we find that Bengali women typically have, at best, only a peripheral access even in *baithaki āddās*, and that their roles in such *āddās* are culturally limited to primarily offering hospitality to the male participants.



Figure 33. Women discussing jewelry in an *āddā* by the kitchen in the film, *The Bong connection*

Moreover, *āddās* seemed to create roles of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ women as well. Bose’s (2010) description of an ideal *āddā*, where the prestige of the *āddā* could be retained only if having relieved the servants, the lady of the house serves snacks and tea to the *āddā* participants, who are all, presumably, men, is a case in point for the role of a ‘good’ woman created by *āddās*. In general, it seemed from reading cultural texts on Bengali *āddā* that women who demurely

participate in indoor *āddās*, while offering hospitality to other participants and occasionally singing a song or two for their amusement, fit the bill for good women in *āddās*.

On the other hand, *āddās* that happen beyond the privacy of a male patron's residence, particularly those *āddās* that take place in the open – at street-corners, in *chāi* shops and coffee houses, or on the *ro'ks* (like in the *āddās* of the young men shown in the films *আপনজন* [The kin], *তিন ভুবনের পারে* [Across three worlds], and *স্থানীয় সংবাদ* [Local news]), and which typically lack a patron as Dipesh Chakrabarty (1999, 2000) points out, are culturally accepted male spaces, where any sustained presence of a woman is socially frowned upon (see figure 34).



Figure 34. *Āddās* at road-side *chāi* shops are considered typical male spaces (Source: Google Images).

Therefore, any woman who regularly participates in *āddās* in such public places (other than in male company) risks her moral reputation being questioned, and might even have to deal with many unwanted overtures from men, who might equate her single presence in such places as

a sign of being available. This, however, does not mean that women never participate in such male-*āddās* in public places.

Thus, Chakrabarty (1999, 2000) reproduces a comic sketch by the noted communist artist Debabrata Mukhopadhyay to represent how young women who habitually participated in mixed-gender *āddās* at the Coffee House were viewed culturally even “as recently as the 1960s” (2000, p.221). The sketch, tellingly titled *makkhirāni* or “the queen bee,” with an unmistakable sexual connotation, is of a “girl” who was a regular participant in an *āddā* of a group of “boys” at the College Street Coffee House at the time. Chakrabarty notes that “[a]s recently as the 1960s, the sight of a woman engaged in adda with her male peers at the College Street Coffee House was rare enough to elicit... [the above mentioned] sketch from the communist artist Debabrata Mukhopadhyay” (2000, p.221). Chakrabarty (2000) further quotes Debabrata Mukhopadhyay’s following comment on his sketch, explaining his reasons for drawing it:

Girls had just begun to come to the midday adda [at the Coffee House]. But they were extremely few in numbers. It was about this time a certain group of boys set up a regular adda around a particular girl. We, who had always been addadharis without the company of women, felt a little jealous. We named the girl ‘the queen-bee.’ One day, I captured her in a sketch (Chakrabarty, 2000, p.211)

While the times have changed since the 1960s, and a lot more young women give *āddā* in the several branches of the Coffee House (and in other cafés) in Kolkata nowadays, yet young women who are habitual participants in mixed-gender *āddās* in the Coffee Houses (and other such non-exclusive public places¹³¹) are still sometimes looked down upon or maligned in cultural discourses in a similar sexist manner as the above mentioned cartoon by Debabrata

¹³¹ There’s a difference between the commercialized public spaces (of civil sociability) of The Coffee House branches in Kolkata and those of the retail *café* chains like the CCD franchises in that The Coffee House branches, being considerably cheaper than most of the *café* chains, were also less exclusive (in terms of the economic class of the patrons) than the latter (see below).

Mukhopadhyay, simply because of their sustained presence in such public *āddās*, besides for their occasional participation in some of the above-mentioned *āddā* activities that are culturally considered unfitting for a woman, like, for example, smoking, drinking or using profanities.

Thus, it seemed that unlike young Bengali men – who could, and did, give *āddā* almost everywhere in public, whether with good friends, acquaintances, or with perfect strangers – say during a train travel (DOS, personal interview, 2015), middle-class Bengali women had fewer choices and a lesser access to public *āddās* as per the general cultural norms. This finds support in Jeffrey's research (2010), where he notes that young women in Meerut had but this one (relatively expensive and up-scale, and thus, exclusive) ice-cream/sweet shop to visit for convivial sociability as opposed to the numerous inexpensive tea-shacks frequented by young men that young women couldn't possibly hang out in.

Nevertheless, my research found some notable exceptions to the above-mentioned gendered cultural norms of *āddā* spatiality in what I call the 'new spaces of civil sociability' – university/college campuses and some commercialized spaces of public sociability like bars, pubs, malls, *cafés*, restaurants, lounges, discos and clubs, where the gendered social sanctions/censorships are relatively lax, or at least, works differently because of reasons that I shall discuss next.

Exceptions to the gendered social sanctions/censorships of *āddā* spatiality and the 'new (commercialized) spaces of civil sociability'.

It seemed that when it came to social sanctions or censorships of public sociability practices, *āddā* was much more commonplace for young middle class, Bengali men than it was

for women. As a young woman participant in the study explained to me, while men could “simply get up and leave [home], saying they are going out to give *āddā* – and they don’t [usually] need to explain where and with whom; a woman can’t do so” (R.C., personal interview, 2015).

Thus, like Robinson (2014) points out for young women in Pune, young women in Kolkata too seemed to be often on stricter curfews than young men, and, therefore, *āddā* for young Bengali women often happened in the guise of some other event or activity, such as going shopping with friends or to the movies or a house party, or to college/university, etc. In other words, while middle-class young Bengali men, most of the time, could officially “give *āddā*” whenever they wanted to, the majority of middle-class, young Bengali women often had to sneak in their *āddās* in between other events. This is both because of perceived parental and social concerns for young women’s safety in public spaces and the gendered social censorships regarding *āddā* activities and *āddā* spatiality. As mentioned before, this concern seemed just as much for young women’s physical safety, as it was to prevent their reputation, and thus also the family’s reputation, from being sullied.

Thus, several women participants of my study mentioned that they avoided smoking and drinking in public (often including their homes when “people” were around), except for in the university campus and in *cafés*, pubs, discos, clubs and restaurants, which I call the ‘new (commercialized) spaces of civil sociability,’ because such spaces are relatively new formations of neo-liberalism (see Robinson, 2014) and are distinguished in the cultural imagination from the street-corner hang-outs of young people by its contrasting civility – places where young women drinking or smoking or hanging out with young men were common, and where, as one woman participant mentioned, young women felt “safe [or bold?] enough to not care even if someone disapproved” (P.G, personal interview, 2015). Besides the perceived safety of such places, this

could, possibly, also be because in these commercialized spaces of public sociability, women ‘buy’ their private time and space just as any man does, and perhaps, therefore, as a consumer, sense equal social rights as the men.

Moreover, as Robinson (2014) writes, quoting Phadke (2007), that places like coffee shops “are not public ‘public’ spaces, but privatized spaces that masquerade as public spaces, where entry is ostensibly open but in reality regulated through various subtle and overt acts of (intentional and unintentional) intimidation and exclusion” (p. 47). Thus, Robinson (2014) agrees with Phadke that the *cafés* and other such alternative spaces of sociability function to “keep out ‘risks and uncertainties’ in the form of lower classes” – the “suggested safety” of which “renders them attractive places for the middle class to be entertained, especially for young women” (p.47). Additionally, most of these commercialized new spaces of public sociability, barring some family restaurants, are exclusively targeted at and appropriated by young middle class and elite people, which makes them safe havens for youth, particularly for young middle class women, to indulge in convivial sociability with like-minded people without the risk of being spotted by a parent or a parental figure, and thus being called out or reprimanded. For it seemed that for these young people, being found out by parental figures like relatives or elderly neighbors were bigger threats than being found out by parents themselves. Several of my participants, both young men and women, mentioned that their parents were generally “cool” about their *āddās*, and trusted them, but for their neighbors and relatives who often spoke out of turn. Thus, DOS, who enjoyed giving *āddā* with his buddies in the university till well into the night on most days, once told me that he thought that most middle-class parents, including possibly his too, didn’t find *āddā* objectionable *per se*, but worried about the family’s reputation for the fear of “what the ‘uncle’ next door might

say if he found out that their son returned home so late from *āddā* every night” (DOS, personal communication, 2015).

While, the threat of “what the ‘uncle’ next door might say” may still plague a young person, especially a young woman, seen frequently returning home late – no matter from where, other than work (in which case, returning home late gains somewhat legitimacy, although less for women compared to men), yet it seemed that hanging out in *cafés*, lounges, bars and pubs and other such commercialized new spaces of civil sociability were generally considered to be a more respectable alternative to the street-side *āddās*, perhaps because hanging out in these ‘new (commercialized) spaces of civil sociability’ denoted a certain civil and elitist distinction in terms of the participants’ class and habitus.

Robinson (2014), paraphrasing Dipesh Chakrabarty (2000/2008), writes that *āddā*, which was initially used to be held on the *ro’ks* or on the perches or verandahs of one of the member participants, when the practice first moved to the city from the villages, gained a “more respectable modern middle-class form when it moved to [elite] tea shops, coffee houses, and restaurants” because it was considered as a ‘Europeanization’ of *āddā* in the model of English coffee houses, French *cafés*, German *bier-gartens*, etc. (p.50), as opposed to the almost simultaneous migration of the homely *āddā* to the street-corners and road-side *chāi*-shops around the same time that represented a symbolic bastardization of *āddā*.

Thus, because of their exclusivity, these new, commercialized spaces of civil sociability provided the Bengali middle class youth, particularly young women, with an alternative space for public sociability and conviviality that was considered possibly safer and definitely more respectable and discreet than, for instance, the *āddās* on the *ro’ks*, in tea-shacks or at street-corners. But most importantly, these ‘new (commercialized) spaces of civil sociability’ provided

the young middle class women with an increased access to public *āddās* on their own terms, where previously they had lesser access.

However, it would also be wrong to assume that all elite youths preferred these ‘new (commercialized) spaces of civil sociability’ over the more plebeian public *āddās* in the open. For instance, S.D, a 25-year-old young man and a participant in my study, who, at the time of the interview was preparing to join a prestigious graduate school in USA, told me that he didn’t much like hanging out in these ‘new (commercialized) spaces of civil sociability’ like bars, pubs and *cafés*, precisely because they seemed “so commercialized and impersonal” (S.D, personal communication, 2015). However, as sort of an exception that goes to prove a rule, barring two women (K.K and Kamalika), everyone who said they preferred the *āddās* at the road-side tea shacks to the *āddās* in the ‘new (commercialized) spaces of public sociability,’ like the CCD franchises, were middle-class young Bengali men.

Gendered social sanctions/censorships of *āddā* temporalities.

Apart from the gendered social sanctions and censorships of *āddā* spatiality and *āddā* activities that tended to limit young women’s access to public *āddās* in comparison to young men’s, most middle class young women who preferred to have a social life also had to deal with the gendered social sanctions and censorships related to *āddā* temporality – that is, gendered social sanctions or censorships regarding the timings and durations of public *āddās*. For instance, while “what the ‘uncle’ next door might say” is perhaps a matter of concern for most middle-class parents whose children frequently return home late from *āddā*, irrespective of their gender; it is

usually a matter of far graver concerns for the parents of young women. This was most aptly articulated by one young women participant during an interview:

*Ektā chele, 6 ghontā kimbā 12 ghontā āddā dile loke tāke bokhāte bolbe, kintu
ektā meye 3 ghontā āddā diye, sondhebelā bāri firle loke tāke bokhāteo noy –
noshto meye bolbe – etāi pāρθokyo –*

[If a boy gives *āddā* for 6 or even 12 hours straight, people might call him wayward, but if a girl gives *āddā*, say even for 3 hours in the evening, people would call her worse than wayward – they would label her a woman *with a loose moral character* – that’s the difference –]

(K.K, personal communication, 2015; emphasis added).

It was, perhaps, for this reason – this ‘Cinderella syndrome,’ wherein women who stayed out ‘too late’ were metaphorically stripped off of their fancy dress of respectable reputation in society, that most of the *āddās* that I had attended towards late evenings had fewer women participants in comparison to the *āddās* that I had attended earlier in the day. It was also possibly why the number of women participants in such late *āddās* further dwindled with every passing hour till only a handful of women, or none at all, were left.

In comparison, generally, as the night grew, the *āddās* seemed to swell with more and more male participants joining after finishing off their commitments elsewhere – be it a job, household chores, studies, dates, or other *āddās* that finished early. This was because, in comparison to men, women had stricter curfews not only in homes, but also in hostels, boarding houses and places where they lived as paying guests – for instance, as mentioned before, the university required its resident female students (apparently, for their own safety and security) to be back in their hostels before 10 P.M, and those who returned late were sometimes denied entry, and thus, were left without a place to stay for the night. Whereas, in contrast, there were no corresponding ‘in-time’ for the resident male students of the university.

Therefore, understandably, many young middle class Bengali women, despite mostly trying to adhere to the temporal curfews imposed upon them, sometimes resorted to lying in order to obtain sanctions for occasional digressions from the regular temporal censorships on their public sociability practices, as one participant mentioned in an interview:

Occasionally, I would be out late with my boyfriend or other male or female friends (sometimes, I just lie to my parents about the presence of other girlfriends because it makes things easier), clubbing, partying or eating out at Park Street or somewhere – but no later than midnight, because, like Cinderella, it's the deadline at my home too – but, for that, I have to be home by 7-8 P.M on most other days. (R.C, Interview, 2015)

Thus, the above excerpt illustrates that while the above-mentioned 'new (commercialized) spaces of civil sociability' allowed young middle-class Bengali women to have spatial access to public sociability practices, including *āddā*, when previously they had little to none, yet the gendered social sanctions/censorships of *āddā* temporality that typically superseded the exceptions to the gendered social censorships of *āddā* spatiality, continued to limit young middle-class Bengali women's access to public *āddās*. What this means is that while middle-class young Bengali women often hung out or gave *āddā*, and participated in some of the censored *āddā* activities like smoking and drinking with their male friends and partners in some of these 'new (commercialized) spaces of civil sociability' like bars, pubs, *cafés*, restaurants, lounges, discs and clubs, as also in college/university campuses, yet young Bengali middle-class women, typically, still had only a limited temporal window of access to such unstructured convivial, public socializations in comparison to young middle-class Bengali men.

Conclusion

Therefore, it could be concluded that Bengali *āddā* as a concept, despite some digressions in practice, is largely understood in classed and gendered ways. Moreover, whether held in open, public spaces or hosted by a patron in his house, *āddā* is typically a male homosocial space, in which young middle class Bengali women have, at best, limited temporal and spatial access. It was also found that while *āddā* seemed to be culturally commonplace for middle class young Bengali men, it wasn't quite so for most middle class Bengali women, who were, usually, on a stricter social and familial leash than most Bengali men; and women generally seemed to be both aware and critical of this. Moreover, in most public *āddās* in the open, women typically had very little or no spatial access, except when with family and friends on some sanctioned special occasions like festivities or during vacations out of town. Such gendered social curfews or social censorships on young middle-class Bengali women's public sociability practices seemed to be mostly out of perceived societal and familial concerns for their physical safety and moral reputation. However, even where physical safety or moral reputation weren't particularly at stake, such as in *baithaki āddās* in the homes of patron-friends or extended family members, women's access in men's *āddās* seemed to be only peripheral, with their primary role being socially constructed to offer hospitality to the (male) guests. Additionally, with regard to intellectuality – a seemingly defining characteristic of the middle-class Bengali *āddās*, it was found that there exists a considerable gender bias, corroborated by cultural texts and D/discourses, which prompted women's *āddā* to be generally viewed as unintellectual and, therefore, inferior; and while several women participants seemed to be aware and critical of this gender bias, yet some young women and a fair number of young men seemed to have accepted it uncritically.

The research also found some notable exceptions to the various gendered social censorships of women's *āddā* that functioned to limit women's access to *āddās* in the 'new (commercialized) spaces of civil sociability' like bars, pubs, *cafés*, restaurants, lounges, discos and clubs, and, to an extent, in some educational spaces such as college/university campuses. These 'new (commercialized) spaces of civil sociability' provided an alternative space to the young middle class Bengali women for convivial participation in mixed gender *āddās* with other like-minded youths, unlike most open, public *āddās* or even some *baithaki āddās*. This was found to be because of several reasons such as the exclusivity, the discreteness, the elite private-public nature and, consequently, the perceived safety and respectability of such spaces that, despite being ostensibly open to all, was, in reality, regulated to keep 'threats' in the form of the lower classes at bay.

However, it was also found that despite the potentially unrestricted spatial access to mixed-gender, public sociability practices, including *āddā*, that the 'new (commercialized) spaces of civil sociability' opened up for the middle-class Bengali women, their access to public convivialities at night still remained limited in comparison to Bengali men because of the 'Cinderella syndrome' that demanded that middle-class women returned home before it was 'too late'.

Chapter 6

‘To-do or not to do’: Young people’s *āddā* and notions of productive utilization of time

Introduction

In the previous chapter I have attempted to show how D/discourses of class, race and gender lace the conceptualizations of contemporary Bengali youth *āddās*, how certain classed and gendered notion of intellectuality is employed to define and understand *āddā* in the Bengali cultural imagination and how these notions of intellectuality and *sikhshā*, or education, work in myriad ways to sanction or restrict (censor) young people’s – particularly young women’s – access to convivial, public sociability practices like *āddā* in classed and gendered ways. I have also attempted to show how the Bengali youth – both young men and women – negotiate such discursively received ideas about *āddā* – refuting and reproducing them in many different ways in their quotidian practice of giving *āddā* regularly in this university and in other places as well. However, the worth of a particular *āddā* is not only determined in terms of class, race and gender, but also in terms of the conventional ways of understanding time and its value in one’s life vis-a-vis certain popular notions of productivity. Therefore, in this final data chapter, I shall attempt to examine and understand how the worth of young people’s *āddā* is often culturally determined in terms of certain popular notions of productive utilization of time; why, how and when *āddā* fits or doesn’t fit in the popular referential and teleological frameworks of productive utilization of time and if there may be some alternative schema of understanding the same.

