

PEDIকON2026

63rd Annual Conference of The Indian Academy of Pediatrics
16TH JANUARY - 20TH JANUARY, 2026 | KOLKATA



West Bengal
Academy of Pediatrics



16th - 20th January, 2026



Venue: Biswa Bangla Convention Centre, Kolkata, India

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Kolkata: A Journey Through Time...





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Issue 3: Kolkata: A Journey Through Time

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Editorial Note

Welcome to the third issue of the **PEDICON 2026 Newsletter**, where we embark on a fascinating journey through the rich heritage and history of Kolkata. A city where the past meets the present, Kolkata's colonial architecture, contributions to India's freedom struggle, and cultural renaissance have shaped the nation's identity. This issue will highlight the **glorious legacy of the British era, the valour of freedom fighters, and the intellectual resurgence of Bengal's Renaissance movement.**

Echoes of the Past...

Pre-Colonial Kolkata: A Thriving Trade Hub

Before the British, the region consisted of small villages, including Sutanuti, Gobindapur, and Kalikata, which later merged to form modern Kolkata. The area was under the influence of the Sabarna Roy Chowdhury family, who controlled the land and trade routes. It was a significant trade and riverine hub, connecting Bengal's merchants with Southeast Asia and Europe.



The British Takeover: From Traders to Rulers

Kolkata's transformation into a British stronghold began in 1690, when Job Charnock established a trading post in Sutanuti, Gobindapur, and Kalikata. By 1698, the British formally acquired these villages, fortifying Fort William to secure their commercial interests.

The turning point came with the Battle of Plassey (1757), where Robert Clive defeated Nawab Siraj-ud-Daulah, aided by the betrayal of Mir Jafar. This

victory gave the British control over Bengal's wealth and administration. Further consolidation followed after the Battle of Buxar (1764), where the British defeated the combined forces of the Nawab of Bengal, the Nawab of Awadh, and the Mughal Emperor, securing Diwani rights (tax collection) over Bengal, Bihar, and Odisha.

With Warren Hastings as the first Governor-General (1772), Kolkata became the capital of British India, evolving from a trading post into the center of British administration. The city remained the seat of power until 1911, when the capital was shifted to Delhi due to nationalist movements in Bengal.

Kolkata's early British history laid the foundation for nearly 200 years of colonial rule in India, setting the stage for the city's eventual role in India's freedom struggle.



Historical Timeline of Kolkata

- 1690 – Job Charnock establishes a British trading post.
- 1698 – British East India Company officially acquires Sutanuti, Gobindapur, and Kalikata.
- 1756 – The Battle of Plassey lays the foundation of British rule in Bengal.
- 1772 – Kolkata becomes the capital of British India.
- 1857 – The First War of Independence (Sepoy Mutiny) sees Kolkata as a major administrative center.
- 1911 – Delhi replaces Kolkata as India's capital.
- 1943 – The Bengal Famine devastates millions due to British wartime policies.
- 1946 – The Direct-Action Day leads to communal riots in Kolkata.
- 1947 – India gains independence, and Kolkata becomes the capital of West Bengal.
- 1971 – The city plays a crucial role in the Bangladesh Liberation War.
- 1984 – Kolkata Metro, India's first metro railway, begins operations.
- 2001 – Calcutta officially renamed Kolkata to reflect its Bengali heritage.



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Colonial Kolkata: Architectural Legacy

The British Influence – Kolkata became the hub of British administration, trade, and culture, earning it the title of the “Second City of the Empire.”



Writers' Building – Originally built as the residence of junior writers of the British East India Company, this iconic red-brick structure later became the seat of Bengal's administration.



Raj Bhavan – Inspired by Kedleston Hall in England, the Raj Bhavan was the official residence of the Viceroy of India before Delhi took over as the capital in 1911.



St. Paul's Cathedral & The Great Eastern Hotel – A magnificent Anglican cathedral and one of Asia's oldest luxury hotels, both of which continue to stand as proud symbols of Kolkata's colonial past.



