



# Living the 'Absence'

The Rajbanshis of North Bengal

Samir Kumar Das

TISS Working Paper No. 5

March 2015

# Living the 'Absence'

## The Rajbanshis of North Bengal

SAMIR KUMAR DAS



*Research and Development and  
Centre for Social Theory*  
School of Development Studies  
**Tata Institute of Social Sciences**

**© Tata Institute of Social Sciences**  
**TISS Working Paper No. 5, March 2015**

# CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iv
ABSTRACT.....	v
I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
II. THE ABSENCE.....	2
III. POLITICS OF THE MOBILE .....	4
IV. POLITICS OF THE BODY.....	7
i. Theorising Caste and Body .....	7
ii. Reconstituting the Rajbanshis into a Body.....	9
iii. Disciplining the Rajbanshi Body.....	10
iv. The Bare Body.....	11
V. RE-DISCIPLINING THE BODY .....	15

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

An earlier version of this paper with the title ‘Constituting the Absence: The Rajbanshis of North Bengal’ was presented to the national seminar on ‘Caste in India: Presence and Erasure’ organised by the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS), Mumbai in collaboration with the Indian Council of Philosophical Research (ICPR) on 20–21 January 2014 and forms the nucleus of this paper. The second part of the paper draws on the Ambedkar Memorial Lecture that I delivered to the Department of Anthropology, Calcutta University on 24 March 2014. This paper—still a draft—grows out of my interaction with many of my colleagues both at home and abroad.

I am grateful to Girindranarayan Roy, Nikhilesh Ray, Dipak Ray and Ananda Gopal Ghosh of North Bengal University, Shubho Ray of Calcutta University for having enriched my thought through my discussion with them on various occasions and most importantly by helping me in keeping track with the latest publications on a subject I was hardly familiar with. Special thanks are due to Ramesh Singha for having initiated me to Kamatapuri/Rajbanshi language. I thank Surindar Singh Jodhka, Dwaipayan Sen, Swaraj Basu and Sekhar Bandyopadhyay for having helped me from time to time by sending papers which are not easily available and which they thought I must read before taking up this work. Last but not the least, I thank Parthasarathi Mondal of TISS for having given me the precious opportunity of tossing around what I still consider as some of my raw and extremely tentative thoughts by writing this occasional paper and two anonymous referees for their valuable comments. Lapses, if any, are entirely mine. All translations from original non-English sources are also mine.

## ABSTRACT

While we often describe the modern era - framed by the Post-Enlightenment narrative - as one marked by an unprecedented concern for identity and identification, we often lose sight of the parallel process of dis-identification whereby a body of people either finds it impossible to make any claim to identity or is expressly deprived of the identity that it claims as its own. We propose to focus on two registers of identity politics, namely, caste and ethnicity and make a case study of the Rajbanshis of North Bengal – numerically the third largest Hindu caste in West Bengal. By all accounts, Rajbanshi search for Kshatriyahood and a separate linguistic identity met with little success inasmuch as the Bengali upper castes hardly ever accorded recognition to their claim. These denials and exclusions reduce them to a body that is caught in an endless process of becoming. The paper shows how ‘lack’ or absence becomes active and how the Rajbanshis *live* their absence by exercising agency for more than a century in ways specific to their situation.



## I. INTRODUCTION

Much of what is written on identity politics in India and outside is informed by the well known binary between what Ernesto Laclau calls 'a sense of lack' (Laclau, 1994: 1–10) or absence that the communities aspiring for an identity feel they suffer from and the *consequent* practice of coming to terms with—if not making good—that lack or absence. While any quest for identity has its origins in the collectively perceived sense of lack, every community seeks to replenish it by engaging in some form of social and political practice. This paper seeks to tell a different story—beyond that of lack and absence—and find out how absence and lack are not simply what the community is subjected to till it reacts as a consequence and seeks to replenish it, but how the community exercises its agency even while remaining absent, how lack and absence too can become active and are constituted, lived and experienced through a kind of politics that, as I will argue, often escapes our attention. Viewed in this sense, the paper proposes to understand absence not through the usual trajectory of denial and exclusion that a community faces in society, but through the practice of constituting its own absence, by becoming an active subject—without necessarily attempting to replenish the lack and register its presence through replenishment.

## II. THE ABSENCE

By all accounts, a community marks its presence by asserting its identity and through a process widely known as ‘identification’. Identification is what connects a community to the social whole—of which it is supposed to be only a part. Identity and identification also serve as a technology of governance in modern times, first, by fashioning and calling into existence a ‘systemic whole’ (Harris, 1993:87)—within which relations amongst (wo)men, animals, nature, things and so forth are conducted, and secondly, by exercising control over the access and distribution of resources. Thanks to the coming into being of the social whole, that a group exists not only in itself, but for society, that is to say, in relation to others and relationality is as it were stamped on the elements that constitute the society.

The argument of identity/identification corresponds to the Hegelian distinction between *difference* per se and *differentiation*: we use the term difference in the same sense of ‘diversity’ (also translated by some of his translators as ‘variety’). According to him, diversity is what the things left to themselves are as isolated and unrelated entities and the things, according to this principle, remain unaffected by the relation in which they stand to each other. Since difference is external to the things that are different from each other, it requires a ‘third party’—other than the things themselves—to appreciate their difference. Thus to cite an instance, no majority community in South Asia seems to have any problem with the minority Blacks of the USA, although they may have a problem with the minorities living in their respective countries.

But the term ‘differentiation’ is used here in the sense of ‘opposition’. For, in the case of opposition, each of the things considered as different is different only in relation to the other much in the same way as the other is different from it. The mutual opposition is constitutive of the very identity of things. The things that are differentiated therefore presuppose the existence of a ‘systemic whole’ (Harris, 1993: 87) within which their mutual opposition is played out and makes sense. Almost as an echo, Dumont (1980) too views the caste society in India as an integral and indivisible whole.

Identity and identification acquire a ‘use value’ and become a technology of governance. Sanyal and Iqbal named their only daughter as ‘Ananyacheta’ (one who has a mind unique to her own) significantly without a surname. Theirs was an intercommunity marriage and they deliberately decided that the name of their daughter should not carry any ‘religious association’: “Surnames carry religious association. So we preferred not to append a surname to her name” (Sanyal and Iqbal, 2013: 14). As the child grows up and acquires the school-going age, they find it difficult to get her admitted into any school because she does not have a surname. Even authorities of a school asked them how the child’s body would be disposed off after her death (Sanyal and Iqbal, 2013: 14). In other words, this example shows tellingly that one has to have a ‘religious association’ in order that one can obtain admission into a school much in the same way as the Unique Identification Number—again a mark of identification—is a must for gaining access to subsidised cooking gas cylinders and other welfare benefits.