Time and the D/discourses of schooling

Bhaskar Pant (2016), writing for *Harvard Business Review*, notes that unlike most western cultures that view time as linear and finite, with a definite beginning, middle, and end, in some non-western cultures, like for instance, in India, time is often perceived as cyclical and endless. This view finds support both in literatures on religion and philosophy (for instance, the concept of the “wheel of time” or *kāl-chakra* is pivotal both in Hinduism and Buddhism) and in Chronemics, or the study of the use of time, where, for instance, Indic cultures are thought to be past-oriented and polychronic (Time in different cultures, 2018). Such cultures tend to be less focused on meticulous accounting of time segmented into precise, small momentary units to be scheduled, arranged and managed and “don’t tend to run their lives by the clock or equate busyness and a hectic and frenzied life-style with success” (Time in different cultures, 2018) unlike in some Western cultures. People in polychronic cultures do not typically view time as a tangible commodity that can be spent, saved or wasted, and hence, time – at the scale of minutes, or even hours, is often considered insignificant and inconsequential.

Thus, according to this view, Indians are seen as much more laid back and fluid in their approach to time – a cultural trait that is often jokingly alluded to (often by Indians themselves) as ‘THE Indian Standard Time,’ which means being compulsorily late, just as people of color in USA sometimes use similar terms (usually about their own groups), such as ‘Black people time’ or ‘Latin people time.’ However, Pant (2016) points out, with an example of the Flemish and French speaking people of Belgium respectively, how, “even within a single small European country, such as Belgium...two distinct cultures can coexist, each with a different way of thinking about time” (n.p). I would further argue that not just between coexisting distinct cultures

within the boundaries of a nation-state, but such disjunctive approaches to time (and possibly other things too) may and do exist even within singular cultures.

Culture is not a homogeneous, continuous singular entity; if anything, it is an assortment of pluralistic, heterogeneous, and disjunctive beliefs, values and practices masquerading as one, unified worldview. Thus, even though Indians are generally believed to be people with a past-oriented, polychronic approach to time, yet a monochronic linear approach to time also exists within Indian cultures (for instance, even the concept of the *kāl-chakra* or the “wheel of time,” often cited as an example of a cyclical view of time, too seems to presuppose an overarching linear ordering of all the cycles in terms of a ‘hypertime,’ such that each cycle is distinguishable in terms of its occurrences at distinct points in the linear trajectory of the hypertime) and manifests itself more prominently, even dominantly, in certain cultural arenas than others (Ancient philosophy, 2018). One such arena (whether or not because it was introduced by the English colonizers) is schooling and the related career trajectory of a person. Thus, when it comes to schooling and a person’s career related life trajectory, transitioning from childhood to adulthood through distinct life phases like starting school, graduating, obtaining a job, marrying, having kids, etc., a dominantly monochronic, linear approach to time is often assumed, although a simultaneous cyclical approach to time also always coexists as reflected in the belief that both good and bad times come and go alternatively in a cyclical manner throughout a person’s lifetime. Thus, in 2014, during the data collection phase of this research, PM Modi came to power after the 2014 Indian General Election, riding on a tide of optimism throughout the country generated by his Hindi slogan aimed particularly at the youth – “*Āchhe din āney wāle hain*” (good days/times are coming/imminent), implying that a prosperous future was in store for India’s youth if the BJP (PM Modi’s party) came into power.

Therefore, it is a belief in the Ferris' wheel type cyclical repetition of time – the conviction that if one's currently going through a low, then a high will also eventually and inevitably come – that makes waiting for '*Achhe din*' meaningful and worthwhile. However, on the other hand, a simultaneous monochronic linear approach to time with regards to one's life trajectory that necessitates one to successfully complete one phase of life before transitioning into the next (for example, finishing school and getting a job before one could marry and start a family, thereby transitioning into symbolic adulthood from being a student), often causes temporal anxiety in cases of long-term waiting. In fact, the temporal anxiety of the educated young men of Meerut trapped in a limbo of long-time waiting pointed out by Jeffrey (2010a and 2010b) makes complete sense only if the simultaneous coexistence of these different approaches to time is acknowledged.

Thus, within the (adult) D/discourses about schooling – by which I mean, both the broad ideas or conceptual generalizations (ways of thinking) and the body of texts, whether written or oral, pertaining to schooling and the related temporal trajectory of advancement in one's career and life, time is typically viewed as a resource to be managed, planned, scheduled and, much like money, wisely spent or invested, failing which young people risk being stuck in a temporal limbo within the trajectory of progression through distinct life phases from childhood to adulthood, because, as noted before, the symbolic transition into adulthood requires successful attainment of certain milestones in one's career and life like completion of education, obtaining a job and being married.

For instance, as I noted in chapter 1, in the cultural imagination of middle class Bengali people, the youth, particularly young men, are often viewed as a child-like, unfinalized subject in the process of "becoming" (Sarangapani, 1999) until a suitable, white collar job or *chākri* is

obtained – a view that also finds support in Jeffrey’s (2010a) work, where he notes that educated young north Indian men in Meerut could not hope to fully transition into male adulthood without first obtaining a suitable (government) job.

Productivity, learning, *āddā* and the D/discourses of schooling

Thus, within the formal culture of schooling (which is not just limited to schools), *āddā* is inevitably viewed as an aberration – a disruption to the dominant view of a linear trajectory of a successful career-life-path, spaced out by certain culturally valued milestones like obtaining a degree, finding a job, buying a house, marrying and having children, etc., unless, of course, the disruption it creates is temporary, moderate and helps to reinforce the linear trajectory of a ‘successful’ life by middle-class standards.

Based on Foucault’s notion of ‘governmentality’ (1991), several scholars (Shore, 2008; Shore & Wright, 2000; Holmwood, 2010; Sparkes, 2007) have forwarded the idea of an ‘audit culture’ in the field of higher education “to describe the process whereby individuals render themselves accountable to long-distance external controls” (Teitle, 2012, p.77). Holmwood (2010), thus, explains the functioning of audit culture as:

The broad trends in higher education systems seem to be most strongly associated with neo-liberal forms of governance and, therefore, with the ‘Anglo-American’ model of regulation (see Whitley 2007). Essentially, neo-liberal forms of governance seek to manage public activities by finding proxies for market mechanisms. The market is held to guarantee ‘efficiency’, while the distribution of public funds is argued to have no equivalent mechanism. Audit mechanisms, performance targets, outcomes and objectives, etc., all became key measures to provide a supposedly transparent governance of publicly funded institutions (see, Power 1999; Strathern 2000) ... Universities are not adapting to the requirements of effective knowledge production as judged by some ‘intrinsic’

standard, then, but to the policies and practices of the particular form of funding of higher education. (pp. 640-641)

While in my understanding, audit culture pertains more to teachers and institutions, rather than to students, yet what it means, in other words, is that, when it concerns formal education, people were expected to demonstrate the value of their activities with respect to the amount of time (and other resources, particularly money) spent in obtaining an education vis-a-vis achieving certain externally set targets as a result of obtaining education, like, for instance, being able to perform certain tasks. And while, fortunately, in the higher education scenario in India, we do not have to deal with an audit culture, yet what we do have to deal with is a similar teleological view of education that seeks to determine the value of any educational endeavor by its end-results like obtaining good grades or a well-paying, white-collar job upon finishing school. Thus, any form of education (or any related activity) is considered worthwhile only if it helps in achieving certain manifest outcomes or goals like obtaining a well-paying, white-collar job. And anything else – any activity, including *āddā*; and even degrees and diplomas that doesn't directly help one in obtaining the much coveted white-collar job or *chākri* is viewed as a 'waste of time' within this dominant Bengali middle-class worldview, structured by the D/discourses of schooling.

However, it is not like parents and teachers do not recognize the importance of 'fun' and 'play' in students' lives. It is generally believed within the dominant Discourses of schooling that such activities have some, if limited, benefits – namely, providing refreshment for the mind so that students can return to work invigorated (which is, indeed, an idea of *āddā* that many of the young participants of my study largely subscribed to as well); which is why curricular visions of higher education in India typically allow for such temporary lapses or recesses, as the 'annual sports day' or the 'annual fest' in schools, colleges, and universities. But such activities, like any

outdoor activity as Bigelow (1996) points out, are considered “fun,” that may aid in learning but do not have any worthwhile educational value in themselves, because “real knowledge was ‘Egypt,’ ‘arithmetic,’ ‘report-writing,’ ‘the Civil War’ – even ‘Indians,’ but in a ‘let’s name the tribes and make tee-pees’ kind of way” (p.15).

Therefore, beyond the annual sports day and the fest, beyond the ‘TV time’ and recess – a word that itself connotes a break from study or work, students are repeatedly called upon to demonstrate the worth (in the teleological sense) of their non-curricular, socio-cultural activities such as involvement in student politics or *āddā*, or such projects located outside of the official curriculum as little magazines or students’ band by the standards of “conventional measures in national, state, and local systems of education” (Gruenewald, 2003a, p.621).

Gruenewald (2003a) rejects this view of learning and argues that formal education is just a part of the larger cultural context of living in places (p.620). He further argues that “as centers of experience, places teach us about how the world works and how our lives fit into the spaces we occupy” (p.621) – such as the university campus, which a student told me taught him the crucial lesson that the larger society outside the university campus wasn’t quite such a liberal place as the campus, but potentially could be, if striven for, since the university was a proof that it was clearly possible:

R.D: The point you made about learning from – from these experiences – what you’re basically saying is that this freedom etc., or the environment or the culture – someone may learn from these, or they may not learn from them – so, in that case, another question could be – that what have YOU learned from it? You can’t really tell me what you did not learn – but that what you have learned if you have learned something – if you can share it with me that would do too – even an example would do – so that I can understand.

Sane: I can say that – I feel much less awkward – I mean now I can have a conversation with just about anyone out there in the streets.

R.D: You mean, having mingled with people here at the university – having given *āddā* –

Sane: In the [name of the university] – by the way, I have learned something else too – which is – [name of the university] is not the whole world – first lesson – now this metaphor of the world, which I just mentioned – it is not the true – alright – it is not true BECAUSE it is a metaphor – and that is [name of the university] is not the world – what goes in the the university, doesn't go outside the university – not in the least – they are total[ly] different.

R.D: You mean that this freedom does not exist outside?

Sane: doesn't exist – doesn't exist at all – now –

R.D: so what can be learned from this?

Sane: The first lesson is to share this lesson with others – people you know – explain them that, 'look here, you want to do it, do it here (in the university campus) – you can do it here (in the university campus), no problem – but don't do this outside – do not do it at all,' and the other lesson is explain to the people outside that there is a possibility like this [possibility of a liberal place like the university campus].

R.D: So this is what you learned – I mean it has helped you to be less awkward with people – This has been a personal benefit for you – have you benefited in any other way? From the lessons learned from the university?

[...]

Sane: And I have been trying to be less judgmental about people – I don't know to what extent I can – whether I would be able to or not – but because I got to know so many different people here, whenever I meet someone new I now try to make an effort to understand who the person is – how does s/he think – they must have their reasons too [for what they say or do]! And there must be a reason for their reasons too – Therefore, as soon as you stop judging – that this is good or that isn't good – say there's a notion on that side that these aren't good – on this side they believe it's all good – the same thing – on that side they say it's all very good – but on this side they say it's terrible – how terrible!! Alright? So the fact that this is really two sides to the same coin – it is really a very interesting – thing – and – that – like this is not the world – alright? And the world is made of people – you know!! People here must realize that this is not the world – and then they should go out and explain that a world like this is possible – that a place like this exist and that we have studied in a place like this. (Sane, personal interview, 2015)

Another student similarly pointed out that giving *āddā* in the university helped him understand people better by making him less judgmental and more open and attuned to the various needs of different kinds of people (Priyam, personal interview, 2015); and as a student, several years ago, it had taught me to grapple with the idea of how places, while being expressions of culture and human actions (see Gruenewald, 2003a), were also, at the same time, extremely influential in shaping our identities (Dutta, 2015a). Nevertheless, non-curricular youth activities such as *āddā* finds sanction within the teleological Discourses of schooling only as far as, in a measured way, it helps students to get back to their curricular work – refreshed and eager to take on more; failing which, these activities are viewed as ‘waste of time.’ Thus, besides my teacher friend’s comment (which prompted me to undertake this study) that excessive indulgence in *āddā* by her students was a waste of their time and reflected their apathy for learning, as already noted in chapter 1, a parent I interviewed, told me:

R.D: So, now that it appears that you’re going to have both your daughters studying in this university, what are some of your concerns about the culture of student *āddās* in this university?

Mr. S.: There’s a need for *āddā* as well. My point is that it’s true that *āddā* is also needed, but – everything – like don’t they say that there’s a line or a limit to everything – like they say there’s a time and place for everything – maintaining everything if one does it, then it’s fine – but if this *āddā* thing descends into waywardness – for instance, if one gives *āddā* after finishing studies then it is okay but, say – too much *āddā* – getting high – if all these become excessive – then definitely it’s bad – and parents fear only one thing – that their children – that their children’s *āddā* – Like they say hanging in good company, paves the path to heaven (chuckles) and the opposite makes one rot in hell – I mean a lot depends on one’s social environment, otherwise even a good boy too will turn bad – if the environment of the *āddā* is like that – discussions and sports and games are one thing, joking and goofing around too, falling in love is okay but, things shouldn’t become rotten – parents don’t ask for anything else. (Priya’s father – Mr. S., personal interview, 2016)

Thus, apart from the fact that Mr. S. spoke about “boys” turning bad in *āddās*, when I had actually explicitly asked him about his concerns for his two daughters with regard to campus *āddā*, this excerpt illustrates the primary parental concerns regarding *āddā*: their children’s possible miseducation in *āddā* and the possibility of their children exceeding the sanctioned temporal limit of *āddā* as a recess-activity, which, again, might have further implications for their formal education and career (like, for example, obtaining poor grades in examinations).

However, it wasn’t just parents and teachers who held such a view about *āddā*. Several student participants of my study, while vehemently disagreeing that *āddā* could possibly be a waste of time, fell back on the same ‘*āddā*-as-recess’ kind of logic used for sanctioning and defining ‘good’ *āddā* (as opposed to the deviant or the “waste-of-time” kind of *āddā*) within the teleological Discourses of schooling that largely structured the worldview of the Bengali middle class due to socio-economic reasons discussed earlier (see chapter 1). Thus, when asked if he considers *āddā* to be, sometimes, a waste of his time, 29-years-old Neel – an advertisement professional and a former student of the university, said:

N: No No No – the whole day I have been busy with some work or the other so that I can get myself a position where I can earn something, after a long tiring day I come here to open up everything where I can live and think freely for a while I can be in a free mind set up, that’s why I come to *āddā*.

R.D: So you mean that you primarily give *āddā* to take your mind off –

N: From my living – from reality.

(Neel, 29, personal interview, 2015)

Others, like Dev – a 21-year-old student of aviation management and a budding drummer, who went to a different institution but regularly hung out at the university in the evenings (because according to him, the *āddās* that took place in the university were of far

superior quality in terms of intellectuality than the *āddās* in his college), said that *āddā*, in his opinion, was a waste of time if done the whole day or at the cost of doing what was important for one's career, like studying or, in his case, "jamming." He also pointed out that "other people" (adults?) would still probably consider *āddā* as a waste of time, no matter what, and that it wasn't something that "you and I can change":

R.D: Right. Do you think *āddā* can also be a waste – I mean – time waste?

D: Yes – it can be

R.D: *Ācchā* [Okay] – how?

D: Eaaaaah

R.D: I am asking an obvious question.

D: I could have jammed now. I had 4 hours' time – seven o'clock to 10 o'clock – I am wasting my time.

R.D: Then why are you doing it?

D: Because SOMETIMES it is necessary man.

R.D: *Ācchā* [Okay]

D: Because this should be done – here is something called mind which needs to be refreshed – all the time studies –

R.D: So how is it a waste of time then if it is necessary?

D: This is actually what other people think. You and I cannot change this.

R.D: *Ācchā* [Okay]

D: I am giving *āddā*, for me it is not waste of time – for you it is – people will say that this boy is wasting his time. So – yeah

R.D: Ok – But for you it is never a waste of time?

D: No – no, no

[...]

R.D: So for you *āddā* is never a waste of time?

D: Not for every time – for a particular time

R.D: *Ācchā* [Okay]. So tell me, for you – just give me an example how –

D: I woke up at 10 o'clock in the morning. I played the drums for 2hrs – went to college and attended the classes. Again I came back home – something to eat – again I played the drums for 2hrs: 6 to 8 o'clock – (Words indistinct) – whether I smoke or have tiffin it does not matter –

R.D: So otherwise you are saying that *āddā* is –

D: =Now I did nothing – I stayed in [the university] the whole morning –

R.D So that is not ok?

D: Yeah

R.D: So you are saying that after you have done your thing –

D: =Yeaah

R.D: = that you are supposed to do and then if you participate in *āddā*, it is ok – but if you are not doing –

D: You cannot come leaving your work; important thing – then seniors should stop you – Id cards should be used – if such thing happens then life of many boys will be destroyed – my point of view is this

(Dev, 21, personal interview, 2015)

Interestingly, while Dev considered *āddā* to be a 'waste of time' if one indulges in it leaving one's work unfinished, another young man, Tirtha, said that he thought *āddā* was a waste of time for him if it doesn't help him 'clear his head,' particularly when he comes to *āddā* leaving unfinished work so that he could return to it with a refreshed mind after the *āddā*:

R.D: Have you ever felt like that the *āddā* today –

T: Yes, *āddā* didn't go well, it didn't fill my heart – I am not satisfied –

R.D: Maybe – did you think that perhaps it was a waste of time?

