

## Resonance of Identity in Rajbanshi Poetry

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### Abstract

The recent proliferation of poems in Rajbanshi language in Assam and North Bengal has immense significance as it has become one of the most abiding assertions of the recent historico-cultural awareness of the community. The Rajbanshi language, which is not taught in any educational institution, gains significant status as a hermeneutic tool for cultural expressions as well as a means for the manifestation of the community's political aspirations. This article seeks to chronicle the historical development of the Rajbanshi poems and the tangible contours through which they have evolved into a powerful ethnic literary genre. It also makes efforts to contextualise the growth of the Rajbanshi poetic voices against the backdrop of historical, political and cultural contingencies that have shaped the discourse emerging from the growing political and cultural identity consciousness of the Rajbanshis as a nation.

Key words: Kamatapur, Pratima Barua Pandey, Rai Saheb Panchanan Burma, Kshatriya movement, Greater Coochbehar.

### I

'Poetry addresses the plurality of pain and the awareness of each neighbourly murder forces the poets to burst into songs'<sup>1</sup>, remarked Pradip Acharya, an eminent translator and critic from Assam. The statement becomes pertinent when it comes to finding a road to arrive at the narrative landscape of the Rajbanshi poems. The Rajbanshis in Assam and West Bengal are a peculiar entity with the odd historical compulsions to continually justify their own existence in the respective geo-political contexts of the two territories.

The Rajbanshi historiography has an uneasy legacy of being devolved from being a mainstream chronicle to a fringe narrative. The subordination of the Rajbanshi nation and its subsequent disfiguration as a marginal entity has effectively reduced them into a 'culturally disabled' collective being. In

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case of the Rajbanshi articulations, the aspects that we generally define as folk, assume a complicated semantic dimension, i.e., a politically loaded emotive awareness.

Padmashree Pratima Barua Pandey, the legendary singer of Rajbanshi folk songs, is intimately associated with the unarticulated desire of the Rajbanshis to legitimise their cultural self. The songs she resurrected, with the inspiration of Dr. Bhupen Hazarika, were not mere components of the folk; they, in fact, turned out to be the most powerful tenors for the spatio-temporal reconfiguration of the Rajbanshi identity.

The folk repository of the Rajbanshis is rich. But against the backdrop of the changed socio-political context, the cultural elements no longer remain neutral manifestations of folk innocence. The myths, the familiar images, the landscapes, the folk gods and goddesses, the banal body of the individuals and myriad other assortment of things transform into chronotopic metaphors. In Debesh Ray's *Teeesta Parer Brittanta*, which narrates the life of the Rajbanshis in North Bengal, the naked body of the Rajbanshi protagonist, Bagaru, is symptomatic of how the cultural other is perceived against the sanctified image of the self of the onlookers. For a mainstream Bengali onlooker it seems natural to conceive the indigenous native as a semi-civilized, near barbaric individual against the perceived superiority of their own self. Against such a situation of forced disfiguration, the 'othered' community gets engaged in an exercise of exploring the possibility of self-retrieval. In the process, from the brink of near oblivion, the myths and other intimate cultural ingredients are resurrected, and through their temporal reconfigurations they emerge as abiding artefacts.

Ernest Renan, the nineteenth century French philosopher in his 1882 lecture at Sorbonne, "What is a Nation", famously said that both the past and the present are the two things that constitute the soul of a nation. One he described as the "possession in common of a rich legacy of memories; the other is present-day consent, the desire to live together, the will to perpetuate the value of the heritage that one has received in an undivided form." Rajeev Bhargav in his essay, "History, Nation and Community Reflections on Nationalist Historiography of India and Pakistan" interpreted this as nation's dependence both on "the possession of rich remembrances and on the shared amnesia, a collective forgetfulness." (2000: 193).

The *maishals* (buffalo-herder), the mahouts, the *garials* (bullock-cart puller), the elephants are part of the rich legacy of the Rajbanshi community.

They are not mere references to a folk landscape but also the abiding symbols through which they access and approximate their self. The Rajbanshi consciousness is perpetually haunted by a historiography that is largely preserved in the realms of community memory. Despite a huge historical legacy, the Rajbanshis are smarting under the uncanny pains of ahistoricity.

The Rajbanshis as a nation have been long engaged in a search for a workable historical address informed by their shared emotional legacies. They betray a deep urge to emerge as a nation across the geopolitical boundaries that has divided their cultural territory. This endeavour, in the words of Benedict Anderson, is a 'historically ordained' enterprise of a nation. Anderson locates three temporal junctures of nation's 'historically ordained' rise. One such juncture is when a particular language gains privileged access to ontological truth and attains an inseparable linkage to this. There is a second juncture when society evolves into a naturally organised body around or under a hierarchically superior power centre like that of a monarch who is supposed to have obtained the authority to rule from a shared cosmological disposition reflecting the essential human loyalties for the hierarchical and the centripetal. There is a third occasion when nations rise, that is, at the time when conception of temporality is achieved and *cosmology and history become indistinguishable* from each other (italics mine), the juncture when the origin of man and the world becomes essentially identical (Anderson 1991: 36).

