



**City of Shadows: Space, Politics, and Cultural Decay in 1980s Calcutta in
Saikat Majumdar's *The Firebird***

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Abstract

Saikat Majumdar's novel *The Firebird* (2015) offers a richly layered portrait of Calcutta in the 1980s—a city negotiating the simultaneous pressures of political turbulence, economic decline, and cultural transformation. This paper explores how Majumdar deploys urban space as a living, breathing ideological construct that shapes the identities, desires, and destructions of its inhabitants. Drawing on the theoretical frameworks of Henri Lefebvre's spatial theory, Mikhail Bakhtin's chronotope, and postcolonial urban studies, this paper argues that the novel's Calcutta is not merely a backdrop but an active agent in the narrative—a city whose crumbling theatre halls, election-graffiti-smeared alleyways, and conservative domestic interiors encode the tensions between artistic aspiration and social repression, individual selfhood and collective conformity, and the dying world of Bengali theatre and the rising tide of mass media culture. The paper traces how Majumdar's use of space, politics, and cultural decay converge to produce a portrait of a city in the shadow of its own former glory, dragging its inhabitants into its long decline.

Keywords: Urban Space, Cultural Decay, Bengali Theatre, Politics, Postcolonial City, Spatial Theory.