T: *Hā hā hā* [Yes Yes Yes]

R.D: When have you felt this?

T: THIS at the time –

R.D: Actually why I am asking this –

T: This is I have felt at times say when I am at total mess with some work and I am under pressure due to a work. I REALLY – I come to *āddā* thinking that I have to clear my head and I need to take them out of my head and say on that day something related to that happened and the same thing also happened in *āddā* and which dragged me more into that

R.D: *Ācchā* [Okay], so when it did not clear your mind –

T: The GIST is that my head did not get clear – I could not bring it all out and was not able to express it all and it got into my head all the more – it got settled in my head – in that case I shall say that yes it is –

R.D: That means in the words of Aristotle there was no catharsis.

T: Absolutely (laughing) – there is no catharsis – then I will say today's *āddā* was not fun or say that I talked to someone in *āddā* about the complete mess I am in but everybody's perspective in *āddā* went against me – I mean the thing which I wanted badly but I did not get from anybody in *āddā*.

R.D: They could not relate –?

T: They could not relate, so THIS CAN BE A REASON that I may think for which the *āddā* today was not fun – (pause) and we love to CHAT with those people WHO can relate to what I am saying so to relate is a vital point of *āddā* – so the thing “relate” [makes quotation sign with fingers] can be for or it can also be against –

R.D: *Hā hā* [Yes, yes], absolutely

T: ABSOLUTELY IT IS – but if they could relate –

R.D: That is, if there was a connection?

T: Yes, there is a connection – a mental connection – this is VERY IMPORTANT for *āddā* or else *āddā* will be not be fun if there is no mental connection

R.D: So now when the *āddā* is not fun and is not satisfying then the feeling is that of wastage of time, is it? Do you feel the same way? Umm – then – does it then occur it was a waste of time? it may not be –

T: Ummm – *hā hā hā* [yes yes yes] – a waste of time –

R.D: ESPECIALLY when you have some work to do and you came to *āddā* leaving your work –?

T: Yes – when I came leaving my work –

R.D: What if you have no work and nothing else to do –

T: [Then I will say that] TODAY’S *āddā* was like this, there is nothing to do – this was the situation but if I have work and came to *āddā* taking off from there to become fresh then in that case I will consider it a waste of time

(Tirtha, personal interview, 2015)

Therefore, while largely subscribing to the dominant cultural view, structured by the Discourses of schooling, that *āddā*, as an activity, is worthwhile only as far as it can help one to get back refreshed to the activities that really mattered teleologically, Tirtha’s goals weren’t quite the same as most Bengali, middle-class parents’ for their children – namely, obtaining a well-paying, white-collar job.

However, there were also some young people, who thought differently and their responses seemed to reflect their understanding of the existence of alternative ways of conceptualizing time and its fruitful utilization beyond the teleological Discourses of schooling. For instance, K.K, a 26-year-old woman and a former student of the university, who is currently pursuing a doctoral degree in the US, explained that she thought *āddā* to be a waste of her time only in terms of her “career advancement or in the context of studies,” but not for her life goals:

I mean the time WASTE that I am talking about is in the sense of my, say career advancement or in the context of studies but I mean from the perspective of INDIVIDUAL growth, I would say that I mean it was like something which I mean I would hold dear, you know? I – I mean it’s – it’s GOOD to be able to

spend – I mean at the end of the day – I mean – like, I mean – people often say that – I mean what they wish more was that they had spent more time with say family or friends, so – I mean it's so – I mean I have spend a lot of time with friends and I have made like very good friendships because of this time which I have spent which I wouldn't have made otherwise – I mean – If all I had done was, say, study all day at that time without hanging out in [name of the university] for instance – I would not have met you or Sandy da for that matter – I mean these are like all things – I mean – which I hold dear – the fact that I met so many people, the fact that I HAVE so many friends, the fact that I can RELY on – I mean if something terrible happens I know that there are at least 2-3 people I can talk to about it – SO THESE TOO – I mean – are also VERY important, I think – so having given *āddā* at [name of her previous college] I have like made some of the BEST friends of my life who are still my friends – so meeting them when I visit Kolkata, to hang out them – I mean these things – that I do – I mean the attraction that I still have for Kolkata OTHER THAN my family is that – I mean the prospect of meeting my friends – so that too – this involvement in other people's lives AS WELL, that is also something you know which you cherish and which is important to you at the end of the day – So. (K.K, personal interview, 2016)

Likewise, with regard to juggling studies or work with *āddā*, DOS said:

You give *āddā* when you can and don't give *āddā* when you can't, just like you study or work when you have to – it's simple! What's the big deal with it? I don't understand why people – people confuse *āddā* with study or work. I mean you don't study for an exam all the time, you study for an exam before the exam. Similarly – so today, if I am in an accident – in a bike accident, okay? And I break a leg and am lying in a hospital bed – I won't go out to give *āddā*; I won't go out to give *āddā* in the middle of the office [day] – the boss would kick me out but when I can, I give *āddā* – what's the – why do they talk about shit like time and all – time waste – I mean, dude, you have as much time as anybody else ... (DOS, personal interview, 2016)

These responses, and several others like these, therefore, reflect that contemporary Bengali youth often grapple with the dominant D/discourses about the cultural and material worth of their time spent in giving *āddā*, and that, in their views, there exist other ways of evaluating the worth of such time spent in convivial sociability with their peers besides the representational frames of knowing that the teleological Discourses of schooling would have us believe. Some of these other ways of viewing time spent in *āddās* that the youth pointed out to me included

experiential logic associated with the YOLO philosophy and the exploratory logic related to potentials and possibilities of an unknown future.

Learning and knowing in *āddā* vs. in schools.

Although my research is not about schools, yet my attempts to understand the *āddās* of students and youths repeatedly brought me face to face with the culture of learning and knowing within the school-world as opposed to that in the students and youths' peer worlds, including *āddās*.

I have often wondered about what is it that drew me to *āddās* when I was a student in the university; and what is it that still draws students to *āddās*. When I pursued these questions, I often came up against the academic culture of institutions such as schools, colleges, and universities (school-world) that values and validates certain ways of knowing and certain ways of taking from the world or meaning making over others, as a primary reason for the attractiveness of *āddās* for students, besides convivial sociability and “a break” (or recess) from work or studies.

Thus, when asked what attracted them to *āddās*, quite a few participants of the study (like DOS, for example; see below), brought up the different ways of meaning making and knowing in the world that are accepted within the school-world as opposed to the students and youths' peer-world of convivial sociabilities, including *āddās*, as a primary reason.

Therefore, even at the expense of a digression, I think it is worthwhile to briefly explore how learning and knowing within the school-world essentially differs from learning and knowing

in the peer-world of the students and youths; and how such differences often make *āddās* seem infinitely more interesting and attractive to the students and youths than classroom discussions.

‘Funds of knowledge’ in the school-world

Building on Moll et al.’s (1992; 2005) concept of ‘funds of knowledge’ as the set of skills and knowledge that individuals historically and culturally develop in order to function within a given culture, Moje et al. (n.d.; 2004) argue that all of us carry multiple funds of knowledge with us from the multiple social worlds that we simultaneously inhabit (or have inhabited in the past).

In negotiating our day-to-day lives, we selectively draw from these multiple funds of knowledge as per the demands of the situation, the time and the place, just as these quotidian negotiations in turn contribute to our funds of knowledge. Thus, in asking someone out on a date, in haggling over the price of fish in the market or in participating in a class debate we draw from different (but not necessarily mutually exclusive or incompatible) funds of knowledge; Moje et al. (n.d.) might even point out that the seemingly disparate acts for the most part require much of the same set of skill – namely, being persuasive.

Moje et al. (n.d.) also point out that the multiple funds of knowledge that students (as also teachers) bring to school jostle for space and recognition within the ‘school-world’ (Dyson, 1993), against the schools’ officially validated ways of knowing and meaning making (Moje et al., n.d.). Thus, these various funds of knowledge are a part and parcel of both the students’ official school-world and unofficial ‘peer-world’ (Dyson, 1993), and freely intermixing, these funds of knowledge influence students’ ‘ways of taking’ (Heath, 1983; 2001) from the world or meaning-making both inside and outside of the schools.

These different funds of knowledge that students bring to schools with them are already present in the classrooms, even before the lectures begin; already given, so to speak, as students draw on them to make sense of schoolwork, often reinterpreting schoolwork in new ways in the process and infusing them with “unexpected social and cultural meanings” (Dyson, 1993, p. 6). Thus, what the teacher teaches or thinks she teaches, and wants the students to learn, might not be what students take from the lessons. When this gap between the teachers’ intent and the students’ reinterpretation of that intent becomes apparent like when little Eugenie decided to focus her creative efforts on President Lincoln’s imaginary love life in her response, instead of what her teacher had possibly hoped for when she had asked her students to represent a crucial part of President Lincoln’s life pictorially, we see the teacher shaking her head in despair over the disconnect with her students (Dyson, 1993). In most such cases, when the disconnect becomes evident, teachers’ primary coping mechanism is to put the blame squarely on the students as did my teacher friend, with whose example I started this dissertation (see chapter 1).

However, not only such disconnect is not the students’ fault, nor an indication of their lack of interest or ability, it is perhaps, to some extent, at least, also natural and inevitable. According to Bakhtin (1981; 1986), in the absence of any common, shared meaning, interlocutors must dialogically negotiate meanings of acts as unique acting agents from particular subject positions within the context of the particular act itself. In other words, as Bender (1998) points out, meaning is constructed “in the relationship of understanding [between the speaker and the addressee – real or imagined] from a particular perspective and the obligation of acting from that position;” and as such the truth or the meaning of any utterance is essentially partial, ever unfinalized and subjective (p. 189). Any meaning making process, according to Bakhtin (1981), is essentially dialogic and must attempt to include both the interlocutors as unique acting agents.

However, when Bakhtin speaks of dialogue, he means more than just the act of conversation between interlocutors. What he means is a dialogical relationship between the uniquely different subject positions of the interlocutors that are informed by the various social worlds simultaneously inhabited by each of them and the multiple funds of knowledge that each of them possesses as a result of inhabiting these various social worlds.

Dialogism

According to Bakhtin, every utterance (even those utterances that are addressed to no one in particular or those that are thought of but are never actually articulated or communicated) is dialogic in that it anticipates an addressee and can never be free from the influence of the anticipated response to the utterance. An utterance emerges from the desire to be answered; it is “not designated to dissipate in a vacuum” (Braxley, 2005, p.13). Braxley (2005) explains that the response to an utterance, however, does not need to be immediate for the utterance to be dialogic; nor does the response (or, for that matter, the utterance itself) have to be oral or even verbal. The response could be “either in words or in action,” spoken or written and directed to the speaker or not, but there’s always a listener and “the listener will respond eventually” (p. 13). Therefore, meaning is always negotiated and, according to Volosinov/Bakhtin (1973), “can only arise in interindividual territory” (Dyson, 1993, p.4). However, as pointed out above, dialogue should not be understood as a “mere verbal exchange” (Vitanova, 2005, p.154) between two interlocutors. For Bakhtin, dialogue is that complex, socially embedded meaning making process in the world that “stresses interconnectedness and permeability of symbolic and physical boundaries” (Vitanova, 2005, p.154), and in which “the historical and the present come together in an

utterance” (Hall, Vitanova, Marchenkova, 2005, p.3), even in the absence of any actual, physical addressee. In Bakhtinian ontology then, dialogue is synonymous with “human action and life itself” (Vitanova, 2005, p.154). Moreover, dialogues are possible only in an unfinished world of meanings. If a word is known completely (which, according to Bakhtin, is an impossibility), when meaning is shared and fixed (like so many of us, teachers, want the meanings our words to be for our students!) and when there’s no longer any difference, the word ceases to be dialogic. In fact, according to Bakhtin/Voloshinov, if this indeed happens, the word would cease to exist. It would make the question, “what do you mean?” redundant, just as it would make the need for a response equally redundant. Such a state would be similar to Nirvana in Buddhist philosophy or Moksha in Hindu philosophy – a state of perfect knowledge or enlightenment, when the being ceases to exist for there would be no further reasons for existence as beings are essentially forever unfinished: a work in progress; because “to be” is synonymous to being incomplete or short of being perfect. According to Bakhtin/Voloshinov, “[o]ne voice alone concludes nothing and decides nothing – two voices is the minimum for life; the minimum for existence” (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 213). Fortunately or unfortunately, however, most of us lesser mortals who worry about learning and education have not quite reached that state yet. Therefore, assuming differences and incompleteness of meanings, educators need to understand the ethics of answerability if we, indeed, wish to understand the role of dialogues in our classrooms, and, by extension, in our lives and those of our students.

Answerability

Bakhtin's notion of 'answerability' is embedded in dialogism as Vitanova (2005)

explains:

[answerability] invokes the need of dialogues between selves who act to answer other's action. In this sense, dialogue is perceived as a form of answering others' concrete or generalized voices and thus their axiological positions. (p. 154)

However, 'generalized' here implies an imagined other in absence of a concrete, physical other; it does not imply that the addressee of an utterance is replaceable by just anyone, for in the absence of any shared meaning, every utterance or act must assume a unique acting agent and not just 'anybody.'

Bakhtin argues that precisely because meaning cannot be fully shared with others, "the 'ethical act' is grounded in an awareness of difference," and is unique "within the act itself" – because its truth cannot be accessible outside "the act itself," in which "the unique self plays a crucial part" (Bender, 1998, p.188). Bakhtin's notion of participative thinking "emphasizes that I can only understand theoretical ideas and other people within specific actions that exist in relation to myself" (Bender, 1998, p.188). Psychologist Jerome Bruner (1996) distinguishes between the explanatory and interpretive functions of the human brain in 'understanding and explaining other minds,' which Bruner sees as complementary but irreducible to each other:

The explanatory, aims to elucidate the necessary and/or sufficient conditions that enable us to recognize a mental state... [while] the interpretive way is after-the-fact and typically context-dependent, and therefore 'historical'... in the latter case, one reasonable interpretation does not preclude others. (p. 102)

Therefore, it is in this heightened sense and realization of the non-replaceable self and the other, and of the unfinalized uniqueness of our every single utterance or act among the multiplicity of possible utterances that we are born into the ethics of 'answerability' and ethical

action. As I see it, it is precisely this realization that meaning is not given; that meaning is what we make of any utterance or act we participate in that prompts us to ethical responsibility of trying to understand and answer the utterances of the other. Bender (1998), thus, writes, “Bakhtin’s ethical self... participates in events from a particular position that is hers or his alone, and cannot be replaced with any other position or anyone else’s moral imperative” (p. 187). This implies that we have a crucial role and an obligatory responsibility in any meaning-making processes we participate in, and that the meanings that we actively construct is our very own and nobody else’s. Nor could meanings be explained causally as they are rooted in the domain of interpretation (Bruner, 1996). Further, even the meanings that we construct are unique and specific to the current context; it will invariably change at a different time and place or for a different act or a different acting agent. This realization places the responsibility of understanding others and being understood by others on none else than ourselves collectively. Answerability for Bakhtin is “precisely that act which is performed on the basis of an acknowledgement of my obligative uniqueness” (Bakhtin, 1993, p.42; also quoted in Bender, 1998, p.190). Therefore, to negotiate the meaning of an utterance – however partial and incomplete our understanding of it might be, and to answer it, we need to understand the utterance or the act itself, as also the position of the speaker or her ‘accent’ in relation to the act or the utterance. In other words, besides realizing the meaning of an act or utterance in relation to myself as the addressee, I also need to make a genuine effort to understand (even though such an understanding would be invariably limited and partial) the meaning of the act or utterance in relation to the speaker. Thus, Bakhtin (1986) emphasizes the role of the listener as an active respondent in the dialogic meaning-making process:

When the listener perceives and understands the meaning of speech, he simultaneously takes an active, responsive attitude toward it. He either agrees or disagrees with it, augments it, applies it, prepares for its execution and so on. (p.68)

Thus, to extend the example of Eugenie, if one of our students chooses to focus on President Lincoln's imaginary love life above everything else in her response to a class-prompt, then there has to be reasons why she does so and Bakhtinian ethics of answerability demands that we, as educators, make a genuine effort not only to understand her reasons, but also to answer them as well. Whether we agree or disagree with her, we need to augment the dialogue inherent in the utterance by responding to her; by answering her; and never should we shut her down by calling her response not being on task – which is, unfortunately, the most typical response of many teachers to such seemingly irrelevant comments or responses by their students during class discussions, as some of my research participants pointed out with examples from their lives.

However, teachers also often do not know how else to respond to their students' wide array of responses to class discussions, except to dismiss some of them as not being on task or as not being to the point, when the disconnect between teachers' intent and the students' reinterpretation of the same intent becomes evident as in the case of Eugene, because the negotiation of meaning – the *a priori* anticipation of a probable response and the reasons behind it is only possible (and could only be understood) when one has a thorough grasp of the context, which the teachers often do not have when it comes to their students.

It's worth mentioning here that context in a Bakhtinian sense implies more than just the time and place of the utterance (although it is that too). A grasp or knowledge of the context here would mean knowledge of the language, awareness of the multi-accentuality of meaning (Bakhtin, 1981; 1984), knowledge of the socio-cultural and historical connotation of the

particular words used, knowledge of the addressee and his/her relation to the speaker, as well as the time and place of the utterance and any other relevant information that impinges on the meaning of the utterance, including any historical precedence of the utterance. Thus, Bakhtin (1986) writes:

Any speaker is himself a respondent to a greater or lesser degree... he presupposes not only the existence of a language system, but also the existence of preceding utterances, his own and others' – with which his given utterance enters into one kind of relation or another... Any utterance is a link in a very complexly organized chain of other utterances. (p. 69)

This “chain” extends both in temporal and spatial dimensions as Braxley (2005) explains with the example of dialogism he sees in Bakhtin’s own body of work between the various academic disciplines he draws from: “the chain also stretches out to other fields, other genres, and other languages” (p. 13).

