The Politics of Castelessness in West Bengal

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Objectives
- To see how caste discourse in West Bengal is enmeshed with discourses concerning social justice and class and how partition has brought to the fore such a condition.
- To locate the middle-class as a modern cultural space bounded by a certain language and a set of norms and regulations, the very theme of which is being set by the upper-castes elite.
- To locate the movement of the marginalized castes into this modern cultural sphere and to draw a hint as to what results such movements can bring forth.

Introduction
In recent times, we are seeing the onslaught of the Hindutva politics all across the country. In such times, we are witnessing structural as well as daily oppression coming down upon people from various marginalized sections of society. One such section is the marginalized caste community (-ies), that section which has been historically sidelined by the Hindu caste society. In our present mode of governmentality, violence plays its role, broadly, on two levels - i) structural and ii) everyday. Existing caste discourses and critiques play their role on these two levels. On the one hand, there is the discourse of the centrality of class and social justice, which brings mainly the divide of base/super-structure and presents caste relations as a matter of ideological efficacy. Against this, there is the critique of circularity which puts into question the very functional treatment of the category of caste in the former. In the second explanation, caste seems to substitute class in an Indian reality. This second method poses a problem of relativism in which we find the universal logic of class formation and conflict, falls apart (Chatterjee, 1989). The problem, in a country like India, is that the transition of democratic politics grounded in an idea of popular sovereignty to a democratic politics shaped by governmentality presents certain sharp contradictions (Chatterjee, 2001). The principle contradiction, here, is rooted between the notions of universal ideas of nationalism and particular demands of historically marginalized cultural identities. In his book, *The Spectre of Comparisons* (Anderson, 1998), Benedict Anderson tries to deal with this dichotomy. He brings in the concepts of unbound and bound serialities, doing which, he tries to show how universals of modern social thought such as nations, citizens, intellectuals et cetera transgress state borders. On the other hand, bound serialities constrict individual beings into integers, 0 and 1. One is either a black or not a black, a Muslim or not a Muslim et cetera. Partha Chatterjee, however, in his essay, *The Nation in Heterogeneous Times* (Chatterjee, 2001), questions his position of Anderson by saying that Anderson ultimately posits himself as a proponent of Enlightenment values, thereby, translating time into space very easily. For Anderson (Anderson, 1998), politics inhabits the time-space of modernity, in other words, the empty homogenous time, a time which people imagines but not lives. Partha Chatterjee disagrees with this position. He says modeen democratic governmentality occur in real time, which is "unevenly dense" (Chatterjee, 2001). He claims that empty homogenous time is not located anywhere, it is imagined, hence, it is utopian. Politics doesn’t reach with the same meaning to every individual. He draws the example of an industrial worker and his work discipline which contradicts the notion of discipline in the capitalist mode of production. Chatterjee however draws the formulation of Bhaba, that there is a conception of double time at play due to which the narrative of the nation is split (Bhabha, 1990). Firstly, there is always a process of nation-making in progress to achieve the promises that modern nation-states entail, while secondly, on the other hand, the unity of the people among themselves and with the nation has to be "continually signified, repeated and performed." Thus, we see violence coming down upon the marginalized caste communities on both planes. The contradiction that is posed here is between liberty and fraternity, two essential components of democratic politics