



THE CHC SCHOOL JOURNAL

IN COLLABORATION WITH

INDUS VALLEY WORLD SCHOOL



HERITAGE DIARIES: THE DALHOUSIE SQUARE

WHAT WAS AND WHAT IS...

Research

Agniv Chakraborty- IX, Irina Topdar-VIII, Heemraj Chakraborty- IX,
Riddhi Ghosh-IX, Sharanya Ghoshal-VIII

Artwork

Lino Print (Cover Page) and **Pen and Ink Sketches**
Anuja Maitra-XI, Ishika Debnath-XI, Saina Shankar-XI, Taniqsha Roy-XI

Mentors

Kaushik Roy, Mausumi Roy, Rashmita Roy

VOLUME I ISSUE I
APRIL 2022

WHERE IT ALL BEGAN.....

In the heart of Dalhousie Square (the present BBD Bagh), lies a man-made water body spanning 25 acres of land. It was called Lal Dighi and it pre-dates the arrival of **Job Charnock** and the establishment of the East India Company's trading settlement.

It is not known for sure how the tank got this name. It is commonly believed that it gets its name from the red colour of the water from the abir that was used during the celebration of **Dolyatra**, at a temple in the area built by a well-known aristocrat **Sabarna Roy Choudhury**. According to another version, it gets its name from **Laichand Basak**, the person who was responsible for digging the pond. A third legend attributes the name to the reflection of the tall spire of the Old Mission Church which coloured the tank water red at sunrise.

Historically, Lal Dighi is well-known as the site where the infamous battle was fought between **Siraj-ud-daulah and the East India Company in 1756**. The tank was neglected and was overgrown with weeds until Warren Hastings launched a project to clean up the tank. The water from Lal Dighi supplied clean water to the British residents and until the introduction of municipal water supply, it remained the chief source of supply of drinking water to the garrison at Fort William and the European community at large.



The park adjoining the water body, referred to locally as Lal Bagh (or Lal Bagh), became the pivot of the British settlement at **Fort William** and the European garden houses in the vicinity. In 1789, when **Captain de Grandpré** visited Calcutta, Tank Square was the centre of fashion. "As we enter the town," he writes, "a very extensive square opens before us, with a large piece of water in the middle for the public use. The pond has a grass plot round it, and the whole is enclosed by a wall breast-high, with a railing on the top. The sides of this enclosure are each nearly five hundred yards in length. The square itself is composed of magnificent houses, which render Calcutta not only the handsomest town in Asia, but one of the finest in the world."

The age-old heritage buildings surrounding the Lal Dighi have their eventful histories, both pleasant and dark, joyful and melancholy. History talks inside those old structures if one cares to listen.

GPO

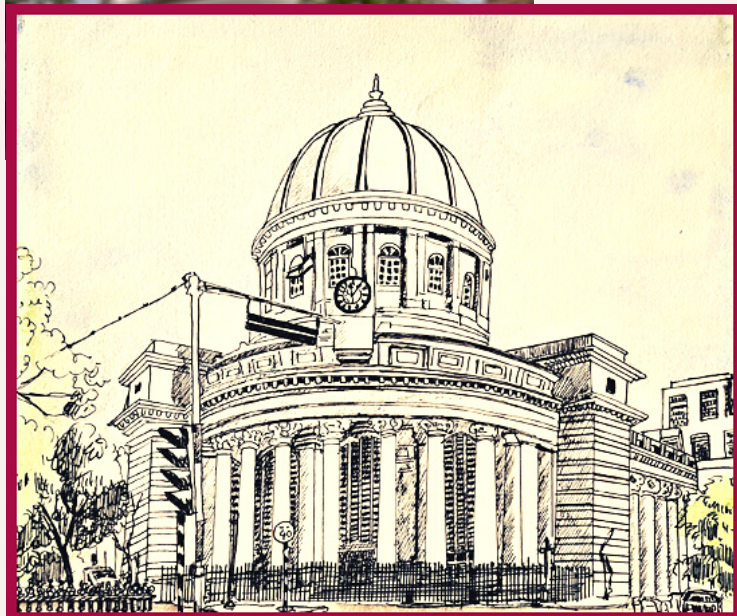
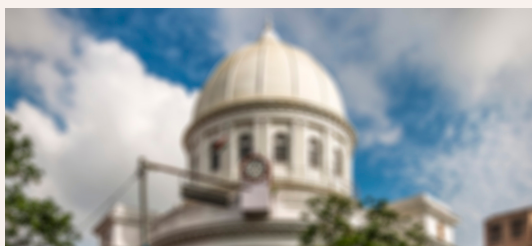
The postal system was introduced in Calcutta by Warren Hastings in **1774** and the first Post Office of Calcutta was situated on **Old Post Office Street** - which is, of course, how the street got its name. The office moved to several different locations including the buildings now occupied by the Allahabad Bank, the Lalbazar Police Headquarters and 2 Bankshall Street, where the Small Causes Court stands. In 1868, the General Post Office shifted to the magnificent building constructed at the corner of Koilaghat Street and Charnock Place at a whopping cost of Rs 6,30,510.