In other words, multiple funds of knowledge enter into a dialogue not just in Bakhtin’s works, but whenever any of us speaks. Moreover, Bakhtin (1981) says the word is only half ours and half someone else’s – they are always already given to us infused with other people’s meaning and accent/intentionality; we don’t learn words from the dictionary, but from other people’s mouths (Bakhtin, 1981). Similarly, students and youths learn from each other in different social contexts and draw from those funds of knowledge as necessary just as Dyson (1993) points out that children’s language use is fraught with relentless inter-textual citations: “They take words learned from others and use them to give voice to their own feelings and thoughts.” (p.4).

Therefore, learning in our life-world is interpersonal and intertextual – it spans multiple contexts, multiple social worlds and draws from various funds of knowledge that we already possess. Since learning involves meaning-making, it is also essentially dialogic and extends

beyond the classroom-space both temporally and spatially – that is, learning seeks to connect with the students’ present, past and possible (future) life-experiences (Bruner, 1996), both inside and outside of the classrooms.

Significant learning, according to Fink’s taxonomy (2003), includes several components besides ‘foundational knowledge’ or understanding and remembering of information and ideas (likely taught in classrooms). Some of the other components of Fink’s taxonomy of significant learning include ‘application,’ ‘integration,’ ‘human dimension,’ and ‘caring.’

Significant learning, then, is not (and cannot be) limited to simply memorizing information and being able to recall it when required (Ayling, 2010). Significant learning involves much more: not the least of which is being able to make connections between one’s life and one’s learning – that is, in acting on the knowledge and in connecting the proverbial dots. However, the goal-based, target-oriented teleological curricula of most schools often do not allow room for such an active pursuit after connections.

“This is where I am heard”

Although always present, these multiple funds of knowledge that students bring to the classrooms with them are often not acknowledged; rather students “are often implicitly asked to set aside what and how they have come to know in the world” (Moje et al., n.d., p. 5) and embrace the dominant ways of knowing that are valued in the classrooms. The consequence of which for the students, Sidorkin (2004) argue, is “a specific educational form of alienation” created through participation in meaningless, unpleasurable activities and the production of useless ‘products’ – “useless not in a sense that students will not use them sometime in the future,

but useless in terms of immediate use, or exchange for something else” (p. 3). For instance, writing an essay on the Constitution of India in class would create a text (product) that might not have any immediate exchange value, and thus, would be useless for the students. This is precisely where *āddā* often scores one over classroom discussions because unlike in most classrooms, discourses generated in *āddā* often have an immediate use-value for students’ in their peer world, no matter how worthless such use-values might seem to adults observing from the sidelines. For instance, a former student of the university I interviewed (DOS), expressed that he thought *āddā* was important to young people like him because even though things discussed in *āddās* might have little or no “education-value” (meaning, being useful for grades), they are usually full of “life-values,” which provide interlocutors with a sense of self-worth and identity unlike in the classroom spaces:

DOS: Plus – *āddā* is the place where you won't ever suffer identity crisis.

R.D: Okay. How so?

DOS: I mean – in *āddā* – if you're in that particular group – if you're in a healthy group – then you'll get a chance to express yourself – like no one would be dominating – *āddā* means you've to be yourself – be yourself – I mean – [if you] want to be controlled by a person – that's your call. But if I go to an *āddā* today – I share my views – today I may not be able to engage you in some kind of a debate in a classroom or may not be able to question you – but when I come to *āddā* – then, however, I can express myself – people are listening to that – People are appreciating that point – they are appreciating that – that – ‘Yes – okay – you said something’ – maybe it is of no use in the class – but here it may be of some help to someone – the things that I say – it might help someone – So what this does – !! People are –

R.D: hmm – hmm –

DOS: you're creating an identity of yourself – I mean the identity that you have [in society] – you carry it – it's not like – you're not suffering a loss of your identity here – like you're nobody, you don't have – any – like – I mean – don't have any benefit [for others] – there's no point of you being in the group – you're useless – you just come, attend and go like in classrooms – it's not like that [in

āddā] – I mean – [here] you've a stand in the society – you've stand in your *āddā* group – You've an your own identity – people will call me [his name] – when I'm – like I'm doing – when I'm going there – and I'm expressing my views – People will know me as [his name] – this is [his name] – we refreshing usually – they won't say 'abc' – or he's talking of behalf of that person –

R.D: right!!

And when asked to elucidate what he meant, he provided me the following explanation:

R.D: So – you said something that really immediately – you know – piqued my interest – wait – let me find it – you said – yes – you said something like *āddā* is like – like different things are discussed in an *āddā* – which may not, I mean – might not be useful in a class – or – what I think you mean by class is – you mean to say that – it won't be useful for your studies – but may be useful in life –

DOS: Yes!! In life – yes!!

R.D: So – can you elaborate on that?

DOS: In life – see – in life –

R.D: I mean – that it won't be useful for you in class –

DOS: The activity that happen outside class – I am talking about those outside of the class activities –

R.D: Hmm.

DOS: Yes – It might be political; it might be a – about a match – a particular game – It might [be] related to games, sports, politics or – work – or some other work – some meaning – for an example – say – I know how to – I'm studying – in Comparative [Literature] today – till literature background I've to go through literature – alright – Now I'm very good at making strategies –

R.D: Achha [okay].

DOS: [As a student of literature] I've gone through literary works, where I've READ – for an example, Machiavelli's [*The*] *Prince*, I [have] read – ^BUT the strategy which – one that I am thinking that in this particular political situation if I use this strategy – then it would be – you know? Useful for the party you favor – yes – now – the body you favor – political body. Now it is here [in the class] that I have read Machiavelli – but, what I am trying to say is: this is how something should be done. But if I say this in class, people will listen to me – then it is forgotten! Because it is only something that I am trying to explain theoretically [theoretical talk]. Practically I can use it only when I say it to a

political body or to my friends outside the classroom that, “listen, you do this the next time when, you know, something happens, like during the [student union] election, you try this strategy!!!” He'd listen to it, he would think about it, he can apply it – at least one per cent – if s/he applies it, and if it's a hit – that idea would then become used to, it would enter the processing – at least somewhere my idea I can share, I can express – that is – which can be used later on.

R.D: Hmm – Hmmm.

DOS: Yes!! So – this thing – there are many who – they hesitate in the class because of this – alright – in the class – like I said – many even say that what's the point of speaking in class – so this is like – I mean – *āddā* session umm – they – like with these things – I mean let's say five of us are seated in an *āddā* session today – say someone – like I said before – let's say there's a guy like that who knows everything that one can know about Machiavelli – he devises good strategy – now among these five people – doesn't happen in class [uses an untranslatable Bengali cuss-word, which roughly means nothing worthwhile, such as the kind of discussion in *āddā* that he was giving an example of, ever happens in the class] – but once he [is] out [of] the class – once he [is] into *āddā* zone – listening – listening to everything everyone is saying – at that time there would be at least someone there to ask him — “what do YOU think about this? You can tell us. Express your own views.” Then what happens is – he's free – Everyone is not watching him!! Not even class teacher or professors are not watching him – only four or five people with whom he's interacting – he can express himself much more – perhaps s/he – perhaps s/he have some – problem – that can't speak in front of the whole class – or cannot address everybody – but when in a comparable situation [comfortable situation?] – when with friends – then – that thing clicks – that – ‘no – okay fine – when I have these four friends here – I can give *āddā* with these four people – let me tell them this in the way of *āddā* – that look, I think this is –’ So what happens in this case is – not only he is telling them about the strategy – he is also giving them reference of Machiavelli. Now four people can – will go through Machiavelli – that means four more people are getting interested and they are going through the text – This is also through *āddā* – because, these [discourses] are being generate[d] through [and in] *āddā*. Today, if I ask people in an *āddā* to read Machiavelli – at least some four people would read it [...] they are not literature student – but they are going through that word – maybe – now – maybe from that work – from whatever is written in that particular strategy [formulated by Machiavelli] – maybe they get ideas from that – like ‘okay, when it is like this – then, maybe, we could think about it in this way’ – in that case, they will – [obtain] some ideas from there – like they get some point[ers] from there – remember that they are not reading [Machiavelli] on a daily basis for coursework. (DOS, personal interview, 2015)

This clearly brings forth the perceived divide in my young friend's mind between the epistemological paradigms of the school-world and that of the social world of *āddā*.

In the social world of *āddā*, a student's reinterpretation of the strategies from a 16th century political treatise by an Italian diplomat and political theorist is heard with the expressed interest of being potentially employed during a student union election; and the consequence is that even if only "one per cent" of that which is discussed is applied in praxis and it enters "the processing" or starts a new trend, the student would have produced a useful product "in terms of [its] immediate use" and exchange value (Sidorkin, 2004, p.3). And even in the case that the student's idea is not used or cannot be used in practice, the invested interest with which it is usually received by his peers in *āddās* and the expressed intent of the addressees for the possible application of the idea in near future ensures that the student-speaker's utterance is answered, in the Bakhtinian sense of the word. In fact, that the student's ideas are considered worth implementing and, as such, are received with interest, infuses his discourse with a certain "exchange value" or "life-value" that makes it a "useful product" (Sidorkin, 2004).

However, classroom-spaces provide a stark contrast where the very same ideas are destined to dissipate into nothingness; where, as my participant put it, ideas such as using Machiavellian strategies for winning student elections are heard (if they are heard) but "then it is forgotten" as merely another theoretical gibberish of a hyper-imaginative student. Worse still, the stifling spaces of the classrooms often don't even allow for such thoughts to be germinated, much less being articulated. And besides causing alienation and *ennui* in students, the dominant ways of knowing and meaning-making in schools often also create structures of inequality within the school (and outside), where, as Heath (2001) has shown, children acculturated into specific 'ways

of taking' in their communities that are different from the 'ways of taking' privileged in schools are marginalized.

Moje et al. (n.d.) stress the importance of "active integration of various knowledges, Discourses, and literacies that teachers and youth bring to school" (p.4), particularly in multicultural classrooms. Moje et al. (n.d.) argue that this is important for "supporting youth in learning how to navigate the texts and literate practices necessary for survival in secondary schools and in the 'complex, diverse, and sometimes dangerous' world they will be a part of beyond school" (p. 3). My argument is that college and university students, more often than not, already know "how to navigate the texts and literate practices necessary for survival" (Moje et al., n.d., p. 3), both in schools and in their social worlds beyond schools as exemplified by their successful navigation of the spaces of *āddā*, hang out, or those of the "messaging around time" (Moje et al., n.d.). What the students might lack, and where an educator might be of help is with metacognition or awareness of what the students already know, how they came upon that knowledge, and how their knowledge in various spheres of life mutually inform and connect with each other (like in the example of DOS connecting the 16th century Machiavellian thoughts to practical strategies for winning a student election in the 21st century), as also with their ethical imperative to act responsibly based upon their knowledge.

However, what we usually often find is that instead of paying attention to the funds of knowledge that students bring into the classrooms from their various other social worlds, which several scholars (Alim, 2011; Dyson, 1993; Eshach, 2007; Moje et al., n.d; Moje et al., 2004; Moll et al., 1992; Vadeboncoeur, 2006) have advised teachers to do, schools often, in practice, fail to acknowledge and tap into students' knowing-in-the-world (Alim, 2011; Dyson, 1993; Dyson & Ganeishi, n.d; Moje et al., 2004; Tagore, 2009), thereby perpetuating a sort of epistemic

violence on students by cutting them off from the pulse of their cultural life and their learning-in-the-world (Bigelow, 1996; Gruenewald, 2003a; Tagore, 2009). This often makes education seem “unreal, heavy and abstract” (Tagore, 2009) and causes disconnect (Dyson, 1993; Noddings, 2005) and *ennui* or boredom (Sidorkin, 2004) in students. Consequently, therefore, students often turn away from the classrooms towards activities outside of the classrooms, including *āddā*, where they typically find what they often miss in the classrooms – namely, self-worth as competent beings and learners in the world. This was neatly summed up by a student (Sane), when I asked him why he gave *āddā*:

I go to classes, because I have to – so I go, as little as practicably possible; I give *āddā* because I don’t have anything better to do the whole day – I mean, intellectually – something that makes me feel that I am still the same person, alright [Laughs]? (Sane, personal interview, 2015).

Two other young men – Piku and Tirtha, both dropouts from formal education, reflected similar sentiments to the same question:

Tirtha: Why I give *āddā* (sounds amused)? That is as I was a school dropout – my knowing, my studies, my writings and my learning is solely from my self-education – what else do I have?

R.D: Self – Self-educated –

Tirtha: So naturally I have always wanted to educate myself from somewhere so as I have chosen outdoors – have chosen reality that’s why I come to *āddā* and place like that for learning something to get more information, to know more and then I can verify it and strain and extract things which I should take and eliminate those which I should not.

R.D: Okay – but when and why did you drop out from school?

Tirtha: In class XI – because I could not connect with them anymore –

R.D: Couldn’t connect with them anymore?

Tirtha: *Hā* [Yes] – *māney* [I mean] – in class eleven a change took place in my way of thinking and ideology.

R.D: Hmm

Tirtha: And I dropped school in class eleven

R.D: Hmm

Tirtha: And – *aaaaah* – after that I started reading in public libraries –

R.D: Okay, but what do you mean by you “could not connect with them anymore?” What does that mean?

Tirtha: Them meaning my classmates and teachers –

R.D: Hmm?

Tirtha: Main – *hā* [yes], mainly that was kind of I started reading some kind of literature at that time – and poetry was certainly a big part of it – and along with it –

R.D: Any particular author, or poet?

Tirtha: Particular author, poet of that time – we were at that time new – new in the field of poetry – so we did not know any particular author poet at that point of time – so fairly the known names like Sunil Ganguly, Joy Goswami, Nirendranath Chakraborty, Shankha Ghosh – so overall I read these repeatedly – this is it – and after I got engaged with little magazine movement and then I started exploring literature more

R.D: Hmm.

Tirtha: So mainly the time I am talking about, at that time I was reading Sunil, Joy, Nirandranath and Subhas Mukhopadhyay – this was what I was reading then.

R.D: Fine

Tirtha: At the time, I was new to all that – I had such hunger – I was reading up anything and everything I could lay my hands on in the town library – ‘*khudhār rājye prithibi podyomoy*’¹³² [roughly: where hunger (for poetry, or learning in general) reigns, the world seems lyrical] [Laughs]

¹³² A well-known poem by late poet Sukanto Bhattacharya. The original line read as follows: ‘*khudhār rājye prithibi godyomoy*’ [roughly: where hunger (for food) reigns, the world seems prosaic]. Tirtha replaces the last word in the original line – *godyomoy*, or prosaic, with the rhyming word *podyomoy*, which means lyrical to suggest his hunger (*khudhā*) for reading poetry – a pun on the quite literal hunger of the poor and socially marginal people suggested in the original poem.

R.D: [Laughs]

Tirtha: So then – at the time – I saw everything poetically; related to everything in terms of poetry – Algebra, Calculus, Physics –

R.D: So you were a science student then?

Tirtha: I was a science student – yes –

R.D: Okay, then?

Tirtha: Then – everything – even – even the monkey paradox¹³³ was like a poetical metaphor for human struggles for me – our struggles, my struggles – we were going through some financial problems back then – my family – I related to that –

R.D: So, you are saying that your problems –

Tirtha: =Not just my problems – our problems – humanity’s problems –

R.D: You related all of that with the monkey –

Tirtha: =Yes – with the monkey paradox – I relate –

R.D: Interesting. So what happened in school?

Tirtha: They did not understand me, of course – the teacher said I was mad and told me to go sit in the back of the class (room).

R.D: The teacher said that in the class?? He called you “mad” in front of everyone??

Tirtha: She called me mad in front of everyone in the class – everyone laughed like “Ha ha ha ha” –

R.D: Jeez! Then? What happened? Why did she call you mad?

Tirtha: No, no – I don’t want to – It’s too painful.

R.D: Okay, never mind. So you did not do any FORMAL studies after class XI?

¹³³ The ‘monkey paradox’ is a well-known maths rider for young children where a monkey climbs an oiled pole and for ever two units of progress in a minute, it slips back one unit. Therefore, the rider asks of student to calculate the time it will take the monkey to climb to the top of the pole. The popularity of the rider turned it into a metaphor for “two steps forward, one step back.”

Tirtha: I have not done formal education.

(Tirtha, personal interview, 2015).

Thus, it is clear that Tirtha, who was a science student till the eleventh grade¹³⁴, dropped out of school because of a perceived disconnect between him and his school-world, where nobody cared to understand who he was or why he was the way he was, but simply wanted him to conform to the dominant ways of taking within the school-world. Apparently, this disconnect became evident to him after a particularly painful incident that he didn't want to reveal in detail, despite several gentle and respectful probing from me throughout the interview, but said that it involved his teacher calling him "mad" in front of a full class that then laughed at him in response to the teacher's comment.

