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Calcutta Through the Lens of Prabir Purkayastha

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2 DAYS AGO

Calcutta, once considered a prominent cultural capital and India's "City of Palaces," has been home to numerous individuals of influence, from Mother Theresa to Indian filmmaker, Satyajit Ray. A major trading port and base for the British East India Company during British colonization, Calcutta grew large quickly, and with its rapid urbanization came challenges. Taking note as the city's historical façades fell into decay and the once-vibrant, diverse demographics began to fade, Indian-born photographer Prabir Purkayastha took up his camera to document the city's remaining colonial architecture. The resulting images—each one a poignant narrative of nostalgia—form his "Stories in Stone," on view now at [Sundaram Tagore Gallery](#) in Chelsea.

From afar, the buildings in Purkayastha's photos appear majestic; this is the case with, *'Raj Bari', Bengali Aristocrat's Colonial mansion, outskirts of Calcutta*, which features an elaborate palace perched serenely on the edge of a reflective black pond. A closer look though, under Purkayastha's sharp lens, reveals that deterioration has set in. Overgrown roots cascade over the side of a mansion balcony in *'Verandah railing', Bengali mansion, North Calcutta*, and in *'Time Passages', Maghen David Synagogue, North Calcutta*, a chaotic pile of forlorn chairs collects dust in a corner.

Though Calcutta is home to more than 14 million people, many of the once-thriving sub-communities, including Jewish, Chinese, Armenian, Parsi, and Anglo-Indian cultures, are becoming a memory; significantly, Purkayastha's photographs are nearly devoid of human life. Says Purkayastha, "Watching helplessly as communities slowly vanish into the dusty corners of our nation's history, I felt something needed to be done to record and preserve for future generations."

"Stories in Stone" is on view at Sundaram Tagore, New York, May 1st–31st, 2014.

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'Raj Bari', Bengali Aristocrat's Colonial mansion, outskirts of...
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Prabir Purkayastha
'Verandah railing', Bengali mansion, North Calcutta, 2011
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'Time Passages', Maghen David Synagogue, North Calcutta, ...
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Prabir Purkayastha
'Alexander', Shovabazaar Raj Bari, North Calcutta, 2011
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Prabir Purkayastha
'The Rani's Residence', Central Calcutta, 2013
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'Castle Gate', Bengali Aristocrat's Mansion, outskirts of Calc...
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