situated in the idea of popular sovereignty (Chatterjee, 2001). I agree with Chatterjee that we need to be reminded of people living in real time but I equally don't want to dispense off the idea of imaginary, since that is where ideology at its purest, operates. In commenting about caste violence and discourses, I have chosen West Bengal as my site since it is believed popularly that Bengal being the fore-bearer of enlightenment values in India, a pre-capital or archaic category like caste do not exist/operate in West Bengal. Sekhar Bandopadhyay and Anusua Basu Ray Chaudhury, in their essay, *Partition, Displacement, and the Decline of the Scheduled Caste Movement in West Bengal* (Bandopadhyay and Chaudhury, 2015), talks about this trope where we see, discourses regarding caste often gets juxtaposed by discourses by discourses regarding class and social justice. Sarbani Bandopadhyay, in her essay, *Another History* (Bandopadhyay, 2015), also talks about the *bhadralok* status category which she sees as nothing but a space for upper-caste men having modern education and secular profession. In his essay, *Partition and the Mysterious Disappearance of Caste in Bengal* (Chatterjee, 2015), Partha Chatterjee claims that upper-caste elite culture in West Bengal has created a space where its hegemony isn’t limited to caste dominance but its existence is due to its "ability to create and defend larger social consolidations." He offers a critique to Bandopadhyay's argument by saying that *bhadra* status isn’t limited to upper castes. Chatterjee brings here as a factor, language, "a language of respectability and a genteel lifestyle that goes with it that is, as it were, nobody's patrimony, but one that each person has to acquire through learning in order to become *bhadra.*" However, Dwijapayanan Sen, in his essay, *An Absent-Minded Casteism* (Sen, 2015), disagrees with Chatterjee by saying that there is an order of "domination with hegemony" to which the marginalized caste communities have "consented through persuasion". In all of the essays revolving around the politics of castelessness in Bengal, one thing stands common. That partition created a grave consequence to the marginalized caste discourse and movements in Bengal. In this paper, I want to see and re-figure a couple of problems attached to the latency in caste discourse.
in Bengal. Firstly, I want to see how partition and the spatial migration which followed it has put a dent in marginalized castes' capacity to mobilize and protest. Secondly, I will try to bring out the modern category of middle-class as a space for contention between the elite and the marginalized castes. That caste discourse in Bengal cannot be properly understood without meandering through the space that middle-class, particularly in the context of Bengal, provides. Thirdly, I will also try to show the rise and the impact of Left politics in Bengal and how it failed to understand the dynamics of caste in crucial historical junctures. Fourthly, and finally, I also want to give an effort in showing how the apparent contradictions among the various above mentioned authors can be resolved by problematizing the situation on two levels - i) ideology and ii) lived experiences. In placing the problem this way, I hope the readers will also find that absence of caste-discourse is not being dealt by me as a negative issue. To elucidate further, absence makes its presence felt. It is this efficacy of the presence of absence that I want to build through this paper.

**Formations of the Bhadrakol (Bengali Middle-Class)**

Before going into the discussion of partition and spatial migration, it is important to define the scope and idea of middle-class that I will be using for my own formulation in this work. In this section, I would like to trace how the Bengali middle-class or *bhadralok* community critically engaged itself with the caste hierarchies and toiling masses in colonial Bengal. By tracing this engagement, I would like to clarify my notion of the middle-class and also show how caste discourse is marginalized or silenced as well as incorporated in post-partition/post-independence Bengal through modern tropes such as social justice and questions of class.