While we often describe the modern era—framed in the Post-Enlightenment narrative—as one marked by an unprecedented concern for identity and often identification, we often lose sight of the parallel process of dis-identification that this era brings in its wake. Dis-identification in Psychoanalysis implies an exercise in subjectivity—‘either to state that the existing identifications are not who you are or that you are more<sup>1</sup> than any of them.’<sup>2</sup> We propose to redefine it as a process whereby a community aspiring for an identity is deprived of the very conditions that would have otherwise enabled it to embrace such an identity. It may respond to such an impasse either by agitating for such conducive conditions or by doing the opposite—by exercising its agency and rendering itself unidentifiable and thereby marking its absence in the society. While the resistance that the low-caste groups and communities face from the upper castes while trying to sanskritise themselves is much too well-recorded to be recounted here, there is very little, if anything, in the existing literature that reflects on how the perennially unstable and uncertain nature of a group’s location constantly situates it on a critical node pointing to irreducibly multifarious directions of identification and social mobility and the possibilities are illimitable. The community is as it were precariously perched on a node of illimitable possibilities—illimitable because each remains wide open without ever being actualised. At one level, all these possibilities are present and the community in question can potentially actualise all of them. At another, all of them are also absent in the sense that these possibilities are serially denied to it. How then does the community negotiate its everyday life and live (with) the absence of possibilities? Its presence ironically is woven through the practice of negotiating with the absence of possibilities.<sup>3</sup>

We propose to develop the argument with reference to the Rajbanshis of North Bengal. In the existing literature on the subject, the Rajbanshis’ search for identity is viewed predominantly in a negative way and dismissed as a failure on their part in achieving the identity that they sought to establish for themselves over the years. The ‘failure’ of course was forced on them by the conditions that seemed hostile to the realisation of what they would consider as their identity albeit at different points of time. But the so-called ‘failure’, as we will argue, has lent to their politics, a mobility that prevents it from arriving at any given station in the society. Since communities such as the Rajbanshis are constantly on the move without having successfully arrived at any station thus establishing their identity, their politics is marked by endless itineration without any final destination. Since they are not stationed anywhere, they have been unable to mark their presence and remain absent in society.

We map their absence along the two well-known registers of identity politics, namely, caste and ethnicity. If dis-identification is what makes the Rajbanshis perennially itinerant, at least during the last one and half centuries, it also takes off from them any identity and reduces them albeit figuratively to their body—bare, pure and unmediated—unidentifiable by any of the available markers and protocols of governance circulating in society. Accordingly, the paper is divided into two parts highlighting their mobility and body respectively.

---

1 <http://www.psavalon.com/articwdisident.html> accessed on 31 May 2013.

2 Although it is important to critique the genre of writings on identity politics that continues to be overwhelmed by what in Philosophy is called ‘metaphysics of presence’, it is equally important to remind ourselves that there is hardly any scope for overdoing the juxtaposition between identity/presence on the one hand and absence on the other. One has to problematise the relationship. As we argue in the paper, the practice of negotiating with absence does mark presence of a certain kind—politics of the body—as we term it. I thank the anonymous reviewer for having drawn our attention to this point.

3 ‘Nasya’ in Bengali is said to be the perverted form of ‘nashta’ meaning ‘rotten’. The Muslims by adopting Rajbanshi language and culture are said to have become rotten (*nasya* or *nashta*) (Ray 2012:24).

### III. POLITICS OF THE MOBILE

Numerically the Rajbanshis are the third largest Hindu caste in West Bengal constituting 28 percent of the total population. Rajbanshis are numerically the majority presently accounting for about 60 percent of the rural population of North Bengal and the 'earliest settlers' in the region (Jana, 2012: 313). In 1901 when the Rajbanshis were enumerated in the census as 'the Koch' (a tribal community), there was protest against the decision by the leaders of the community who claimed the Kshatriya status for the Rajbanshis. One should also recollect that this was also the time when many other communities like the Naths (or the Jugis), Shils (the barbers), Namashudras (the most numerous peasant caste of Bengal) and so on also aspired for Kshatriyahood in North Bengal.

The principle of differentiation, according to Hegel, imposes on the things that are supposed to be differentiated, the obligation of being different—not in any way—but only in a socially recognised way. The Rajbanshis have been asserting their identity for more than a century through their attempts at transforming themselves into such Hindu castes as the Kshatriyas or the Vaishyas in order that they could secure recognition from the 'mainstream' Hindu caste society.

On 27 Magh 1319 BS (1912 AD), the Rajbanshis first organised the ceremony of adopting the scared thread by the river Karatoya at Debiganj in the district of Jalpaiguri under the leadership of Thakur Panchanan Barma (1866–1935). The claim to Kshatriyahood continues to be as strong especially amongst a section of the Rajbanshi intellectuals. Sukhobilas Barma refers to a postcard (dated 4.8.2001) which he reportedly received from one of those who had heard two or three of his speeches to the community. The writer sharply reacted against the current attempts at conferring dalit (literally the downtrodden) identity on the Rajbanshis and reaffirmed their Kshatriya identity in the following terms:

I have heard your lectures in two or three meetings. Do not bring in the dalit context—whatever opinion you express about the Kamatapuris (the inhabitants of the land that once constituted the historic Kamatapur Kingdom, which includes many other communities alongside the Rajbanshis, the author). Rajbanshis can never be dalits. We are the ruling race of this region. We have our political history which the Bengali *Bhatiyas* (people from the downstream or the Southerners, the author) had never had. If we cry out identifying ourselves as dalits, the *Bhatiyas* will hate us more. Do not go to any assembly of the dalits, do not drag the Rajbanshis into a context that will only add to our indignity. The poor amongst us have been taking the advantage of reservation—let them; but do not add to our indignity by claiming us as dalits (quoted in Barma, 2002: 179).

Interestingly, their claim to Kshatriyahood was considered by Thakur Panchanan as a pledge 'to dedicate the Rajbanshis to entire India' (*samagra Bharat*). Acquiring Kshatriyahood is the means by which the Rajbanshis are expected to become eligible for the work destined for them.

By all accounts, the Rajbanshi search for Kshatriyahood met with little success inasmuch as the upper castes had hardly ever accorded recognition to their claim, while many from their own community were insistent on re-invoking and retaining their tribal identity. The immigration of 'the upper caste gentry' guided as they were by the Brahmanical values—from outside North Bengal—brought about some sort of a tectonic shift in the society in a way that the Rajbanshis 'failed to get a respectable position in the status estimation of these immigrant caste groups' (Basu, 2003: 62–3 ff). By 1947, according to Basu, the search for Kshatriyahood 'lost its vigour and dynamism' (Basu, 2003: 23).