Metcalf Hall – A striking Greco-Roman building, once home to the Asiatic Society, showcasing India's rich literary and historical records.



South Park Street Cemetery – One of the oldest cemeteries in India, housing the graves of British officers and influential colonial-era figures.



Marble Palace – A private mansion with neoclassical architecture and an impressive art collection.



Tipu Sultan Mosque – A historic mosque built in the 19th century, reflecting Indo-Islamic architecture.



General Post Office (GPO) – A grand colonial structure, known for its iconic dome and historical significance in British administration.



Belvedere House – Once the residence of the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal, now housing the National Library of India.





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The Zamindars of Kolkata and the Rise of the Babu Culture

During the colonial era, Kolkata became home to powerful Zamindars (landowners) who amassed wealth through land revenue collection under the British system. Many of these families played a significant role in shaping the city's culture, economy, and nationalist movements. Prominent zamindar families, such as the Tagores, Debs, and Mullicks, built grand mansions, patronized the arts, and engaged in philanthropy. The Babu



Culture: A Blend of Opulence and Intellect

The rise of the Babu Culture in 19th-century Kolkata was a unique phenomenon, where wealthy Bengali elites, known as Babus, indulged in luxury, fine arts, and intellectual pursuits.

This era saw:

- **Extravagant Lifestyles:** Babus hosted lavish festivals, organized Jatra (folk theatre), and engaged in classical music.



- **Patronage of Art and Literature:** Many Babus supported poets, painters, and theater artists, significantly contributing to Bengal's artistic heritage.



- **Fusion of Western and Indian Influences:** The Babus adopted European fashion and etiquette while remaining deeply rooted in Bengali traditions.



- **Social and Cultural Movements:** Despite their indulgences, some Babus played an active role in the Bengal Renaissance, supporting reformers like Raja Rammohan Roy and Vidyasagar in their efforts for education, women's rights, and social change. This period gave Kolkata its distinct cultural flair, blending the grandeur of aristocracy with a deep engagement in literature, theatre, and reform movements.

Kolkata in the Freedom Struggle

Kolkata was at the heart of India's struggle for independence, serving as a center for revolutionary movements, nationalist ideologies, and political activism. The city witnessed the rise of fearless leaders, underground revolutionary activities, and mass protests that shook British rule. From the Swadeshi Movement to Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose's call for armed resistance, Kolkata played a defining role in shaping India's path to independence. This section explores the city's landmark events, key figures, and the indomitable spirit that made it a crucial battleground for India's freedom.



Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose & the Indian National Army (INA) – A revolutionary leader, Netaji's call for armed struggle against the British resonated across the country. His escape from house arrest in Kolkata remains a thrilling chapter in history. Swadeshi

Movement & Boycott of British Goods – The movement saw mass protests, bonfires of British goods, and the rise of Bengal's indigenous industries.





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Jorasanko Thakurbari – The ancestral home of Rabindranath Tagore, this house served as a melting pot of nationalist ideas, literature, and music that inspired the freedom struggle.



Bengal Renaissance: A Cultural Awakening

The Bengal Renaissance was a period of social and intellectual revolution in the 19th century, led by prominent thinkers and reformers.

Raja Rammohan Roy – Known as the 'Father of the Indian Renaissance,' he was a staunch advocate for abolishing Sati and promoting women's education. He founded the Brahmo Samaj, which played a significant role in modernizing Bengali society.



