

The Making of New Market

A Constitutive Paradox

FROM DHURRUMTOLLAH TO NEW MARKET

In June 1863, some seven hundred Europeans residing in and around Calcutta submitted a petition to the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal complaining of the unsatisfactory state of the Dhurrumtollah Bazaar.¹ The petition was timed to generate extensive discussion and concrete actions in the administrative circles. Since Dhurrumtollah and Tirecta were the only markets Europeans obtained their supplies from, the first spate of discussions centered on the upkeep and improvement of the said markets alone. Very soon it was alleged that refurbishment of existing infrastructures in these markets would no longer suffice, and that the government was required to set up a suitable “first class market” in order to cater to Calcutta’s European inhabitants.

As an immediate measure, Section 198 of Act VI of 1863 instructed owners and occupiers of markets to arrange for proper drainage. All the drains were to be paved with stone or burnt tile, as approved by the Justices of Peace, and a sufficient supply of water had to be provided to keep such markets or slaughter houses in a clean or wholesome state. The act further warned defaulters of a penalty not exceeding fifty rupees for everyday during which such default was continued.² But the

¹ J. N. T. Wood, Esq. Calcutta, to the Hon’ble A. Eden, Secretary to the Government of Bengal, dated 29 June 1863, in ‘Memorial of the European inhabitants of Calcutta complaining of the unsatisfactory state of the Dhurrumtollah Bazaar’, July 1863, Judicial Department, Judicial Branch, Proceedings 422/26. [WBSA]

² Section 198 in Amendment of Act VI of 1863 B.C, proposed by Conservancy Committee, Judicial Department, Judicial Branch, B proceedings 4/6, February 1866 [WBSA]

real move was made only some eight years later. In 1871, the Justices of Peace decided to purchase Dhurrumtollah Market from its proprietor, Heera Lall Seal, and consequently convert it into a municipal market. The price was fixed at Rs. 6 lakhs. But since the whole structure had to be razed to the ground to make room for new construction, it boiled down to paying six lakhs for the bare plot that otherwise cost only Rs. 1.5 lakhs. The construction of a new structure entailed another Rs. 4 lakhs. Instead of blowing up Rs. 10 lakhs on the project, an alternative scheme was proposed and readily accepted. The plan was to purchase the large tract of land lying between Jaun Bazaar Street and Lindsay Street, exactly opposite the Opera House and to construct a municipal market thereon. The cost of acquiring the plot under Act X of 1870 was speculated to be around Rs. 1.5 lakhs³. The new plot comprised a sprawling 17 *beeghas* as against the 10 *beeghas* and 5 *cottabs* of Dhurrumtollah Market. Bigger space implied more ventilation, roomier stalls and wider passageways. It was also hoped that a well-wrought, economic distribution of the market space would ensure greater turnout.

Since a plan had already been drawn up and subsequently acceded to; it remained for the Justices to realize proprietorship by actually *buying* the plot and erecting a municipal market thereon. It now rested on the Governor General in Council to grant a loan, “on favorable terms,” to the Justices to enable the purchase of the same. Scores of letters and notes circulated between the Justices of Peace and the different departments of the Governments of Bengal and India in the year 1873-74 on the issue of the municipal market loan. In February 1873, the Lieutenant Governor opined that the Justices pay in addition to the interest at five percent, three percent to the Sinking Fund, or in all eight percent on the loan amount of Rs. 6 lakhs. As a way of explaining this rather tall demand, His Honor had laconically exclaimed that the market was a “doubtful speculation.”⁵ A few years from

³ Stuart Hogg, Esq. Chairman of the Justices of the Peace for the Town of Calcutta, to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal, No. 62, dated Calcutta, 16 January 1871, in Correspondence relative to the establishment of a municipal market in Calcutta, 27 January 1871, Judicial Department, Judicial Branch [WBSA] Act X of 1870 was enacted for acquisition of property for public purposes. Construction of the Calcutta Municipal Market, popularly known as New Market, is an example of application of this act.

⁴ *Ibid*

⁵ H. A Cockerell, Esq. Officiating Chairman of the Justices of the Peace for the Town of Calcutta, to the Officiating Secretary to the Government of Bengal, Judicial Department, No. 69, dated 4 January 1873, in ‘Municipal Market Loan’, No. 231, dated Calcutta, 7 February 1873, Judicial Department, February 1873, Index No. 27 [WBSA]

this time, when New Market would be caught in a web of illicit entanglements, the lieutenant's aphorism would seem quite prophetic. For now, however, the Justices assured a security of the markets and the collateral security of the rates and taxes against the loan of Rs. 6 lakhs. Even in 1871, when talks about the loan had just ensued, the Justices were convinced that rates and taxes aside, the rents derived from the municipal market would be "fully sufficient to meet not only the interest on the capital expended, but also to provide a reasonable sinking fund to liquidate the loan raised for the cost of the market"⁶

Despite such reassurances, the government held its ground. Given the dubiety it had come to invest in the market, the Government further informed that it was wary of an arrangement where the repayment would continue over 50 years. Instead, it allowed a fifteen-year tenure, at a rate of 8 percent, interest and sinking fund included, until the whole was sunk.⁷ After rounds of concerted imploring and bargaining by the Justices, the Lieutenant Governor relented to extend the tenure to 25 years. The rate of interest was also lowered to a modest 4½ percent.⁸

Just as the loan issue was getting resolved and reaching a point of settlement, another spate of controversy reared its head. This time the contention revolved around the prospective take-over of the Dhurrumtollah Market. In February 1874, the Lieutenant Governor was prepared to sanction the take-over at an estimated value of Rs. 7 lakhs. Accordingly, the Justices sought to vest the regulation and management of the old market in the Chairman of the Justices. However, a certain G. C Paul (an advocate) drew attention to section 11 of Act VIII (B. C.) of 1871 that conferred power of *constructing* municipal markets to the Justices. But as he astutely observed, "It did not confer on the Justices the power to purchase an old established market. The language of the Acts clearly indicates that its intention and scope are *confined* to the construction of one or more

⁶ Stuart Hogg, Esq. Chairman of the Justices of the Peace for the Town of Calcutta, to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal, No. 62, dated Calcutta, 16 January 1871, in Correspondence relative to the establishment of a municipal market in Calcutta, 27 January 1871, Judicial Department, Judicial Branch [WBSA]