The Rajbanshi consciousness arrogates itself through an experiential geopolitical contingency that assigns meaning to their everyday 'fatalities of existence'. This consciousness is embedded with a strong awareness of a disembodied cosmology and history that used to govern their universe of meaning and space. The distillation of this uneasy awareness keeps haunting the body of the texts that provide tangible contours to the sounds in the emerging narrative of the Rajbanshi poetry:

King's canopy crumbled  
Washing away river's rule  
Religion and culture are like flowing rivers  
Like the way there was once *sati*  
Now gone; reformation in a way

Yet it hardly pleases your heart: old people, old songs  
The heart has its own say: the days of the kings were rather good  
We could have only *arum* roots as food, yet had the soul to sing *Bhawaiya* songs

Days out, and days in,  
This is what Phulti Abo ruefully hums

'Phoolti Abo's Tale' by Phulti Abo. Tr. Jyotirmoy Prodhani

The Rajbanshis, living intimately with their folkways, found adequate expressions in the rich spool of the Rajbanshi folk narrative. But their contingent encounters with the reality beyond their bucolic familiarity and the settled landscape of the memories of their history impel them to invent alternative sites and tools of expressions compatible to organise the anarchic hinterland of their present mind in formal linguistic articulations. Poetry is born out of an imperative to relocate their social self, for they are alert to the processes of a political and a cultural displacement. Or, as Pradip Acharya puts it, 'poetry is born out of the 'plurality of pain':

I beat the drum and it  
Blows like glass  
In search of diverse claims  
The inkpot is veiled  
I feel I know it  
But I don't

I would rather ask  
Who are you  
The whole realm is the clamour crows

'It Shocks' by Hiralal Das. Tr. Pradip Acharya

## II

Modern Rajbanshi poetry has a long history. It dates back to the early twentieth century with the pioneers like Rai Saheb Panchanan Burma whose collection of poems, 'Dangdhari Mao' (Menacing Mother) can be considered as one of the first published anthologies of, what we may call, 'Modern Rajbanshi Poetry'. The birth of modern Rajbanshi poetry seems to have been a palpable linguistic manifestation of a deep sense of agony in sharp contrast to the dominant mood of romantic ease and mystic melancholy of their folk songs – the songs popularised by Pratima Barua Pandey.

Rajbanshi poems betray a perpetual sense of anger and a helpless nostalgia for a seemingly lost horizon that used to nestle their myths and

lores. They relocate themselves as helpless onlookers to the processes that have mutilated the very references of understanding their self, which they so confidently used to refer to as the repository of their community identity and consciousness in their past. The resignation of a clueless nation to this fate makes the alert members of the community livid. Rai Saheb Panchanan Burma's 'Dangdhari Mao' is an enraged mother, restive at the apparent inertia of the able-bodied male folk when their souls are symbolically molested. In fact Panchanan Burma wrote this poem when Rajbanshi women were frequently subjected to sexual atrocities by the goons in Rongpur district during the later part of 1920s. He wrote the song reflecting his anger and the indomitable urge to effectively take on the perpetrators:

The scream startled my menacing mother  
 She spies the ways of life, sheer clamour  
 no doors, no direction  
 father's homestead or of brother's  
 the husband's lap, the few women  
 lecherous ruffians, while the few women  
 daughters and sisters thrown aside  
 forcing the walls  
 the woman holds onto her husband – she is gagged  
 Yet her heart rending wails pierce beyond her clothes  
 Her screams clamour from earth to sky  
 The men-folk just gape and shocked  
 Menacing my mother shouts her anger  
 And rages beyond brandishing the pestel

'Menacing Mother' by Rai Saheb Panchanan Burma

Application of a community language in formal forms like poetry is a remarkably formidable project, for the Rajbanshi language had remained a living heritage outside the ambit of any official patronage in post-independent India. This language seemed to have been without any official warrant for its manifestation in solemn formal discourses. Despite the current linguistic protocol, most of the scholastic investigators had ticked it off as a *dialect*. Some called it a sub-dialect of Assamese or Bengali, mostly the scholars of the respective language groups. Suniti Kumar Chatterjee, Sukumar Sen, and Upen Goswami in Bengal and the scholastic icons like Banikanta Kakati in Assam were the major champions to have identified Rajbanshi language as a dialect/subdialect of Bengali and Assamese languages respectively. There is a parallel school belonging to the scholars of relatively less eminent aura

who claimed Rajbanshi as an independent language. This school of thought includes scholars like Khan Choudhury Amanatullah (author of *Coochbeharer Itihas*), Rai Saheb Panchanan Burma, Gauri Nath Shastri, Upendranath Burman, and more recently Girija Shankar Ray, Dwijendra Nath Bhakat, Ramendranath Adhikary, Girindranath Roy, Mathew Toulman, etc. Despite being a language which is yet to obtain constitutional recognition or become a part of curriculum, the speakers of the language opted for urgent articulations in their own idioms rather than train their voices to express in acquired languages.