There have been many debates concerning the idea of middle-class. The concept has been attributed in various ways by various scholars. Marx sees it as an "intellectual class", Weber sees it as a status-group sharing a common understanding regarding a particular life-style, and moreover thinkers such as Bourdieu have come to say that theoretical definitions and distinctions concerning the middle-class do not hold much ground since at the end of the day, middle-class is situated or grounded through sets of rituals, practices and activities (Jodhka and Prakash, 2016). If we see through these diverse viewpoints, we can see a common theme which lurks behind as a presupposition to all these formulations. It is that middle-class is considered as a modern category born out of the contradictions effaced out of from the consequences of Industrial Capitalism in Europe. Though there are divisions and differences among thinkers as to whether in capitalist logic of development, the middle-class would perish or expand, the history of 19th and 20th centuries suggest the continued existence of the middle-class. Moreover, in countries like India, the middle-classes have risen in number and the marketing industry presents itself by imagining this section as its target audience. It is very hard to find one or two objective criteria depending upon which we can call a section of population as the middle-class. Criteria like income, consumption, language, ancestral land propriety and such others play an important role in determining the constitution of the middle-class. It is this complex a category because in major parts of the world and especially in a country like India, it is generated through an encounter between the colonizer and the colonized. Therefore, the middle-class become a sort of product of the colonial conquest for knowledge of the other. In constructing a history for the other, the British administrators-historians mainly relied on Brahmanic interpretations and translations of ancient cultural texts and records. Alongside with this, played the political project of *civilizing* the "barbarians". As a step to further advance this project, the colonial forces planned to give the Indians a taste of their Western education system and through it their values, beliefs and tastes. The main point was to produce "a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern, a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, opinions, in morals and in intellect" (Macaulay, 1835). These *local babus* were supposed to represent and govern the majority section of the population. The rules behind such representation and governance were laid down by the colonial rulers and since all this elevated this newly formed community of western educated individuals who come from an elite, upper-caste background, they also submitted themselves to the colonial ideology most of the times. Parallel to this process of incorporation by discursive practises, there grew another simultaneous trend which ultimately gave birth to anti-colonial fervour and nationalistic sentiments. The privileged individuals when studying and inculcating Western values and perspectives, also came in contact with Western ideals of liberty, rights, democracy and cetera (Jodhka and Prakash, 2016). They realised that being colonized, they had no access to practise such ideals. On the other hand, they started to see the traditional hierarchical rituals of *sati*, child marriage in a questionable manner. All this resulted in a contradiction between the traditional and the modern selves in them(Jodhka and Prakash, 2016). Partha Chatterjee, in his *Whose Imagined Communities?* (Chatterjee, 1991), had described that this contradiction was resolved in a subtle way by the educated, *bhadralok* community. The scenario was being seen from two spheres or levels - i) material and ii) spiritual or one can also say - i) thematic and ii) problematic (Chatterjee, 1991). On the material level, that is in the sphere of economics, science and technology, the West served as a blueprint. But on the spiritual level, there occurred a *classicization of tradition* (Chatterjee, 1993). This revoking of traditional values and modes of living, however, depended upon imperialist historiography and thereby we shall see, at the level of thematic, the West continued its dominance while on the level of problematic, in the sphere of of specific cultural and social contexts, ancient records and texts were invoked in order to reform Hindu morality and sexuality that was deemed fit for 19th century. Thus, we see a distinction here in the formation of civil society from the classical European model. In Europe, we shall see that the spheres of political and civil society are nonetheless, same. However, in India, the vectors according to which the civil and political societies were generated had been fundamentally different. This distinction of the civil and the political society have played a crucial role, in marginalizing the question of marginalized castes post-independence, to which we shall come later. In creating a separate sphere of social space for themselves, the educated *bhadralok* community took initiative to run schools, colleges, newspapers, theatres et cetera. Thus, in this logic of development, we shall see that the language concerning the civil and political spheres starting to take two separate shapes, broadly. It is following these occurrences, that the civilization question came into being and the Bengali *bhadralok* and moreover the whole of the Indian middle-class started to criticize the colonial powers on grounds of representation in state power. It is from this position of contention that the Congress was formed in 1885. This questioning attitude came to the educated minds because they saw that the mission of enlightening India with which the British had conquered India had to remain a project whose finality was always *yet to come*. If it was not this way, then the British could not extend its hold over its overseas colonies. But, concerning the question if the marginalized castes, the peasants and the urban poor,
the educated Indian middle-class shared the same understanding as per the colonial forces rendering them as a potential threat to ordered life, dangerous for public health and moreover as people who couldn’t articulate their own problems, hence they have to be represented. But to such a representation of the poor, toiling section of the population, the Indian elites have to depend on a certain language of mobilization and politicization against the British. However, the demand during this period was mainly based on historic deprivation, economic backwardness and socio-political rights (Jodhka and Prakash, 2016). There was no question of Swaraj. It was during this time, during the end of the 19th century that the Hindu revivalist movement took an international shape.