The imposing structure of the GPO is one of the landmarks in the city. Designed in **1864 by Walter B. Grenville**, consulting architect to the government of India from 1863 to 1868, the high domed structure rises to a majestic **220 feet**.

The building's white dome is supported by an octagonal base and 28 grand Ionic Corinthian pillars. **The iconic clock was installed in 1896** and was manufactured by the same company that made the Big Ben in London.

The site where the GPO is located was actually the site of the first Fort William which was damaged by Siraj-ud-Daulah at the time of the **"Siege of Calcutta" in 1756**. The staircase at the eastern side of the GPO features a brass plate, which marks the eastern end of the Old Fort William. This is probably the only remainder of the ancient fort of Calcutta. Recently a marble plaque has been installed on the Eastern wall of the GPO, highlighting the Brass Plate.

A postal museum was built in 1884 which boasts of an impressive collection of artefacts and stamps. The Philatelic Bureau is located on the southwestern end of the building.



For additional pictures and information, please click here..



TALES FROM THE SQUARE

An alley beside the GPO was the site of the guardhouse that housed the infamous Black Hole of Calcutta (1756). It is claimed that Nawab Siraj-ud-Daulah held 146 prisoners captive in an underground cell 14 x 18 feet on the night of 20 June 1756 after the capture of Calcutta. 120 of them supposedly died from the heat, exhaustion and suffocation. This infamous incident, referred to as the "Black Hole Tragedy", rests on the account of John Holwell, one of the prisoners who survived to tell the tale. However, historians believe that it may have been grossly exaggerated to malign the Nawab, a sworn enemy of the British. The story, however, continues to circulate among the local people.



AKASHVANI BHAVAN



To listen to the iconic, classic Mahalaya chant, please click here...



Akashvani Bhavan, the Kolkata home of All India Radio, was designed by the firm **Ballardie, Thompson and Matthews** and completed in **1958**. The style is an excellent synthesis of Buddhist and Hindu Temple architecture.

The Indian Broadcasting Company, set up on the lines of the BBC, opened its Calcutta station at Temple Chamber, opposite the High Court, but then moved to **No 1, Garstin Place** and started to broadcast from August 26, 1927. In 1936, the Company was taken over by the Government and re-named All India Radio.

In 1958, All India Radio shifted its office from its old building at 1, Garstin Place, to the new building in front of Eden Gardens. The ancient building was unceremoniously demolished in January 1997 to give way to the present structure. It was Rabindranath Tagore who coined the term 'Akashvani.'

The Akashvani Bhavan has seen iconic programmes like **Golpo Dadur Asar, Sangeet Siksha Asar** (conducted by the legendary Pankaj Mullick), **Gaaner Bhelay, Akhil Bharatiya Karyakram and Radio Sangeet Sammelan** which brought together master musicians from all over the country, and kept listeners enthralled for years. Equally heart-warming were programmes like **Anurodher Asar**-a request show for Bengali songs. It has seen luminaries from Ustad Keramatullah Khan and Ustad Md. Sagiruddin Khan to Jnan Prakash Ghosh and V. G. Jog, performing live in its precincts.

The blind singer **Krishna Chandra De**, uncle of the legendary **Manna De**, was a regular teacher and noted elocutionists like **Partha and Gouri Ghosh, Shankar Ghosh and Mihir Bandopadhyay** were associated with programmes at Akashvani Bhavan for several decades. All the greats of theatre like **Chhabi Biswas, Jahar Ganguly, Ahindra Choudhury, Sarajubala Debi, Sambhu Mitra, Ajitesh Bandyopadhyay and Basanta Choudhury** performed here.