⁷ A. Mackenzie, Secretary to the Government of Bengal, Judicial Department, to the Secretary to the Government of India in the Financial Department, No. 977, Dated Calcutta, 19 Feb 1873, Judicial Department, February 1873. [WBSA]

⁸ C. Bernard, Secretary to the Government of Bengal in the Financial Department, to the Chairman of the Justices of Peace for the Town of Calcutta, in 'Municipal Market Loan', Revenue Department, Local Taxation Branch, 2 April 1873, No. 559, dated Calcutta, 2 April 1873, Revenue Department, Local Taxation Branch. [WBSA]

Bernard stated, "If the Justices agree to make arrangements by not more than twenty-five years, the Government of India is willing to extend the term of repayment to that period and to reduce the rate of interest to 4½ percent per annum."

markets.”⁹ Lest this revelation jeopardize the impending take-over, a Municipal Markets Amendment Act of 1874 did the needful to salvage the situation. A deft interpolation now legitimized the Justices to “[p]urchase or take on lease any place, land, or buildings *now used within such limits as a market, or registered as such*, upon such terms, or subject to such conditions as they may consider necessary.”¹⁰

Acquisition of Dhurrumtollah Market was formally sanctioned in May 1874. By mutual agreement between the Justices and the market’s proprietors, the value of the whole property, including the upper storied house at the corner of Chowringhee and Dhurrumtollah Roads and measuring about 13 *beeghas* and 12 *cottabs*, was fixed at Rs. 7 lakhs. The Justices pledged to liquidate the Government’s loan with a 4½ percent interest within 30 years.

Incidentally, as was just discussed, the Government had conceded a maximum of twenty-five years for the repayment of the municipal market loan. However, when it came to the old Dhurrumtollah Market, the tenure extended to a good thirty years, despite similar rates of interest. Could this insinuate the Government’s greater faith in the solvency of the older establishment than the one that came up newly? After all, in contrast to the Justices’ airy speculations about the *inevitable* success of the new municipal market, the revenue-generating capacity of the Dhurrumtollah Market was a more tangible evidence to reckon with. Reports reveal that it yielded a whopping Rs. 80,000 as annual rental under the aegis of its former proprietors.¹¹

⁹ Correspondence regarding the establishment of the Calcutta Municipal Market. See under the section ‘Opinion’, WBSA, Municipal Department, Local Taxation Branch, March 1874, No. 226, dated Calcutta, 12 February 1874. [WBSA]. Emphasis added.

¹⁰ River Thompson, Esq. Secretary to the Government of Bengal, to the Chairman of the Justices of the Peace for the Town of Calcutta, in ‘Draft: Municipal Markets Amendment Act’, No. 381, dated Calcutta, 14 Feb 1874. [WBSA]. Emphasis added.

¹¹ Report of the Market Committee on the working of Municipal Market and fitness of Mr. Dissent to hold the office which he now holds, dated 28 April 1880, Municipal Department, Municipal Branch, Mun. Head Mis, Coll-2, File 8, Pro 22-24, May 1880 [WBSA]

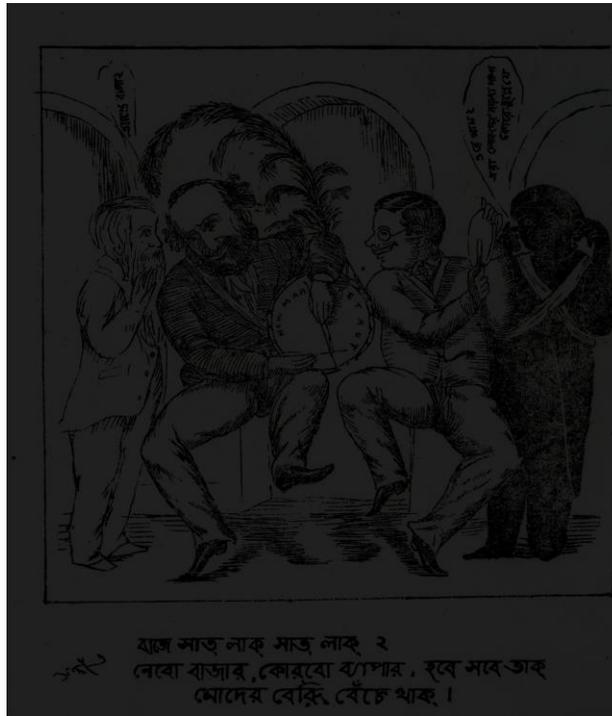


Image 2.1¹²

I shall now fast-forward the narrative to the year 1878 when New Market hit a financial downturn. Estimates showed it was incurring a loss of Rs. 9026 per annum.¹³ Having wagered all its rents and taxes as collaterals against the government loan, the market was close to reaching an impasse. The Commission marked the collective yield of the Dhurumtollah and New Market at Rs. 1 lakh in 1875. The figure kept plummeting in the next few years till it hit an all time low in 1878 touching the Rs. 96,000 mark. Dhurumtollah market alone – records tell us – generated an annual rental of Rs. 80,000 under its former owners. This trivia does little to flatter the economic health of the newly erected municipal market.

¹²“Dharmahater Tamasha” in *Basantak*, Vol. 1, 1874, 12

¹³Report of the Market Committee on the working of Municipal Market and fitness of Mr. Dissent to hold the office which he now holds, dated 28 April 1880, Municipal Department, Municipal Branch, Mun. Head Mis, Coll-2, File 8, Pro 22-24, May 1880 [WBSA]

YEAR	RECEIPTS	EXPENDITURE			LOSS BY RATES AND TAXES
		ESTABLISHMENT AND MISCELLANEOUS	INTEREST AND SINKING FUND	TOTAL	
1872	—	—	13,500	13,500	—
1873	—	—	36,350	36,350	9,223
1874	57,368-2-11	47,933-4-0	52,374-8-0	1,00,307-12-0	9,751
1875	1,00,811-13-0	41,673-15-10	98,899-3-9	1,40,573-3-7	8,697
1876	97,186-5-0	12,841-10-11	77,937-9-6	90,779-4-5	8,170
1877	98,734-9-5	11,204-2-1	38,963-14-2	50,168-0-3	8,828
1878	96,334-6-0	21,803-7-10	1,14,963-8-1	1,36,766-15-11	9,487
TOTAL	4,50,435-4-4	1,35,456-8-8	4,32,988-11-6	5,68,445-4-2	54,156

Table 2.1¹⁴

As a close inspection of the table shows, the Corporation assessed the Dhurrumtollah Market at Rs. 45,000. This was a little more than half of what it was proclaimed as capable of generating. In reality, however, the income fell even lower. Its total turnover from 1874 to 1878 was a meager Rs. 1, 53, 597-15-8. The consolidated income (receipts) from the two markets in these five years had been 4, 50, 435-4-4. New Market's income in these five years therefore nearly touched three lakhs, which is twice as much as what the older market had made.