Swami Vivekananda took off to America to show to the world that the Vedanta doctrine is in certain aspects more developed and superior than the diverse forms of Western philosophies. Although, Vivekananda's position regarding caste system can be put to question today, he engaged himself in proving that Hinduism is essentially a humanist code of ethics and if one cannot have love for his/her fellow human being, one cannot know the true nature of God (Vivekananda, 1893). His speech in Chicago had a tremendous impact on the young minds of India back then and members of various militant, anti-colonial secret groups and associations were inspired by Vivekananda's thoughts and actions. Another name which must be taken while talking of mass mobilizations and agitations is of Gandhi. Gandhi, too, was a supporter of varnasram dharma. But his propaganda against untouchability and his initiatives for promulgating inter-caste marriages and inter-caste dining, also had a huge impact on the toiling section. Therefore, it is easy to understand why Manindranath Mandal, a representative of the marginalized caste called Paudra Kshatriya, who founded the Bangiya Jana Sangha (BJS) in 1922 have strategically invoked the name of Vivekananda and Gandhi in order to speak for the liberation of the oppressed castes. As we enter the second decade of the 20th century, it is important to locate the impact of the international communist movement on India and especially Bengal politics and how that specific discourse is engaging itself with the dynamics of caste and landed property. Thus, we shall be dealing with the rise and the impact of Communist Party and the left discourse in Bengal in the following sub-section.

Rise and Impact of the Left
The Russian Revolution in 1917 had an international impact in terms of political, organisational, cultural and ideological frames. Working class and progressive intellectuals, all over the world were heavily influenced and shaped by the phenomenon. Indians, being a colonized population then, was also hugely influenced by this new social analysis and way of signifying one's enemy. It was in 1920, just three years after the revolution took place, that an organised endeavour to form the Indian Communist Party took place (Dasgupta, 1995). This was no isolated event. After the Communist International had been formed in 1919, Communist Parties were constituted in various regions all over the world. It is during this time that a few students, studying in Eastern University in Moscow got attracted to Marxism as a political doctrine and came forward to form an Indian Communist Party at Tashkent on October 17, 1920 (Dasgupta, 1995). Right during this period, activists trying to form a communist party within the territory of British India were also arrested under Regulation 3 of Act of 1818. Mention must be made here of several Bengali intellectuals such as M.N. Ray, Dr. Bhupendra Nath Dutta, Birendra Chattopadhyay, Nalini Gupta, Barkatullah, Abani Ghosh who all had started underground political activities in Berlin. Their main focus was to spread the tenets of Marxism to India and especially to Bengal by communicating with militant anti-colonial groups such as Anushilan Samiti and Jugantar. The impact of Marx started to get its effect felt in the journals of these groups like Atnasakti, Samkha, Dhumketu (Dasgupta, 1995). Consequently, we see after the formation of the Communist Party of India (CPI) in Kanpur in 1925, a mass front named Workers' and Peasants' Party being formed in Bengal consisting of leftists and militant nationalists. One of the most eventful political programmes that this front took was to lead a procession of 30,000 workers and sympathisers in 1928 placing the historic demand of Purna Swaraj forward and insisting the leadership of the Indian National Congress (INC) to adopt a resolution in their Annual Session in correspondence with their demand. The event was historic in the sense that never before such an unambiguous demand for India's freedom was insisted upon during any Annual Session of the INC involving the toiling masses. Following this, we will also see that the Workers' and Peasants' Party involving itself in a series of organised working-class strikes in Bengal-Nagpur Railways and in Liluah Workshop of East India Railways. Along with these, mention must also be made of the industrial strike in 1931 in which almost 4 lakh jute mill workers participated (Dasgupta, 1995). During this period, we would also find in the student community an appeal for the Communist movement and thus in order to cater to this need, All India Students' Federation (AISF) was formed. Simultaneously, during this time, we shall also find, specifically, in Cellular Jail and also in other jails where political prisoners were being kept, a political interaction leading up to the formation of Communist Consolidation Committees. Such developments had a huge impact on the anti-colonial national sentiments. We will find that in 1928, Subhas Bose and Jawaharlal Nehru forming the Independence of India League and in their demand drafts talking of not only political freedom from the British but also of economic freedom and social freedom where they were addressing problems such as untouchability and gender discrimination. Thus, we see in this rise of the Left in Bengal, an attempt to analyse society through the lens of class and registering caste as a problem of ideological efficacy. Though there were differences regarding this view among the various Communists activists, the Communist Movement in India addressed caste through the lens of class in which landed property and relations to land and agricultural produce became a vital component. We can also say that the question of unity of the marginalized castes and the Muslim community emerges from these questions of class and social justice. Thus, the criticality of these questions comes into play.