The movement, as he argues, also introduced an element of schism between the 'Rajbanshi elite' and 'their relatively backward caste brethren'. As he puts it:

The advanced group among the Rajbanshis, whom we may refer to in the absence of a better term, as the Rajbanshi 'elites', followed the upper caste Hindus of the region in dress, lifestyle, marriage, customs, and religious practices. Discarding the traditional clothes, both men and women dressed in the fashion of the upper castes in society. In this group, there were now also restrictions on the movement of women who were not allowed to work in the field, or go to market to sell goods, nor were they permitted to talk freely to unknown men either at home or outside. So far as marriage customs were concerned, except *phul biha* i.e. the regular form of marriage, all other irregular forms were proscribed for them. Widow remarriage was not allowed either. In religious practices, the gods and goddesses of upper caste Hindus had taken the place of the traditional local deities. They had also started to follow idolatry and Brahmin priests were invited to officiate in their religious ceremonies. All these emulative tendencies of the Rajbanshi elites distinguished them from the more backward sections of the community and as a result, social equality which had previously existed among them gradually disappeared and was replaced by a system of caste differentiation. These elites even suspended social relations with their relatively backward caste brethren, leading to a clear socio-cultural divide within the community (Basu, 2003: 46–7).

On the other hand, Debendranath Barma, an intellectual from the community, observes that the Rajbanshis are 'in reality' not Kshatriyas, but belong to the Indo-Mongoloid family of races. The followers of Manu (Manuwadis) have 'imposed Brahmanical culture on them' (Barma, 2009: 21) and the Rajbanshis were 'inspired to intensively incorporate Brahmanical values and practices for a purified social image' (Sarkar, 2006: 155).

The fiasco of Kshatriyaisation aptly illustrates how the Rajbanshis were almost effectively dis-identified. If dis-identification is what keeps the Rajbanshis from being part of the 'systemic whole' represented by a caste society, the same process is as much active in their search for ethnicity and linguistic identity. Girindranarayan Roy argues that almost as a rebound effect of abortive Kshatriyaisation, there grew the realisation amongst the Rajbanshi intellectuals that increasing assimilation into the 'Bengali Hindu society' would lead them either to inevitable disappearance or to total subordination (Roy, 2003: 11)—neither of which benefit them. It was from then onwards that the emphasis of the movement started shifting towards the assertion of the distinctiveness of their identity in the field of 'language, culture and literature' (Roy, 2003: 12).

This search for an ethnic and linguistic identity was in a sense prompted by the seemingly failed history of the search for Kshatriyahood. According to Barma, the language had to suffer political machinations first in the hands of 'the Muslims' and then in 1950 with the merger of Cooch Behar in West Bengal, the parts of the erstwhile Kamata state were split into Assam and West Bengal. The 'invasion' of Bengali language from the South dealt yet another blow insofar as Bengali became the official language of West Bengal thereby turning Kamatapuri into 'a dialect' (*upabhasha*) of Bengali (Barma, 1407 BS/2000: 10).

Sanyal—one of the earliest historical anthropologists to write on the Rajbanshis—however argues back in the 1960s that their language is only a *chalit bhasha* (dialect) of Bengali. The tradition of repudiation continues. Nirmal Das concludes that although this 'language is different from colloquial Bengali, one (who knows Bengali, the author) does not find it too difficult to understand it' (Das, 1984: 18). He detects that in the 1981 Census, some 'Bengalis' have retained Kamatapuri as their mother tongue. In a derogatory reference to the advocates of the Rajbanshi language as 'Rajbanshi-wallahs' he argues

that they are bent on according ‘the status of a full language’ (*purna bhashar maryada*) while ‘from the standpoint of Linguistics, the language of this area is nothing but a dialect of the Bengali language’ (Das, 1984: 24).

Even naming the language has been a bone of contention amongst the Rajbanshi ideologues. Those who are in favour of naming it as ‘Kamatapuri’ argue that this name would lend to their identity its broad-based character by way of including all those who today live in the land which once constituted the historic kingdom of Kamatapuri. This would include not only the Rajbanshis, but also many other groups and communities. Nandy, a left intellectual, for instance, observes:

Who are they (the sons of the soil) and what is their language? There is a large section of peasantry that has been working here for centuries after centuries as the royals (*rajpurush*). Beside this, there have developed such occupational groups as potters, ironsmiths, weavers etc. Even the Brahmins. Thousands of such people have migrated to North Bengal from the district of Rangpur (now in Bangladesh, the author) and surrounding districts after Partition. Add to it these groups, the Nasya<sup>4</sup> and Suryapuri Muslims whose language and living culture (*krishiti*) are not different from theirs. According to me, these people together have formed a nationality (*jati*) separate from the Bengalis. There has emerged a mindless controversy concerning the name of this nationality and its language. Some people call it Rajbanshi, some Kamatapuri, some moving in the upper echelons call it East Kamarupi (*purba Kamarupi*). For me, naming it as Rajbanshi will undermine its spread and reality (Nandy, 2011: 21–22).

On the other hand, Debendranath Barma strongly feels that the name of the language should be Rajbanshi and naming it as Kamatapuri is ‘irrational, unethical and unhistorical’ because historically this language has been known as Rajbanshi language: “For long this language has been the bond (*bandhan*) of the Rajbanshi society” (Barma, 2011: ka). If this language is replaced by Kamatapuri, ‘the Rajbanshi community will lose its national (*jatigata*) and linguistic distinctiveness and will face an identity crisis’ (Barma, 2011: 41). As he argues:

The language of the Assamese community is Asomiya—the language of Asomiya has not been named after the Assam province. ... whereas the mother tongue of the inhabitants (‘Muslims, Bavan, Nepali community) is Rajbanshi—the language of their smile and tears - the one through which one expresses one’s happiness and woes, why has there been the necessity of changing the name from Rajbanshi to ‘Kamatapuri’? The question is: Why has he omitted the Bengalis? Do Bengalis not communicate the state of their mind (*bhav*) in Rajbanshi - other than Bengali? A community naturally adopts the language of another as a result of cohabitation with the (Rajbanshi, the author) people and speaks their mind, this is only normal (Barma, 2011: 33).

When the very name of the language is in dispute, the nature of their language becomes all the more problematic. The naming controversy only attests to the permanently fluid nature of their identity. Bharatiya interestingly raises the question: whether the Rajbanshis will ‘sleep till the language is decisively named’ or will instead try to develop the language irrespective of the name given to it (Bharatiya 2004–2005: 88), little realising that there are ways of remaining awake other than trying to develop the language. We will refer to some of them in the following section.

---

4 Interviewed on 17 April 2013 at Shivmandir, Darjeeling.

## IV. POLITICS OF THE BODY

Rajbanshis' search for identity turns out to be perpetually mobile—without an end - notwithstanding that it has frequently changed its registers and trajectories. The persistent denials and exclusions make them what Prodhani calls a 'displaced' community (Prodhani, 2000: 5)—a community, that is never a being—but is caught as it were in an endless process of becoming. The presence of the community is perpetually deferred. To reframe the question in a Foucauldian way, their quest for identity produces a *surplus* that cannot be governmentalised into an identity. Their dis-identification in history has given them the scope for celebrating their perpetually mobile nature. Inasmuch as they move perpetually, they refuse to be appropriated by any of the given protocols of identification and differentiation. Dis-identification correspondingly renders them ungovernable.

As dis-identification takes off from them their identity, it reduces the Rajbanshis figuratively to their body—a kind of bare, pure and unmediated body—unidentifiable by any of the known markers and protocols of caste or ethnicity. Body politics is the opposite of identification; it involves, as I argue, dis-identification. The process of dis-identification deprives the subject of the possibilities of identification and reduces it to what it is—its bare body.