THE HOGG-HEERA LALL CLASH: NARRATING THE TRANSFER

That the profit margin of the Dhurrumtollah bazaar fell drastically in the late seventies and that the New Market swelled its rank and accrued double of what the old bazaar was generating were not unconnected facts. As the Market Committee reported in 1880,

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

The transfer of most of the market shops from ... [the Dhurruntollah Market] has steadily reduced its value. ... As a matter of course, the same cause which reduced the income of the Dhurruntollah Market tended to improve the income from the New Market.¹⁵

The government market could grow only at the cost of the older establishment. The New Market was a loved parasite, designed to gradually suck all vitality out of the Dhurruntollah market. While the next section will speak of this question through an analysis of the vendors' testimonies, here I want to point at a contemporary vernacular farce called *Bājārer Ladāi: The Battle of the Markets*.¹⁶ Published in 1874, this three-scene play was a running commentary on the Hogg-Heera Lall clash. It seems that for the playwright Sisir Kumar Ghosh, the editor and proprietor of *Amrita Bazaar Patrika*, this farce was journalism by other means. He makes all the characters speak in Bengali though, barring the *paharawala* who speaks in Hindi, the language of force. For a *sahib*, Hogg's Bengali seems inordinately perfect, if not altogether incredulous! The chastest language in the play occurs when two sahibs – Hogg and Roberts – confer in private. The vendors' bengali, again, is rather self-consciously distinguished from that which the *sahibs*, *babus* and *keranis* converse in. The exchange of language and the language of exchange are locked in this nationalist text in an uncanny proximity.

The play opens with an argument between Stuart Hogg and Heera Lall Seal in the municipal office. Hogg tries to tempt Seal into relinquishing his proprietorial rights over the Dhurruntollah Market by offering an equal share in the profits accrued by the two markets. Seal refuses, asserting that as the son of the great entrepreneur Mutty Lall Seal, he has enough local clout to keep his bazaar running in the face of all adversity and competition. Hogg does not take this nicely, because, as he exclaims, "I am the Chairman of Calcutta Municipality! I am plush with money!"¹⁷ Blinded by his personal ambition and obstinacy, the Hogg of the play launches a vendetta against the Seals, deploying his men to forcibly transfer vendors from the older bazaar to the new market. Hogg calculates that unlike the natives, the *sahibs* do not enjoy going to the market. Therefore they have to be lured in.¹⁸ Of all the enticements Hogg can think of in the play, there are plans to offer the

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Sisir Kumar Ghosh, '*Bajarer Lodai: The Battle of the Markets*', Sree Gourango Press, Calcutta, 1874

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

Europeans free transport to the market, monthly feasts, and even sweets and refreshments on arrival. For those who cannot make time to visit the market, he also plans to deliver the necessary supplies to their residences for free. Hogg's ideas however do not go down well with the commissioners Rajendralal Mitra, Krishnadas Pal and Mr. Roberts. Mitra especially condemns Hogg for squandering the ratepayers' money to appease the sahibs, adding that if Hogg wishes to spend more, he should do so with his own money. When Mr. Roberts concurs with Mitra's allegation, a fuming Stuart Hogg calls him a "traitor" (*namak haram*) who had been unnecessarily pampered with champagne, kebabs and cutlets for long. Roberts reminds Hogg that such luxuries happened at the ratepayer's expense. Ghosh's narrative is rife with humour and provocative dialogues. But all banter seems quite single-mindedly directed at the figure of Stuart Hogg, an unpleasant maverick, maddened by the pursuit of fame and the sheer lust for achieving one-upmanship against the native entrepreneur Heera Lall.

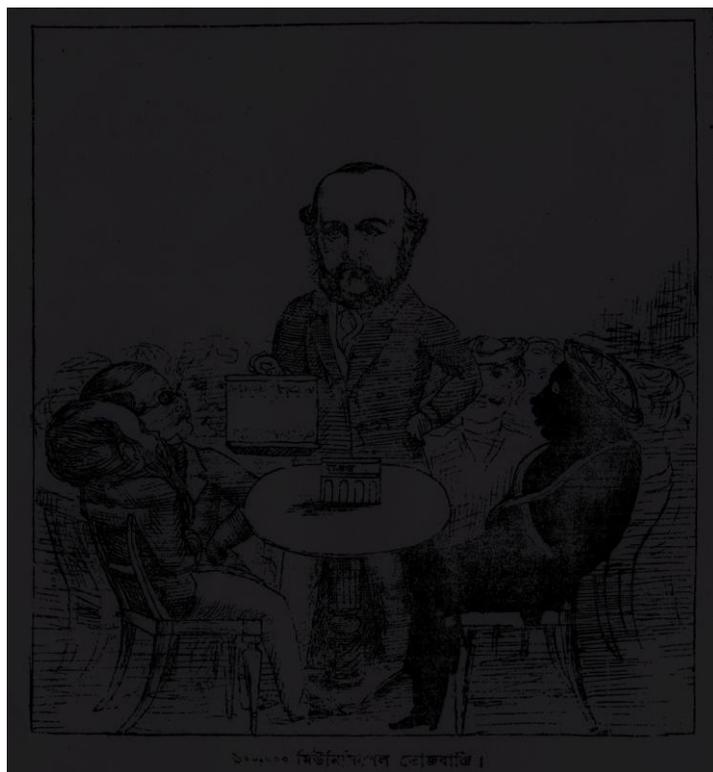


Image 2.2¹⁹

¹⁹ "Dharmahater Tamasha" in *Basantak*, Vol. 1, 1874, 9

Scene II opens with a *paharamallah* exhorting all vendors at Dhurumtollah to accompany him to the new market. Whoever will come to Hogg Sahib's New Market will be fed sweets, he lures them. The plebeian fisherwoman cries hoarse when the guard tries to forcefully whisk her away. She uses the choicest abuses to express her reluctance in moving to the new bazaar. Even the cauliflower vendor scorns in smattering Hindi. Eventually, Hogg's troops arrive at Dhurumtollah Market to forcibly take away vendors to the new venue. Hogg, who is close on the heels, soon engages in a literal tug-of-war with Heera Lall, both parties physically pulling the vendors from either ends. The hyperbole of literary rhetoric and the extravagance of government initiative merge to blur the boundary between the fictive and the real.