Caste Dynamics in West Bengal
In this section, I would like to finally deal with the central theme of this paper, that of caste dynamics in Bengal and the effect of partition on caste discourse. In Another History (Bandopadhuyay, 2015), Sabani Bandopadhuyay claimed that from the beginning of 20th century, marginalized caste communities had started to feel that what they needed to fight against was not limited to ritual disabilities but also political and economic disabilities. To fight against the latter two, they realized that without a strong caste-based organization such a struggle could not be brought about. It was from this understanding that BJS was built up in 1922. Its
main focus had been to unify the lower and marginalized castes, to pressurize the colonial regime and the Bengali society by putting forward their demands and finally, but not the least, to fight for their rights. To give a legitimacy to their politics, the BJS played a subversion by appropriating two upper-caste figures, Vivekananda and Gandhi, and claimed that all what they were fighting for, was self-reliance, without which swaraj could not be attained(Bandopadhyay, 2015). It was during this time that the marginalized caste communities realized the need to unite with the Muslim community in Bengal, so as to form a larger pressure group through which they can put their demands for social reforms. The leadership of the anti-colonial movement started to realize that if such a united base started to play its role, then their own interests, which mainly represented the upper-castes elite section, would be put into question. Thus began the process of appropriating the struggle of the marginalized communities into the greater Hindu-fold by various right-wing and conservative groups. In the post-Swadeshi period, we see various efforts by the bhadralok community to build up institutions which would be working under the central effort of Hindu Mahasabha. It was in this way that Bharat Sevashram Sangha(referred to as Sangha henceforth) had been formed by Pranabandhu. Thus began the mission of the caste Hindus of constructing a narrative which would supersede all smaller, contradictory identities based on caste/sect(Bandopadhyay, 2015). For this narrative to gain ground, the Sangha needed an Other and the Muslim community came up for viewing regarding this. It was keeping in mind all of these that the project of building Hindu Milan Mandirs, as a counterpart of the mosque were put forward. Also, by 1935, Rakshi Dal was formed to protect( emphasis mine) the Hindus from the Muslims. Interestingly, this Rakshi Dal comprised of the outcastes. It gave this people a feeling of becoming the defenders of that very exclusionary society from external and internal threats. By 1940, the Sangha had built up 500 Mandirs and was constituted by 30,000 armed volunteers of the Rakshi Dal. The Sangha would indulge itself in social work in order to reconcile the conflict of interests between upper and marginalized castes. They would protect people during times of natural disasters like floods and famines and also from caste-based oppression in villages. The Sangha realised that it needed to strive for material improvement for marginalized caste communities if ir needed to achieve its goal of reconciliation. By doing this, the Sangha reduced the enmity between the upper and the marginalized castes and also increase the divide between the Hindus and the Muslims. In response to this kind of a polarization, the All Bengal Muslim Samity was founded in 1943. Throughout the 30's and 40's, we see various caste-based organizations being built up which have internal differences between themselves regarding the resolution of the caste question(Bandopadhyay, 2015). Some of these organizations shared an alliance with Congress, others with Hindu Mahasabha or All India Scheduled Castes Federation(AISCF) led by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. The Bengal Provincial Scheduled Castes Federation(BPCSF), which was built up in 1943, posed a threat to the organizational work done by the Sangha by preaching for alliances between Scheduled Castes and low-caste Muslims. It was thus from