### i. Theorising Caste and Body

In the existing literature on caste, body is seldom identified as an object of research. In fact, there is reason to believe that early studies in the ideology of castes has almost overshadowed the field in a way that makes it difficult for us to turn our attention to the human body in its pure state as the site where caste ideology exercises its hegemony and etches itself by way of investing it with varying grades of purity or pollution. The little that has been written on it focuses more on how the body is subjected to caste rules and protocols, how these rules and protocols discipline the body—particularly of the dalits (literally the downtrodden)—in a way that also takes away from it, its stridency and ability to resist, how the body of the dalitbahujan, in other words, is pressed into the service of the Brahmins. Sekhar Bandyopadhyay (2014: 32–47) shows how the 'frail' and 'effeminate' upper castes of Bengal depended for their protection on the 'virile' heroes of the dalits and how the alliances and networks developed in Bengal between such upper and middle castes as the Brahmins, Baidyas and Kayasthas on one hand and the Namashudras and Bagdis on the other - thereby reducing the volume of untouchability. Their dependence, as he informs us, could never undermine the hierarchy that otherwise obtains between them.

The principle of birth and heredity that has hitherto governed the Hindu caste system has, according to Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, contributed to inbreeding and genetic decay and thereby stunted the body of the Hindus in India. Dr. Ambedkar in his address on *Annihilation of Caste* that he prepared for the 1936 Conference of the Jat-Pat-Todak Mandal but could not deliver "owing to the cancellation of the Conference by the Reception Committee on the ground that the views expressed in the Speech would be unbearable to this Conference", observes that human species is essentially one and their division into diverse races, castes, ethnicities and so forth is a 'gross perversion of facts'. Much of his reference to how the essential oneness of human species gets 'perverted' alludes to the science of modern eugenics. He takes great pains to argue that the Caste System has 'stunted the stature' of the body of the Hindus and left it always 'wanting in stamina' (Ambedkar, 1944: 39). As he puts it:

To argue that the Caste System was eugenic in its conception is to attribute to the forefathers of the present-day Hindus a knowledge of heredity which even the modern scientists do not possess. A

tree should be judged by the fruits it yields. If caste is eugenic what sort of a race of men should it have produced? Physically speaking Hindus are a C3 people. They are a race of Pygmies and dwarfs stunted in stature and wanting in stamina. It is a nation 9/10ths of which is declared to be unfit for military service. This shows that the Caste System does not embody the eugenics of modern scientists. It is social system which embodies the arrogance and selfishness of a perverse section of the Hindus who were superior enough in social status to set in fashion and who had the authority to force it on their inferiors (Ambedkar, 1944: 38–9).

On the other hand, there have also been attempts —particularly on the part of the dalit intellectuals—to ‘liberate’ and set free the body from the discipline of caste rules and protocols. Kancha Ilaiah, for instance, argues that the body of a ‘dalitbahujan’ presents itself in its ‘naturalness’ (Ilaiah, 2002: 34). What Ilaiah calls ‘naturalness’ is to be distinguished from Ambedkar’s notion of ‘efficiency’. ‘Efficiency’ that may be of use for the society at large, as Ambedkar points out, is not intrinsic to the body, although it first of all presupposes the ‘liberation’ of the human body from the obligation of complying with the caste rules and protocols. He looks upon the human body as a site where efficiency will have to be carefully cultivated and such cultivation requires a new mode of disciplining of the human body. We will return to this point in the last section of this paper.

Between complete disciplining of the human body by the caste society and its complete ‘liberation’ from caste rules and protocols lies the argument that even a caste society leaves room for negotiation with the caste rules and norms and with it the relative reconstitution of the human body. Chatterjee in one of his papers draws our attention to the limits of such ‘liberation’ framed within the context of caste society and the historical specificities and contingencies that define any act of ‘insubordination’ by the subalterns (Chatterjee, 1989:169-209). By contrast, the ethnography of Gorringer and Rafanell emphasises on how individuals negotiate with the caste ideology that seeks constantly to inscribe itself on the human body. In a caste society, if the body is subjected to the protocols and disciplines of governance, then - as Gorringer and Rafanell point out—it is also “continuously reconstituted rather than internalised at an early age” (Gorringer and Rafanell, 2007: 107). Their case study shows how these rules and protocols are neither given nor unalterable, how notwithstanding the disciplinary rules dalits—whether as individuals or as collective subjects—bend and redefine them from time to time and assert their subjectivity.

What Ilaiah calls ‘naturalness’ does not mean that a bare body is necessarily ‘natural’ and therefore free from the obligation of complying with the caste rules and protocols. Caste society enumerates and enforces the codes in detail while seeking to chisel the body and render it governable whether ritually or by energising the caste economy or both. The bareness of the body does not necessarily imply its freedom from coding and disciplining in a caste society. The imperative that persons belonging to some lower castes in some parts of India were/are required to keep only the lower part from their waist to the knees under cover is imposed by the caste society. For them, bareness is stamped on them by the caste society. Bareness may be integral to caste protocol insofar as it defines the very identity of a caste— indeed their lower status within the caste hierarchy.

It is unfortunate that not much research has been conducted on how the human body is disciplined, honed and chiseled through the rules and practices of Hindu caste system and with what effects on the society at large. In this paper, I propose to turn the focus of our attention on the human body—most importantly its physical and mental features—and how the body is sought to be governed by subject-

ing it to the caste rules and protocols and most importantly against resistance. I will make a reference to the Rajbanshis of North Bengal—particularly the initiative of such Rajbanshi intellectuals as Thakur Panchanan Barma—who, as we have already seen, fought hard for securing Kshatriyahood for their community towards the end of the nineteenth century and in the early twentieth century. While such initiatives, as we will see, had had the effect of introducing newer sources of division within the community, it at one level disrupted the unity that seems to have hitherto held them together and at another level triggered a series of attempts by them to reconstitute themselves into a body. Thakur Panchanan's insistence on Kshatriyaisation was complemented by his call for reconstituting the Rajbanshis into a social body. Both Kshatriyaisation and reconstitution mark two largely overlapping moments in the body politics of the Rajbanshis. On the other hand, as the body of the Rajbanshis refuses to remain compliant with the caste rules and practices, it marks the arrival of the third moment. We define 'moment' not as a stage in history, but in the sense in which Hegel has used the term—as a specific configuration of forces.