The actual story may not have developed very differently. Several vendors, shopkeepers, and stallholders were transferred from Dhurumtollah to the New Market in a coordinated way. The degree of coercion adopted in the transfer can, of course, be debated.

THE SALAMEE SAGA

I contend that what the Market Committee identified as a financial deadlock was actually a period when the Dhurumtollah Market was systematically disintegrated. It was broken down into small units and sold off piece by piece shortly after the Justices purchased it.²¹ The New Market, on the other hand, would undergo vast expansion with the turn of the twentieth century. But in the eighteen seventies the victory of the New Market was hardly a settled fact. In the summer of 1878, barely four years since its inception, the New Market was reported to be in decay. The

²⁰ Dr. Arun Kumar Mitra, *Amritalal Basur Jivani O Sahitya*, Navana, Calcutta, 1970. Basu's article 'A Stroll in the Hogg Market' had been published in the Calcutta Municipal Gazette on the occasion of its third anniversary, on 19.11.1927

²¹ Ajjit Kumar Basu, *Kolikatar Rajpoth- Samaje o Samskritite*, Heera Lall Seal agreed to sell Dhurumtollah Market to the Municipality. As a result, New Market became a thriving enterprise and Dhurumtollah Market closed down. The plot was broken up into pieces and sold off for construction of houses, 157

establishment suffered sustained losses and there was a sharp drop in market receipts. A desperate Hogg was seen exiting Sisir Ghosh's play screaming, You keep the bazaar! Let the bazaar go up in flames, let it go wherever it wishes, let it go to the dogs...you keep your Municipality, let these (official) papers remain with you."²² However, in the theatre of reality, once set up, the New Market could not be so easily vacated by the Government. The much-trumpeted first-class market of Calcutta was caught in the throes of an imminent closedown, and the Town Council had to address it. In a meeting on 11 April 1878, the Council assigned the Market Committee the task of probing into the working and overall management of the New Market to investigate the cause behind the decrease in market receipts.

The Committee's report is certainly remarkable for the details it takes pain to gather. It gives us a sense of the exact individual actors who operated in the New Market during the period under discussion. Entities who had so long maintained anonymity beneath the garb of official titles like 'Market Superintendent' or 'Health Officer' or even 'stall holder', now acquire names and dispositions. Calcutta's first municipal market emerges in this report as a lived space, abuzz with the din and bustle of its myriad actors. But the report is also equally remarkable for the larger set of issues it brings to light.

Whatever moral premium Sisir Ghosh might have put on "force", coercion was certainly not the only means employed to bring vendors into the New Market. Concrete promises were made, which were, practically a series of person-specific negotiations. The vendors agreed to relocate so long the municipal market officials agreed to meet their demands. The assurances personally meted out to individual vendors came at loggerheads with the main principles of uniformity, equal treatment and abolition of monopolies in the municipal market, regularly espoused in the numerous propagandas, bylaws and market regulations. The foundation of the New Market was therefore contingent on the perpetuation and reproduction of those very practices that it had touted "illegitimate" and promised to weed out in the first place. As the New Market swung into force, this paradox started playing itself out.

²² *"Thaklo tomader bazaar! Bazaar poore jak, chulo-e jak, uchchbonne jak. ... Thaklo tomader municipality, thaklo tomader kagojpotro."*

Mr. Wright, Personal Assistant to the Health Officer in the New Market, was allegedly the first official to have suspected “abuse” in the market administration. Roopchand, a fisherman, informed him that market officials regularly took *salamees* from vendors. Although the New Market Superintendent Bartlett, the chief accused in the probing, would subsequently try to justify the *salamees* as “bonuses”, such as were realized by zamindars from the tenantry, even he had to admit that no receipts were ever given for them. The vendors however maintained their personal records, *kbatas*, where these “unauthorized transactions” were often duly noted. These *kbatas* indeed became useful to the Market Committee in the course of its investigations.

The steady fall in market receipts had alarmed the Town Council. As the Market Committee explained,

Under the ordinary rules of competition, the rents of the shops and godowns should have risen according to the extent of the demand. But shopkeepers generally prefer to pay a bonus in the first instance to paying a heavy permanent rent. *The competition, therefore, regulates the bonus and not the rent.* In the municipal markets, the amount of this bonus varied from Rs. 20 to Rs. 250. *It opened also a wide door for the exercise of favoritism and for illicit gains.*²³

The distinction drawn between the licit and the illicit modes of revenue appropriation was too simplistic, if not altogether facile. If a receipt were indeed what distinguished a legitimate exaction from a bonus or a *salamee*, then Bartlett threw his own logic into major disarray with the following statement. In the meeting convened on 27 June 1878, he contradicted his previous point by drawing attention to the permanent stall-keepers who, despite paying ‘rents’, did not receive any receipt in lieu of it, either. The rent/bonus divide was a convenient boundary that could be manipulated, readjusted and overstepped from time to time.

²³ Report of the Market Committee on the working of Municipal Market and fitness of Mr. Dissent to hold the office which he now holds, dated 28 April 1880, Municipal Department, Municipal Branch, Mun. Head Mis, Coll-2, File 8, Pro 22-24, May 1880 [WBSA]

Name of vendor	Item sold	Amount paid as <i>salamee</i>
Koonjo Mohun Dass	Potato	Rs. 72-8
Nogorebashi Shaha	Potato	?
Sreenath Mookerjee	Potato	Rs. 60 in Dhurumtollah Market Rs. 85 in New Market
Dwarakanath Pal	Potato	Rs. 25 for one store, Rs. 16 for another.
Kishto Chunder Dutt	Potato/Vegetable	Rs. 25
Huroo Pal	Potato, Cocoanuts	?
Kesub Lall Dass	Vegetable	Rs. 60
Nilmadhab Dutt	Vegetable	Rs. 50
Chundee Churn and Churamony Dey	Fruit	No <i>salamee</i>
Johurodeen	Fruit	Rs. 76
Nuseerooddeen and Ramjan	Shin beef	Rs. 5/month, Rs. 65 altogether
Oomer Mullick	Salt beef	Rs. 100 as <i>salamee</i> , Rs. 35 as fine.
Chatee	Crab	Rs. 200
Ahmed Aliullah	Goat/ meat	Rs. 200+100+4= 304
Chunoo Butcher	Goat/ meat	Rs. 60 as <i>salamee</i> Rs. 60 to hold onto shop
Shaik Woojeer	Meat	Rs. 150+100=250
Shaik Husnoo	Second class goat stall	8 <i>annas</i> /diem (Rs. 15/month)
Shaik Muytoo	Kid butcher	Rs. 50
Golami	Sheep heads and trotters	Rs. 20
Doorgachurn Koondoo	Fish	Rent free
Naseehur Raramen	Oilmen's Stores	Rs. 110
Ramessur Kar, <i>fareewallah</i>	Palm- <i>punkah</i>	Rs. 50