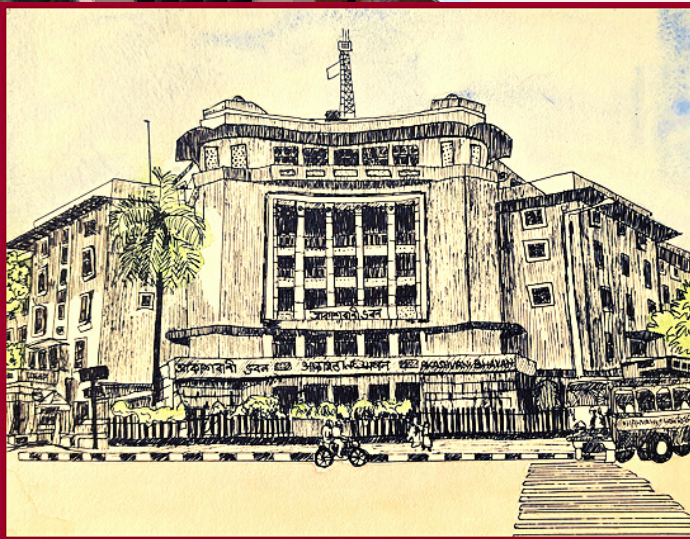
Perhaps the most iconic radio programme associated with Akashvani Bhavan is the **Chandi Path** by Sri Birendra Krishna Bhadra which ushers in the Durga Puja festivities on Mahalaya. It has a special place in the hearts of all Calcuttans since 1931 when it was first performed. Initially it was performed live, but in 1966 a recorded version was created. In 1976, AIR decided to revamp the programme, but even the voice of the superstar **Uttam Kumar** was not accepted by the people of Calcutta.



To revisit the nostalgia of the All India Radio tune, please click here..



Akashvani Bhavan was attacked, and people were on the streets in protest, despite the emergency! The level of outrage forced All India Radio to issue a public apology and run the recording of Mahisasurmardini. Since then, the original recording of the programme continues to be played **every Mahalaya at 4.00 am**.



CURRENCY BUILDING

The Currency Building was **originally built in 1833** to house the Calcutta branch of the **Agra Bank**. Originally it was the site of the Calcutta Auction Company's office building. In 1868, the imperial Controller of the Currency converted a large portion of the building for use by the Office of the Issue and Exchange of Government Currency, after which it became known as the Currency Building. In addition to issuing and storing coinage, the Indian government also utilized the building for the issue of paper currency

TALES FROM THE SQUARE

The AIR office at 1, Garstin Place was one of the most haunted addresses in the city of Calcutta. Popular anecdotes of celebrities, including Birendra Krishna Bhadra and Soumitra Chatterjee, encountering ghostly spirits in the building abound. One account was that of the carstaker Jagmohan, who supposedly encountered a group of shadowy figures carrying the cot on which he had been sleeping on their shoulders and going up the stairs. He screamed and fainted! Another account was of a tall European man who roamed the corridors, glaring at anyone who happened to "meet" him, and yet another European man "without eyes".

As the area surrounding Garstin Place gradually became home to the old Fort William, the plot of land which became 1, Garstin Place accommodated a graveyard. In the early 18th century, 460 Englishmen and women who died of malaria were buried here. Possibly, this is where the spooky tales came from!

