

Little Rebellions: Demands, Transgressions, and Anomalies in the Kamtapur Struggle

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In an age when ideology of instant gratification and the interpellations of a consumer-friendly amnesia are at large in every nook and corner of the habitable world, it is but a mystery why some men resist the interpellation. Then again, is it a mystery as such? On June 2012, Joydeb Roy informed his relatives back home about a work he had to do at some distant place, and as to this day he has not returned. Joydeb Roy alias Tom Adhikari went underground for the second time after being released from prison in 2011. Roy, along with some of his ex-comrades had been assigned the duty of collecting poll-tax at the “commercial gate” situated in Barobisha overseeing a Highway connecting Assam and eastern part of Kochbehar. This work assigned by the government as part of the rehabilitation programme was surprisingly conducted with better financial security than the other ex-KLO¹ members I had interviewed. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why it was shocking for the State as well as his ex-comrades when he went underground for the second time.

While the media point out the cathartic error of freeing such unrepentant political prisoners, let us also acknowledge that there is more than one perspective in the struggle for Kamtapur. Why Kamtapur? Why has the hotbed of leftist movements as Tebhaga, Naxalbari and militant unions in tea-plantation sites suddenly change into ethno-centric political space? Or is it at all ethno-centric? Is the estrangement and secession from the central power realm a new diktat coming straight from the underbelly of democracy? These questions are yet to be answered with brevity. I understand that in the process of making an argument, *apologia* is the master-tool of safe writing; and *prophecy* is the evergreen affliction in political philosophy; yet I shall try not to fall into the traps of either. For my part I shall try to answer some of these questions in regard to my research findings; however, the subject being still alive, I had to delimit my arguments only about what *it was*.

As part of the terms I have used in my research, I shall lay down some of them and a plausible defence in some cases. I have used the term “indigenous” sometimes to address

the local population. I understand that the term itself is very much drenched in colonial discourse on the native population of a space, thereby stripping the people of their differences, histories, opinions and identities. I use the term, however, to explain a population that had existed for some time in a particular geographic domain and had erstwhile resorted to traditional agrarian techniques, minimalistic state authorities, ecologically sustainable existence and in some cases barter system as internal commercial transaction. The other motif that seemingly has engulfed my work is the politics of the term “*dominant section.*” By this word I do not only mean the dominant class and its ideology but also the ethnocentric categories that ascribe to it. In an area where an overwhelming production of cinema in Rajbansi language has decreased since its rise with Kamtapuri movement in the earlier part of the decade of 2000,² and the print-culture in the same language has declined due to lack of entrepreneurs, and are perpetually replaced by Bengali, Hindi and English usages, I am prone to treat it as mark of cultural imperialism only solidified by cultural cringe of the communities at stake. I have also addressed the presence of State powers along with corporate mechanisms of commerce. In areas such as Daukimari, Naxalbari, Metelli, Najirandeutikhata, Barobisha and Kumargram there is a general lack of healthcare, efficient schools for higher studies and means of transport in the areas away from national highways. In some areas such as these, without a formal declaration of AFSPA or domestic security plans as Operation Green Hunt, the presence of different and multitudinous camps such as Eastern Frontier Rifles, SimaSuraksha Bal, Central Reserve Police Force, Border Security Force, West Bengal Police and Indian Army and their positioning in civilian, rural and urban spaces raise some questions; however the number of these camps are only outdone by stalls and shops selling corporate merchandise in the remotest of corners of the rural areas. I, therefore, in my library as well as field works, fail to dissociate corporate commercial ambition from a modern State apparatus. The other term that I have seldom used but none the less demands explanation is “*mainland India.*” This word is not one that has been born in recent times; it might have been consolidated in the media, books, and scholarly works as well as once written Vallabhbhai Patel’s letters.³ The North-East, like many other words, is a political construct, and has been in existence since the colonial era. What North-Bengal once was and still continues to be is a door connecting two different parts of a nation. The said area comprising of four (then five) districts was the door for Mughals, East India Company and other power bastions

to pass into the borderlands of the seven states lying at the extreme north. The word *duar* meaning a door is consistent in its meaning in Assamese, Bodo, Bengali, Nepali, Rajbansi languages, but it is possible that the name was coined by trading and warring bands of Bhutanese people.⁴ *Duars* and the Siliguri corridor are also known as “*chicken’s neck*”⁵ in strategic studies regarding India’s defence grid. In its geographic and political positioning it neither falls into the north-eastern states nor falls in the mainland. From what has passed on by the British to the current regime and media, I differ in my view as to what the *mainland* is. In my analysis *mainland* is not a historically canonised spatial category alone, but also a modern political one. I have theorised “*mainland*” as spaces where repressive state mechanisms are limited, active civil society, healthcare and amenities, access to media and mechanisms of achieving civil rights are present. If by a combination of these categories and the rapid militarisation observed since 1980s tends to the conclusion that mainland, habitable India is perpetually being replaced by a military State, then it might be a slight misreading for my work. The last and equally important term that I have used is “*language*.” There are multiple variations of the “local” at any and every place we visit; the urban spaces are mostly language markets of Bengali, Hindi and Nepali. The rural spaces, however, are a completely different lingual domain, dominated by Bengali and Rajbangsi. The language that is used is not by Rajbansis alone. This is similarly spoken by various people across the rural parts of the four districts with resonant modifications. Rajbangsi is an ethnic community, some theorise that they are the Koch people who had acceded to the Hindu fold; however, it is not detrimental to hypothesise that they are one of the branches of the Kachhari/Kamrup nation. Kamtapuri, on the other hand is a political construct to identify a particular language and alienate it from the label of Rajbansis alone. The debate is so powerful that every time some senior leader had announced a possibility of hope regarding acceptance of Rajbansi as a language, as was recently done by Mamata Bannerjee,⁶ it had raised protest within the factions regarding the same matter.⁷ I therefore begin with my expositions.

