Imminent ruin and desperate remedy: Calcutta and its fragments

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Swapan Chakravorty provides an account of his native Calcutta in terms of its political failures past and present. He describes how the failures of the British colonisers to adequately make good on their promise to modernize the city meant that to justify its status, Calcutta (population 15 million) was forced to fall back on its cultural heritage. During the economic crises of the 1960s and 1970s, the Communist government rose to power through the support of the city's poor; today, still governing, it courts Western investors at the expense of those very same people. By sanitising public spaces, by evicting street vendors and stall holders, the government is threatening the city's cultural heritage and vital tradition of urban commons.