Table 2.2²⁴

As the list demonstrates, the market officials made individual *salamee* arrangements with each one of the vendors, stallholders and shopkeepers. It is fascinating what a string of innocuous numbers can reveal. Complex relations of power, hegemony and tales of persuasion can be deciphered through the intricate play of figures. There are tacit references to the way the market officials wielded control

²⁴ *Ibid.*

over certain people, while with some, the equation bordered on mutual negotiation. There are stories of favours, collusions and intrigues.

While Sreenath Mookerjee, a potato vendor, coughed up Rs. 85 as *salamee*, yet another potato vendor, Dwarakanath Pal paid a paltry Rs. 41 (25+16) for his two shops in the same market. The size of the shops may have differed; the reports do not speak of it. But the calculations of square feet do not seem to have had much to do with the amounts of *salamee*. In another case, fruit seller Johurodeen had to shell out Rs. 76 as *salamee* while Chundee Churn and Churamony Dey paid none at all. In fact, the rate of *salamee* for different vendors was so uniquely arranged that no one standard aspect can help determine what it was contingent on – the item on sale, the size of the shop or the profit one enjoyed. The 1880 report could look at such inconsistencies only in shock, without realizing that it was precisely to these inconsistencies that the New Market owed its existence.

Certain vendors evidently bribed more than the others, often exorbitantly, to secure “monopoly” rights over the goods they sold. Chatee, the sole crab vendor in the New Market, exercised “monopoly” at Dhurumtollah as well. Chatee had pawned her ornaments with the bazaar poddar, Toylukho Bania to pay a *salamee* of Rs. 200 to the *mookhtear* of the fish market, Doorgachurn Koondoo. On being asked the reason for an additional, almost sudden payment of Rs. 8 in the month of *Assar*, Chatee divulged the arrival of another crab seller, Jogessur Barea. Sensing a possible threat to her “monopoly”, Chatee had commissioned Doorgachurn to “get rid of him”. Ramessur Kar, a palm-*punkah* vendor did not even own a shop, and yet he paid a staggering *salamee* of Rs. 50 to secure “monopoly” in the market, more than what many shopkeepers paid.²⁵

The allotment of stalls and shops was another important consideration. Koonjo Mohun Dass, a potato seller used to occupy a position in front of the fish market in Dhurumtollah. After moving into New Market, Dass wished for a similar arrangement. Lest the officials assigned him a stall close

²⁵ A hasty invocation of an older record seems irresistible here. In the January 1871 correspondence between Eden and Grey, the latter (pitching in for a municipal market) had deplored the Dhurumtollah Market thus, "It is not only that the present market is bad in a material sense. But it is conducted on a pernicious system, it being well known that the proprietor allows monopolies to exist within the market, which necessarily tends to raise prices." W. Grey, check post to A. Eden, Secretary to the Government of Bengal, Judicial Department, K.W Progs. for Jan 1871, Nos. 196-97 [WBSA]. It is almost as if the specters that Grey hoped to exorcise through the establishment of New Market returned to haunt it anew.

to the large vendors of potatoes, Dass agreed to pay a salamee of Rs. 72-8. Excessive bidding was recorded for the corner shops which ensured maximum footfall. The highest bidder landed the shop in lieu of a fee that was never acknowledged in any written document. If buying a shop was complicated, holding on to it often proved to be even more difficult. Chunoo butcher recounted an incident where Mr. Bartlett had threatened to give away his shop to someone else because it stayed shut for three days. Fearing eviction, Chunoo had to deposit Rs. 60 to prevent the same. This was in addition to the stipulated salamee of Rs. 60.