I must at this juncture make a special note of one quintessential difference between two terms. The terms “Rajbansi” and “Kamtapuri (or Kamtapur)” are not interchangeable. Rajbansi is an ethnic community. “Kamtapuri,” meaning someone who supports or sympathises Kamtapur movement is a term describing political position. Although several Bengalis are observed

making a derogatory usage of the term ‘Kamtapuri’ for Rajbansis, at no point however they are the same.

One more important addition to the discourse is also the relationship of Rajbansis and the Bengali population. During the peak of the movement several organisations have allegedly claimed active involvement and leadership from the Namashudras and the Bengali Muslims.⁸ If we discount the amity as that of a negligible section, in its entirety the relationship of the Bengalis and the Rajbansis are that of the dominant section and the section under repression (repression in lines of cultural, social and lingual imperialism). The common pejorative used by the non-Rajbansi to describe one from the community is “bahe”⁹ or “bau,” essentially meaning father but used as derogatory addresses none the less.¹⁰ The Bengali higher caste forms the central narrative of disdain against the Rajbansi. As an evidence of this contradiction of ethnicity along with castes we can certainly remember the Kshatriya Movement among Rajbansis.¹¹

A community survives by its policy of adaption, assimilation or confrontation with its physical or social contradictions. In order for a community to survive, keeping at par with its surrounding problems, it needs to create and recreate its historicity and its values in given circumstances. *Culture* on the other hand, is a process of a moving framework of practices and prejudices, followed by ideological confirmations. A practice stays as a mere practice, if it is not valorised or categorized as an important *trade* or *skill* placed along with the community’s own sense of social hierarchies. The birth of *high culture* or *low culture* in a community is because of its own set of ideals and hierarchies, which (fortunately) even in this era of late capitalism and globalization is still varied, relative and fragmented. The history of Kamtapur movement is interlinked with the history of communities residing in the space itself.

Little Wars of the Frontier:

The immediate history of Kamtapur movement (one that is closer to the movement today) starts with the later dwindling organisations vying for the Kshatriya status. In the year 1968 an emissary from King Ajit Narayan’s court, along with Dr. Girija Shankar Ray, formed *Kamtapur Rajya Shongram Parishad*. They were also helped by trade union leader Bipin Chakraborty and Shibendra Narayan.¹² The forum did not stand the test of time, even a short time. However, we

do find a record of King Ajit Narayan taking up the position as a sectional Chairman few years after the formation of the political organisation. The organisation that came into being after the repression of the Naxalbari uprising was *Bharatiya Koch-Rajbangsi Kshatriya Mahashbha* (All Indian Koch-Rajbangsi Kshatriya Association). BKRKM came into a renewed existence in 1984 on the 476th birth anniversary of Chila Ray,¹³ organised and led by the ex-member of parliament from Assam, Dr. Purnashingha Ray.¹⁴ I use the word renewed in order to refer that BKRKM was initially like various other aspirant-Kshatriya assemblages with no explicit political ambitions; it later developed as a political organisation.¹⁵ In the meeting along with supporters from Assam, Meghalaya and Tripura it was decided that the party would work for the larger benefit of the tafsili, adivasi and Rajbangsi people. They demanded from the government the acknowledgement of Koch-Rajbangsi as a scheduled caste, the resistance to infiltration from Bangladesh, relocating the refugee section to viable places, and the acceptance of Kamtapuri as a language

The BKRKM later divided itself into two different sections; they were binaries but not binary opposites. On one side it was the Koch Rajbangsi International Forum, which was spearheaded by a central committee situated in Tejpur Assam; and repeatedly visited and supported by KoochBehar's princess and Jaipur's *Maharani* Gayatri Devi. It was established in the year 1986, around 23rd or 24th February. It was also supported by other organisations like *Kamta Rajya Parishad*, *Chila Ray Shongo*, *Nepal Rajbangsi Bhasha Shomiti*, *Uttorkhondo* and other similar parties meant for Rajbangsi solidarity.¹⁶ Along with the previous aims of BKRKM it also added demands for incorporation of Kamtapuri language as a mother tongue and reservations in administrative posts. There were several other smaller groups which were established during the period.

The turn which changed the phase of the movement was probably the birth of *All Kamtapur Student's Union* in the year 1994 and *Kamtapuri People's Party* at a later date of 7th January, 1996. *All Kamtapur Student's Union* (AKSU) was modelled on a similar framework of *All Assam Student's Union* (AASU) and started functioning from North Bengal University campus. Their main aim was a separate council for the proposed Kamtapur administration and acceptance of Kamtapuri language as the chief language in sectors of education and media, and

especially the setting up of a department of Kamtapuri Studies at North Bengal University in Siliguri. Several sources claim that it was a section from AKSU front who led to the foundation of KLO.¹⁷ On 28th December, 1994; Jiban Singha along with other similar politically inspired men and women founded *Kamtapur Liberation Organisation* or KLO in a small village of Kumargram situated at the eastern section of the Dooars.¹⁸ Their main agenda was similar to the previously mentioned BKRKM, only with the substitution of electoral politics with armed resistance, spreading and solidifying the movement in systematic attrition to state machineries. It is known today through various sources that KLO was akin and connected to the organisations such as *United Liberation Front of Ahom* or ULFA, and had shared training grounds with them¹⁹. In areas of lower Rangpur and sections of Chattagram the training camps were systematically destroyed by a joint effort of the then Bangladesh government and India. Thus, the base had to shift from Bangladesh to Bhutan; where at a later date it was again systematically cleared by joint Indian and Bhutanese effort with *Operation Flush Out* around the years of 2003-4.^{20 21 22 23}