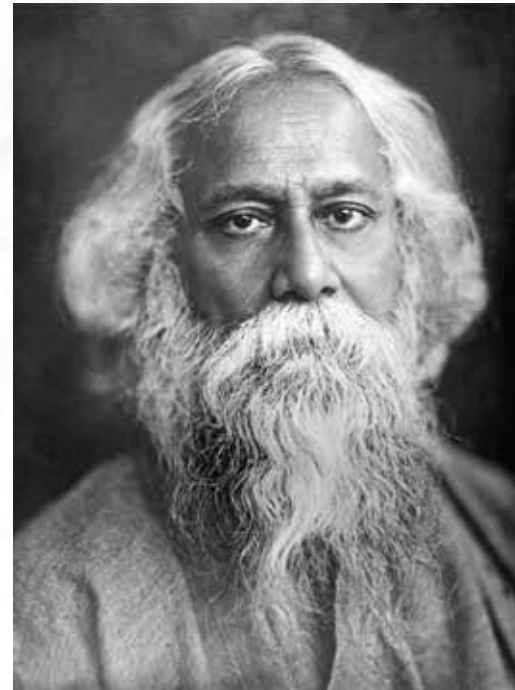
Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar – A pioneer in education reform, he introduced widow remarriage and made primary education accessible to girls. His contributions laid the foundation of a progressive Bengali society.



Michael Madhusudan Dutt – A literary genius, he revolutionized Bengali poetry with blank verse and wrote the first Bengali epic, 'Meghnad Badh Kavya.'



Rabindranath Tagore – A Nobel Laureate, Tagore's poetry, music, and educational reforms had a profound impact on Bengal's cultural identity.



The Role of Newspapers – Amrita Bazar Patrika, Jugantar, and Anandabazar Patrika emerged as voices of resistance, fueling the spirit of independence.



Chittagong Armoury Raid – Kolkata played a crucial role in supporting revolutionary activities like the daring Chittagong Armoury Raid led by Surya Sen.



The Establishment of Educational Institutions – The establishment of institutions like Hindu College (now Presidency University) and Bethune School played a crucial role in spreading modern education and social reform.



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Kolkata's Historic Transport System

Palkis—The Aristocratic Ride of Old Kolkata. Palkis (Palanquins) were the primary mode of transport for the elite in Kolkata. These beautifully decorated, enclosed sedan chairs were carried by four or more bearers and were commonly used by noble families, zamindars, British officials, and women from aristocratic households who followed strict purdah traditions.



The First Railway Station (1854) – Kolkata played a pioneering role in India's railway history with the establishment of Howrah Station.



India's First Metro: A Revolution in Urban Transport. Kolkata made history by launching India's first metro railway on October 24, 1984, connecting Esplanade to Netaji Bhavan. Built to ease the city's growing traffic congestion, the Kolkata Metro became a symbol of modern urban transport and remains an integral part of the city's lifeline. Over the years, the network has expanded significantly, with the latest milestone being the underwater metro tunnel beneath the Hooghly River, connecting Howrah to Kolkata—a feat of modern engineering that marks a new era of connectivity for the city.



Trams – Introduced in 1873, Kolkata's trams were initially pulled by horses before electrification in 1902. They remain Asia's oldest running tram system, adding to the city's charm.



The Iconic Ambassador Taxis: The Face of Kolkata's Streets. For decades, Kolkata's streets were dominated by yellow Ambassador taxis, which became synonymous with the city's identity. Manufactured by Hindustan Motors, the Ambassador was inspired by the British Morris Oxford and was once considered the ultimate symbol of reliability and status. Though gradually being replaced, these taxis still evoke a sense of vintage charm, making them an enduring part of Kolkata's heritage.



Must-Visit Places for History Enthusiasts in Kolkata

For those passionate about history, Kolkata offers a treasure trove of landmarks that narrate tales of the past. Here are some must-visit places:

Colonial & British Era Landmarks

1. Victoria Memorial – A grand marble monument dedicated to Queen Victoria, housing historical artifacts and paintings.



2. Indian Museum – India's oldest and largest museum, featuring rare fossils, mummies, and colonial-era artifacts.

Hand-Pulled Rickshaws – A colonial-era mode of transport still seen in parts of the city, symbolizing Kolkata's living history.



Fitton Carts – Horse-drawn carriages used by the elite, offering a glimpse into the grandeur of old Kolkata.



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3. Writers' Building – The former administrative headquarters of the British East India Company.