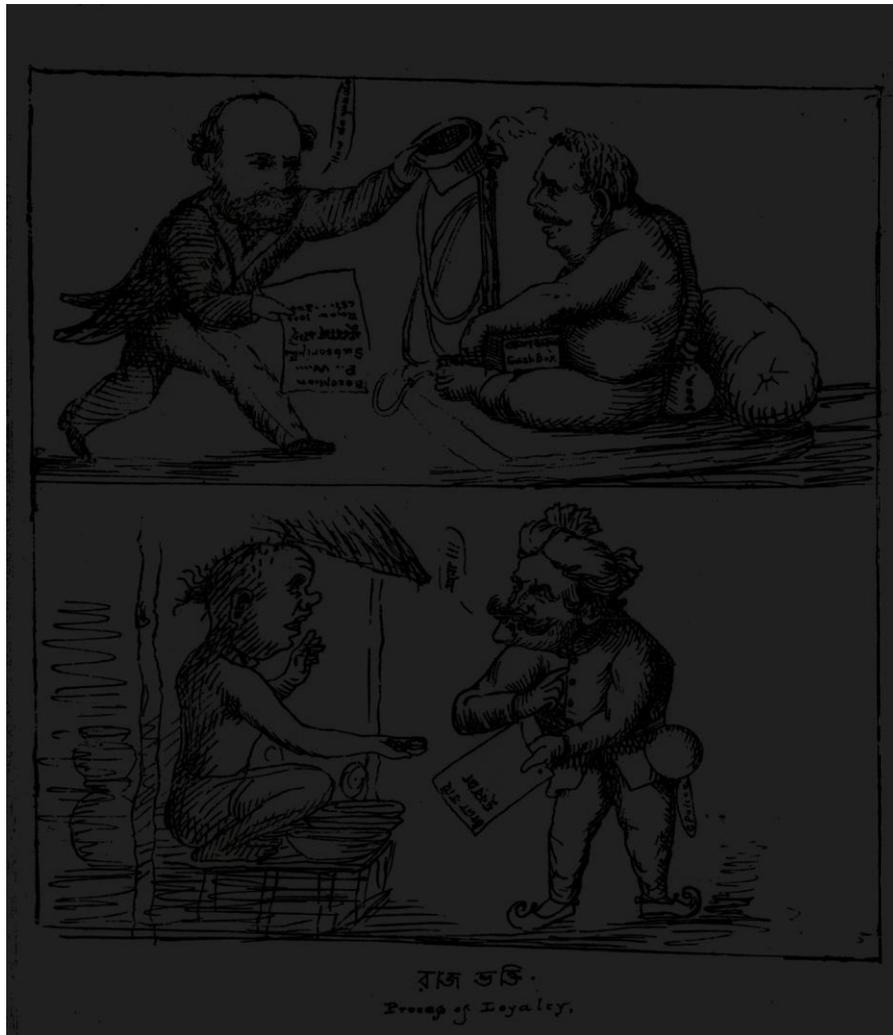


Image 2.3²⁶

²⁶ “Dharmahater Tamasha”, in *Basantak*, Vol. 1, 1874, 13

Doorgachurn Koondoo, a fish vendor was also the *mookbtear* of the fish market. He held two rent-free stalls in the New Market. He revealed that Stuart Hogg, in recognition of his father's services to the market had exempted him from paying rents *forever*. On the other hand, Oomur Mullick, a salt-beef seller, recounted how four salt meat vendors had relinquished their stalls owing to its high rental charge of Rs. 12. They now assumed sub-tenancy under those who retained their shops. Mullick further reflected on a scuffle that had ensued between his son and some of the sub-tenants over the ideal selling price of salt meat. Since the latter did not pay regular rent, they could undersell their product at three annas when the likes of Mullick sold it for four.

Similar pressures provoked more and more vendors to evacuate the New Market. Gunga Hurry Dutt, the *mookbtear* of the vegetable section in New Market was asked if he knew why a great number of greengrocers at the New Market no longer turned up. He reasoned that it was because their things could not be disposed of. They could not affect sales since they did not bring "English vegetables." He added that they had gone away to Bow Bazaar, Taltollah and other native markets. In a similar case, when Gholam Ghouse, the *mookbtear* of the meat market, was questioned about the gradual disappearance of butchers, like Hajeemun, Ghouse nonchalantly filled in, "Hajeemun is an old man. He left off work about a year and a half ago. He now remains at home. The others are elsewhere; some are dead."²⁷Accounts such as these show that retaining the vendors in the municipal market was no less a job than getting them. Initially, many were coercively dragged in or persuaded with special concessions, and some arrived voluntarily, seeking to cash in on its allure. The traffic did not cease there. In due course vendors, who did not find the new space adequately remunerative, tried to strike better deals elsewhere and if successful, moved out.

This evacuation strategy adopted by the vegetable sellers was, of course, not new. Early in 1871, A. Eden, the Secretary to the Government of Bengal had expressed his strong doubt about the feasibility of erecting a municipal market precisely in these terms. While discussing the proposal of making the rates and taxes collateral for the loan, Eden had said that

²⁷ Report of the Market Committee on the working of Municipal Market and fitness of Mr. Dissent to hold the office which he now holds, dated 28 April 1880, Municipal Department, Municipal Branch, Mun. Head Mis, Coll-2, File 8, Pro 22-24, May 1880 [WBSA]

[t]he poorer rate-payers, indeed the mass of them, have no sort of interest in a market, and *don't want one*. They may with good reason say that they are taxed for the purpose of *supplying a market for the European and East Indian population*.²⁸

To Eden of course did not occur the predicament of those vendors who did not have supplies for the European and East Indian population.

Four years since its inception, New Market continued to cater to a largely European clientele. Local buyers, if there were indeed some, were too few to sustain vendors who stocked up on *native necessities*. Compared to the teeming native populace, the number of Europeans in Calcutta was few and far between. Yet, demands and pleas of the minority enjoyed the highest premium. It is an unforgettable moment in Ghosh's *Bājārer Ladāi* where the clerk informs Hogg of a certain Santiram Mali, a brinjal-seller, who had demanded Rs. 2 to relocate to the new market. Hogg gasps at the bribe demanded, which, as he dramatically exclaims, is outrageous for that petty vegetable. Besides, brinjals are quite useless to the sahibs' palate, he declares. ("The sahibs do not have anything to do with brinjals.")²⁹ And with that, Mali's case is dismissed!

New Market was an endeavour by the Justices to rid the marketplace of gross abuses, misappropriations and misconduct. The market byelaws, revised and promulgated at regular intervals, bear testimony to this commitment. It was supposed to enact a sharp line between the licit and the illicit. The assumption was that infrastructural improvement would automatically ensure a more transparent and uniform system of exchange. The probes, as we now know, confirmed quite the contrary. It exposed the incommensurable gap between the promises professed and the practices

²⁸ A. Eden, Secretary to the Government of Bengal, to W. Grey, Judicial Department, keep-with proceedings for Jan 1871, Nos. 196-97 [WBSA]. Emphasis added.

²⁹ Sisir Kumar Ghosh, *Bajarer Lodai: The Battle of the Markets*, Sree Gourango Press, Calcutta, 1874.

resorted to. *New Market*, then, starts sounding like a misnomer that, barring its new façade, continued to embody the sensibility and logic of markets past. The task, I contend, is to contemplate if market operations such as these were indeed aberrations or the essential fulcrum that held markets in place and helped them run. What has often been dubbed as “abuse” and “corruption” that allegedly slander the promise of a *clean* market, may, for a change, be conceded as the leitmotif in the market narrative. As early as the late eighteenth century, Sudipta Sen reminds us,

Market duties were considered particularly offensive to the rulers of political economy and law. Physical insignias of power in contemporary Bengal, the ability to send armed retainers. into the marketplaces and extract tolls in coins, cowries and kind, or distribute rights to resources from markets in the service of worship, or support liturgical or martial practices were not to be tolerated any more.³⁰

Yet, nearly a century since the resolution to erase the last vestige of oriental despotism from the face of Bengal markets had been drawn, not much could be changed. Not only was Hogg deploying “armed retainers” to evacuate Dhurumtollah Market, the extraction of illegal tolls or salamees, in this case, went on unabated.

Having held 22 meetings, examined 50 witnesses and consulted various papers and statements, the Market Committee report came up with numerous suggestions for the future management of New Market in its July meeting of 1878. The final resolution was arrived at two years later in 1880, which largely drew from the previous suggestions, apart from some addenda. The next set of Byelaws was only passed after a long lull of thirty years. It would perhaps not be too erroneous to suppose that these byelaws succeeded, at least temporarily, in redeeming New Market from its “depravity” for in twenty years time, the corporation would be agog with talks on a prospective spatial expansion.