The other political organisation which gave a substantial turn to the movement is *Kamtapuri People' Party* (KPP). It started off with a joint venture by Atul Roy and Nikhil Roy. An initial movement for Uttarakhand during the same period comprising the areas of Jalpaiguri, Siliguri, lower sections of Darjeeling district, Goalpara and Dinajpur met a sudden death when a considerable section of the populace joined KPP, discarding the already waning *Uttarakhand Andolan*. Around the years of 1991 to 1994, Atul Roy²⁴ was involved in creating *Kamtapur Yuva Shongothon* and *Kamtapur Liberation Front*; it was in this period that he met Nikhil Roy, a member with a strong note of dissent for Uttarakhand Dal. On 7th January, 1994 members of Koochbihar People's Association, Kamtapur Mukti Morcha, Malda Barindra Krishok Mukti Morcha and similar political parties met at Nikhil Ray's house, and formed the KPP. The fellow political parties affiliated to KPP are Kamtapur Students' Union (1994), Kamtapur Bhasha Shaitya Porishod (1997) and Kamtapur Women's Forum (1998). The basic demands of KPP were the same as before –the official acceptance of Kamtapuri language, freedom in the media, and protective reservation for the Rajbangsis and other minorities.

The demands also flow into several other narratives. KPP claims that the Bengali populace following the partition and once more from 1971, had a steady help from the Indian

state; as part of their rehabilitation program, rationing, electoral rights, and legal help. In other words, newer citizens displaced the rights of older ones. The changing economic relations post-independence laid the foundations of a large disparity between the dominant and the marginalised class, further supported by the administrative machinery which was dominated by upper-caste Bengalis. The large influx from Bangladesh was also one of the key reasons for marginalisation, where gradually the Rajbangsis and other indigenous people became the minority in their own land. A large section of fertile soil was turned into tea-estates, and these tea-estates in turn were owned by people who were the *nouveau middle-class* of the lands. Another approach was against the militarisation of North Bengal. Northern Bengal is also a precarious strategic point for the Indian border, and therefore internal defence too. A considerable section of the lands were acquired by the military during the 1962 war with China, and since then has continued and left some farmers and owners of the indigenous community landless.²⁵ The Teesta Barrage project had been a pivotal cause for the eviction of several thousands of people and left a considerable populace without land. All these factors contributed to the rise of Kamtapur movement.

It must be noted here that I do not intend to theorise the concepts of freedom, rights or the subject of liberty in its idealist sense. I have looked into the concept of relative equality and freedoms, keeping in mind the covenant with the State powers, rather the nation-state in itself. I base my argument in lieu with the relationship of a group or people with the nation-state and thereby mutual demands and relationships. This not only applies to the demand of the administrative system alone but also applies to the conceptual framework of a modern democracy as well.

What we see here is a series of non-meeting of the demands of democracy, or at least from a space which can be called the underbelly of democracy. A constructive democracy is supposed to be more than the procedure of voting and representation through ballots. Democracy is participatory, arguable and constructive. It gives the choice of participation to agents, choosing modes of protest, decision making, functioning and capability of individuals and groups through continuous exchange of reasons.²⁶ The new social movements that are on the rise following the consolidation and rediscovery of identities posit a threat to the nation-state and the conception of

linguistic provinces. In such a context, the lacuna is further widened by perpetual and relentless coercion by a dominant section, which is of course casteist, ethno-nationalist in its own terms. It is for these reasons why political or social communities are driven to what can be called as “active nihilism.”²⁷

In case of the lack of structures and manoeuvres of meeting demands, what we see in this part of the *North-East* is the demand for a radical democracy. It is in such a context that we have to analyse the undercurrents that run further into the deeper sections of the Kamtapur movement.

The Political Framework and Anomalies:

The decade of the 70s might not have come out as “the decade of liberation” but it surely changed the nature of several social movements. The rise of Naxalbari changed the natures and trajectories of socio-political movement in an exemplary form and over the years changed the strategies of new social movements. In his Introduction to “Subaltern Studies Reader 1986-1995,” Ranajit Guha points out—

That decade---or, to be more precise, the years between the Naxalbari uprising and the end of Emergency--- has often been described as a period of disillusionment and Subaltern Studies as one of its outcomes. For even illusion does not work in quite the same way for the young and the old. It comes in two forms--- the illusion of hope and the illusion of recollection.²⁸

This seemingly recurrent politics of illusions of hope and illusions of recollection or that of any *active nihilism* is one of the key notes of my argument. It was because of this that new social movements got infused with different and alternate trajectories of ideologies and agendas in the coming years.

The struggle for Kamtapur in recent history can be divided into two different political thoughts. The iconisation of Panchanan Burma, Madhusudhan Das, poet/singer Abbasuddin Ahmed and several others is a dominant political trend in the movement. The first strand that I am about to speak is the remembrance, commemoration, and active role of “the royalty” of Kochbehar. As was mentioned earlier, the initial phases of Kamtapur movement were also

encouraged by the royalty as Ajit Narayan. The more laden politics of the royalty, however, has taken place in Kochbehar. The Greater Koch Behar Movement is marked by an appeal made by Greater Koch Behar People's Association which comprised some agendas as support for the language of Kochbehar by government authorities, making compulsory the studies of history and culture of the Kochbehar royal family in schools, preservation of books of the library, repairs of temples, mosques and historical sites made by Kochbehar kings and allowing Anilendra Narayan as the chairman of the board of trustees. The Board of Trustees for Kochbehar was presided by the line of ex-kings. The last king was Kumar Brajendra Narayan; after his demise there was a debate and later agreement on Anilendra Narayan as a distant relative to the kings. The move was not accepted by the governing bodies and thus the nationalism surrounding the royal family gained momentum across the land. One might find this issue as archaic and conformist in terms of social-movements; if so, it is certainly a mutated discourse.