In contrast to Tirtha's predicament that prompted him to discontinue his studies in high school, Piku, who dropped out of formal education after his second year in college, said it was because college courses seemed a waste of his time:

I dropped out college because I want to do music – live by music – and the courses we had to take – most of them – they were nice, interesting but except for African Studies which had a section on African folk music taught by Durjoy *dā*, it wasn't needing – meeting my needs – it was a waste of time. (Piku, personal communication, 2015)

Both Piku and Tirtha, who would be considered 'failures' by the conventional social standards structured by the Discourses of schooling that teaches us to determine a student's intellectual worth by her GPA, said they had found their true calling and life's purpose through *āddā*. Neither of them wished to return to formal education, nor did they want to do jobs (*chākri*) if they could help it. While Piku wanted to be a musician and travel the world by busking, Tirtha

¹³⁴ Being a science-student beyond the 10th grade is an indication of merit as students who don't score above a certain percentage of marks (typically above 75%) in the state-wide board examinations after the 10th grade don't get to study science thereafter.

hoped to be an author and an editor and a curator of Bengali folk music for his YouTube channel that had already garnered a subscriber base of over 9.6 thousand as of August, 2018. Piku, on the other hand, had more than twenty-eight original compositions to his credit and several collaborations and commissioned works, including one for the prestigious Art Department of Visva Bharati University in the short time (roughly three and a half years) that he has been working professionally as a musician-composer. Extremely hard-working, both these young men may be considered ‘failures’ by conventional social standards, but they were anything but unproductive with their time; and along with Sane, they are the three ‘*āddā*-entrepreneurs,’ whom I shall discuss next.

***Āddā* and productivity: Three *āddā*-entrepreneurs**

There are many ways of being productive. Thus, for instance, within the representational framework of productivity reflected in the teleological Discourses of schooling, being productive means getting good grades in examinations, graduating with distinction and obtaining a well-paying job through campus placement or otherwise. In any case, one needs to show something – a product or, as Sane mentioned, a “text” of value or worth to demonstrate the productive utilization of one’s time. And while the worth or the value of the text or the product, thus created or produced, is a subjective matter, Sane maintained that creation of text (or a product) is by definition necessary in order to be productive. However, products (or texts) could be of various types (commercial or non-commercial; mainstream or avant-garde) and so can be productivity. Therefore, in this section, in a departure from the rest of the chapter, I shall attempt to provide ethnographic snapshots of three young men and of their creative-productive endeavors as *āddā*-

entrepreneurs, utilizing the space(s) and the human resources that their *āddās* in the university offered them.

Sane - a poet, lyricist, and a storyteller

Twenty-seven-year old Sane can hardly be seen as unproductive. With an undergraduate degree in Computer Science Engineering and a masters and an M.Phil. degree in Comparative Literature from a top university in the state, along with a full five years' UGC-NET scholarship (JRF) to pursue doctoral studies, he has accomplished much. But his accomplishments are not just limited to academics. Between his degrees, Sane has worked as a script and dialogue writer for a mega-serial under a well-known corporate production banner, has been a story writer for a weekly radio show and a script writer for another, and has written songs for three mainstream big budget Bengali films, including one for which he won a Film-Fare Award in the 'Best Lyricist' category. Much of his success, including his academic successes, could, at least partially, be attributed to his *āddās*. For instance, Sane had always been a bright student but wasn't particularly inclined to attending lectures in college, particularly in his undergraduate days because he found most classes intellectually unstimulating.

India still largely follows the system of higher education introduced by the British that is organized around lectures and yearly written examinations (Jeffrey, 2010b; Kumar, 1988, 1994; Spivak, 2004), and which, thus, poses a Herculean challenge prior to the yearly examinations for students who don't study in an organized manner throughout the year or miss lectures. Therefore, Sane said that each time before the final examinations, he realized that he knew nothing of what had been covered in classes. Thus, in situations like this, with barely 10 days or so remaining

before the examination, Sane said he turned to his *āddā* friends from class for help and each time they helped him pass with a C grade or above, in lieu of the entertainment that he provided them in their daily *āddās* by reading out loud to them from his collection of original stories and poems. Again, Sane mentioned that the “culture industry in West Bengal,” that is the film-television-theatre and music industries primarily, thrives on “contacts” or connections. Thus, the ‘breaks’ that Sane got for writing scripts and lyrics for films and television serials, even the radio job, were all obtained through contacts he developed through his various *āddās* at different points in time, for as Sane puts it: he knew “someone who knew someone who knew someone else” (Sane, personal communication, 2015).

However, Sane didn’t much like the environment of the ‘culture industry;’ he said that he found there were too much cultural snobbism and pettiness. Thus, after working in the industry for a few years, Sane broke away and decided not to work in a commercial project again. In the meantime, he, along with two of his friends and his then girlfriend – who all gave *āddā* together in the university, started a publishing initiative from their respective homes:

someone had a printer, someone else had a scanner, we all had computers at home [and] pirated software were readily available on the Internet; we shared resources [and expertise] with each other; worked from home and discussed in *āddā* [in the university] – we had four offices in the city; five, if you count the [university] campus, and it didn’t cost us a thing. (Sane, personal interview, 2015)

Later, a few others, including Tirtha, joined the initiative and together these *āddā* buddies published 18 chapbooks on poetry, fiction, and paintings and line drawings – including three volumes of poetry by Sane and one volume of poetry by Tirtha – in the course of six years at the time of the interview. All of the books published by the initiative were authored by friends and acquaintances known to the publishers through *āddā*, irrespective of their involvement in the

initiative. At the time of the interview in 2015, Sane proudly declared that in each of the past six years of the initiative's existence, they had managed to procure their own stall at the annual Kolkata International Book Fair that is organized between January and February every year since 1974, to vend and publicize their works.

Besides the publishing initiative, and in-between scripting, producing, directing and acting in several proscenium and street plays, including adaptations of several well-known literary works that Sane had studied in his MA class in Comparative Literature, with his *āddā* buddies, Sane also started a YouTube channel for digitally publishing poems and songs penned by him and some of his *āddā* buddies. Thus, poems and songs penned by Sane and his friends, set to tune by other friends, including Piku, and sung or recited by yet other friends were turned into elaborate *mis-en-scenes*, shot and dubbed – again using the skills, expertise and equipment of different *āddā* buddies, and were published online as music-videos and poetry-videos for free dissemination. Thus, the projects that Sane and his *āddā* buddies undertook, effectively created a platform for everybody involved to showcase their talents and passions, and to try out new interests and learn new skills, and even integrate some school texts with experimental creative endeavours – all in a friendly, playful and mutually cooperative environment, while giving *āddā* and having fun.

Piku – a musician and composer

Twenty-three-year old Piku came from a middle-class family that lived in the northern suburbs of Kolkata. His father, he told me, used to do some job but now ran a local fix-it shop for electronic gadgets; his mother was a home-maker and his sister – ten years younger to him – was

in school. After his mother died in his second year of college, barely a few weeks after he had turned nineteen, he seemed to become a little aloof from his family and started staying away for days on end, living with friends, in the university hostels or in the streets. On one such occasion he told me that he went home from time to time only for his sister, for whose well-being he felt all the more responsible after their mother's passing.

When I first met Piku in his first year of college, towards the end of 2009, he was just a regular Joe who came to college, attended a few classes, skipped the others, dabbled a little in student politics, hung out some with friends and went back home. He first shot to prominence within the university, I was told, as 'Crazy Piku,' late in his second year of college, when acting on a bet with friends in an *āddā*, he jumped off the second floor balcony of his department and broke a limb. Three and a half years later when I returned to the university for my field research to collect data on student *āddā*, Piku was a well-known figure in the university as an up and coming musician, who already had several very successful public performances under his belt. I was surprised because I didn't know he played; Piku told me he didn't three years ago, not at least publicly, but now he did and how.

Piku told me that he had always been musically inclined and liked listening to different genres of music, but he never played any instrument; nor had he ever thought he would, but it all changed for him when he joined the university. He first started picking up the guitar in his *āddās* in the university during his first year and seeing how quickly he got better at it, Piku said he knew he was a natural. But he soon gave it up because it was too common an instrument – “everybody played the guitar,” he told me (Piku, personal interview, 2015). Giving up guitar seemed to be a well thought out decision for Piku, who wanted to learn to play “something else, something different – a little uncommon instrument” (Piku, personal interview, 2015) in order to stand out.

Thereafter, one day at home, he chanced upon his sister messing around with her toy flute, making random sounds and he had an idea. He took away her toy flute and after messing around with it for a few days, played his first tune – a Bollywood number. He said he was mesmerized hearing the sounds that the toy flute produced – the kind of soul-twisting sounds that he said, “no string instrument can ever produce” – and that’s when he knew that this was it. However, he needed a better flute – a real flute – to practice. Again, he said it was his *āddā* buddies who came to his aid. Someone he knew had a flute lying around at home from a time when he had bought it to learn to play the instrument himself, but never quite got around to it and so he gave it to Piku. It was a basic, end-blown, bamboo reed flute of the Carnatic variety with eight holes, but it was more than adequate for Piku at the time, who would later go on to buy a variety of flutes for himself, including an expensive Western Concert Flute, popularly known as the C-Flute.

The next several months, after he obtained the flute from his friend, Piku told me, was spent in endless practice sessions in front of the computer. When he thought he had become decent enough as a flutist, Piku started bringing his flute to his *āddā* in the university, where he would often play solo or jam with other musicians, who played different instruments, during their *āddās* – both to assess if people thought he was as good as he thought himself to be and also to get the word out or, in other words, to market himself as a flutist. Gradually, he started doing some gigs: initially within the university – in different events organized by the students throughout the year, including the three annual fests of the university organized respectively by the faculties of Arts, Science and Engineering, but increasingly outside the university as well, through contacts developed in *āddās*. Piku also collaborated with Sane in several music videos for Sane’s YouTube channel mentioned above, both as a flutist and as a composer.

It was while working on the music videos that Piku acutely realized the need for a more sophisticated instrument for professional work. Seeing an advertisement post on Craigslist, Piku contacted a person in Paris who had a broken, but fixable, branded (supposedly one of the best brands) C-Flute for sale at a reduced price. Piku bought the flute and said he fixed it himself by watching DIY videos online. The flute cost him over 70,000 rupees (roughly \$1000 at the time), which he paid for with all his earnings from the gigs he had done up until then and by borrowing the rest from several of his friends. “Once again, I had nothing but the shirt on my back and my flutes,” Piku told me (Piku, personal interview, 2015).

Around the same time, Piku, along with Sane and few others among their *āddā* buddies, started a street-art initiative – the guiding philosophy behind which, Piku told me, was that art is priceless and therefore cannot be sold or commercialized as it is done today in the form of selling price, tickets or entry fees. In ancient Hindu and Buddhist traditions, a *sanyāsi* or a monk was forbidden to work or serve for money as it was believed that money was the root of greed and, consequently, of all evil, and, thus, was of no use to a monk who had renounced social life; rather he or she was expected to graciously accept alms in kind from generous commoners in order to survive – a practice known as *Mādhukari* or ‘honey-gathering’ (a practice that is still in vogue among some sects of Hindu and Buddhist monks) after the honey bees that went about collecting nectar from flower to flower. In fact, not just monks, but it is believed that people in several different professions in ancient India such as artists, doctors and teachers, as per tradition, did not ‘sell’ their creations or services, but rather accepted rewards and tokens of appreciation in cash, kind or barter services, where offered. Thus, building on the tradition of *mādhukari*, the street-art initiative organized several shows and performances at different street corners and other public locations in the city, where the students and youths performed skits, musical jam-sessions, songs,

poetry reading and street-painting. They also displayed various paintings, installations and other craft-work, besides the chapbooks published by Sane's publishing initiative – any of which could have been picked up for a price one thought was worth it.

The street-art initiative brought Piku a lot of positive publicity, through which he developed several contacts and obtained many invitations to work in projects and collaborations, including an invitation to collaborate as a sound designer in an elaborate art installation project of the prestigious art college of the Visva Bharati University. By the time Piku reached his third and final year of college, with several 'back-logs' in papers that he didn't pass or appear in, he was so swamped with his work in numerous projects that he decided he didn't have time for formal studies – which he felt, in any case, wasn't serving his purpose – and dropped out. Thus, far from being a 'wastage of time,' Piku's story reflects a very conscious and purposeful utilization of the space(s) and the human resources of *āddā* by him towards attaining his life's goal of becoming a successful musician and composer.

Tirtha – a poet, an editor, a layout-designer, and a curator of digital Bengali folk music

Unlike Piku and Sane, who were both students of the university, I didn't know Tirtha before I started my field study in the university in late 2013. As far as I can remember, I first met him on a Sunday, sometime in 2014, during a rehearsal of a street-play directed by Sane at the Viewpoint that I had arranged to observe for my field study. Thereafter, I started noticing him in the evening *āddās* at the Parking Lot fairly regularly: always keeping to himself, literally at a corner, and usually not very vocal, he was the quintessential shy kid in an *āddā*, who was easy to be missed, unless specifically looked for. Over the next several months, I got to know him better

and even visited him at his residence in Kolkata once during the *#Hokkolorob* movement in the university. Finally, in 2015, I formally interviewed him for the study, after having hung out with him several times in *āddās* that I had studied as a participant-observer.

Originally from a non-metropolitan city of one of the northern districts of West Bengal, Tirtha, as noted above, had dropped out of school in 11th grade due to a perceived disconnect between him and his school-world, and had moved to Kolkata with a job in advertising a year or so later. After working several different jobs in Kolkata for a few years, Tirtha, deciding not to be an “intellectual labourer” anymore, turned to freelance work as a content writer, proof-reader and an editor. Not unlike the other *āddā*-entrepreneurs discussed above, Tirtha told me he that he got his first break as a freelance content writer, while he was still working a full-time job in advertisement and thoroughly hating it, through a contact developed in his after-work, evening *āddās*. Initially, he continued with his freelance work on the side, while still working a full time job, but after he landed two more long term freelance projects, he quit his job and focused entirely on his freelance work. He first came to the university to hang out, one evening, with a friend from a different *āddā* and soon became a regular at the evening *āddās* in the university. He said, he soon stopped going to his other *āddās* and hung out only in the university in the evenings. Being the quiet type, Tirtha, unlike some of his more outgoing friends, didn’t often hold the center stage in his *āddās*, but rather preferred to sit back and observe people, claiming (like Bose, 2010) that he collected fodder for his writing by observing people in *āddās* and that this was one among the many ways in which giving *āddā* was productive time spent for him:

Tirtha: I am into writing. So this place is useful – favourable for me that I am seeing ten people sitting at one place: that they talk in this way, they think like this, they move their body – their body movement – this way. These give me a different place – a chance to explore kind of. What I do in an *āddā*? In general,

that I do – I sit in one corner and turn around and watch everybody to find out what they are they doing MAINLY

[...]

R.D: So you tell me, how is this productive for you?

Tirtha: Ummmm – that which I was telling. I told this from the very beginning that this is productive to me because I do writing stuffs. So a human – human nature, to know it, see it and explore it – this is a very interesting thing that which I can do the most in *āddā*.

R.D: You can take ideas from your *āddā* and put it into your writing?

Tirtha: Yes, I can do to the extreme – Not only the question of writing, to learn and to know the way a person thinks: “*Ācchā* [okay], then this also is a thing to be thought about.”

(Tirtha, personal interview, 2015).

I have often noticed him video recording a heated debate or people singing in an *āddā* on his mobile phone, and sometimes I would go to him after an *āddā* and ask to see his recordings of it. At other times, I noticed him sitting in a corner during an *āddā* and scribbling poems in a pocket notebook that he always carried with him or typing it right into his phone. Tirtha was a part of both the publishing and the street-art initiatives, lending his services to both the initiatives as best as he could, but perhaps he was more involved and more useful to the publishing initiative, where he took care of some of the editorial aspects – including proofreading, typesetting and the general layout – of the publications. In 2016, Tirtha published his first poetry chapbook through the publishing initiative.

Besides his involvement in the two initiatives mentioned above and the freelance projects that he worked on for a living, Tirtha’s pet project was a YouTube channel – a digital archive of sorts for rare Bengali folk songs (the kind that are not readily available from established record labels) – that he called his ‘retirement plan.’ Tirtha told me that he had always been musically

inclined and loved listening to good songs, but couldn't play or sing; therefore, his YouTube channel was meant for other people out there who were like him. He also told me that although he had been toying with a rudimentary form this idea – “something like this, but not quite so solid” (Tirtha, personal interview, 2015) – for long, yet the idea of creating a YouTube channel of his own first occurred to him after he learned about Sane's YouTube channel in an *āddā*; he also first learned that one can make money out of YouTube channels through advertisements in an *āddā* discussion. Speaking of which, he mentioned that since he didn't finish his formal schooling, it was *āddā* that had prompted him to learn everything that he knows today. For Tirtha, *āddā* meant a source for a wealth of information, from where he could selectively take what most interested him and build on it through individual endeavor like one would with a writing prompt:

Tirtha: When you asked me the question and I was thinking, I felt that this could be the reason that in *āddā* people from different places come for example one who sings, one who is a painter, one who writes stories, one who is a poet, one who does some other things, or is into politics, one who takes part in drama. So when people from different walks of life gather together in one place then the place of discussion or the knowledge gathering sector becomes vast. It is spreading to different directions. Coming to one place, [in] ONE POINT I get the whole thing about how can a point [idea] be at the same time thought in SIX different ways and that is that very *āddā* point. Because they – everyone is living at that place – they are alive in the same place so they are thinking about that place and everything about them goes around that place [...] then you see in the same way I am getting ten perspectives on one single thing – in the same way going to an *āddā* – going to an *āddā* is not like any place of discussion – in an *āddā* you are getting ten, ten, ten, ten perspectives on DIFFERENT topics or different point.

R.D: But on WHAT KINDS of topic? My point is that the *āddās* that I have seen [...] I won't say that there is no discussion on serious topics but how much and how many times does it happen?

Tirtha: *NĀ* [NO] – Now see your thinking will be very wrong if you think whatever you came to know from *āddā* about a thing is all about it

R.D: *Ācchā* [Okay]

Tirtha: You know a thing, NOW here you need to have that urge which determines how much more you want to know about it.

R.D: *Ācchā* [Okay]

Tirtha: I heard a point here, say, say, somewhere there is one – there is some political movement happening in some part of the world. I came to know about this in an *āddā* like DO YOU KNOW this is happening? Hearing this I felt interested, it knocked in my head, now after returning home I started researching on that about what it is? Where it is going on? Why happening? Who are doing it? Who are against it? Why happening? THESE are the things that I started learning about and from THERE I came to know about it and THIS might somewhere help to evolve MY thought process

R.D: *Ācchā* [Okay]

Tirtha: THIS POINT is the importance of *āddā*.