## ii. Reconstituting the Rajbanshis into a Body

Girindranarayan Roy—himself coming from a landed Rajbanshi family of *jotdars* (owners of *jots* or landed estates)—remembers that the *adhiars* (sharecroppers entitled to the *aadh* or half of the produce) and the agricultural labour working in their *jot*—although belonging to a different class—were considered as part of their family, dining and lunching with them, taking the same food and the female members of their family would not mind cleaning the utensils used by them. They would even rebuke and punish the children of their masters, help organise *pujas* (worship) in the family. He argues that this would never be the case in respect of the Hindu *jotdars* of the then East Bengal who would have utmost contempt for the Muslim *adhiars* and agricultural labour. This is the reason why class confrontation with the tenants was always alien to the Rajbanshi history even when North Bengal stood in revolt against the *jotdars* during the Naxalite movement in the late-sixties. Similarly, Sen and Dutta report: “Both *jotdars* and *adhiyars* belonged to the same community. *Jotdars* were at the same time cultivators” (Sen and Dutta mimeo n.d.). In a somewhat anecdotal style, Kartik Chandra Sutradhar recollects:

In my childhood, I used to hear from my father that the Rajbanshi *jotdars* of this region are very kind (*dayalu*). If a refugee or a helpless one comes to them with an earthen pot of curd and a fish, they would be pleased and give them a plot of land. If necessary, they would provide (money) for the construction of their home for living (Sutradhar, 2013: 210).

Girindranarayan Roy further recollects that during his childhood the *adhiars* would remain in the family as family members—as much as their parents were.<sup>5</sup> Amar Roy Pradhan in his recently published autobiography points out that these *adhiars* are addressed as 'uncles' (*chacha, kaka*) though of course he argues strongly that their being part of the family would never reduce their poverty and hunger (Ray Pradhan, 2012: 23).

As the new land system was introduced and land was exposed to market forces, the signs of a crack were visible within the Rajbanshi society. In his famous essay on 'Kamata Behari Sahitya', Thakur Panchanan imagines the Rajbanshis as *one*—as a territorially bounded body spreading across such areas as parts of Dinajpur, Jalpaiguri, Cooch Behar of then undivided Bengal, Dhubri and Goalpara of Assam Province—and regretted that although they formed a territorially bounded body they were fragmented into several administrative setups of districts, provinces and sub-divisions during his time. But they, ac-

<sup>5</sup> While Ray is a common Rajbanshi surname, the full name - 'Umanandan Prajnranjan Panchanan' itself—speaks of its heavily sanskritic and Brahmanical roots.

According to Barma, still take pride in declaring that they belong to 'the same land' (*ekdeshbasi*) so much so that the people of Jalpaiguri greet the people of Goalpara as their own (*apnar lok*) and give them a place at the corner of their heart (Barman, 2001: 105).

### iii. Disciplining the Rajbanshi Body

In a caste society, body is subjected to the protocols and disciplines of governance. Even the 'bare body'—as we have already pointed out—does not necessarily imply its freedom from coding and disciplining in a caste society. The imperative that persons belonging to some lower castes in some parts of South India were/are to keep only the lower torso of their body under cover is imposed by the caste society. Even bareness in this particular instance is as it were stamped on them by the caste society.

We have already noted that in 1912 the Rajbanshis first organised the ceremony of adopting the scared thread by the river Karatoya at Debiganj in the district of Jalpaiguri under the leadership of Thakur Panchanan. Acquiring Kshatriyahood, for him, is the means through which the Rajbanshis are expected to become eligible for the work destined for them. But in order to become eligible, the Rajbanshis need to educate themselves. Education, as Thakur Panchanan understood, is divided into many parts—moral education, education in being part of the fraternity (*sampreeti*), social education, religious education etc. (Barman 2001:30). By all accounts, from 1329 BS there was near anarchic situation in parts of Bengal with the sudden spurt in crimes like sexual assault, abduction and rape of 'Hindu women'. Thakur Panchanan exasperatingly remarked: "There is no rule, no justice from the King. How does the society (*samaj*) survive?" (Barman 2001: 31) In the thirteenth session of the Kshatriya Samiti he himself established in Rangpur (now in Bangladesh), Panchanan Barma observed:

Criminals humiliate women. We need to appoint volunteers for defence (*rakshasevak*) by training them in the *lathi* (stick) play and making them parade like the soldiers do during war. Being fearful and compelled by (the dictates of, the author) others is downfall (*adbahpatan*). We will not attack anybody. We have to create *rakshasevakdal* (a corpse of volunteers for defence, the author) to save ourselves and the attacked (Barman, 2001:31).

Being Kshatriyas the Rajbanshis—as Thakur Panchanan felt—will have to cultivate such virtues as prowess, valour, enterprise, zing, forgiveness, truthfulness to one's roots (*dhriti*), ability to punish the wicked and render service to the suffering—all, according to him, are characteristic of the Kshatriyas (Barman 2001:33). He seems to define the caste not in terms of birth, but in terms of 'quality' that it is supposed to embody. Only the right kind of education can render the Rajbanshis eligible to become Kshatriyas. As he puts it:

Military education is the true and principal education of the Kshatriyas. Physical might is as much important as the method of commanding the army. From ancient times, the party that is just, has been waging war against the unjust party. As long as the (human, the author) nature of doing harm to others does not go away, war will not come to an end. Earlier, the people doing injustice were ordinarily punished in a contentious war (*dwandwayuddha*). Today in order to defend them, their kinsmen, countrymen (and) friends from other countries join in. Today new weapons and new technologies of killing the enemies have been discovered. Those (countries) which are militarily stronger have been settling interstate conflicts by waging war on weaker states. Therefore as long as human beings are yet to achieve perfection, the possibility of war will remain open. For this it is absolutely

essential to acquire strength and learn the tactics of war. In India, Kshatriyas have always defended the country. Brothers! You have been born into that lineage of the Kshatriyas, do defend for self-defence and the glory of your clan (*vamsa*) (Barman, 2001: 184).

For him education was immensely important. As he says:

Friends! I am humbly soliciting before you a hundred times with folded palms, please do provide for education of your children. If everything (all your resources, the author) gets exhausted or you have to resort to begging for this while providing education to them, then be it. Yet should not keep them illiterate (*murkha*) (Barman, 2001: 181)

By all accounts the Rajbanshi search for Kshatriyahood, as noted above, met with little success inasmuch as the upper castes had hardly ever accorded recognition to their claim, while many from their own community were insistent on reclaiming the body and subjecting it to the rigours of Brahmanical discipline. Gradually ‘soul power’ overtakes military power and the plea for cultivating the human body through physical and military education is replaced by ‘penance and meditation’ as the technology of disciplining the body. Upendra Nath Barman—one of Thakur Panchanan’s illustrious disciples—wrote the history of the Rajbanshi community. Umanandan Prajnaranjan Panchanan alias Pramod Ranjan Ray<sup>6</sup> while introducing the fifth edition of this immensely popular book by Barman wrote:

This animal world, this world of human beings is the overt expression of the soul. The body that holds the soul becomes as much powerful, vigorous and influential as its soul becomes more clean and powerful. Although it appears the same, power expresses itself in different degrees. Although bulbs of forty watts and hundred watts look the same, their difference is detected in their incandescence, this is the power of the soul and this power is acquired by embracing some action. Activism is the source of power. Activism is the name of life... The proof of the soul power lies in subjecting soul to (the regimen of, the author) meditation. The radiation of power from within the soul becomes possible only through penance and meditation (Panchanan, 2012: page number not mentioned).