The assimilation of Kochbehar, like many other princely States under the British regime, had a different political history than the spaces directly under British administration. The assimilation was not done following a plebiscite; rather it was done on the word of the King himself. On 28th August, 1949 the *Maharaja* Jagaddipendra Narayan Bhupbahadur of Koch Bihar surrendered his rule to the Government of India. The transfer of the administration to the government of India took place on the 12th day of September 1949; from this moment on, Koch Bihar was governed by a Chief Commissioner appointed by the Government of India. This was done without any form of electoral mechanism or representation of the population except the king. In the next few years, it resulted in a series of tug of war between the Government of Assam and that of West Bengal, as who should have Kochbehar (as well as Goalpara) and the Union Ministry of India. It was later decided by the Government of India that the Kochbehar State shall be best served under Government of West Bengal. The Government of West Bengal followed suit and passed an act, the Cooch Behar (Assimilation of State Laws) Act in 1950, in which contained in the first schedule, the new district of Kochbehar was assimilated by the laws of the State of West Bengal. Since then Kochbehar has become a district of West Bengal.²⁹ The nationalism and its nature have largely been different in case of the Kochbehar State, as well as the surrounding areas. The pan-Hindushtan or *Swadesi* nationalist practice did not have much effect in these hinterlands of the nation. The nationalism, surrounding the Kochbehar State is

relatively new; and is posited to combat the hierarchy of the power structures of West Bengal and the Government of India.

The Kamtapur movement brought with it a drive to read up the social-history of the land by circulation of earlier textbooks as Ahmanutullah Khan Choudhury's *Kochbeharer Itihash* and newer works by scholars from different ends. The other important aspect was a large number of low-budget cinema in the local language—most of the times concerning some social, political or historical issue.³⁰ When the crackdown by the State finally arrived, it was total and upon all of them. The then regime in control of the West Bengal Government was Communist Party of India (Marxist) or CPI(M). Several magazines and pamphlets by CPI(M) were circulated to combat against the rising hegemony during the Kamtapur movement, which not only combated them in terms of politics, such as Kamtapuris are conspirers sent by the Central Ministry to disturb peace in Bengal, to larger claims of them being co-conspirers with ISI (Pakistan) agents and ultimately leading to the allegation of being funded by CIA and American Imperialist forces.^{31 32} However, along with these statements, the drive was also on proving how the line of kings was broken long ago and that the court language was Bengali. It seems that this iconoclasm was nascent in the socio-political groups much before it had showed its face as paranoid propaganda. Therefore the nationalism surrounding the royalty is co-constitutive with the act of denying the history altogether, thus becoming a site for struggle in itself. The other important strand of Kamtapur movement is its interesting fusions with leftist practices.

Somenath Hore in *Tebhagar Diary* as well as in Adrienne Cooper's work we find the areas of Dinajpur, Rongpur, and Jalpaiguri as hotbeds of Marxist cultures of protest. With the withdrawing of the some major leaders of CPI during the year of Independence and Partition, the movement had already weakened to an extent. The final death knell was the mass genocides and displacements on both sides of the border, leading to a complete overhaul in demography and significant blow to overall human condition. The Indian side of the border, later comprising Kochbehar, had its own presence of communist parties throughout the decades of 50s and 60's as opposed to the crackdown on the other side of the border by an alarming growth of Rajakars, Al-Sham and Al-Badrs allegedly helped by Jamat-e-Islami. The trouble began with the split in the parliamentary leftist organisations with the advent of Naxalite rebellion. Charu Majumdar was

enormously influenced by works of Mao Tse Tung; to an extent that he in a spree for Internationalism had said “China’s chairman is our chairman,” which however was distorted and delivered by paranoid nationalists all over the country. If we are to track Marxist undertones, shades and trajectories in the New Social Movement based on language or ethnic minorities, we must also keep in mind these two shades of Leftist politics in India.

The first instance of political charge that is present in these movements is the charge of denied rights, social values and equality. One may say these are the charges of nationalism too, but one must question also whether nationalism has not picked up mechanisms from Marxism and has Marxism not assimilated issues of nationalism in its sojourns. Have they both not given rise to powerful figures and centres of their own? Has Stalin’s “socialism in one country” and Trotsky’s “proletarian internationalism” not become the central questions of Marxist discourse on the question of nation? However my enquiries lie on the natures of interpellations and political drive of Marxism. One of the distinguished issues that come in the charge of leftist politics is its deferral of the ideal. The deferral of all values dear, an oceanic breath of the redemption of the history of oppression, of one man on another, a wind of change and the wait for an unrequited justice. In his chapter *Injunctions on Marx*, Derrida compares Hamlet with the “ghost of Marx,” as a ‘spirit’ it appears and refrains, like an idea that has yet to be achieved, yet to be realised and is deferred forthwith.³³

This point of entry also discloses how later social movements, who are not proclaimed Marxists might have assimilated the ideas of deferred social justice, rights, freedom, liberty and other valued qualities in political philosophy. Let me now analyse the polemics of leftist politics, its contradictions and infusions within the Kamtapur movement.