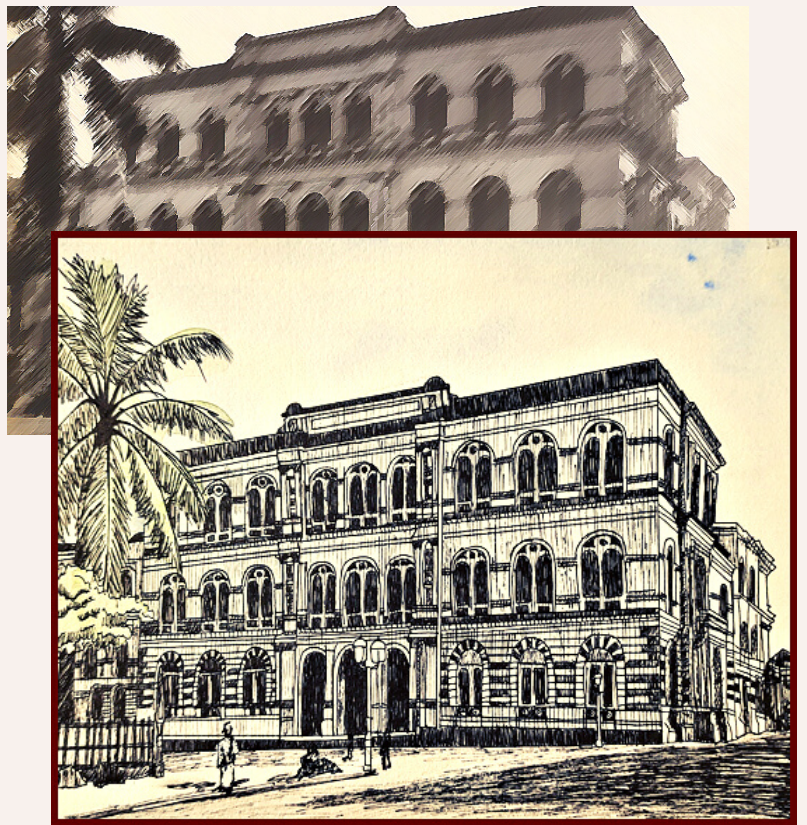


For additional pictures, please click here..



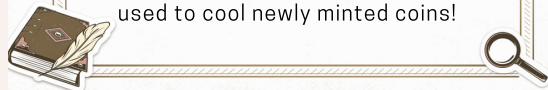
The Currency Building is a three-storey brick structure, built in the Italian style of architecture - a "rarity" given that most buildings in Calcutta from that era exhibit a **Gothic style of architecture**. Its arched roof is supported by iron joists and the central hall, now an open-air courtyard, was formerly topped by three large domes with skylights. During the building's use as a currency office, the central hall contained the exchange counters for banknotes, gold, silver, and small change. Soumitra Das writes, "Old men remember how they would go there to change soiled notes. New note forms were kept in giant iron safes, and a working reserve of silver was kept inside a massive masonry vault fortified with two sets of iron doors and a grate of prodigious strength."

From **1935 until 1937, the building served as the Reserve Bank of India's first central office**. After the RBI central office was relocated to Bombay, the building suffered neglect, and was used at one time by the Central Public Works Department as a storehouse. It was reduced to a terrible state - full of undergrowth, its domes broken, and the central courtyard all caved in. The building lost the barrel vault, the north-eastern first floor on the eastern side, the joists, its valuable Italian marble, Burma teak furnishings and iron chests whose estimated cost would be over Rs 2 crore! The authorities declared the building "unsafe" and in 1994, they decided to demolish it! But thanks to the intervention of **INTACH, it was saved and in 1998, the entire structure was declared as a heritage building**, and custodianship passed to the Archaeological Survey of India which was entrusted with the conservation and restoration



TALES FROM THE SQUARE

During the restoration work of the Currency Building, ASI archaeologists uncovered evidence of an underground canal from the nearby Hooghly River, the water from which was used to cool newly minted coins!



After the completion of the reconstruction, the old Currency Building was given a new lease of life through the inauguration of an art gallery '**Ghare Baire**' showcasing the richness of Bengal art from the 18th to the 20th centuries. But unfortunately, it has had to down its shutters after enriching the Kolkata cultural landscape for about two years.

GREAT EASTERN HOTEL

THE "JEWEL OF THE EAST" - AN ICONIC LEGACY OF THE RAJ

The Great Eastern Hotel initially started out as a bakery run by the English confectioner **David Wilson** in the 1830s to serve the East India Company's officials. The bakery served the best quality bread and English breakfast at the time hence earning the nickname '**Breadbasket of the East**'. These were the golden days of Calcutta, and the city was in much in need of a luxury hotel, and it was probably this need that motivated David Wilson to turn his bakery into a luxury hotel.

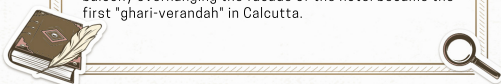


For additional pictures, please click [here](#).