R.D: You came to know about such things – I mean you heard, your interest developed and you researched it at home

Tirtha: Hm Hm – *āddā* is like a prompt.

[...]

R.D: Hmm.

Tirtha: but from my personal experience, I have the interest to know more because to me one thing is clear...that which I feel, as I have not cleared the so called profession – levels of school college step by step so I have this intense – that I have to know¹³⁵

R.D: Hmm.

Tirtha: So to know I have to keep doing that research – I have to keep that place for my growth

R.D: Hmm

Tirtha: And *āddā* helps in making the area of growth – the place from where I get to know about that point and personally I know more and make myself aware of and this is from where I come to know about the point. This is completely for my

¹³⁵ Thus, it seemed that even though Tirtha valued his informal learning from *āddās* no less than the formal learning that he might have gotten from his schooling, had he finished it, yet he possibly also felt the need to make up for his lack of formal education that is valued as a cultural capital within the Bengali cultural worldview.

knowledge, so that I can say [participate in discussions in *āddā*] from my personal perspective.

(Tirtha, personal interview, 2015)

Therefore, when he is not busy learning about something new in his *āddās* in the university or working on some freelance project, Tirtha travels extensively in rural West Bengal – participating in *āddās* with *Bāuls*¹³⁶ and other local folk-performers, and recording authentic folk music performances for his YouTube channel that currently boasts of 9.6 thousand subscribers and many more page hits each month. And although I was skeptical, but Tirtha hoped that at this rate, in another two to three years, his channel will earn him enough revenue every month for him to live comfortably by middle-class standards without having to worry about working for a living.

“I don’t need no books to learn, and no laptop to be productive”

The ethnographic snapshots of the three entrepreneurial young men above illustrate alternative ways of taking from and being productive within the space(s) of *āddās*, while still broadly staying within the representational framework of productivity valued in the teleological Discourses of schooling. But not everybody is similarly entrepreneurial to the same extent or is as talented as our three *āddā*-entrepreneurs. So, therefore, how are we to view the time spent in *āddās* by youth who don’t have any text or product to show for the productive use of their time?

¹³⁶ *Bāuls* are a group of mystic minstrels from the Bengal region of South Asia, which includes Bangladesh and the Indian states of West Bengal, Tripura and Assam’s Barak Valley. *Bāuls* constitute both a syncretic religious sect and a musical tradition. *Bāuls* are a very heterogeneous group, with many sects, but their membership mainly consists of Vaishnava Hindus and Sufi Muslims. They can often be identified by their distinctive clothes and musical instruments. Although *Bāuls* comprise only a small fraction of the Bengali population, their cultural influence is considerable. In 2005, the *Bāul* tradition of Bangladesh was included in the list of Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO [Source: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baul>].

If not quite as productive in terms of text or product creation, should the time spent by young people in *āddā* be viewed in terms of ‘*āddā*-as recess’ or, alternatively, as a waste of time? Or, is there a way of looking at youth *āddā* outside of the narrow representational framework championed by the teleological Discourses of schooling? Can generation of ideas and knowledge that don’t culminate in a text or a product in the immediate, foreseeable future be considered productive? DOS seemed to think in the affirmative. In his opinion, the worlds of schooling and *āddā* are distinct – each with their unique learning advantages, and the two cannot be viewed through the same lens:

First of all, the thing is the things that we get to learn in *āddā* – the things that we get to know – these come handy to us the most in our day to day life – we do not [learn?] theoretically – you don’t really give *āddā* with books and all – so why do people relate it [*āddā*] with text book – or with their job life I have no idea – *āddā* is not about studies – Why people mixed *āddā* with studies [...] I am just talking to some people – and that what I am learning from it – it’s not like I have to go give *āddā* whenever I am told to study or just because I am giving *āddā*, doesn’t mean I am neglecting my studies – there’s absolutely no connection between the two – this is the most foolish interpretation – if anyone ever thought of it – he’s the one of the most – stupidest and foolish interpretation – conflating *āddā* and studies – where the two are being like together – they cannot be stitch[ed] together [...] grades are separate – then there are also people who are like – who’ve stood first [in academics] – first class first – but outside [of the academia] – when they go out in the world with a job – perhaps they go work in a particular nominal position – before they are like this amazing first class first students – but now they work in some nominal position – then that is also – what it means then is – again the grades don’t influence their professional career. Why? Because there [in the job market] grades don’t matter – what matters there is your working capability – you’re good in studies – but you can’t work hard – then what good is it me being first class first in studies? If I cannot work well? Same thing – *āddā* is a different thing – why do you – I mean why connect *āddā* with academics I don’t know – why people connect that? (DOS, personal interview, 2015)

In another instance, speaking about the popular, adult perception of youth *āddā* as mostly a waste of time, DOS pointed out that not only are there various ways of being productive

but productivity doesn't always look the same and hence, cannot be accurately identified by external visual symbols such as books or laptops:

DOS: But – our *āddā*s here are not like that – we talk sense – where discussions are sensible – there – if a person is commenting – I think if you're commenting about *āddā* session – then first go and join that session – and then you comment – before you do that you shouldn't comment – because maybe they are actually talking about academics there – for who knows what five kids sitting in a circle are talking about – in their *āddā*? It's not like – one has to have books open all the time – or that you have to like, you know? This here is the basic point – I mean – people think that when kids are seated without books – then it must be an *āddā* and that's not good!! Meaning – you need books – you need – oooh – text books – and writing copies, you need to discuss – you need to have laptop to show that you're doing something productive – but – if I'm talking about something which is theoretical and I don't have to refer to books – then – and I'm just verbally communicating – what is the harm of that? That's not wastage of time – because – still I'm getting to know anything – I don't need no books. It's not a class – *āddā* is different – I don't need no books to learn – and no laptop to be productive [...] Whenever they say that *āddā* is a wastage of time – wastage of time means to them – one has to have books open or else – but when you have books open – it's like discussions would get centralized at a particular point – and would become static monotonic – it would restrict me to this one place – to this one center – but I don't want to be like that – I want to know many things – different things – I have many curiosity – *āddā* means we are wandering all the time – mentally – it means we embark on a visual journey – we as one – through verbal communication – so – that is it – I mean it's not about – that – wastage of time – not at all [...] even people here – even the professors here know – I mean that even our professors also know that – if I can make a study session seem like an *āddā* – then it's much more productive – and why's that?? If you take this very *āddā* into the classroom – then the boy who cannot speak in class today – he would speak in the next class – because he's finding – that – wow – my environment – it's because of the environment – the ambience – where he work – I mean the moment you create a similar ambience in the class – if you do – with the professor[s] – if they talk to you – tell you that 'okay, today – no books – no text books – no copies – we just talk today' — that is the form of an *āddā* session – if you're in form of *āddā* session – I think the productive potential it would have – the positive vibes it would have – the influence it would have – it would be the maximum – much more than having textbooks open – because opening textbooks means – you need to focus on what he's teaching!!! But out of 30 students in a class, maybe 15 would be paying attention to the book or the notebook – and the other fifteen? Some would be staring out of the window – some would be doodling – some would be doing something, like you know – but in an *āddā*, discourses get polish[ed] [sharpened?] all the time – know why? Because all the matter and topics of discussion are produced fresh: “No – Why is

this not turning out like that? This is – no – then maybe like this – what do you think? What is your – what is your point of view?” I mean it’s all random [spontaneous] – and it’s very friendly – so this is why – how it helps you is – the interaction is usually much more polished – and the communication too is also much more clear [...] there are plenty people who can’t remember a thing from reading books but when they discuss something in an *āddā*, they vividly remember them – why’s that? It’s because [in an *āddā*] there’s none to remind them to “Study, study, study” all the time – they give *āddā* in their own interest – no one is telling him – showing him the way: “you need to study, study” – no – He (is like): “I need to know this – *āchhā* [okay] – this is happening – let me listen” – this is how it is –

R.D: So, are you saying that – classes in general are more – aahhh – like impersonal, where people – you know – they don’t feel that interest – that they feel in *āddā*?

DOS: Yes, generally speaking – now the thing is – this is [...] today if I give *āddā* with five boys outside [the classroom] – now I am with the same five boys in the class[room] – only that I am sitting inside a four wall[ed] room – now – thing is that – basically there are no changes really – there’s no change in the people I am hanging out with – there’s no change in my topic [of discussion] either – so then like I am giving *āddā* today outside [the classroom] – if I did the same thing inside the class – then really nothing is changing – in that case sitting in the class[room] is not impersonal for me – it’d become impersonal if it is – if someone is forcing you to attend the classes – ‘You’ve to attend each and every day – you – you’ve to read this book and come down,’ etcetera.

R.D: Right.

DOS: Now, if you’re interested then you’ll attend the class, alright? But in the class – in between class – the sessions that happen – the *āddā* sessions that takes place – students discuss studies there as well – in a different way.

(DOS, personal interview, 2015)

Thus, DOS also points to the potentials of integrating *āddā* into the formal curricular vision of schooling and thinks that doing so would make learning more effective for students.

Conclusion: “*āddā* is unpredictable – like one long love affair”

Thus, in conclusion, it seemed that yet another reason for youth *āddās* to be popularly perceived as a waste of time by adults was the teleological vision of time and the referential framework of productivity valued in the culture of schooling, where the end result or product largely determined the value of the processes leading up to it. Thus, within this framework, *āddā* could possibly have only a limited worth as a form of recess that helps students to return to class-work rejuvenated and energized, failing which *āddā* was considered a ‘waste of time.’

On the other hand, the youths – although they seemed to struggle with the teleological, referential framework of the Discourses of schooling pertaining to time spent by them in their *āddās* – highlighted a different way of looking at time and productivity through the lens of affect: an alternative framework that valued feelings, sentiments and emotions in the moment over and above the products and the end results. Thus, it seemed that although sometimes, admittedly, fruitless, *āddā* was like “one long love affair” for young people like Tirtha, who spent hours each day in the apparently unproductive activity of giving *āddā*:

Tirtha: *HĀ* [YES] – this is, say, from the example of love which I have told – in the same way you may get fucking pissed off with your lover on some days.

R.D: Certainly

Tirtha: But that does not mean your love for her will vanish

R.D: No, I am not saying that.

Tirtha: YES, I may get fucking pissed off because I may have that feeling – say from 2008 to 2015 end I am coming to the same place for *āddā* for so many days and of that on some days I feel like I am fucking pissed off, I will say here – this can very well happen

R.D: Can very well happen

Tirtha: And I will say this is an exception – it is like prove the rule time –

R.D: Okay.

Tirtha: YES – *āddā* IS unpredictable – on some days it's so good – exciting that you fucking don't want to go back home – But sometimes – rarely – *āddā* – it – it's a wastage of time – that – that – you don't want to – but still can't go home – and get fucking pissed but the next day it is normal again – like one long love affair – fights and all. (Tirtha, personal interview, 2015)

Therefore, no matter how adults viewed it, *āddā* seemed to be a really important part of Bengali students and youths' social world. *Āddā* also seemed fraught with educational potentials for 'learning-in-the-world' (Bigelow, 1996; Gruenewald, 2003a; Tagore, 2009), such that ignoring it would be a disservice to education itself.

Chapter 7

Discussions and conclusions

What is *āddā*?

Even though the question (what is *āddā*?) isn't one of my research questions (because that would have required the study to be designed differently – for instance, as a set of case studies of different *āddās* at various locales), nevertheless, this entire dissertation has in some ways been a quest to understand what *āddā* is, at least in the contexts presented in the dissertation. Thus, I had started the dissertation (in chapter 1) by asking what *āddā* is (which has now brought us to a full circle in this chapter). In chapter 4, I have presented some vignettes of my experiences related to *āddā* and in chapters 5 and 6, I have discussed in detail issues of class, gender and learning in *āddā*. And in the process, I have attempted to understand what *āddā* is, what are its attraction and worth for middle-class Bengali students and youths, why is it that student and youth *āddās* are often criticized by adults even when Bengalis generally accept *āddā* as one of their valuable cultural heritages, if indeed *āddā* is a waste of time for middle-class Bengali students and youths, and how do the Bengali students and youths make sense of all this? Therefore, in this chapter I shall revisit the relevant information and insight obtained in the process of the research through readings, experiences, reflections, participant observations and interviews, and attempt to put the pieces together.

Defining *āddā* – a failed attempt and a realization

As they read and re-read the progressing drafts of my dissertation, my American committee members kept asking me to define *āddā* for them. “What IS *āddā* – is it a speech genre?” “What does *āddā* entail?” “What are its norms?” The questions kept coming.

Each time I attempted to define *āddā*, I failed to come up with a clear and specific definition of it. It didn’t help that in the literature too, *āddā* is primarily defined through description that are specific to instances and are not particularly generalizable. For instance, in chapter one (p.34), I have included Bose’s (2010) description of *āddā* as a gathering of friends where there is ease and comfort (for instance, a mattress to lie down on if one is tired) and light snacks and fragrant, golden tea in fancy cups. The problem with such description is that it doesn’t really tell us anything about *āddās* in other places (for instance, in a university campus or at The Indian Coffee House outlets), where such facilities as described by Bose aren’t available. Surely, the lack of a mattress to lie down on or the non-availability of snacks and tea couldn’t be the ground for dismissing an *āddā*. Other authours like Chattopadhyay (2010) essentially directs the readers to their emotions to understand what *āddā* is because, according to him, *āddā* does not have any external markers: “To locate an *āddā* is extremely difficult because *āddā* does not have any external markers unlike club-houses that have a names, addresses and telephone numbers ... *āddā* grows unaided from the desires of the heart” (p.19).

Dipesh Chakrabarty (1999) pointed out (see chapter 1) that Rajshekhar Basu had once defined *āddā* in a dictionary compiled by him as a rendezvous of rogues, but I don’t think many Bengalis would concur with such a definition of *āddā*. In fact, Chakrabarty (1999) suggests that perhaps Rajshekhar Basu, himself, wouldn’t have agreed to his definition of *āddā*.

Moreover, a definition like this doesn't really tell us much about the actual practice of *āddā* or what it entails. Chakrabarty (1999), himself, on the other hand posits *āddā* as “long, informal and unrigorous conversations” (p. 110) between friends. And while Debarati Sen (2011), calls *āddā* a speech-genre, yet she doesn't give us the specific features of *āddā* that makes it a distinct speech genre, except that *āddā* typically involves intellectual discussions, particularly politics, arts, literature and music.

On the other hand, the participants of my study typically pointed or referred to their *āddās*, besides maintaining that *āddā* is typically Bengali and intellectual, when asked to explain what *āddā* meant for them. Some of them offered definitions like: “*āddā* is the place where you won't ever suffer identity crisis” (DOS; see chapter 6) or “*āddā* is where you sit down with friends and talk, smoke, play cards” (Kamalika; see chapter 5).

Curiously, this indexicality (pointing or referring to an example of *āddā* as a way of defining what it is) in defining *āddā*, noted by Sen (2011) with the participants in her study, is observed in the literature too, for instance, in Bose's (2010) descriptions of *āddā* or when New York Times journalist, Peter Trachtenberg (2005) was told by Calcuttans that the best *āddās* happened at The Coffee House on College Street.

On the other hand, the most common qualifiers of *āddā* that surfaced both in the interviews with the participants of the study and in a literature review are vague and subjective: like, for instance, ‘informal,’ ‘long,’ ‘unrigorous,’ and, most commonly – ‘intellectual.’

Thus, failing to adequately define *āddā* as per the directions of my committee members led me to a realization: that different people understood *āddā* differently, as per their own uniquely subjective experiences. The implication of this realization is huge. What this, effectively, means is that there's no such thing as uniquely Bengali *āddā* per se. Like race, *āddā*

then functions as a ‘floating’ or ‘empty’ signifier, and is a discursive construct. Which, then, explains the cultural need to so often discursively posit *āddā* as uniquely Bengali (something that only Bengalis practice or understand) because it is *not*; and neither is it uniquely middle-class, as it is also often posited.

This does not, however, mean that individual *āddās* do not have norms, but such norms are specific to each *āddā* and are typically observed in collusion by the participants as per their collective common interests. Such collusions are usually not officially orchestrated, but are often intuitively practiced. For instance, an *āddā* group with a particular common interest (like the group of students interested in playacting; see chapter 4) might shoot down an attempt by someone in the group to discuss something off-topic.

In general, though, *āddā* has very few norms. The only thing that *āddā* demands is that participating in *āddā* be the primary reason for participating in an *āddā*; and although a propensity for narrating life-events or life-experiences is often noted in *āddās*, yet that seems to be a common tendency for any sustained oral discourse and cannot be considered an exclusive marker of *āddā*. Therefore, *āddā* could be defined as any social conversation, where the conversation itself is the primary objective or the *raison d'être* of the conversation.

Why is *āddā* considered bad and a ‘waste of time’ for students and youths?

The question above can actually be broken down to two distinct (but related) questions – what is bad about *āddā* and why is it particularly bad for students and youths? The answers to both these questions are inextricably related to concepts of education, career, time and youth, as

well as to the related notions of class and gender. In the next few sections of this chapter, I shall, thus, attempt to answer these questions brick-by-brick.

(Mis)education in *āddā*

My argument is that contrary to how *āddā* is culturally posited as a ‘waste of time’ for students and youth (we shall discuss why it is particularly considered a waste of time for students and youths below), *āddā* is actually considered as a learning space. It is believed that people can and do learn in *āddās*. However, since the spaces of *āddā* typically lack adult supervision (unless, maybe the *āddā* happens in someone’s home under the watchful eyes of parents),¹³⁷ it is believed that the education obtained from *āddās* could be either good or bad (miseducation or *asikhshā*). Which could explain why parents often want to shield their (male) children¹³⁸ from exposure to *āddā* and the reason why the parents of the housing-estate boys did not want their children to be associating with me after my exposure to *āddās* in the slums¹³⁹ became known (see chapter four).