The Two Shades of the Red:

It is important to remember that I am not trying to pit the Marxists along with ethnocentric movements but rather pointing towards a beginning of a new era of social movements. One of the why it is exceedingly difficult to acknowledge trends of Marxism in the new social movements is its mechanisms of politicization. Marx himself put utmost stress on the trade unions and labourer/working class regimentation.³⁴ In “The Communist Manifesto,” Marx

talked about how the formation of the universal, the ever growing, ever oppressed class of working men turn into the conscious Proletariats, and thenceforth become a political party. Marx had stressed on the formation of the proletariat keeping in mind the revolutionary nature of the Bourgeoisie itself, he elucidated on the subject of ‘unions’ with its importance of turning “the numerous local struggles, all of the same character, into one national struggle between classes” following its own path into international arenas.³⁵

It is rather an uncomfortable question as to what Marx’s thoughts were regarding the peasantry as a political group. In any case, it must be noted that Marx himself chided/warned one of his Russian critics for turning his theoretical formulations into an unchallengeable logos; he warns “success will never come with the master-key of a general historic-philosophical theory, whose supreme virtue consists in being supra-historical.”³⁶ In other words, he lays down a foreboding and declaration that all his works were rather based on Western European context, perhaps a dilemma which still haunts communists who set sail in social-democratic raft. However, in the end, it all sums up to working class unions, revolutionary middle class and class-conscious peasant society joining a struggle against the bourgeoisie regime to replace it with hegemony of the proletariat. It is safe to assume that Indian communists had found their own way across the debate regarding peasantry between the Soviet and Chinese or Havana polemic. The problem in this case is the extreme economic-determinism which had different results in the western world as opposed to the developing nations. Another shade of Marxism altered by Mao had entered the subcontinent through the Naxalite insurgency. The difference is the mechanism yet again. In Mao’s own words

Some contradictions are characterized by open antagonism, others are not. In accordance with the concrete development of things, some contradictions which were originally non-antagonistic develop into antagonistic ones, while others which were originally antagonistic develop into non-antagonistic ones.³⁷

This new idea of non-antagonist forces pregnant with antagonist contradiction paved way to different ways of developing movements. As one might remember that apart from the organisation of CPI (M-L), the practice then and even after disbanding of the original political organisation the movements were dispersed in forms of tribal groups, ethnic minorities and other

forms of political commitment. This practice of assimilating and acknowledging different identity struggle has also been taken up by later Maoists.³⁸ By these two shades of Marxism, one can press history to the point of assimilation, which again, would be an error.

The secessionist tendency in the new social movements is a different question which needs to be addressed in a different order. To probe this issue further, I have interviewed several people who range from middle class local intelligentsia with no or negligible political affiliations with Kamtapur to political activists falling within electoral and non-electoral factions. Out of this number all my informants who were/are politically affiliated have answered one question unanimously and it has given a different shape to my work. The idea of post-Kamtapur governance in terms of language, cultural trends, and socio-economic relations is answered by a promise of spontaneity. It is easy to deem this as a deferral of intentions by a contesting hegemony; or a simple phrase of “they don’t know what they speak off” might be applied too, as is reiterated by every dominant power. It proves otherwise because in terms of recreating hegemony through reservations, reservations in terms of class barriers, strategic coercion of land rights, they point towards a relatively set out path. This spontaneity, however, is a promise of the movement itself. This act itself distances the movement from a Marxist political movement. The secession in Marxist organisations is in the lines of ideological and methodological difference. As far as we know, Marx in his *The Poverty of Philosophy* and Lenin in his self-explanatory title *What is to be done?* are strict critics of spontaneousness, and any, even subtle forms of primitivism. This is a powerful handicap which often returns to haunt the Indian Leftist political groups working with multiple ethnic groups.

The tension of secession and multiple languages has been encountered by Marxists since long time back. In a paper entitled ‘*Voice of Kamtapur*’ dated September-October 2011, a left-hand column reads a section by the name, “bhaabibar kaatha,”³⁹ that is, words or statements to contemplate. The first quotation reads “bichhinotar odhikaar chhara shwadhin milon michha kaatha” (Freedom without right to secession is a falsity) which is followed by a hyphenated V. I Lenin. The statement is indeed a part of a larger polemic encountered by Lenin, and not just as the division of Bolshevik from the Mensheviks alone. Lenin in his *Theses on the National Question* argued for secession on the basis of political self-determination.⁴⁰

The article is but a historical reference, as it was chiefly concerning the Tsarist remnants and its intended overthrow. Nonetheless, it is interesting to note his stance on secession and right to form a separate State. It was much later that Lenin changed his stance about separation and pressured more on the formation of a regimented Soviet union of States rather than secession. In case of the question of language too, Lenin had argued against the idea of a centralised Russian language. In an argument against Liberals, Lenin had advocated for the necessity of teaching Native language in schools, colleges as well in administrative policies; this was professed to an extent that he declared that the “mighty culture” and the homogeneity of Russian are forced upon others. Lenin analysed this as a clear act of “coercion,” in other words, an abstinence from using a “cudgel” to drive people into paradise.⁴¹

Once again, we do find in the later years of Soviet Socialism, a trend towards officiating and normalising of the Russian language as opposed to other Slavic languages. It is regarding these cases that I am trying to point out the uncomfortable position in the leftist politics regarding secessionist and lingua-political movements. Not to mention, the role of caste and ethnic problems.

It also must be noted that the trend in this movement is not only that of distance making from the regional power bastions as Kolkata but also against New Delhi. The charge is for the empowerment of local bodies. The bodies which comprise multiple ethnic foundations that are seemingly put together in supra-identities; this supra identity is not the erstwhile seen nationalism but an assimilatory incorporative one. In my first interview with Nikhil Roy in July last year,⁴² I asked him KPP’s stance on class positions, to which he replied that most of the Rajbangsi people, the Oraon, Munda, Khyen and Namshudras are in the “have-not section of the society but it is not just class that is oppressive to them, it is also the social position”. In another interview with Dhananjay Burman an ex-KLO member and his wife, an ex-KWRF member Sumitra Burman—both were ex-aides and were close to Jeeban Singha (the alleged standing Commander of KLO), I had once again asked a similar question. Once more Dhananjay revealed that they were not fighting economic issues alone, and the settling of class disparity will only partially solve the problem. It is precisely for such reasons why I theorise Kamtapuri movement having an anarchist tendency towards formations of socio-economic base.