these times that we see a correlation between the occurrence of Pranabananda visiting places to preach his politics and communal riots taking place in the corresponding regions. Thus, in this way, "communal consciousness" and "solidarity" were being built up within the extended Hindu order(Bandopadhyay, 2015). In the 40's, as the question of independence loomed large, BPCSF was being proclaimed as "separatists" by parties from left to right. In this we find the Hindu Mahasabha and the CPI in a similar position. Both posited themselves in saying that the question of independence is prior to social reform. But BPCSF claimed that it is in the interests of foreign capital that the "peaceful transfer of power" was taking place, that the British Empire and the Congress had a symbiotic relationship. The CPI, though it was leading the Tebhaga movement during this time and had huge mass organisations, we see that it misinterpreted the dynamics of class and caste relation in the Indian reality. That the proletariat, or class-for-itself, cannot be founded until and unless identities such as caste and religion remains an obstacle in building up class consciousness. Sarbani Bandopadhyay argues(Bandopadhyay, 2015) that such misinterpretations occurred due to absence of de-classed and de-brahmanized leadership. Hence, the brahminical notions were rooted in the leadership of almost every parties during the 40's and after. It was due to this that the alliance between the CPI and BPCSF could never happen, though they were in theory having same objectives. The CPI proclaimed that the leadership of BPCSF had little understanding of class and hence were dividing the farmers' movement. It was in this situation that Partition took place and consequently, we see huge migration of marginalized castes from West to East Bengal. Thus, in pre-Partition age, we find that the marginalized castes like Namasudras had a big population in the eastern part of Bengal. Likewise in the northern part, there was huge population density of the Rajbanshis. These were the only two marginalized communities who had large base in pre-Partition Bengal and hence, they formed a huge part in the caste-based movements. The organizations formed by them also had divergences within them as they ascribe to an alliance with different mainstream parties who were also opposed to one another. For example, Jugendranath Mandal, leader of the BPCSF, for his belief in Dalit-Muslim unity, made an alliance with Muslim League. Leaders such as Pramatha Ranjan Thakur of The Depressed Classes League, made an alliance with Congress and Birat Chandra Mandal was aligned with the Hindu Mahasabha(Bandopadhyay, 2015). Due to this, the leaders and the organizers of the marginalized castes communities were also divided on the issue of partition. With partition and consequent spatial migration, the very caste discourse got affected due to the scattering of the people from the oppressed castes(Bandopadhyay and Chaudhury, 2015). In post-Partition Bengal, there were refugee movements, which were mainly against the rehabilitation policy. In these struggles, refugee become the prime category of victimhood. In The Decline of the Scheduled Caste Movement, Sekhar Bandopadhyay and Anusua Basu Ray Chaudhury claimed that it was a fact that there was a level of caste discrimination in the refugee camps, however, the "structural compulsions of the struggle for rehabilitation imposed on them a language of unity that could bring all the residents of the camps to the same barricade lines" (Bandopadhyay and Chaudhury, 2015). The two main organizations which played a crucial role in the refugee movements were United Central Refugee Council(UCRC) and Sara Bangla Basthurara Samiti(SBBS). A close study would reveal that these organizations were, to an extent, used for vote-bank purposes by mainstream parties such as CPI and Krishak Praja Party which were instilled with brahminical values to great extents. In Partition and the Mysterious Disappearance of Caste in Bengal, Partha Chatterjee claimed that it was the formation of a middle-class hegemony in the post-Partition Bengal which incorporated within itself all caste/religion barriers that helped to juxtapose the caste question with modern tropes such as social justice and economic class. Also, Sekhar Bandopadhyay and Anusua Basu Ray Chaudhury, in their study, showed that the movement of refugees to different camps was also determined to some level by caste, kinship and religion(Bandopadhyay and Chaudhury, 2015). Simultaneously, Chatterjee shows