³⁰ Sudipta Sen, “A Permanent Settlement of Markets” in *Empire of Free Trade: The East India Company and the Making of the Colonial Marketplace*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), 138

THE NEW MARKET EXPANSION PLAN

The Corporation had been intent in resolving the urban maladies Calcutta had been fraught with since the late eighteenth century. Well into the nineteenth century, the tradition continued. Having significantly “improved” the town conditions, the Corporation was now intent on bettering it. I try to read the market expansion as a political maneuver that helped the municipality to further that process. It served as an intricate ploy to reclaim lands that had been put to misuse.

The project for the expansion of New Market emanated from the Markets Sub-Committee around 1901. The extensions were planned in a wholly different style from the existing market. The buildings or sheds, as the plan below will show, were isolated to avoid congestion. Poultry, meat, fish, dried fish, pork products were all to be housed in separate buildings.

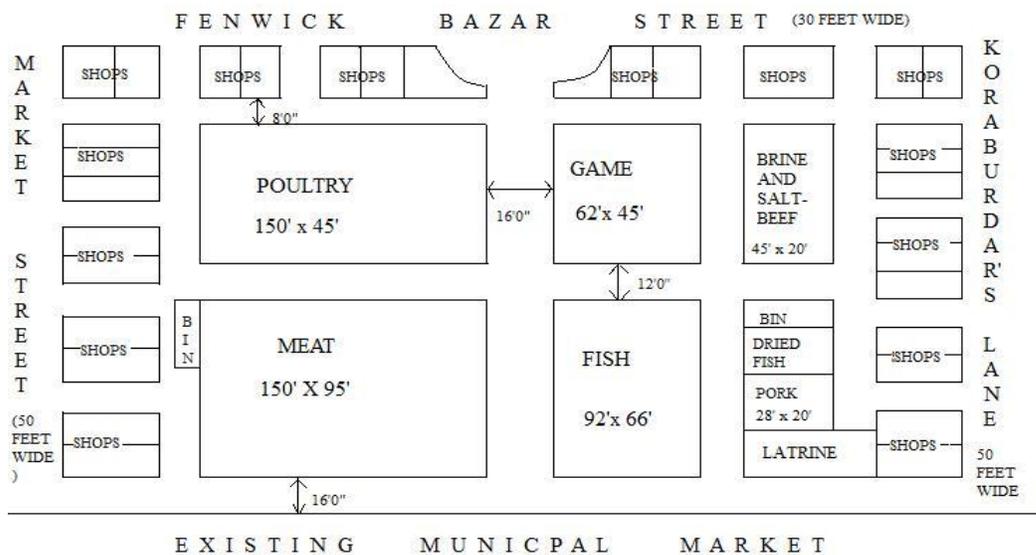


Image 2.4³¹

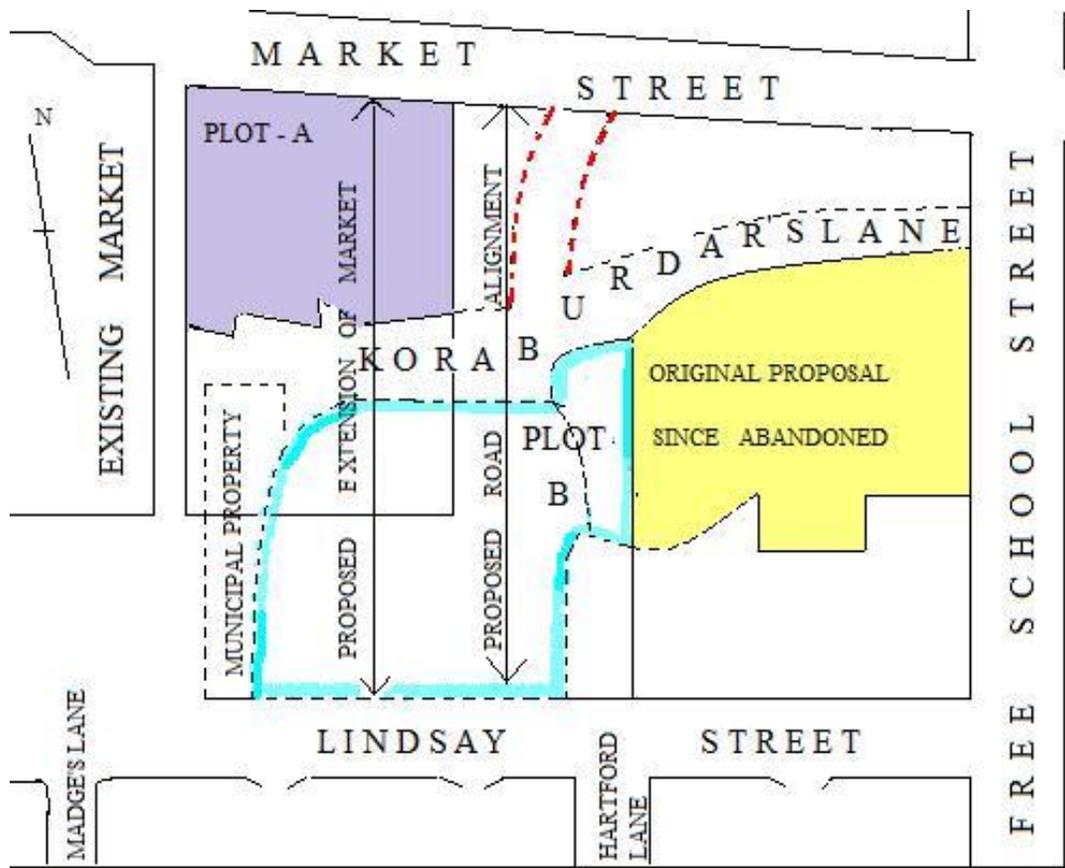
³¹ Report of the Market Committee on the working of Municipal Market and fitness of Mr. Dissent to hold the office which he now holds, dated 28 April 1880, Municipal Department, Municipal Branch, Mun. Head Mis, Coll-2, File 8, Pro 22-24, May 1880 [WBSA]

The buildings were to have iron column reinforcements and tiled roof, which assured good ventilation. The ground would have patent stone paving or other such impervious flooring. Shops in groups of two were to fortify all around the market with passages 8 feet wide between each two shops to lead into the market. The plan also included quarters to offer shelter to two market sergeants and the market staff. The architects even contemplated to have all vacant spaces between the sheds laid down with flag-stones and a service of ground hydrants so that the whole place could be thoroughly washed as often as required, everyday if thought necessary.³² One must not forget that it was a clamor for hygienic and well-ventilated marketplaces that originally ushered the municipal market boom. It therefore comes as no surprise that the market resolutions would constantly harp on it.