Indeed, the current research shows that *āddā*, in fact, could be both educating and miseducating (although the research could not establish a class connection to either education or miseducation through *āddā*). For instance, I have already elaborated on some of the nuanced literacy connections made in my early *āddā* with the housing-estate boys in an abandoned half-built building, as also the education and miseducation I obtained from my *āddās* with the slum boys in chapter 4. And while, a major limitation of my research is that it is exclusively focused on

¹³⁷ It should be remembered here that culturally students and youths (who are yet not established in their careers) are often not viewed as complete adults (see chapter 1).

¹³⁸ With the girl children, I believe, above and beyond miseducation, the parental concern is about the girls’ social reputation as *āddā* is generally considered a male space and a male activity.

¹³⁹ The class dimension is also an important consideration here: while *āddā* is generally considered as a potential site of both education and miseducation, *āddā* with lower-class youth is possibly considered to be invariably miseducating.

the *āddās* of the educated, middle-class Bengali students and youths in one university (thereby, excluding the *āddās* of the not-quite-so-educated, lower-class youths in other contexts), my research does illustrate both the education and miseducation of students and youths in the *āddās* in the university campus.

For instance, if we turn to ‘Vignette 1’ in chapter 4, we shall find instances of both education and miseducation being perpetuated in the same *āddā*. While the students in the said *āddā*, (re)learn, for instance, Bengali adages and rhetorical expressions (like, for example, “*chā e jol meshāy nā jol e chā meshāy*,” “*jāhā bāhanno, tāhāi tippānno*,” “*lāl jol*,” etc.), the difference between mixing and dissolving (and the Bengali expressions for either of these), the meaning of theoretical concepts (such as intertextuality and ‘reading’) with references to texts, indigenous medicinal knowledge (for example, someone exposed to the loo should drink salt-and-sugar water as a home-made substitute of ORS) or how punning works (for example, “*lāl jol*” and “A. Lal *er ghorer dulāl*”), on the other hand, they also learned that it was okay to interjectionally use profane words that are mostly misogynous in nature (for example, ‘*bokāchodā*’ and ‘*khānkir chele*’).

Chapter 5 illustrates how class and gender inequalities are often performed in and through *āddās*, even in the access to *āddās* and in chapter 6, I have shown with examples how *āddā*, besides being educative, can also sometimes promote agency in the youth participants.

However, *āddā* is typically also time consuming and while the non-savory consequences of *āddā* have practical repercussions (for example, loss of reputation, distraction from studies, miseducation, etc.) that are well understood by adults, the Discourses of schooling that often structure our views not only on the ideal type of education and the proper utilization of one’s time, but also on the desired outcomes that one’s education and utilization of time should be

valued for, seems to make the education obtained in *āddā* matter less to adults for being inconsequential for the career progressions of the students and youths (see chapter 6). Thus, for most parents, their children returning home late from *āddā* or learning to smoke mattered (as it should), but their children learning to apply Machiavellian strategies to student union elections (see chapter 6) or learning to identify suitable tree branches for making catapults (see chapter 4) didn't. The Discourses of schooling, coupled with a middle-class Bengali identity that is historically dependent upon formal education and career (particularly, *chākrī*), made such learning in *āddās*, as discussed above, inconsequential in the Bengali middle-class worldview.

The students and youths, on the other hand, did not always see eye to eye with the adults on the (mis)educational potentials of *āddā*. Rather, they considered *āddā* to be not only educative, but also liberating and important for the construction of their social identities.

Class and gender in the practices and D/discourses of *āddā*

Āddā is classed and gendered both in its D/discourses and in practice. Thus, in chapter 5, I have attempted to demonstrate how ideas of class and gender lace the conceptualization of *āddā*, and how, particularly, a gendered notion of intellectuality is often employed to culturally marginalize and restrict the *āddās* of women and lower-class people. Specifically, I have shown how the common Bengali phrase – “*Sāri-goynā'r āddā*” (*āddā* about *sāris* and jewelries) – is often used as a placeholder for women's *āddās* that men disapprove of or find little interest in. The Bengali phrase, “*sāri-goynā'r āddā*” – which is used both by the noted cultural commentator, Buddhadeb Bose in his memoir (Bose, 2010) and by several participants of the present study – is, thus, often used to designate and discredit women's *āddā* on the grounds of being material, and

hence, not intellectual enough to be counted as *āddā* proper. Not just women's *āddās*, but the *āddās* of non-middle-class people were similarly designated as unintellectual, only the placeholders used in these cases were “*āddās* where they drink and talk useless stuff” (P.G., 2015) and *āddās* where “guys talk about their fathers' cars” (DOS, 2015; see chapter 5). This is notwithstanding that middle-class Bengali students (both men and women) both drink and talk about their mobile phones, tablets and the other gadgets that they own fairly regularly in their *āddās* in the university.

Interestingly, while hypothetically describing the *āddās* where “guys talk about their fathers' cars,” DOS spoke in Hindi (when, he otherwise spoke only in Bengali and English to me). This suggests that perhaps he thought of the guys as being non-Bengalis, besides being from families that are rich enough to own a car.

Therefore, it seemed that only the educated, middle-class Bengali men were generally considered intellectual and cultured enough to hold *āddās*, whereas women, the uneducated lower-class men and the rich, upper-class men, who are surely educated in terms of being schooled, but not perhaps adequately *sikhshito*, were considered unintellectual or uncultured (*asikhshito*), at least by *āddā* standards.

The discursive non-recognition of women and lower class people's public socialization as *āddā* on account of their perceived inability for intellectual contributions in social discussions is, thus, as pointed out before, one way of limiting their access to the middle-class male world of *āddā*, as well as, for women, another way of limiting their involvement and participation in the public life.

Additionally, certain *āddā* activities like smoking, drinking or swearing (all of which are common in young people's *āddās* as some of the vignettes in chapter 4 illustrate) are typically

considered to be masculine activities, just as most of the public places (that is, physical locations) where *āddās* are typically held like street-corners, *ro'ks* and road-side *chāi*-shacks are considered male spaces. Thus, these also seriously impede women's participation in public *āddās*, besides that women are typically often not allowed to (or cannot afford to) stay out for as long as men usually do or could.

The role of alternative *āddā*-spaces

I have also, in this same chapter, discussed some of the alternative public spaces of *āddā* – commercialized private-public spaces like bars, pubs, restaurants and cafés and non-commercialized spaces like college and university campuses, where the structural inequalities of *āddā* with respect to classed and gendered access to *āddā* is perhaps marginally less. For instance, commercialized spaces like bars, pubs and cafés are generally considered to be safer and more respectable spaces for women's public sociability practices than the more openly public spaces along the streets like *ro'ks* and road-side *chāi*-shacks. But this is only because such commercialized spaces of public sociability like bars, pubs and cafés effectively function as 'private-public' places by screening the lower-class people, despite being ostensibly open to all.

On the other hand, even though in many cases *āddās* in college and university campuses are also not easily accessible to lower-class youths, particularly to those who aren't students of the institution, yet this particular university being a residential university, many male family members of university staff like guards and peons, and their friends, often participated in the students' *āddās* in the campus. And this is, precisely, why it is so important to safeguard the non-

commercialized alternative spaces of *āddā* in the college and university campuses like in this university campus where I conducted my research.

Possibilities and potentials of *āddā*

It has been often argued in New Literacy Studies (NLS) that more than our ability to simply read and write in print, literacy broadly defined is no less than our ability to interpret and function in the world we live in, which includes everything from films, music, technology, food and sports to cultural practices and social mores and more. The places we inhabit in our social worlds and our everyday experiences in these places teach us to read our worlds and function according to our knowledge of our world. In the process we interpret and produce meanings through our actions.

Several scholars have advised teachers to pay attention to the funds of knowledge that students bring into the classroom from their various other social worlds (Alim, 2011; Eshach, 2007; Dyson, 1993; Moje et al., n.d; Moje et al., 2004; Moll et al., 1992; Vadeboncoeur, 2006). I interpret this to mean that the places in our lives and our experiences in these places teach us invaluable lessons, particularly how to read the world we live in, which happens to be the definition of literacy in Alim's (2011) view.

However, as noted in chapter 5, the Discourses of schooling often structure our views on education and learning in such ways that we not only fail to acknowledge students and youths' experiential learning in the places inhabited by them in their various social worlds, including that of *āddā*, but we also often disregard such informal learning as inconsequential, unless they lead to serious miseducation. In Tagore's (2009) view this is no short of an epistemic violence

perpetuated on children's mind by adults due to our disciplinary tunnel vision: "When we accept discipline for ourselves, we try to avoid everything except that which is necessary for our purpose; it is this purposefulness, which belongs to the adult mind, that we force upon school children" (p.108) [see also Jardine, 2006a, 2006b]. While Tagore was specifically concerned with school children in this particular argument, his astute observation is no less true for college and university students, who are often chided for not studying enough – which, ironically, often makes *āddā* seem a lot more attractive to them as a participant in the study pointed out: "In *āddā*, nobody tells you to study study study all the time" (DOS, 2015, see chapter 6). Thus, according to several participants in the study, they come to *āddā* to "refresh (their) minds" from this constant pressure to perform and it is in *āddā* that they often found their identity and their true calling; and it is here they believe they can be themselves and yet be heard (unlike in classrooms). Clearly, then, *āddā* means a lot to these young people, whether or not we consider it consequential, and, therefore, as parents, teachers, and concerned adults, students and youths' *āddā* warrants our attention.

The social world of *āddā*

As discussed earlier, whether or not distinctively Bengali and inherently intellectual (and what constitutes intellectuality is a debatable topic too), most people who have participated in *āddā* would generally agree that it is, if anything, extremely engaging and pleasurable. The attraction of *āddā*, according to several Bengali cultural commentators, is the sheer joy of talking – the pleasure of engaging in meaningful dialogues with others. Meaningful not in the sense of its value as a product that could be used or exchanged (although *āddā* does serve as a cultural capital

for the educated, middle-class Bengali *bhოდ্রলোক*s, as noted before), nor in the sense in which schools typically value certain activities as ‘meaningful,’ but meaningful in a personal sense as a deeply satisfying social intercourse with peers on matters that matter to us all, even if only temporarily. Thus, as an intensely pleasurable leisure activity, *āddā* becomes meaningful as a product for immediate consumption by those who produce it (Sidorkin, 2004).

Form-wise, *āddā* is not much different from the break-out group discussions in schools that we are familiar with or, for that matter, from any kind of group talk. What makes *āddā* distinct from break-out groups in the classrooms is the lack of adult supervision and policing of its contents – the myriad ‘trivial’ things that are discussed, the stories of various life-experiences that are narrated, and in what counts as knowledge or knowing, that is, the *āddā*-epistemology. In *āddā*, one’s knowledge of something (and his or her opinions), be it the latest love-interest of some celebrity or whether a communist government is good for the country’s economy, need not be backed by references to books or scholarly writings, although references to books and other texts are not uncommon either. In *āddā*, one just knows based on praxis or experience, irrespective of whether that knowledge can be supported with factual evidence or not. As Bruner (1996) puts it, “[o]ur practices often presuppose knowledge that is plainly not accessible to us by means other than praxis” (p. 105); and the example he gives is that of the knowledge of grammar that is required for our daily conversations, but which many amongst us may not know that we actually ‘know.’ It is perhaps for this reason that claims made in *āddā* are often backed with personal stories and anecdotes for evidence. This however does not mean that anything goes and that views and opinions go unchallenged. On the contrary, *āddā* is often marked by frequent heated arguments and counter-arguments (see Bose, 2010). However, the crux of the matter is that in *āddā*, one’s theories and opinions based on knowing-in-the-world is just as easily accepted

as evidence as someone else's counter-opinions and counter-theories based on the same worldly knowledge. And if an agreement cannot be reached on one or the other view even after extensive debating, then people are just as happy with a difference of opinion on unresolved issues; the discussion simply moves on to some other topic. Several commentators on *āddā* (Bose, 2010; Chattopadhyay, 2010; Das, 2010; Ghosh, 2010; Gupta, 2010; Mitra, 2010; Singh, 2010) have mentioned that it is not in the least uncommon in *āddās* to see people, who were fighting to an extent of just being short of coming to blows with each other, only moments ago, to take each other's side on another issue. Disagreements (or agreements) between people do not need to be final in *āddās*, and does not normally generate animosity or disrespect for each other.

Such attitude towards each other and towards knowing-in-the-world makes *āddā*, contrary to what it might appear outwardly, a tolerant, democratic and a dialogic space, where, as the Bengali scholar and poet, Buddhadeb Bose (2010) mentions:

Everybody must have equal status and respect... While it is impossible to avoid differences [of power, status, social standing, etc.] between people in real life, yet those who don't know how to rid themselves off such differences along with their work-clothes will never get a taste of *āddā*. (p. 13).

Bose (2010) further writes about the compassion and fellow-feeling necessary to make *āddā* work:

There's got to be diversity of thoughts and beliefs [in an ideal *āddā*], but there should also be deep fellow-feeling and understanding [between participants in *āddā*]. *Āddā* is only for those who are drawn towards each other by strong emotions of compassion and fellow-feeling, and should only be restricted between them. (p. 13)

As is evident from Bose's writing, *āddā* is essentially dialogic in nature. Moreover, *āddā* acknowledges multiple accentuality, varying points-of-view, different 'funds of knowledge,' and is framed within the ethics of answerability. Thus, one Bengali, graduate student in USA once

pointed out to me that “as long as the discussions and stories are interesting, have internal consistency, and include everyone, all heartily participate in the *āddā* and nobody really cares if the matter under discussion or the narratives could be scientifically proven or not; judging others is not for people who love *āddā*” (Shilpak Banerjee, 2012, personal communication).

This doesn’t, however, mean that people never judge each other in *āddā*, but just that *āddā* does not have any specific goals or teleological agenda, which nullifies the requirement for any sort of evaluation of progress made towards an end result or product unlike much of the class discussions in schools. Thus, in the words of Bose (2010):

The first and foremost rule of a successful *āddā* is that it lacks any and all rules. There is no agenda and no inherent purpose to *āddā*, and yet one shouldn’t even be mindful of that. (p. 12)

Such description of *āddā* as ‘purposeless’ interaction with one’s peers that produces no apparently ‘positive’ outcome or result resembles the “messaging around time” for the Latino and African American youth that Moje et al. (n.d.) worked with. Although apparently purposeless, such “messaging around time” usually generates valuable funds of knowledge for youths. It is during such times that the youth engage with popular culture, politics, as well as a host of other oral and literate practices:

The ‘messaging around’ that often seems to be aimless, or even problematic, activity of youth is replete with social purpose and literate practice. What makes this category relevant to our study is that the activities youth engage in when ‘messaging around’ often have some direct relevance to scientific and other content-area literacy learning, particularly as the youth engage in Discursive practices similar to those demanded in school content areas, such as making claims and providing warrant for choices of music, media, and clothing. It is in these activities, often unmediated by adults, that they teach each other concepts and practice forms of Discourse that are unique to youth culture. They learn, for example, the music that is considered popular, the forms of language that are acceptable, and how to make signs and written symbols that will be read in particular ways by other youth. (pp. 32–33)

Similarly, commenting on the often invisible learning that happens in *āddās*, Bose (2010) wrote in his memoir:

I have learned more from *āddā* than from books. It was because of *āddā* that I picked the apparently alluring fruits from the top branches of the tree of knowledge with relative ease. I also welcomed *āddā* as the primary source for my literary endeavors. (p. 12)

Similar sentiments were echoed by Tirtha, one of the participants in the study and a budding poet, who mentioned that he gathered fodder for his writing by observing people in *āddās* (see chapter 6).

Besides social learning, *āddā* is also a time when young people come together as a peer community, and, as I have argued elsewhere (Dutta, 2015a), this has important implications for shaping youth's social and cultural identities.

Dyson (1993), thus, suggests that to reap the maximum benefits of such informal social learning, teachers and students alike should “be open, curious, and willing to imagine worlds beyond their own” (p. 9). *Āddā* too, according to Bose (2010), Chattopadhyay (2010), and Mitra (2010), works best when people approach it with an open mind, curiosity and a ‘willing suspension of disbelief.’

Final thoughts and remarks

In essence, I view college and university students' *āddā*, irrespective of educators' active participation in them, as a loosely organized forum similar to the forum-like learning space envisioned by Anne Haas Dyson (1993) for elementary grade students:

I am suggesting a forum, within which children might explain about Lincoln and imagined loves, about Jaws in the deep and decisions about clams, and within which we as educators connect their efforts with the world beyond. (p. 32).

As such, *āddā* suggests a world of convivial sociability with one's peers that is located in the "third space" (Bhaba, 1990) between home and the school – a space where students come together with their experiences of living-and-knowing-in-the-world to discursively construct meaning of their lived experiences in (apparently unrelated) local contexts. *Āddā* is, thus, the perfect mingling space for ideas, funds of knowledge, and lived experiences – a space where, in the process of *mélange* of knowledge, new understanding and wisdom are naturally produced. It is also where relationships (between people, places, memory, and wisdom) are established. A lot goes on in the peer-world of students and youths in this third space between home and school, as I hope this dissertation has been able to provide a glimpse of so far. It is for this reason that paying attention to students' experiences in *āddā* and allowing them the autonomy to take ownership of their learning-lives are so important for adults, particularly for educators.

The informal context and nature of *āddā* as discussed above could provide teachers with opportunities to help students see the connections they might have already established unknowingly (and which often naturally surface in discussions in *āddā*) between their classroom learning and their lived experiences (see Dutta, 2015a). Making the connections explicit could further lead students to critically re-view their experiences and learning.