that the educated elite class who gave rise to the bhadralok migrated to the city to settle down. Hence, the upper caste hegemony in villages, which were mainly built upon large holdings of land also broke apart. In addition to this, the new generation who were born and brought up in the colony settlements went through the common experience of loss and struggle. The rural experience of communal ties were slowly disintegrating. On the other hand, poor migrants were coming in from Bihar and Orissa, "many of whom were upper caste themselves and who jealously protected their own cultural claims to rural purity" (Chatterjee, 2015). Also the refugee movements led by UCRC and SBBS, brought to the fore modern categories, axes and idioms of protest where caste, separately had no place. Hence, the new generation who were brought up in post-Partition Bengal understood the bhadralok-chhotolok divide in a completely different way. Partha Chatterjee claimed that it was the formation of the bhadra language which, due to the absence of Bengali industrial or commercial capital-owners and also of the upper caste dominance of land holdings, played a crucial role in building up the cultural capital. Although the norms and values of this cultural capital was being determined and constructed by the upper castes, it continued to exercise its dominance over the public and political sphere. I finish this part of the paper by problematizing the notion of empowerment that capital brings with itself. The imaginings by which the marginalized castes are constituted of are very much dictated by the middle-class cultural capital irrespective of the fact that it is due to this capital that they face humiliation everyday. Moreover, the middle-class bhadralok acts as a structural and functional category which ultimately constitutes the civil society. The middle-class in Bengal is a sphere not closed, but open-ended giving a leeway-for an apparent upward social mobility. The middle-class have its own language, its own code of civility, its own norms and regulations much of which are dictated by the upper-castes. But the intrusion of the marginalized castes creates a new arrangement, ignoring which the dynamics of caste in Bengal cannot be understood further. This arrangement is obviously not static, but dynamic, emerging and adjusting itself to a specific space and time. Hence, I would contend that there has been a shift in the process of marginalization in the post-partition period. Although the middle-class' thematic has been brought about by the upper castes elite and give representation to people from marginalized castes, this very process of empowerment is constitutive of the problematic which comprises of the people from the oppressed marginalities, caste being one of the marginal social category of identities. Thus, the intrusions, ranging from participating in social/rights-based movements or securing a higher education degree or involving oneself as a pressure group in mainstream politics are not innocent and at the final analysis, maybe, not against the order of the day. But that the middle-class as a modern space, offers this space of contention, opens up a host of possibilities for the downgraded and the marginalized. It is not that the marginalized castes' people, while they are being empowered, offers a passive response or that they have no subjectivity of their own. On the other hand, their struggle and their way of living has been put to historical manoeuvre. In this way, we can see, how the post-colonial nation-state building up after the peaceful transfer of power and constituting mostly of upper-caste people as representatives, has otherised a section of its own people, thus re-asserting once again Bhaba's claim that the location of nation is always held in temporality.