Whither Anarchy and Why Kamtapur:

What is Anarchism? What are the chances of a discourse on Anarchism in India? In what ways do I formulate Anarchism as an accompanying political philosophy in Kamtapur movement? Anarchy is not about riots, wars, robbery, vandalism, bombing, assassination, mobbing or other forms of negative commitments. Those that are mentioned may become the outcome of any political organisations' lack of option or *modus operandi* of approaching contradictions, and or, conflicts. Anarchy is not absence of order; it is but an absence of glaring presence of powerholders.

Anarchism is about the widening of choices of individuals and groups in a society. It has taken several forms over several centuries. It has come across as syndicalism, federalism, individualism and several other political philosophies in its wake. The essential issue however is but one, more power to the individual citizens and lesser power to the authority.⁴³ The first prophets in the West were Proudhon and Bakunin, who sketched out the earlier mechanisms of oppressions and apparatus of oppression in the society, and thus became part of a major political movement in nineteenth century European political topography. Since then it has travelled with ebbs and flows across various thinkers, political frameworks, and social processes; and it has been taken up by various other thinkers across continents. In this case, I theorise this on the basis of Peter Marshall's lines from *Demanding the Impossible*:

It would be misleading to offer a neat definition of anarchism, since by its very nature it is anti-dogmatic. It does not offer a fixed body of doctrine based on one particular world-view. It is a complex and subtle philosophy, embracing many different currents of thought and strategy. Indeed, anarchism is like a river with many currents and eddies, constantly changing and being refreshed by new surges but always moving towards the wide ocean of freedom.... The first anarchist was the first person who felt the oppression of another and rebelled against it. He or she not only asserted the right to think independently but challenged authority, whatsoever form it took.⁴⁴

In India, the most visible figure of Anarchism (at least to the liberal-bourgeoisie of the West) is Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi. The Gandhian form was that of non-violence, non-

cooperation and peaceful disobedience of laws of the British Raj. It is true that Gandhi was greatly influenced by thinkers as Thoreau in his “Civil Disobedience” and Tolstoy, but he was also greatly moved by Kropotkin’s take on politico-economic vision of village communes and their independent associations with a larger body of the nation.⁴⁵ It must be noted however that his visions were also inspired by Indian philosophy, central to which lies the concept of *ahimsa*. That is not certainly the end of anarchist inclinations in the political history of India.⁴⁶ The Naxalbari uprising has more Anarchist leanings than the acts of classical Marxist polity.^{47 48} In a similar manner the modern social movements are deftly at the edge of a space from whence there are but two hegemonies.

In the recent global political affairs there are but two different shades in the political trends of movements, and it does not stop there being just a concept itself, but continuously reshapes and coerces the new social movements towards either paths. On one hand there is the large dominance of the conservative-bourgeoisie accompanying the various frameworks of finance capitalism. This is the space where all dissents are narrowed down as terrorism of some sort and other. In this context—pseudo-democratic or electoral dictatorships with open markets for global capitals are continuously created, dissents in the form of communist/anarchist/ethno-political/eco-political organisations are integrated and/or ruthlessly curbed. This is also the space where repeatedly the developing nations become subjects as financial cushions to the developed nations.⁴⁹ This is the face of capitalism in continuous crisis and spontaneous development. On the other hand, however, we have the progressive forces of the left; comprising of the proto-Marxists, Leninists, the new left, the social democratic lefts rising after the Soviet mistakes,⁵⁰ or the many other forms of the liberal forces. Here in lies the dilemma. The ethnological, caste, gender, sexuality questions are continuously formulated in newer frameworks but are still in an uncomfortable zone, especially in India. It is here that I critique the “hegemony of hegemony,” if one is to combat politically under the associations of new social movements. Richard J. F Day, in his book analyses this criteria and observes—

Most new social movement theorists agree, for example, that (New Social Movements) NSMs differ from (Old Social Movements) OSMs in addressing a wide range of antagonisms that cannot be reduced to class struggle—racism, patriarchy, the domination

of nature, heterosexism, colonialism, and so on. This displacement of class as a fundamental antagonism has led many commentators to see NSM politics as ‘merely symbolic’ and individualistic (Melucci 1989: 5; Touraine 1992: 373; Pulido 1998: 7–8)...Hence, I would argue that the most accurate description of NSMs is not that they have no analysis of socially structured antagonisms, but that they do not focus solely on class as the fundamental axis of oppression. These struggles appear ‘merely symbolic’ or ‘merely cultural’ only in the eyes of those for whom economic concerns are the only important concerns, and who do not perceive the ways in which identity-based issues are intertwined with economic issues.⁵¹

In such a condition, it is essential to look for a theoretical framework that transcends the preconditions that are addressed in the above sections. In my conception of Anarchy, I do not mean what has erstwhile historically happened in the West or the similar ideology as the new cyber-anarchists, nonviolent Civil Disobedience in occupy movements or other cultures of protest in liberal-bourgeoisie urban spaces. It shares no or perhaps little ideology with them.

I do not rest on rhetoric alone but intend to affirm the position by perspectives. I observe following connections to anarchism on the subject of Kamtapur movement.

- a) The Kamtapuri movement is not ethnocentric as it is deemed by a dominant section; it comprises the minorities of the land in its struggle. It is true that the members of Rajbangshi community form a major people of the base, but it associates with other indigenous communities too. Even at the height of KLO insurgency, one will find the subjects of assassinations (attempted or committed) were not ethno-centric but based on affiliations of political organizations of the subject. There were members of Gorkha, Munda and Muslim communities in the militant organization of KLO; let alone the diplomatic ties of the parliamentary organizations. It is seemingly integrationist and radical at the same juncture.
- b) Like anarchists, the base is not that of class. The Kamtapur movement is about language, a newer hegemony against the dominant casteist, urban petit-bourgeoisie and social position in general.