The Rajbanshi body thus becomes a site of contest. While Thakur Panchanan’s search for Kshatriyahood prompts him to emphasise on the physical and military aspect of its training and education, a section of his disciples seems to submit it increasingly to the strict regimen of Brahmanism.

#### **iv. The Bare Body**

The perpetually endless nature of their search for identity not only deprives the Rajbanshi community of any ‘fixed and frozen’ identity at any given point of time —Kshatriya or linguistic identity—but reduces them to their body insofar as the body is unhinged from the imperative of having an identity.<sup>7</sup> Debesh Roy in his epic novel (1990) entitled *Teestaparer Brittanta* (Chronicles by the Teesta banks) describes Bagharu—the protagonist belonging to the Rajbanshi community—as a naked figure wearing only a piece of loin cloth, naked not so much in the sense that he does not have any cloth to wear, which is also otherwise true, but very much in the deeper sense that he has a body that no cloth can cover—a body that is emblematic of resolute refusal of the governmental grids of disciplining and caste identity that society exhorts them to identify with. This body is neither the hapless *homo sacer* as Agamben would have us believe, nor one that renders itself available for being governed as Foucault

6 Body is the site which houses the identity. Remember Partha Chatterjee’s famous comment: “Caste relates to body, not to the soul” (Chatterjee 1989:203).

7 Ray defines *nengti* in the following terms: ‘nengti is the piece of cloth or coarse, handmade towel (gamchha) that is worn as *langot* or loin cloth’ (Ray 2012: 44). This is wrapped around the waist to barely cover the private parts.

argues, but is a *subject* that is constituted ‘as an entity that lasts, that is to say that endures sustainable changes and transformation’ (Braidotti, 2006: 2).

Bagharu in Debesh Roy’s dense and voluminous prose (1990) is the naked figure—both figuratively and literally—a body without any trace of clothing, leave alone ornamentation. At one level, he stands as the unrepresented or—may we say unrepresentable body—bare, pure and unmediated—so much so that he himself denies that he is Rajbanshi or *Bhatiya*, a member of the Uttarkhanda Party (the party that emerged in the 1980s as the spokesman of the Rajbanshi community) or even one of its flag-bearers. He wears no badge to represent anyone, for he does not have any piece of cloth on his body where the badge could be pinned. If he wants to enter a meeting, he is asked to show his identity and is pushed out when he is sighted only with his *nengti* around the waist.<sup>8</sup> He stands as a lump of flesh—a mass of pure energy that cannot be directed towards any party, procession or meeting through which the Rajbanshi voice can be articulated. He is not only voiceless, but his resolute voicelessness also constantly refuses to be represented through any other voice. Bagharu’s body does not belong to anyone. He does not have the body—he is the body. As Debesh Roy describes him:

Language is indeed meaning. Bagharu has no meaning. For Bagharu, it is only living (*bancha*) and living, which is only life (*jiban*) and life.

Language implies some form of ornament. Bagharu has not the thinnest cover from his hair on the head to toenail excepting a *nengti*. Where does one get such a naked language (*nagna bhasha*) as that of Bagharu?

Language implies a name. Bagharu has no name. He keeps changing as he changes his work —*Kudania* [one who collects, the author], *Bagharu* [one who kills a tiger, the author], *Pathriya* [who crushes stones, the author], *Moishal* [who tends buffaloes, the author], there is no end to his this becoming (*hoye otha*) (Roy, 1990: 180–181).

Elsewhere in the same novel, Debesh Roy also describes him as ‘Rajbanshi body’ (*Rajbanshi Sarir*). One wonders whether ‘Rajbanshi’ is the prefix that qualifies the body. I argue that being a Rajbanshi robs the body of its clothing and ornamentation and keeps it utterly naked and perpetually unrepresentable with the potential of refusing to be represented. His names multiply as he performs different kinds of work. In the words of Rosi Braidotti: “The life in ‘me’ does not answer to my name: “I” is just passing” (Braidotti, 2006: 141). That is why Bagharu is not only unnamed—but unnamable. His is not any ordinary question of having to identify with his community or give him a name. His question is much more elementary and fundamental—one of transcendence from the subhuman form to a human form. Bagharu cannot be categorised by any of our known categories and names—neither identifiable as a member of any ethnic community nor the proletariat.

Girindranarayan Roy explains that the use of the prefix ‘Rajbanshi’ in order to qualify the body is significant for it reminds us that there is indeed a binary between *our* body and *their* body, between the body of the Bengali *Bhadraloks* and that of the *Rajbanshis*.<sup>□</sup> The way Bagharu becomes part of nature (and his nakedness contributes to this organic integration with nature) is unlike the Bengalis. The Bengali body allows itself to be groomed and chiseled, disciplined to become useful for and ‘convenient’ to the society; on the other hand Bagharu’s body refuses to be disciplined and stands as a reminder of the essential distinction between what Bagharu can and we cannot, what he is capable of and what we are not. Our body is rendered exploitable through the disciplinary technologies of our time; Bagharu’s body can never be made useful for and ‘convenient’ to the society. In Roy’s famous language, Bagharu

8 Interviewed on 17 April 2013 at Shivmandir, Darjeeling.

‘remains within the society without being part of it’. He compares Bagharu’s ‘society-independent nature’ (*samaj-niralamba bhav*) with trees and birds. Bagharu’s is a brute and savage body—unlike that of ours—a body that Bagharu keeps obstinately unbending and perpetually un-useful to and inconvenient for society.

Girindranarayan Roy also discovers a streak of ‘Social Darwinism’ in the novel insofar as it ends in an apparently inconsolable sense of loss or tragedy. The forests will no longer remain intact, the Teesta will not be the same again, the barrage on the river will mark the triumph of modernity and development as the inexorable law of the universe and Bagharus will have to make way for mankind’s ‘progress’ towards modernity and development. Bagharus have no chance of being part of the Teesta project—the epitome of modernity and development in North Bengal. The good that Bagharu represents, as Roy tells us, emerges from ‘a deep sense of inevitability of the erosion (of the old order)/confrontation with it’. His opposition to modernity and development invokes forces which do not have the potential of forming part of the modernity project. The opposition by the Bagharus is bound to give way. They have no future.

In fact, Debesh Roy’s modernist-developmental argument was countered by a section of the ‘Rajbanshi scholars, intellectuals and activists’ at a time when a Kolkata-based theater group enacted the novel into a play some years ago. The problem with these critiques lies in the fact that they take the metaphor of nakedness too literally and consider it as an affront to their community. Sukhobilas Barma, himself a Rajbanshi intellectual, for instance, observes:

By making him wear a thin piece of loin cloth, the author sought to highlight his proletarian nature (?). No one can forget the *haat* (periodical market, the author) in Kranti where Krishak (peasants’) Samiti is very active and the Naxalite movement is not unknown. Which community identity did the author and the Chetana group [that enacted it, the author] want to establish by showing him naked (making him wear only a loin cloth)? Presence of *chakrindars* (with paltry annual income and bare means of survival) is not unreal even in the Rajbanshi well-off families. Poverty, deprivation and exploitation etc are an integral part of their life. But the way Bagharu has been projected with shaven head and loin cloth —is not only unreal but fictitious (Barma, 1407 B. S.: 329).