Initially, the plan was to extend the Municipal Market buildings to the eastside. The sanction of Government was accordingly solicited to the acquisition of the land required. It was proposed that the road to the east of the existing market in Lindsay Street would be closed and the adjoining Fenwick Bazaar Street be widened to 30 feet.³³ However, when these plans and estimates came to be considered by the Market Committee, it was found that speculators had been artificially raising the price of some land to the east of the proposed extension which the Corporation decided to acquire at their meeting on the 1st March 1904 for the purpose of giving access to the extension. Speculation had in fact been carried to such an extent as to raise the estimated value of the land by a staggering 75%. This made the cost of the scheme prohibitive so that after going into the matter very carefully, the Markets Special Committee decided that it would be more advantageous to make the proposed extension flush with the front of the existing market. For that purpose, the new proposal was to acquire some land and buildings on the north side of Lindsay Street and to extend Fenwick Bazaar Street to give access to the extension on the east. The plan below shows the outline of the scheme.

³² Plan for the extension of the New Market in 'Proceedings of a special meeting of the Markets Sub-Committee', held at the Municipal Office on Saturday, 12 September 1903 at 7.30 am. Municipal Department, Municipal Branch, January 1904, M 1L-12, Proceeding (B) 182-186 [WBSA]

³³ Proposed extension of the Municipal Market Buildings, Municipal Department, Municipal Branch, January 1904, M1L-12, Proceedings B, 182-186 [WBSA]



PLAN OF LAND TO BE ACQUIRED FOR THE EXTENSION OF THE SIR STUART HOGG MARKET AND A ROAD IN CONTINUATION OF FENWICK BAZAR, DOTTED IN RED. LAND TO BE ACQUIRED BOUNDED BLUE.

Image 2.5³⁴

The Corporation eventually abandoned the original project to acquire the *bustee* to the south of Koraburder Lane. In its place, it ratified the Assessor's proposal to acquire the block of land bounded on the north by Koraburder Lane, on the east by a line drawn in continuation of Fenwick Bazaar Street, on the south by Lindsay Street and on the west by the Hogg market at an

³⁴ C. F Payne, Esq. ICS, Acting Chairman of the Corporation, to the Under Secretary of the Government of Bengal, in 'Acquisition of land required by the Calcutta Municipality for the extension of the Hogg Market', dated 9 June 1805, Municipal Department, Municipal Branch, June 1905, Proceedings B, 160-164

approximate cost of Rs. 2, 05, 000.³⁵ This was inclusive of the cost of erecting the buildings required for the proposed extension.

The correspondences continued for a few more years until in 1911 sanction was conveyed to the project for widening Fenwick Bazaar Street and extending New Market at a total cost of Rs. 2, 31, 918.³⁶ Deliberations on the possible expansion of the municipal market spanned over a decade. While frequent correspondences happened between colonial officials to finalize the plan, the Corporation was also feeling the need to invoke a fresh set of byelaws to ensure the newly extended marketplace would take to maintaining discipline just as the previously existing market had been doing since the last promulgation in 1880.

CONCEITS CONCEDED?

Expansion was a routine feature of most municipal markets in Calcutta. Soon after College Street Market underwent a considerable spatial extension, New Market launched a similar project that continued through a good part of the 1920s. The colonial archive records the acquisition of certain premises in connection with the expansion of Hogg Market around February 1928.⁴⁵ The phenomenon that began in the 1870s and which I had dubbed the “municipal market boom” earlier in the chapter still continued in the early twentieth century. But the experience of the New Market, it seems, tempered the conceit of the Municipality officials to some degree. The growth of other private markets in the city bore testimony to the fact that government support was not enough. In 1913 the Special Committee appointed by the Corporation of Calcutta recognized

[t]hat the restrictions by which the tenancies of a municipal market are hedged in make for its unpopularity and renders the establishment of municipal markets peculiarly difficult.

As an Indian representative on the Special Committee clarified,

[In the municipal markets, the] tenants are expected to dress decently, to refrain from smoking and spitting, to give their stalls a neat and cleanly appearance and to treat

customers and visitors with civility. Encroachments on passages are rigorously checked and the punctual payment of rents enforced. An attempt is also made to check the transfer of tenancies. Shopkeepers are prevented from selling such commodities as they please and are compelled to adhere to the specification sanctioned for their stalls. In these and in other respects much stricter supervision is exercised in municipal markets and there can be no doubt that these restrictions must frequently appear irksome and unnecessary to the tenants. In these minor points they have much more independence in private markets and to this extent private markets may be said to appeal more strongly to the small trader.³⁷

To this observation, the Chairman of the Corporation of course retaliated with the oft-repeated jargon about “increased security of tenancy and the freedom from oppression”.

Besides Control in the matter of adulteration, supervision of hygienic and sanitary conditions is more effective in municipal markets than in private ones. The range of prices of articles is also published at regular intervals and periodical check is exercised over weights and measures. Moreover, there is a responsible Superintendent to whom customers can apply for inquiry as to their grievances and objections.³⁸

But in the market of marketplaces, the sacred promise of hygiene, regularity and justice did not consistently win over the profane pleasures of casual dressing, smoking and haggling. That, probably, is another story.

³⁷ The Hon’ble S.L Maddox, M.A, C.S.I, I.C.S, Chairman of the Corporation of Calcutta, to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal in the Municipal Department, in ‘Appendix-B: Minutes of the proceedings of the first meeting of the Special Committee appointed by the Corporation at their meeting held on 30 April 1913 to enquire into the needs and desirability of having a municipal market, and to draw up a scheme accordingly in view of the fact that one of the principal markets in the northern portion of the town, called Madhub Babu’s Bazaar, is about to be acquired by the Calcutta University and that there is no other decent market which can meet the requirements of the locality, held at the Municipal office, on Saturday, 24 May 1913 at 7:30 A.M’, dated Calcutta, 21 July 1913, General Department, Municipal Branch, October 1913. [WBSA]
Excerpted from the minutes of the meeting held on 26 February 1910.

³⁸ *Ibid.*