- c) The demand for power to local bodies and distance from a central power core, that is, minimalist relationship with a central state can be acknowledged as the trope of Anarchy. This anarcho-federalism can be observed in multiple social movements across Indian subcontinent. A large number is communal in terms of demands, but the agenda for localization cannot be overlooked. The anarchy I suggest is not that of individualism or syndicalism, but a smaller federal state with greater powers than larger linguistic province.
- d) Lastly, the movement has generated several political factions in terms of its mode and approach; however, these factions are seemingly entering a mutual consensus. Therefore, it is but a coalition of political groups as opposed to one singular dominant vanguard.

Thus I conclude that Kamtapur Movement, as many others in the subcontinent, is a new social movement with obvious newer political dimensions. The preliminary thought is of course the community as the edifice of a larger, incorporative and continuously changing transition along with the northern part of Bengal. That which is shown by the media houses with their news telecast of Koch-Rajbanshi youths running amuck with guns or the stories of Kamtapur movement being nothing else than the resultant factor of underdevelopment is not doing justice to the important and relevant demands. This merely ascribes the movement to a ghost of the tribulations from a colonial past, an anomaly in a great system of democracy; there are but more things to rediscover within the dynamics of political and social movements in North Bengal. There is much more to the movement in terms of changing relations of class, caste, and other social and political categories. This paper hopes to create an understanding of the Kamtapur movement within the layers of its own inception and existence through the timeline. In addition to that I also request readers to take interest, actively engage and raise voices against the long incarcerations and in ways help the “rehabilitated militants” still caught up in the network of legal formalities for over a decade.⁵²

Notes:

¹ Kamtapur Liberation Organisation.

² This I have observed myself being a resident of Jalpaiguri and during my studies. The topic of cinema and “culture” under repression was also very much the topic of discussion with Nikhil Roy (KPP) and phone conversations with Nalini Burman.

³ Arup Jyoti Das, 2009.

⁴ It is a plausible conclusion considering the high presence of Bhutanese forces right until the attack of the British troops during the expansion under East India Company.

⁵ A common metaphor used for the area considering the smallest strip of land connecting the North-East and the rest of India. It has possibly been a war rhetoric since the Sino-Indian wars.

⁶ “CM to lay foundation for Rajbanshi academy,” *The Times of India*, Jan 28, 2012.

⁷ The condition of the Kamtapuri Movement has been diffused since the heavy crackdown with “Operation Flushout.” It must be noted however that the conditions have barely moved since the change of the regime. A large section of the electoral organisations are still inclined towards negotiations with the State authorities, especially after the declaration of Telangana. Also, the intended idea of releasing the prisoners had taken some effect during the initial period of the coming of the new regime but the network of legal formalities and police proceedings are still a heavy yoke on their shoulders. In addition to that the regular misgivings of poor rehabilitation programs (granting a bank loan, Group-D jobs, a cattle etc) are also a source of tension among the ex-activists. In all its sense, it breeds silent antagonism. Source: Informants during field study.

⁸ One interesting anecdote was shared by Nikhil Roy, at the height of movement, during his period of being under cover, he had allegedly taken shelter in Namashudra houses several times.

⁹ The slur ‘Bahe’ comes from the common word of hailing or calling over a distance. Even the word ‘bau’ has possible root phoneme similar to the addressing of father, however, “bau” is more of a cordial addressing for friends or younger people. Both of them are used as slurs against the Rajbansis.

¹⁰ This is neither my endeavour to sensationalise divergent incidents nor my central yardstick of measuring disdain. I report this because it is much a common practice and an old one indeed. Interestingly it is believed that Panchanan Burma left his job as a superintendent of a hostel in Rangpur because of the same slur being used repeatedly against him by Kalikadas Dutt as well as other Bengali higher castes.

¹¹ Sri Binoy Burman, “*Panchanan Burma'r Shomaj Bhabona*,” 2012, pp. 71-73.

¹² Information from interview with Dr. Girija Shankar Roy. 26th March, 2013

¹³ In circa 1550s, Biswasingha was succeeded by Nara Narayan and Chila Ray. This was a relative period of expansion for the Kanteswar kings and administrative functioning. Nara Narayan was aided by his brother Suklādhwaj in his military campaigns. Suklādhwaj was a brilliant general who fought frontal as well as protracted wars against neighbouring kingdoms. This, the general Sukladhvaj was also called Chila Ray (*Chila* meaning eagle).

¹⁴Lolit Chundra Burman, “Kamtapur Andoloan,” 2008. p. 13.

¹⁵It is to be noted that Panchanan Barma had previously taken part in elections, as other leaders had in their time. I stick to the term to explain a political will of an entire organization, rather than the charismatic leadership of the few.

¹⁶ See *Rajyer Dabite Uttorbongey Andolon*, pp. 14-15

¹⁷ Ibid. p. 16

¹⁸Data collected from interview with Tarjan alias Madhusudhan Ray, Kumargram. On 28th March, 2014.

¹⁹ The issue was not language alone but also self-rule. It was a desperate position as Tarjan recalled “We asked them that we have a demand for a separate state and would like their help; for finances, strategy and diplomacy. To this they replied that we would have to make great sacrifices, and we said we are ready to make them.”

²⁰Arijit Mazumdar, “Bhutan's Military Action against Indian Insurgents,” 2005.

²¹ During the repression Daukimari High School and several other schools were occupied by the State forces. This has also been a source of contention among the local population as was told by Nikhil Roy during several interviews.