While it might not be possible, or even advisable either, for teachers to participate in all the social events and activities of their students' lives, *āddā* provides an informal dialogic space of a forum or a collectivity where these myriad events of student-life naturally surface via narrative discourses. Therefore, it is important for educators to pay attention to their students'

āddās, as it could potentially be an excellent ‘re-search’ site for them to understand and to connect with their students’ cultural lives and informal learning outside classrooms.

Limitations and future directions

Three years ago from now, in February, 2016, the Anthropological Survey of India, in collaboration with the International Institute for the Inclusive Museum, had organized a one-day seminar with some eminent scholars and members of the intelligentsia on the ‘Dialogic of Adda as Urban Intangible Heritage.’ A member of an *āddā*-group that I followed as part of my field research – a young student of the university, managed to get me an invite to the seminar through his father, who was an employee of the Anthropological Survey of India.

In the seminar, the scholars debated whether *āddā* warrants a place in UNESCO’s ‘Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity’ and whether India should lobby for its inclusion. And while the scholars unanimously voted in the favor of the motion, they also noted the acute dearth of scholarly research on *āddā*, with each scholar pointing out a different area with respect to *āddā* that they thought needed researching. As I sat there on that wintery February afternoon listening in rapt attention to those learned people speak about a topic I cared deeply about and had, at that point, spent a good part of six years of my life trying to understand as a researcher, I couldn’t help but agree with them and resolved in my mind to plug all the gaps in the research on *āddā* they mentioned with my on-going study. In short, I had hoped to come up with an all-encompassing work that would cover everything that was there to know about the cultural practice of *āddā*, and, therefore, would be the ticket for its inclusion in UNESCO’s ‘Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.’

I was naïve! Three years down the line, what I have produced can, at best, be described as a tiny pebble tossed into a great lake, creating small transient ripples that fade away just as quickly as they are created and leaves much more to be desired than is addressed. In fact, it leaves so much to be desired that I cannot even begin to list them. For instance, one of the biggest limitation of the study is that it is exclusively concerned with the middle-class Bengali youth, who were mostly highly educated and elite. Even participants like Rohit, who hailed from lower socio-economic, rural background and Tirtha, who lacked in formal education beyond the high school, possessed certain cultural capital that most working class youth of their age don't. Therefore, for all the pejorative talk about the unrefined, unschooled and uneducated working class youth's unproductive, raw *āddās* on the *ro'ks* and at street-corners in the underbelly of the city, and their perverse influence on the arguably gullible middle-class young men in the cultural texts and D/discourses, we know nothing about such *āddās* and it would be interesting to learn how most working class youth – those who conspicuously lack a career trajectory, view *āddā* themselves and negotiate the cultural D/discourses pertaining to *āddā* that typically either exclude the likes of them or paints them in bad light.

Similarly, the study has a metropolitan, male-centric bias, of which the latter is, perhaps, a natural outcome of a cultural practice that itself is dominantly masculine, as the study has attempted to demonstrate. But precisely because *āddā* as a cultural practice is male-centric, an in-depth purposeful study of women's *āddā* – to investigate if women's *āddā* are essentially different from men's and in what ways – would not only be interesting, but is also much needed because just as with the working class people's *āddā*, very little has been documented about women's *āddā* as well.

In a similar vein, despite the rural origin of *āddā* (which is not often acknowledged, and sometimes even out-rightly denied), very little has been written about *āddās* that take place beyond the geographical boundaries of Kolkata. A participant in the study, Tirtha, who is originally from a small city in a northern district of the state of West Bengal, mentioned that the *āddās* that he had with his friends in his hometown were very different in nature from the *āddās* in the university, where he hangs out now. Similar sentiments were echoed by Rohit, who came from a rural background. Therefore, it would be rewarding, in my opinion, to study the *āddās* of non-metropolitan Bengali youth – young people who hang out in street-corners, in parks and roadside tea-shacks, on boulevards by the river as participants in the study from North Bengal mentioned they often did when in their hometowns. In fact, being a case study limited to only one university in Kolkata, this study, despite providing a peek into the world of college bound contemporary Bengali youth's *āddā*, is not suitable for generalizing the findings. Thus, in other words, it cannot be claimed that all contemporary Bengali youth's *āddās* across all college and university campuses in Kolkata are more or less similar. Rather, several participants in the study claimed to the contrary and seemed to suggest that the *āddās* that happened in this particular university campus was better, and even, according to some, the best of the lot, in terms of the freedom of speech and action that was accorded, the acceptability of differences and an atmosphere of non-interference and tolerance exhibited by the authority and members of the university community such as teachers, students, guards and staff members, and the intellectual and creative nature of the *āddā* discussions that were demonstrated, thereby, leaving the participant mentally satiated and content. For instance, Sane mentioned, as did Priya, R.C, K.K, P.G, Piyali and Kamalika, that in no other college or university campus could women smoke so freely, without being stared at or even worse. DOS said that unlike the *āddās* in some other

college or university campuses where student only talked about petty political matters every day and indulged in verbal mudslinging, *āddās* in this particular university were much more varied, positive and both creatively and intellectually stimulating. Thus, according to DOS, unlike *āddās* elsewhere, here the students talked sense: “*But – our āddās here are not like that – we talk sense – where discussions are sensible –*” (DOS, personal interview, 2015; see chapter 6).

Finally, to give one last example, Dev, who was a student of a different college nearby, hung out at the university instead of in his own college because, he said, he found the ambience in the university and the *āddās* here to be better than in his college. Therefore, clearly, these claims need thorough investigating; and a comprehensive study of *āddās* in several other college and university campuses is necessary for understanding contemporary Bengali students and youths’ *āddā* better.

Only after several such studies on *āddās* in different cultural contexts, and across class and gender divides, could we possibly claim to have some comprehensive knowledge about contemporary Bengali students and youths’ *āddā* culture. As Bakhtin/Voloshinov says: “[o]ne voice alone concludes nothing and decides nothing” (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 213), so doesn’t one research alone either – what we need is a dialogue between several studies on the topic to arrive at any particular conclusion on *āddā*.

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Appendix A

Sample Questionnaire (Draft)

Demographic Questions

- 1) How old are you:
- 2) Gender: ☐ male ☐ female ☐ other ☐ don't want to specify
- 3) What is your family's monthly gross income? ☐ INR _____ ☐ don't know/won't tell
- 4) Do you earn? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not on a regular basis
 - a. If yes, what's your gross monthly personal income? ☐ INR _____
☐ won't tell
- 5) Do you consider your family to be: ☐ liberal ☐ conservative ☐ somewhere in the middle ☐ other ☐ don't know or don't want to specify
- 6) Do you consider your family to be: ☐ upper class ☐ upper middle class ☐ middle class ☐ lower middle class ☐ lower class ☐ not sure or don't want to specify
- 7) Are you currently a student? ☐ Yes ☐ No
 - a. If yes, which college/university do you go to? ☐ _____ ☐ won't tell

- b. Which discipline are you in? ☐ arts/humanities/social science ☐ science
☐ engineering ☐ management ☐ mass communication or media science
☐ others (please specify) _____ ☐ won't tell
- c. What's your level: ☐ under graduate ☐ post graduate ☐ certificate ☐
diploma ☐ others (please specify) _____ ☐ won't tell
- d. What's your subject (major)? ☐ _____ ☐ won't tell
- e. Which year are you in? ☐ _____ ☐ won't tell

Opinion Questions

- 8) Do you give/do *āddā*? ☐ yes ☐ no ☐ occasionally ☐ rarely ☐ won't tell
- a. If yes, how many hours on an average do you spend in *āddā* on week days? ☐ Less than 1 hour ☐ 1-2 hours ☐ 2-3 hours ☐ 3-4 hours ☐ 4-5 hours ☐ 5-6 hours ☐ more than 6 hours ☐ won't tell
- b. How many hours on an average do you spend in *āddā* on weekends? ☐ Less than 1 hour ☐ 1-2 hours ☐ 2-3 hours ☐ 3-4 hours ☐ 4-5 hours ☐ 5-6 hours ☐ more than 6 hours ☐ won't tell
- c. On a scale of 1-10 how much do you love *āddā* or how much *āddā* is important to you? _____
- d. Why do you think *āddā* is important/not important to you?

9) How many hours on an average do you spend studying each day (barring class lectures)? ☐ Less than 1 hour ☐ 1-2 hours ☐ 2-3 hours ☐ 3-4 hours ☐ 4-5 hours ☐ 5-6 hours ☐ more than 6 hours ☐ won't tell

10) Would you say that *āddā* is mostly your primary or main form of leisure? ☐ yes ☐ no ☐ maybe ☐ don't know/won't tell.

11) Do you have a fixed group for *āddā* or do you do *āddā* with different groups on different days? ☐ fixed group ☐ different group ☐ both ☐ neither (please specify) _____ ☐ won't tell

12) Do you ever think that you might be wasting valuable time in *āddā*? ☐ yes ☐ no ☐ maybe ☐ don't know/won't tell.

a. If yes, what made you realize this?

b. Are you doing something to rectify it? ☐ yes ☐ no ☐ not sure

i. If yes, what are you doing to rectify it?

13) Have you ever been told that you are wasting time in *āddā*? ☐ yes ☐ no

a. If yes, by whom? (tick all that applies) ☐ teachers ☐ parents ☐ siblings

☐ relatives ☐ neighbours ☐ friends ☐ others (please specify) _____

☐ won't tell

b. When and in what context have you been told this?

- c. How do you see it? ☐ I strongly agree ☐ I strongly disagree ☐ I somewhat agree ☐ I somewhat disagree ☐ I am not sure/decided ☐ I neither agree, nor disagree (please specify) _____ ☐ won't tell

14) Where do you generally give *āddā*? (Tick all that applies for you)

- ☐ locality/neighbourhood ☐ college/university ☐ coffeehouse ☐ CCDs or other such cafés ☐ in shopping malls & food courts ☐ during commute in buses and trains ☐ in some street corner other than your locality ☐ at Nandan ☐ in front of cinema halls other than nandan ☐ at your or some friend's house ☐ in a club or gym ☐ in a pub or restaurant ☐ at roadside tea shops near your college/university or your home ☐ at different random places on different days ☐ in parks ☐ other public or private places (please specify)
-
-

15) What do you think are some of the reasons that draw you to *āddā*? (Tick all that applies for you)

- ☐ The pleasure of participating in a great conversation with like-minded people
☐ Because I get to learn so much in general from *āddā*
☐ Because we discuss study or work in *āddā*
☐ Because I have nothing else to do with my time
☐ Because even after finishing all that I have to do I am left with extra time
☐ Because some classes suck and I would rather be in *āddā* at those times.
☐ Because I get to meet old and new people of the other sex
☐ Because I get to meet interesting old and new people irrespective of their sex
☐ Because all cool kids do it and I am a cool person.
☐ Because that's what kids do in college and are supposed to do.
☐ Because I have been asked not to do *āddā*.
☐ Because I am a Bengali and all Bengalis do *āddā*. It's our cultural tradition.
☐ Because it's fun
☐ Because that's when I smoke up or drink

- ☐ Because that's how I bond with my partner
- ☐ Because that's how I bond with my friends
- ☐ No reason. That's how I roll baby
- ☐ Because I have got things to say/share and *āddā* provides me a space to voice my opinions
- ☐ Because that's when we bitch about people we don't like.
- ☐ Because that's where we share our creativity like sharing poems or songs written by us
- ☐ Because *āddā* is creative in itself. It's verbal art.
- ☐ Because that's how you build connections & contacts & exchange important information
- ☐ Because it's one place I can be myself because you're never judged in an *āddā*
- ☐ Because I get to know what's going on in my friends' lives and in school or neighborhood
- ☐ Because *āddā* is relaxing like listening to music is and after a long day of work or study, I unwind by doing/giving *āddā*
- ☐ Because creative people give *āddā* and I am a creative person
- ☐ Because I have seen someone in my family or a role-model give *āddā* and I think I should do it too
- ☐ I don't know why I give *āddā*
- ☐ I don't want to give *āddā* but I can't stop myself. It's like drugs
- ☐ Because I like taking part in debates in *āddā*
- ☐ I have a reason but I won't tell.

16) Would you be interested in participating in a study of students and youths *āddās* (your identity will be protected)? ☐ yes ☐ no ☐ maybe ☐ not sure

Appendix B

Sample Interview Prompt

“The purpose of in-depth interviewing is not to get answers to questions, nor to test hypotheses, and not to ‘evaluate’ as the term is normally used ... At the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience.” (Siedman, 2006, p.9)

With the above philosophy as the guiding principle, I have attempted to create here a loosely structured interview protocol for the study with the intention of understanding students’ experience of *āddā* and “the meaning they make of that experience.” (Siedman, 2006, p.9) In keeping with Siedman’s structure for in-depth, phenomenological interviewing, I have attempted to keep my interview prompts (I prefer to call these ‘prompts’ instead of ‘questions’) “primarily, open ended” and exploratory (Siedman, 1991, p.9). Further, in keeping with the “Three Interview Series” proposed by Siedman, I have designed my protocol in three phases, with some modifications due to affordances and constraints of my particular situation. Thus, in some instances, where it seemed that sufficient information has been obtained from the participant and any further probing might result in redundancy of data, I skipped the third and final interview. Again, with some participants, more than three interviews were needed.

Phase I - The Personal (exploratory) phase

In this phase, I primarily attempted to get to know the participant and his/her *āddā* experiences better.

Objective(s):

- Understanding the participant
- Experiences of *āddā* in the participants' personal lives, with a focus on past experiences of *āddā*.

Sample prompts:

- Tell me about yourself?
- Do you give *āddā*? Why?
- How often do you give *āddā* in a week?
- How long do your *āddās* run typically?
- Where do you mostly give *āddā*?
- How did you come to give *āddā* there?
- Would you like to share some good and/or bad memories/experiences of *āddā*?
- Would you like to share any particular observations on *āddā* – anything that might have stood out for you?
- Could you describe your typical *āddā* group for me – the people, the place, the usual activities, etc?
- What does *āddā* mean to you as a college student? What does *āddā* mean to you as a Bengali?

Method of observation:

Audio recordings with multiple devices and notes taken by me

Duration:

Approximately 45 - 160 minutes

Phase II - The Probing Phase

This phase of the interview was conducted with the participants as and when I finished transcribing and preliminarily coding their previous interview(s), and were based on my understanding of their views and opinions from the previous interview(s). The idea was to probe deeper into their meaning making processes based on their previous interview(s) and to seek further clarifications, where needed. In this phase, I attempted to understand how the participants made sense of and negotiated their *āddā* practices on a daily basis, based on their lived experiences of *āddā* in and around the campus.

Objective(s):

- Understanding and making sense of Bengali middle-class students and youths' *āddā* practices in the light of the cultural D/discourses surrounding such *āddās*.
- Understanding how students and youths negotiated the cultural dissonance regarding students and youths' *āddās* in their everyday lives.

Sample prompts:

- Would you like to share some experiences of giving *āddā* with friends?
- How do you understand *āddā*?
- Why are you attracted to *āddā*?
- What, in your opinion, is the place of *āddāersity* in college life? How important was/is it for you?
- Do you consider *āddā* as a “waste of time?” Why or why not?
- What do you think of the popular notion that giving *āddā* is a “waste of time,” particularly for students and young people?
- How do you consider the amount of time that you spend in *āddā*?
- Have you ever felt guilty or have you ever been made to feel guilty for giving *āddā*?
- Have you ever been criticized/admonished for giving (too much) *āddā*?

- Do you think *āddā* has educative value/worth?
- Other relevant questions resulting from previous interview transcripts.

Method of observation:

Audio recordings with multiple devices and notes taken by me

Duration:

Approximately 45 - 160 minutes

Phase III - The Clarification Phase

In this phase, I interviewed those participants whose previous interviews raised some very pertinent questions for me regarding *āddā*. In these interviews, I primarily sought clarifications from participants for their previous comments on *āddā*, and, hence, I called this phase as the ‘clarification phase.’ I also interviewed some participants here (for example, DOS), who I felt may have more to say about their *āddā* than what could be covered in the previous two phases of interviews.

Objective(s):

- Seeking clarification on previous comments
- Obtaining further new information

Method of observation:

Audio recordings with multiple devices and notes taken by me

Duration:

Approximately 30 - 120 minutes

VITA

Ritam Dutta

Ritam Dutta was born and raised in Kolkata, a metropolitan city in the state of West Bengal in India, where he lived with his single mother in various rented apartments in different neighborhoods of the city throughout his school years. Ritam attended The Assembly of God Church School and later went Maulana Azad College, where he was introduced to the world of *āddā* and student politics before graduating in 2000. Ritam continued his education at Jadavpur University in Kolkata where he pursued Comparative Literature. His involvement in *āddā* and student politics also continued unabated alongside. At Jadavpur University, he worked on several student publications, including one for which he was the assistant editor, under the mentorship of Dr. Sayantan Dasgupta and Dr. Sucharita Chattopadhyay. During this period, he also held several leadership positions in the student union and in departmental committees. After finishing his undergraduate studies in 2003, Ritam continued with his graduate studies in Comparative Literature from the same university. He graduated in 2005, receiving a second class Master of Arts in Comparative Literature with Canadian Literature as his specialization subject. After graduating, Ritam worked in the editorial department of a leading English newspaper in Kolkata, and later as an Assistant Professor of English. In 2008, Ritam was awarded a Fulbright Fellowship to teach Bengali for a year at Indiana University in Bloomington, Indiana. After a gap year in 2009, Ritam again started graduate school in August of 2010 at The Pennsylvania State University, working under the guidance of Prof. (Dr.) Vivian Yenika-Agbaw in the emphasis area of Language, Culture and Society (LCS) within the Department of Curriculum & Instruction (C&I) in the College of Education, where he researched the *āddā* of Bengali college-going youths in Kolkata. He currently teaches at the University of Calcutta as a guest faculty.