TALES FROM THE SQUARE

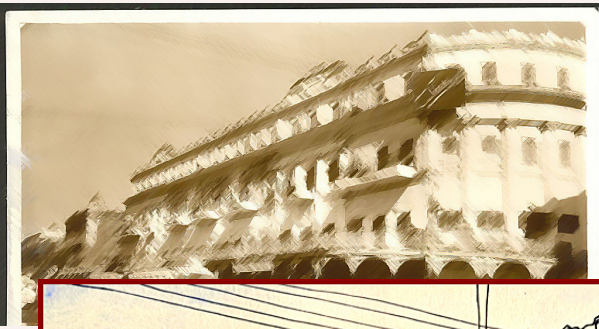
The huge balcony overhanging the facade of the hotel needed the sanction of the Calcutta Municipal Corporation which was entitled to charge a fee of Rs 100 per month. The Corporation however demanded a fee of 300 rupees. Shirley Trehearne, a member of the Board of Directors when it changed hands, refused and being a legal expert, found a loophole in the law, forcing the CMC to settle on 100 rupees as the monthly fee. This huge balcony overhanging the facade of the hotel became the first "ghari-verandah" in Calcutta.



Built in 1840, it was first called the Auckland Hotel after the Governor General of India, though it remained popular as the Wilson Hotel. Soon, it became a social hub of the European aristocracy and a favourite haunt of the city's elite. **In 1865 it was renamed the Great Eastern Hotel** and was regarded as the best hotel east of Suez. Its long list of esteemed guests included celebrities from around the world, including Queen Elizabeth II, Mahatma Gandhi, Ho Chi Minh, Bulganin, Rudyard Kipling and Mark Twain.

The hotel got its electricity connection in **1883**, thus becoming the first hotel in the country to be lit by electricity. During World War II soldiers were housed in the hotel.

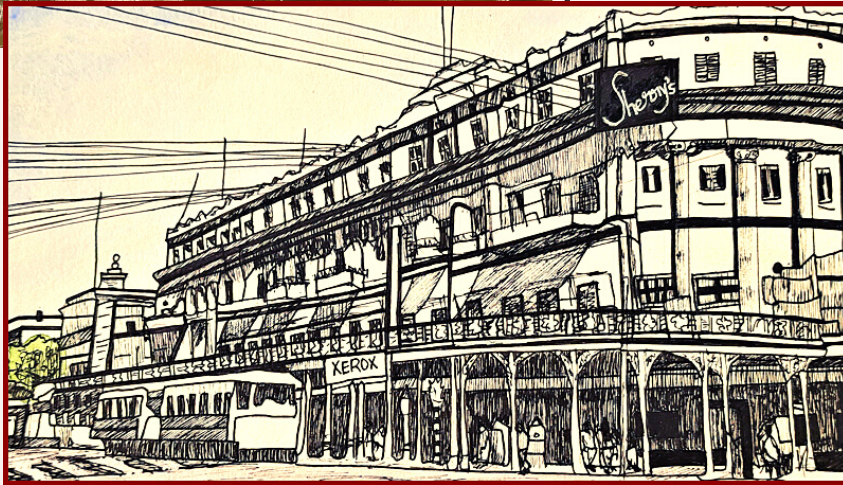
After independence, the Great Eastern Hotel was taken over by the Government of West Bengal. In the late 1970s, decline set in, and the iconic luxury hotel was turned into a shabby shopping complex. The hotel closed its doors to the public after 165 years of continuous operation, the longest by any hotel, anywhere in the world. **In 2005, it was taken over by the LaLiT Hotels** and after seven years of meticulous restoration, it was again opened to the public in 2013.



The hotel is an amalgamation of three different eras of history, covering the **Victorian Block** (1837 – 1901), **Edwardian Block** (1901 – 10) and **Contemporary Block** (2006 onwards).

The Edwardian Block has a steel structure, and a steel pillar is kept exposed in each of the rooms in the block.

At the corner of the lobby, a part of the Edwardian Block, stands a **German Piano, manufactured by M.F. Rachals, Hamburg** and was once the pride of **Maxim, the legendary bar of the Great Eastern Hotel**. It is one of the oldest pianos in the city and is in perfect playing condition.



Old ovens and several other old pieces of machinery manufactured by **Baker Perkins, London**, used in the bakery are on display along with a portion of the old, un-plastered wall.

Artifacts from the yesteryears like teapots, vases etc. have been restored and are now decorative pieces inside the property. The huge dough-kneaders are now planters in the corridors and lobbies. A gigantic oven, roughly the size of a full-sized room, has been converted into a private dining area!