²² The State forces had a series of minor clashes with the local population at Barobisha (Kumargram), this is important to note as it involved non-partisan individuals clashing with the State forces. In the initial period of installing the paramilitary forces, there were several reports of army/military personnel not paying at shops or resorting to uncouth behaviour with the local people, resulting into a series of clashes. Inferred from an Interview with Pintu Ganguly, Kumargram. 28th March, 2014

²³ In an Interview with Amulya Roy (23rd March, 2014) he recalled how he was part of the severe rounding of any and all “young able bodied men in the village (which included some school boys)” were taken away and put behind bars. The idea was to prove “not guilty” to the legal network than the other way round.

²⁴Atul Roy later formed Kamtapuri Progressive Party

²⁵ Also to be noted the rate of militarization during 1970s, Gorkha movement of the 80s, and during the era of ‘Operation Flushout’ and beyond.

²⁶David A Crocker, “The Capability Approach And Deliberative Democracy,” 2008.

²⁷Simon Critchley, "Introduction," 2007.

²⁸Ranjit Guha, “Introduction,” 1997/ 2011. Pp. xi-xii

²⁹ “What followed next – Assimilation”, in *Royal History : Some Statements/ Facts*, Internet Access on 23rd May, 2014 (http://www.coochbehar.nic.in/Htmfiles/royal_history2.html#cob_merger)

³⁰ As has been reported in the field interviews during the study (also during the pilot survey and interview with KPP leader Nikhil Ray.

³¹Interview with alleged ex-KLO member Amulya Roy. Maynaguri. 23rd March, 2014

³²Inferred from an Interview with Pintu Ganguly [member of CPI (M)], Kumargram. 28th March, 2014.

³³ Jacques Derrida, “Injunctions on Marx,” 1994, p. 2

³⁴Karl Marx, “Trades unions.”

³⁵Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, “Bourgeoisie and Proletarians,” 2007, pp. 9-21.

³⁶ Karl Marx, “A Letter to the Editorial Board of Otechestvennye Zapiski,” 1983. pp. 134-137

³⁷Mao Tse Tung, “On Contradiction.” 1937. *Selected Works of Mao Tse Tung*. Marxists Internet Archive (http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-1/mswv1_17.htm)

³⁸I quote from a book entitled “Political Resolution,” published by Central Committee, Communist Party of India (Maoist) (21-9-2004). “In India today many nationality struggles in various parts of the country assuming various forms, including armed struggle, are going on and advancing. The overall picture reflects the rousing mood of the masses. The reactionary ruling classes and their imperialist chieftains, particularly the US imperialists, are desperately engaged in ruthlessly suppressing these struggles. The struggles of various nationalities, particularly the Kashmir, Naga, Assam, Manipur and other nationalities in the North Eastern region are continuing the armed struggle against the Indian state. These struggles continue to strike

powerful blows against the most repressive armed forces of the reactionary ruling classes. Until now over 60 thousands toiling people have been killed in Kashmir in the last 15 years alone. Recently in Indo-Bhutan border, the Indian army in connivance with Bhutanese army has killed hundreds of ULFA, KLO, BODO etc. supporters and cadres in a military operation. Millions of Indian armed forces are deployed in these nationalities to suppress their movements brutally under the iron heel of the military might, but even then the burning flames of these struggles could not be extinguished. The people of these nationalities are struggling not only for their identity but also for the just cause of achieving their honourable right of self-determination including the right of secession. These struggles are striking powerful blows to the armed might of the Indian ruling classes, thereby objectively weakening them. In this context they are playing a positive role. Moreover these struggles are integrated part of the NDR." *Archive of Maoist Revolution in India* Internet Access
<http://maoistrevolutioninindia.blogspot.in/2007/11/cpimaoist-documents-political.html>

³⁹*Voice of Kamtapur*, Vol.21, September-October 2011; (VOK, Daukimari, Jalpaiguri.)

⁴⁰V. I. Lenin, "Theses on the National Question," 1977. Vol. 19. pp. 243-251.

⁴¹V. I. Lenin, "Is a Compulsory Official Language Needed?" 1972. Vol. 20. Pp. 71-73.

⁴²This was part of my pilot research and was conducted in July, 2013. Daukimari, Jalpaiguri.

⁴³ One must, however, acknowledge at all times the difference between Individual and Individualism or Egotism.

⁴⁴Peter Marshal, 2008. Pp. 3-4

⁴⁵ *ibid.* pp. 422-423

⁴⁶ It appears that most of the historians and political theorists concentrate more on Gandhi as the chief figure of anarchism in India. Gandhi's vision was of a combination of political and ethical change in the society, an argument with the State where the dialogue is to decide and negotiate civil, economic and political rights. It appears at times that his vision demands existing and *a priori* democratic conditions to conduct the dialogue.

⁴⁷ One very uncomfortable political debate since the 1871 Paris Commune (rather Marx-Bakunin conflict) is the idea of difference between the methods of Anarchists and Communists in achieving a common path towards a stateless, classless and non-authoritarian society. While the acerbic exchange and criticism has not died down, there have been new developments in the lines of *anarcho-communism*. The first mention of it was by Francois Dumartheray and later lauded by Malatesta, Cafiero and Kropotkin.

⁴⁸ In all its sense, any discussion about any political movement in North-Bengal is but half achieved if we do not also consider the profound impact of Naxalbari uprising in its geopolitical space.

⁴⁹ Andre Gunder Frank, "Imperialism," 1972.

⁵⁰ Sheri Berman, Understanding Social Justice. Internet Access
(http://www.people.fas.harvard.edu/~ces/conferences/left/left_papers/berman.pdf)

⁵¹ Richard J.F. Day, "What Was New About The 'New Social Movements'?", 2005.

⁵² Information as observed and received during my field studies, with special references to Amulya Roy, Dhananjay Burman, Tarjan and several other individuals. The repeated court summons and 'regular checking' by the police has gained a normalcy and nonchalance in their daily lives.

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