Fieldwork:
In this part of my work, I would like to ground my theoretical framework through a field work which I carried out in the month of April of 2021 while the Bidhan Sabha Elections in West Bengal were going on at Duttapukur, a place 35 kilometres away from Kolkata and historically relevant in the development of dalit discourse and resurgence in the state. Before describing the field proper, I would like to iterate my understanding regarding caste discourse and how it got enmeshed with the discourse of the middle-class bhadralok concerning social justice and class. This enmeshment, if I may call it, happened, I state, due to Partition. The historical and social effects of Partition, discussed previously had its effect on the political and social organisation and mobilization of the marginalised castes' communities. It also created a new social category called refugees which cut across identities of class and caste, if claims to be taken on account. Thus, in the struggle of the refugees, social justice became an important axis of progressive politics. It is during this time, we see the process of enmeshment taking place on a historical level. Though there were scenes of caste oppression and violence on a daily level, structurally caste as consciousness or identity was being marginalised. In this paper, my contention, as stated earlier too, is to ponder about, whether at all this caste discourse could ever be totally silenced. In the process of incorporating or appropriating caste as an identity, there remained gaps and fissures and hence this process of incorporation is an ever going process and could not be ever dealt with in its totality. In the field work, I have tried to engage with the theoretical position I have situated myself in. Some of the theoretical positions, however, have been modified, some have crystallised and some have stayed unsubstantiated, to put it strictly. I have carried out certain conversations with my respondents, the nature of them fundamentally informal, out of which I have extracted certain bits and pieces, the rest of which, broadly, are out of the scope with regard to this work. I have also listened with intent the narration of my mother's colleague, with whose help I was able to get hold of my respondents. These different narrations of marginalised and upper castes in a space historically affected by partition presents a unique network in which on the one hand, we find the social fragmentations and divisions of the caste order and on the other hand, the greater Hindu identity emerges out. Upon reaching Duttapukur, I went to the house of Mr. Amit Chakrabarty, my mother's colleague, who himself being a very pious man

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beings, all of us are equal and it is only the Brahminical structure that has imposed artificial divisions in the form of castes. I also came to locate the construction of an alternative history which heavily rested on iconoclasm. But can icons be completely torn apart without erecting in their places their counterparts? Thus we see figures such as Raja Rammohan Ray, Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar being opposed to Harichand and Guruchand and the proclamation of the latter couple as being the true social reformers while the earlier ones are being stained for their casteist outlook. Here, one is easily able to locate an alternative sense of modernity at hand which challenges figures of Bengal Renaissance and thus questions the bhadralok discourse of modernity in vogue. Also, in dismantling these conventions, the respondents, at certain points, favoured the Englishmen for trying to spread liberal education among the masses in the process of which men like Vidyasagar acted as an obstacle(according to both Ranjan and Tridib Ray). There is also a process of ancien-tizing Dalit discourse by connecting its history and culture to Buddhist pasts and heritage and in this whole vision of an alternative modernity, the Muslims, according to them, takes a very contested space. Their positions often get blurred as we see history transgressing into mythical narrations. Harichand and Guruchand were being seen by them as avatars and Ambedkar was being hailed for his stand in suggesting a Dalit-Muslim unity. On the other hand, they saw Muslims as the other or else appropriating them in the great Hindu fold with respect to the logic that the majority of the Muslims in Bengal were originally Dalits. Topics concerning eugenics also came into play in their narrations. They stated and this statement, Amit Chakrabarty agreed, that until and unless the Hindus do not focus on family planning, the Muslims, in near future would soon occupy all the top spaces of administration. Interestingly, the fear of Muslims occupying privileged spaces immediately got connected with the fear of another possibility of migration and with it the haunting of Partition came into play.

Conclusion:
In all this, we see caste in Bengal continue to be a site of various contestations but failing to be a subject or an object of discourse. Either the category was encapsulated in the development discourse in the process of nation building or their identity was reduced to economic strata(Bandopadhyay, Basu Ray Chaudhury, 2014). Thus, we are finding in construction of right or left wing political positions, caste as a social category is being completely overlooked and is being treated as archaic/pre-modern (Bandopadhyay, 1994). It seems that there is a returning back to the process which was undertaken by various right-wing social and political organisations with the aim of communalisation and of finding an essence in Hindu identity. Moreover, it is a question of larger debate whether there can be an archaeology of silence (Derrida, 1978). The very emergence of caste discourse in contemporary Bengal and the importance it is achieving from the mainstream political parties of all shades is a curious phenomenon which needs to be addressed and look onto in the future.

Reference: