

HARVARD UNIVERSITY

AMARTYA SEN

Thomas W. Lamont University Professor

Professor of Economics and Philosophy

Department of Economics, Littauer 205, North Yard

Cambridge, Massachusetts 02138

t. +1.617.496.0084 ~ +1.617.495.1871 ~ f. +1.617.496.5942

e. asen@fas.harvard.edu

Stanford 10th April 2015

Dear Amit,

Thank you for sending me a copy of your excellent joint letter to the Chief Minister of West Bengal on the need to protect the architectural legacy of our beloved city. As you know I do not sign collective letters, but what you say here is so well reasoned and so important, that I would have certainly added my signature to the letter had I not been bound by my self-imposed abstinence.

The architectural heritage of the region in which Calcutta is located goes back more than two thousand years - even Ptolemy, the pioneering geographer, wrote about the old settlements around what is now Calcutta. The rich history of early habitation in the Calcutta region has suffered not only from intellectual neglect, but also from the destructive tendencies of our past (only some glimpses have survived in the literature, for example in the pages of the Mangalkavyas). As your letter brings out, the richly original and deeply engaging buildings of the past two or three hundred years in Calcutta are threatened with demolition – those that have not been destroyed already. This has to stop, and I am glad that your letter even points to specific suggestions of policies that would enhance preservation of the city's splendid edifices. I hope our joint plea will receive the listening it deserves - and the action we demand.

I am writing this letter from the campus of Stanford University which I am visiting for a week to write a joint paper with Kenneth Arrow on “what we owe to the future generations.” This is a largely technical paper in economics, but I am struck by a coincidence here. I cannot but feel that the general topic of the joint paper I am writing with Arrow is very close to the particular subject of your joint letter. We do owe to the future generations a preserved and unmutated heritage of Calcutta's eccentric but exciting old buildings. I hope we succeed in bequeathing to people in the future the opportunity of enjoying Calcutta's enthralling architectural inheritance.

My thanks to you for your initiative in trying to be fair to our splendid city.

Yours ever,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Amartya', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right from the top of the 'y'.

Amartya