

PAGES OF KOLKATA

TEXT AND PHOTOS: APURBA JAHANGIR

It was a usual summer day in Kolkata. A nonchalant working day where one is bound to wake up from the rings and horns of the busy Kolkata streets. As I was no exception, the sound of Kolkata woke me up at an early hour of the morning. The good thing was that the day was planned that way—discovering Kolkata for the first time. I planned this day for that only. As I stepped into a yellow ambassador, I knew Kolkata's College Street (aka Boi Para) with its thousand book stores is going to welcome me with its arms wide open.

Boi Para stretches from Bowbazar's Ganesh Chandra Road crossing to Mahatma Gandhi Road crossing. The area

is glorified not just because of its book stores but also as the major college and university area of Kolkata. Institutions such as Presidency University, University of Kolkata, Kolkata Medical College and Hindu School are all situated in this area—making it the grand central for students.

After an hour of moving through traffic, I finally reached onto the door of College Street. The taxi dropped me somewhere near the Biswabharati's publication store from where I began my stroll through Boi Para. At a glance it looks like a broad version of our very own Nilkhet. Dotted with countless book stores of all sizes, Boi Para is filled with the smell of damp pages. My first aim was to walk through the whole area before committing to a store. My stroll noticed a lot of famous book-stores which are referred in various novels. It was mesmerising to see old stores such as Chuckerverty and Chatterjee, which was established in 1910, still standing with its head held high. A couple of steps ahead stands the

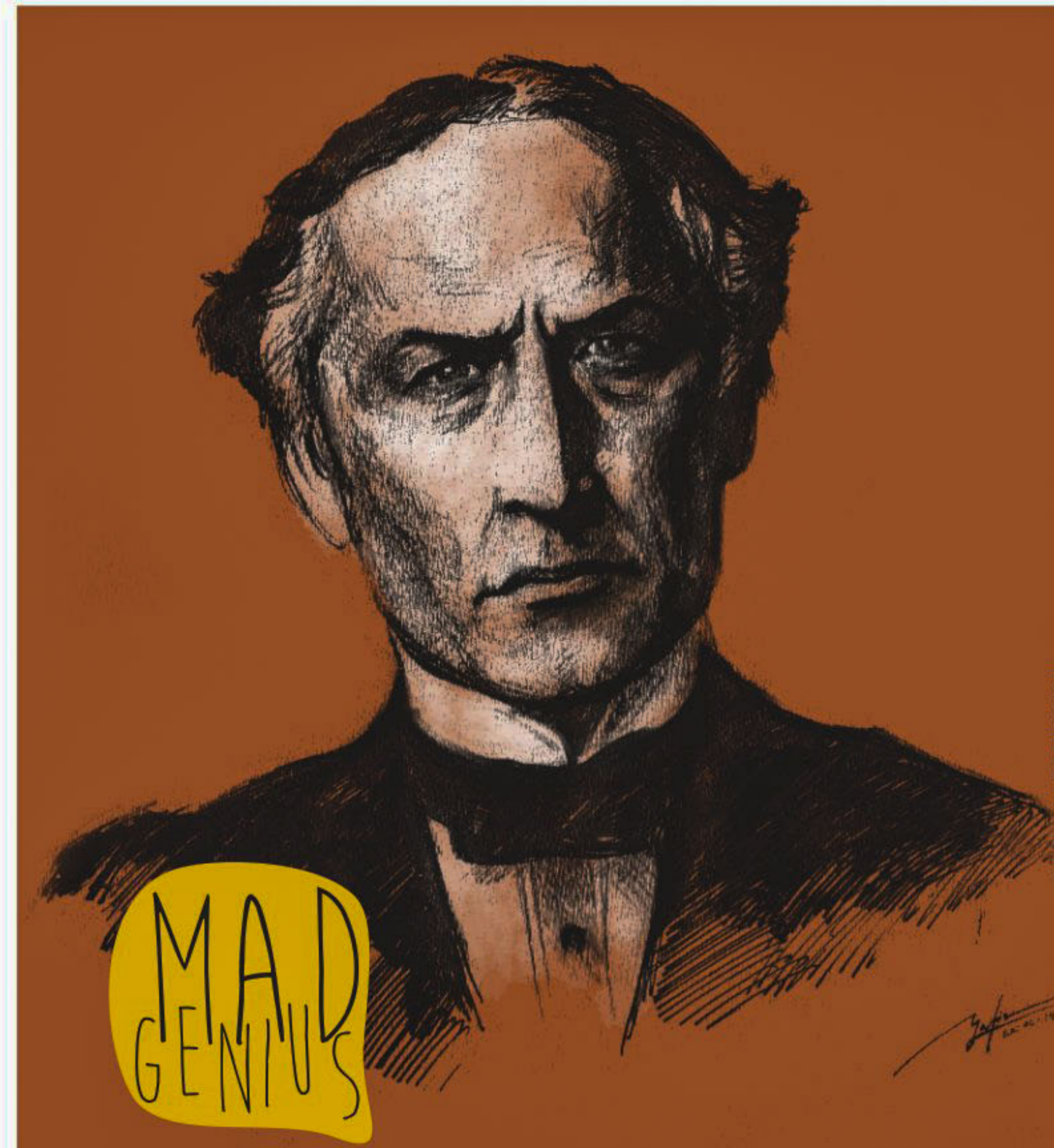
Sri Aurobindo Pathmandir, primarily a religious centre which also sells books.