The projection of the naked body of Bagharu is viewed by Barma as not only unhistorical but an insult to their community. The critique highlights the commonplace expectation that the naked and bare body is not the Rajbanshi identity. Rajbanshis have an identity—not a body that refuses to be stamped with an identity. While the historical truth may be otherwise, the point is that the ‘ancient, motionless (*adim, nithar*) body’ of Bagharu compels us to take notice of the subhuman existence - not so much of the Rajbanshi elite - but a vast section of the community who are only left with their body that refuses to be an integral part of so-called North Bengal’s ‘progress’. It is interesting to note that the entire debate focuses not on Bagharu’s body and forms of politics that his bare body expresses, but on the society in which the Bagharus are considered anachronistic, a thing of the past and society is believed to have registered ‘progress’ in a way that makes it obligatory for everyone to have an identity. A naked and dis-identified body is considered an insult to the honour of one’s identity.

Santosh Kumar Singha’s famous poem ‘Bagharu’ written in Rajbanshi/Kamatapuri language likens the Rajbanshis to the naked figure of Bagharu who remains unnamable till the end of Debesh Roy’s novel. *Nengtiya* is one who wears the *nengti* or the loin cloth. Santosh Singha—a well-known Rajbanshi poet from Mathabhanga in the district of Cooch Behar—raises the question of what the Rajbanshis will do with their identity, if they do not have *maan* or dignity.

## V. RE-DISCIPLINING THE BODY

Ambedkar in his undelivered address on *Annihilation of Caste* (1944) mentioned at the outset, makes a critique of the caste technologies of disciplining the human body on the ground that castes violate the principle of ‘natural aptitudes’ and the biological principle of irreducible oneness of the human species. While he holds that castes are “only varieties of one and same species” (Ambedkar, 1944: 37), he maintains:

The division of labour (characteristic of caste system, the author) is not spontaneous, it is not based on natural aptitudes. Social and individual efficiency requires us to develop the capacity of an individual to the point of competency to choose and to make his own career. This principle is violated in the Caste System in so far as it involves an attempt to appoint tasks to individuals in advance, selected not on the basis of trained original capacities, but on that of social status of the parents. Looked at from another point of view this stratification of occupations which is the result of the Caste System is positively pernicious. Industry is never static. It undergoes rapid and abrupt changes. With such changes, an individual must be free to change his occupation. Without such freedom to adjust himself to changing circumstances it would be impossible for him to gain his livelihood. Now the Caste System will not allow to take to occupations where they are wanted if they do not belong to them by heredity (Ambedkar, 1944: 35–36).

Efficiency, as Dr. Ambedkar points out, is neither given hereditarily, nor unalterable. His emphasis on efficiency—most importantly on ‘development of capacity to the point of competency to make and choose one’s career’—implies that he too appreciates the importance of education and training in re-skilling the *dalitbahujan* so that the right persons are allowed to be placed in right positions. He does not seem to discover the value of the human body in what Kancha Iliah calls ‘its naturalness’—in either its pre-disciplinary state or in a state in which it succeeds in escaping the grids of disciplinary technologies. Instead, he calls for subjecting the human body to discipline—a discipline that is different from that of the caste system—a discipline that enables each individual to experiment with one’s body and constantly cultivate oneself, to actualise the bodily potential and maximise its efficiency.

We know that the demand for a separate state of Uttarkhanda comprising the six districts of North Bengal and the neighbouring district of Goalpara in Assam was first made by the Uttarkhanda Dal in the 1960s. On the other hand, the Uttarbanga Tapasheeli Jati o Adivasi Sangathan (UTJAS) founded by Naren Das with the active participation of the students of North Bengal University in 1979 claims to fight against ‘socio-economic and cultural discrimination of North Bengal’. It changed the terms of Rajbanshi political discourse by shunning the separatist path towards statehood and sovereignty and accuses the Government of not doing enough for the Rajbanshis at the instance of the ‘infiltrators from the South’—a euphemism for the Bengalis migrating from South Bengal. On 30 October 1986, the UTJAS organised a rally in Kolkata and submitted a memorandum to the Governor and Chief Minister of West Bengal. Among other things, the memorandum pleads for industrialisation of North Bengal which continues to remain a primarily non-industrial area, reiterates that 60 percent seats should be reserved for the students of North Bengal in North Bengal Medical College and Engineering College and calls for the formation of an ‘Autonomous Council’ to provide leadership for the development of North Bengal. The movement seems to have shifted its gear and UTJAS felt the need for developing an elite group from within the Rajbanshi community that would have the requisite skill to man the responsible positions of Government. Of course, protective measures need to be taken so that such skill becomes available amongst the Rajbanshis. In 1995, the Kamatapur Peoples’ Party (KPP) came into

existence. In a conference at Kumargram of Jalpaiguri district held on 15–17 June 1998, the Kamatapuri Bhasha and Sahitya Parishad—a sister organisation of KPP—submitted a charter of demands to the Government of India, which among other things includes the demand for the formation of Roy Saheb Thakur Panchanan Barma University in Cooch Behar ‘for the upliftment of higher education for the aboriginal people (sic) of North Bengal’. By the late-1990s, however, the apparently peaceful people’s movement was overtaken by violence and insurgency as a more militant faction of leadership under the Kamatapuri Liberation Organization (KLO) took over and went underground.

The question is: do these new disciplinary technologies make a Rajbanshi free or subject him/her to a new form of power—‘disciplinary power’ as Foucault would have called it? It seems that the struggle for taking control of the Rajbanshi body, taming and appropriating it by way of deploying and experimenting with a variety of technologies has not come to an end and the body continues to be the site of contest, containing all the scars and bruises of the contest.