WRITERS (OR WRITERS') BUILDING

The Writers Building (opinion is divided as to whether the name should be written with an apostrophe or not) was built in 1777 by the British architect **Thomas Lyon**. The construction of this building was commissioned by the then Governor-General, **Warren Hastings**, to house the Writers (or clerks) of the East India Company who used to maintain written records of trade, transactions, etc. It served as the nerve centre of British administration and the business hub of the city that emerged around it.

It was the first three – storey building in Calcutta. Built purely to serve a functional purpose, it was devoid of decoration, and it was described as looking like a “shabby hospital or poor-house”. **In 1821, a 128 feet long verandah with Ionic columns, each 32 feet high, were added on the first and second floors.** Towards the close of the 19th century, the Victorian Era British administration wanted to give a grand and powerful image to this building.

For additional pictures, please click here..

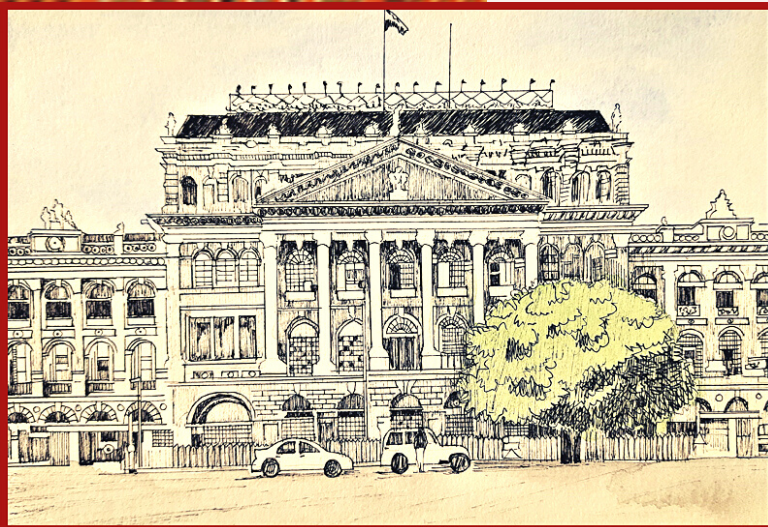


Writers acquired its Greco – Roman look, complete with the portico in the central bay and the red surface of exposed brick, with the iconic parapet and edifying statues sculpted by **William Frederick Woodington** lining the terrace, installed **in 1883**. The statue of Minerva stands above the central portico.

The terrace also contains several other statues and notable among them are four clusters of statues: '**Justice**', '**Commerce**', '**Science**' and '**Agriculture**', with the respective Greek Gods and Goddesses of these four disciplines – **Zeus, Hermes, Athena and Demeter**.

The building is closely linked with the history of our freedom struggle. It is most famously remembered for the **gun battle** that took place in its corridors when on **8th December 1930**, the revolutionary trio **Benoy Basu, Badal Gupta, and Dinesh Chandra Gupta** made a daring attack and killed the hated Inspector-General of Prisons, **N. S. Simpson**, who was infamous for his torture of the Indian revolutionaries. It is this incident, of course, that gave Dalhousie Square its present name – **BBD Bagh**. Many food-stall keepers who sleep outside this building say that often the sound of the gunshots and the cries of Simpson still reverberate in the building!

There are many rooms in this building that have remained locked, and their keys are lost. Interestingly, not all the watchmen have the keys to all doors. If a watchman has a great bunch of keys hanging from his pocket, it can be surmised that he is a very loyal, efficient, and experienced watchman! Many doors which have remained locked are believed to be rooms where people were tortured and killed. Writers Building remained the centre of government power until 2013 when a massive renovation of the building was planned, and the offices shifted to Nabanna.



Artist at work..



“For the administrative power it holds, the depth of history it has seen and the fact that it is the usual end point of Kolkata’s many protest marches, **Writers’ is the ideal building through which to look at the city.**”

TALES FROM THE SQUARE

The land on which the Writers' Building was constructed was a vast expanse of banana plantations. The bananas were famous throughout Calcutta for their sweet taste and smell. In time, however, the fruits began to develop a strange red colour and acquired a pungent smell. When people would consume the bananas, they experienced acute stomach pain and developed rashes, and many died. It was widely believed that the English East India Company would bury rebels under this plantation. People believed that the ghosts of the buried made people suffer and hence they stopped buying these bananas. The farmers suffered great losses, and many cursed the British for this!