Versatility is the most interesting aspect of Boi Para. On the left hand side one can find old men selling second hand science text books and just to their right, sits small book stores selling Russian published books on socialism by distinct publishers. That is the beauty of College Street. There's a saying that one can find gold worth books in College Street if one's lucky. Stumbling upon the first or second edition of Buddhadeb Basu, Sunil Ganguli, or even Ritwik Ghatak are a Monday for College Street.

After my stroll, I picked a store which on display had the book I was looking for. It was among the few air-conditioned stores where one can browse through the books and with this experience I realised another main aspect of this book colony. Boi Para works in a complete different way. It is very hard to browse through books in the small shops. I found most of the people came with a list, naming the books they wanted. A friend of mine living

in Kolkata assured me that it is pretty much safe to assure that they will have the book on is looking for. Most of the owners either keep their books in the storage. One just has to name it and they will bring it.

After spending three and a half hours looking for the books of Manto, Ghatak and others my day with College Street ended. Though the book browsing was over, I saved the cream of College Street for last. With loads of books in both hands I arrived onto the door step of the famous Coffee House. The place obviously needs no further introduction as the famous singer Manna Dey did it very well in his song. This was the place where students and intellectuals would meet after work or class and just get lost in adda. To think that writers such as Buddhadeb Basu, Joy Goswami, Sunil Gangapaddhay once used to sit on these very chairs made me shiver. The coffee and Pakora ended the day for me. A day which made me fall in love with this amazing city. ■



HARRY HOUDINI

(March 24, 1874 – October 31, 1926)

Born Erik Weisz, later Ehrlich Weiss or Harry Weiss; Harry Houdini was an American illusionist and stunt performer, popularly known for his sensational escape acts. Throughout his career, Houdini gained fame after repeatedly escaping from police handcuffs and jails. Different wardens from all around the world gave him certificates for escaping from their prisons. After making his name in America, Harry toured Europe, where he took himself one step further by escaping from straitjackets and coffins. His magic skills helped him catch frauds that scientists and academics had never been able to do. Houdini also starred in number of movies. He was also a keen aviator, and aimed to become the first man to fly a plane in Australia.

“What the eyes see and the ears hear, the mind believes.”

I am a great admirer of mystery and magic. Look at this life - all mystery and magic.

Fire has always been and, seemingly, will always remain, the most terrible of the elements.

A common pickpocket trick is for the operator to carry a shawl or overcoat carelessly

over the left arm, and to take a seat on the right side of the person they intend to rob in a streetcar or other vehicle.”

STAR DINARY
thestarmagazine@gmail.com



ILLUSTRATION: MANAN MORSHED

STUCK AND SURVIVED

Panicking never does any good when it's an emergency- we all know this. But this knowledge seems useless when you are stuck in a lift. Few days ago, my cousins and I went to see one of my relatives. As we walked into the lift, on our way up to her floor, we suddenly felt a jolt and the lights switched off for a second. We soon realised that the lift had stopped. One of my cousins started pressing the emergency button while the other tried staying calm with deep breaths. We yelled, we banged the door and tried to force the doors open. Suddenly I remembered my phone and checked to see whether it had network or not. Luckily we had signals in our phones. So we called up for some help and waited for it to arrive. Finally we made our way out. How many hours were we stuck inside? It was only 14 minutes, but it seemed like 14 years!

Ali Azmal
Badda, Dhaka

NO RECREATION FOR US

I will be taking my O-levels next year. My parents are great but they are beyond overprotective, and always keep track of what I am doing and where I am going. After Eid, my friends and I were supposed to go to one of my friend's places, but we changed our plan and went to a café outside. I did not inform my mother about this change of plans. Recently, one of my cousins saw some of my photographs taken that day in the café, and she told my parents that they should not allow me going out in cafés and restaurants, as it is not safe. My parents trust me a lot and know that I would never hide anything from them. My mother used to drop me off at my coaching centre previously, but now as she doesn't trust me, she stays there till the end of my class. This breaks my heart as I feel like I will never regain her trust again. I discussed this situation with my parents and apologised for not letting them know before. They understood me, but asked me not to hang out in any café as the situation is not very good. I understand their concern. But in Dhaka we don't have too many places to visit for recreation. So all we do is get hooked to our laptops and phones. Then people blame us for being a generation that is overly dependant on technology. But what can we really do?



Amana Faruki
Baridhara, Dhaka

ILLUSTRATION: MANAN MORSHED