## REFERENCES

- Ambedkar, B. R. 1944, *Annihilation of Caste with a Reply to Mahatma Gandhi* (Reprint from Third Edition), Mumbai: B. R. Ambedkar Institute of Social and Economic Change.
- Bandyopadhyay, S. 2014, ‘Does Caste Matter in Bengal? Examining the Myth of Bengali Exceptionalism’. In M. N. Chakrabarty (Ed.), *Being Bengali: At Home and in the World*, London: Routledge, 32–47.
- Barma, D. 2009, *Ouponibeshik Banglay Rajbanshi Janagoshthir Jati Parichiti Prasanga —Kshatra Andolan: Ekti Sameekshan* (in Bengali) [The Context of Ethnic Identification of the Community of Rajbanshis —Kshatra Movement: A Review], Calcutta: Bikas Publication.
- 2011, *Rajbanshi Bhasha: Kamatapuri Bibhranti: Oitihasi O Tattwik Bisleshan* (in Bengali) [Rajbanshi Language: The Error of Kamatapuri: A Historical and Theoretical Analysis], Jalpaiguri: Shri Alakshya Indra Ghosh.
- Barma, D. 1407 BS/2000, ‘Nandiki’ (in Kamatapuri). In Dharmanarayan Barma (Ed.), *Kamatapuri Bhasha-Sahityer Ruprekha* (in Bengali) [An Outline of the Language and Literature of Kamatapuri], Tufanganj: Raidak Prakashan.
- Barma, S. 2002, ‘Rajbanshi Samajer Atmaparichay’ (in Bengali) [The Self-Identity of the Rajbanshi Society]. In I. Sarkar (Ed.), *Oitihye O Itihase Uttarbanga*. [North Bengal in Heritage and History], Dibrugarh: N. L. Publishers, 1561–81.
- 1407 B. S./2000, ‘Teestaparer Asthir (?) Brittantra’ (in Bengali) [The Turbulent (?) Chronicles of the Teesta Banks]. In *Anustup*, Autumn Number, 324–335.
- Barman, K. C. 2001, *Thakur Panchanan Smarak* (in Bengali) [In Memory of Thakur Panchanan], bibliographical information not provided.
- Basu, S. 2003, *Dynamics of a Caste Movement: The Rajbanshis of North Bengal. 1910-1947*, New Delhi: Manohar.
- Braidotti, R. 2006. ‘The Ethics of Becoming Imperceptible’. In C. Boundas (Ed.), *Deleuze and Philosophy*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 133–159.
- Chatterjee, P. 1989. ‘Caste and Subaltern Consciousness’. In R. Guha (Ed.), *Subaltern Studies VI: Writings on South Asian History and Society*, Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Das, N. 1984. *Uttarbanger Bhashaprasanga* (in Bengali) [The Linguistic Context of North Bengal], Kolkata: Oriental Book Company.
- Dumont, L. 1980, *Homo Hierarchicus: Caste System and Its Implications* (Translated by Mark Sainsbury, Louis Dumont and Basia Gulati), Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Gorringe, H. and Rafanel, I. 2007, ‘The Embodiment of Caste: Oppression, Protest and Change’, *Sociology*, 41(97), 97–114.
- Harris, E. E. 1993, *The Spirit of Hegel*, New Jersey: Humanities Press.
- Ilaiah, K. 2002, *Why I am not a Hindu: A Shudra Critique o Hindutva Philosophy, Culture and Political Economy*, Kolkata: Samya.

- Jana, A. K. 2012, 'Ethnic Minorities, the Politics of Identity and the State in Contemporary West Bengal, India'. In P. Nepal and A. S. Chakraborty (Eds.), *Politics of Culture, Identity and Protest in North-east India*, Vol.2, New Delhi: Authorspress, 310–337.
- Laclau, E.(Ed.) 1994, *The Making of Political Identities*, London: Verso.
- Nandy, V. 2011, 'Lecture II'. In A. Sikdar and B. Nandy (Eds.), *Anchalik Bhashar Samasya O Sankat*, Darjeeling: Centre for Studies in Local Language and Cultures, North Bengal University,15–24.
- Panchanan, U. P. alias Pramod Ranjan Ray 2011, 'Introduction to the Fifth Edition of Rajbanshi Kshatriya Jatir Itihas (in Bengali) [The History of the Rajbanshi Kshatriya Community (Jati)]. In Upendra Nath Barman, *Rajbanshi Kshatriya Jatir Itihas* [The History of Rajbanshi Kshatriya Community], edited by Nani Gopal Ray, Jalpaigri: Nanda Gopal Ray.
- Prodhani, J. 2000, 'Secretary's Note'. In D. N. Bhagat (Ed.), *Rajbanshi Bhasha-Sahityar Parichay* (in Assemese) [Introduction to Rajbangshi Language and Literature], Golakganj: Centre for Ethnic Studies and Research (CESR).
- Ray, P. 2012, 'Debesh Rayer Upanyase Pratifalita Uttarbanger Samaj Jiban' (in Bengali) [The social Life of North Bengal as Reflected in the Novels of Debesh Ray]. In *Harit*, 2 (2), November, 32–46.
- Roy, D. 1990, *Teestaparer Brittantata* (in Bengali) [Chronicles by the banks of the Teesta], Kolkata: Dey's Publishing House.
- Ray, D. 2012, *Rajbanshi Samaj Aro Sanskritir Katha* (in Kamatapuri) [Reflections on Rajbanshi Society and Culture], Kolkata: Sopan.
- Roy, G. 2003, 'Rajbanshi Jatir Parichay-Andolan Aar Itihaser Henyali' (in Bengali) [The Movement for Identity of the Rajbanshi Community and the Puzzle of History]. In N. Ray (Ed.) *Degar* 1 (1), 9–13.
- Ray, P. A. 2012, *Jeeban Nadir Banke Banke* (in Bengali) [In the Bends in the River of Life], edited and annotated by Anandagopal Ghosh & Kartik Chandra Sutradhar, Malda: Ashutosh Barman.
- Sanyal, D. and Shaukat, I. 2013, 'Keno Meyer Padabi Nei, Prasna Barbar' (in Bengali) [Why the Daughter has No Surname, Repeated Questions]. In *Ananda Bazar Patrika* (Siliguri), 21 July.
- Sarkar, I. 2006, 'The Kamatapur Movement: Towards a Separate State in North Bengal'. In G. C. Rath (Ed.), *Tribal Development in India: The Contemporary Debate*, New Delhi: Sage, 153–165.
- Sen, P. and Dutta, A., (no date), 'The Kamtaapuri Movement: Its Root and Response of the State' (mimeo).
- Sutradhar, K. C. 2013, *Samaj, Dharma O Arthaneeti: Prasanga Uttarbanga*, Malda: Sambedan.

ISSN 2320-1894

March 2015

Dr. Samir Kumar Das is Professor of Political Science and currently the Dean, Faculty of Arts at the University of Calcutta, Kolkata 700 027. Formerly Vice-Chancellor of the University of North Bengal, he is a member and Honorary Senior Researcher of Calcutta Research Group (CRG). Besides being the Coordinator of the UGC-DRS Programme on 'Democratic Governance: Comparative Perspectives' and Adjunct Professor, School of Foreign Service, Georgetown University (2014), he was a Post-Doctoral Fellow (2005) of the Social Science Research Council (South Asia Program) based in New York. He specialises in and writes on issues of ethnicity, security, migration, rights, justice and democracy. Some of his publications include *Governing Indian's Northeast: Essays on Insurgency, Development and the Culture of Peace* (Springer 2013), *Conflict and Peace in India's Northeast: The Role of Civil Society* (East-West Center 2006) and *ICSSR Surveys and Explorations in Political Science: Volume I: Indian State* (Oxford University Press 2013) edited.



**Tata Institute of Social Sciences**

V.N. Purav Marg, Deonar, Mumbai 400088 • [www.tiss.edu](http://www.tiss.edu)

Published by S. Parasuraman, Director, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, and printed at Mehta Printing Press, Ghatkopar (East), Mumbai.