4. Raj Bhavan – The former residence of the Viceroy of India, now the Governor's house.



5. Metcalfe Hall – A stunning colonial structure that once housed the Asiatic Society Library.



6. South Park Street Cemetery – One of the oldest Christian cemeteries in India, with ornate tombs from the British era.



7. Kolkata Town Hall – A colonial-era structure with exhibits on Kolkata's transformation over the years.



Freedom Struggle & Nationalist Movement Sites

8. Netaji Bhawan – The ancestral home of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, preserving his belongings and escape route.



9. Jorasanko Thakurbari – The birthplace of Rabindranath Tagore, offering insights into Bengal's cultural and nationalist movements.



10. Gandhi Bhawan – A museum dedicated to Mahatma Gandhi's visits and influence in Bengal's independence struggle.



11. Chittaranjan Seva Sadan – A hospital founded by Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das, reflecting nationalist philanthropy.



12. University of Calcutta (Main Campus) – A cradle of nationalist education, with notable alumni who played key roles in India's independence. Bengal Renaissance & Cultural Hubs



13. Bengal Library (Calcutta Public Library) – Established in 1836, it played a crucial role in Bengal's intellectual awakening.





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14. Sanskriti Bhavan – Showcasing the Bengal Renaissance and contributions of social reformers.



15. Bethune College – The first women's college in India, established during the Bengal Renaissance.



18. St. Paul's Cathedral – A majestic Gothic-style church from the colonial era.



19. Tipu Sultan Mosque – A historic Indo-Islamic structure built in the memory of Tipu Sultan.



22. Old Chinatown (Tiretta Bazaar) – Showcasing the rich history of Kolkata's Chinese community. Each of these locations tells a unique story of Kolkata's past, offering visitors a deep dive into the city's rich heritage, struggles, and triumphs. Whether it's colonial grandeur, freedom struggles, or cultural renaissances, Kolkata remains an open book of history waiting to be explored!



Historic Religious Sites

16. Dakshineswar Kali Temple – Built by Rani Rashmoni, associated with the spiritual teachings of Ramakrishna Paramhansa.



17. Belur Math – Headquarters of the Ramakrishna Mission, blending Hindu, Christian, and Islamic architectural influences.



Historic Markets & Commercial Centers

20. Burrabazar – Once the center of trade during British rule, now one of the busiest markets in India.



21. New Market (Hogg Market) – A British-era shopping destination with a mix of colonial charm and modern commerce.



Conclusion: Kolkata – Where History Breathes and Heritage Lives

Kolkata is not just a city; it is an experience woven with the threads of history, culture, and resilience. From its colonial past to its role in India's freedom struggle, from the grandeur of British architecture to the intellectual awakening of the Bengal Renaissance, the city has shaped the destiny of the nation. It has seen palanquins give way to trams, and now, the Metro tunnelling under the Ganges—each step a testament to its enduring spirit of progress. Yet, amidst this transformation, Kolkata remains deeply rooted in its heritage. The laughter in its age-old coffee houses, the debates in its universities, the grandeur of its zamindari mansions, and the devotion in its temples and mosques—all remind us that this city carries its past with pride while embracing the future with open arms. As we journey through this series of newsletters leading up to PEDICON 2026, Kolkata invites you to discover its soul—a city that has always been more than just a place on the map. It is a living, breathing archive of India's history, a cultural powerhouse, and above all, a city that never stops telling its story.



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Coming Up Next: The Literary and Artistic Heritage of Kolkata

As we turn the pages of history, our next edition will explore Kolkata's vibrant literary and artistic legacy. From the profound verses of Rabindranath Tagore to the thought – provoking plays of Girish Ghosh, from the revolutionary writings of Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay to the contemporary art movements that continue to shape India's cultural landscape—Kolkata has always been the heartbeat of creativity.

Join us in the next issue as we celebrate the poets, writers, artists, and theaters that have made Kolkata a true cultural capital. Stay tuned for a journey into the world of words, colors, and imagination.



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