There was an early instance of this endeavour of locating the self beyond folk narratives in the works of Ratikanta Das of Itakumari village in Rongpur district of present Bangladesh. He had published a collection of Rajbanshi poems way back in the eighteenth century during the reign of Warren Hastings (1773-1785). Nevertheless, there has been a steady growth of Rajbanshi publications from the late 1950s onwards. In the sixties, Pathik had published a collection of Rajbanshi *Bhawaiya* songs; in the sixties Saat Bhaiya (Seven Brothers) had brought out an anthology of poems by seven poets. In the seventies Tushar Bandopadhyay had published an anthology of Rajbanshi poems – *Aloloi Jhololoi Moderer Phool*. Meanwhile, several collections of poems were published by individual poets. Perhaps the first most significant anthology of Rajbanshi poems was *Rajbanshi Kavita Sankalan* (1996), co-edited by Jatin Burma and Vinod Bihari Burma of Toofanganj in Coochbehar District of North Bengal, which included 50 poets writing in Rajbanshi language in Assam and Bengal.

Translation of the Rajbanshi texts is as much a political act as it is so for the writers who write in Rajbanshi language. This literary activism has the aspiration to graduate from the sphere of the folk to the domain of the modern or the mainstream. The proliferation of the Rajbanshi texts in recent times has been critically instrumental in the gradual prominence of the Kamatapur as well as the Greater Coochbehar<sup>2</sup> articulations. The growth of literature and the resurrection of the folk have been effectively turned into an alternative mode of eliciting legitimacy against the apparent absence of institutionally promoted history. Panchanan Burma's poems 'Dangdhari Mao' (Menacing Mother) written in early 1930s literally began the era of Rajbanshi literature motivated by anger and agony.

The Rajbanshi poetry becomes a major site where the myths are revived through their temporal reconfiguration. The mythic figures translocate themselves as vibrant metaphors to recast their history:

The *maishal* keeps on searching for his herd  
Amidst the alien crowd

.....  
.....

For he has lost his home  
As all his nearer ones have long gone far

‘Lost Lyrics’ by Kasema Khatun. Tr. J. Prodhani

Sites of history become part of a bucolic nostalgia and memory:

Coochbehar, my proud mother  
No one more delicate than her  
Lotus, hyacinth, lilies abound  
On streams and ponds all around  
Plantains and *supari* (areca nut) trees  
Homestead, rows of bamboo like bows

.....  
.....

Time to strum the *dotora* strings  
Sing nostalgic song in full throated ease  
None will shout you down but to you throng

.....  
.....

Like rivers, trees and the earth  
Man seeks man be the hearth  
Day or whatever hour  
You will be fed before you can saunter  
Still are Aliens

‘Coochbehar’ by Upen Ray. Tr. P. Acharya

The Rajbanshis had eminent presence in history following the long dominance of the Koch Kamata kingdom till the sixteenth century. However, in the post independent India the history of the Koch Kamata kingdom vis a vis the Rajbanshis have been reduced to a mere footnote in Assam while in Bengal the history of the Rajbanshis has been entirely deleted from history curriculum. There was politics behind such moves. In Bengal it was strategically effective to displace the Rajbanshis as a nation from their native hearths both culturally and politically. This was perceived necessary by Bengal because, after the forceful annexation of Coochbehar state in 1950 by Bengal, the Rajbanshis were always seen as a potential threat to the political ambitions of Bengal to

have an expanded backyard for its sustenance. The Bengal regime had adopted similar strategies against most other ethnic communities of North Bengal including the Gorkhalis. History is a major tool of contestation between nations. Since the Rajbanshis or the Gorkhalis or other ethnic entities are always seen as Other by the mainstream Bengal, their histories too are systematically erased from the Bengal history text. The Bengal history text, after deleting all ‘disjunctive’ elements as well as the cultural Other, arrives at a narrative that is unproblematic, unilateral and invincibly majoritarian. Proliferation of new texts in the peripheries therefore becomes a contested narrative. In “National Identity and History Writing in Ukraine”, Taras Kuzio writes that when historical writings and interpretations are contested, as they were among the three Eastern Slavic peoples: Russians, Ukrainians, and Belarusians, writing of history makes a direct influence upon national identities (2006: 407). In Bengal the official and the nationalist history merged as one making the two indistinguishable from each other. Rajeev Bhargava noted that the official histories must be distinguished from other nationalist histories because official history is shaped almost exclusively by collective self-interest (2000: 196).

The historical misfortune of the Rajbanshis to have been fragmented into multiple national identities, particularly because of forceful annexation of Coochbehar by Bengal through the shrewd political moves of the erstwhile Bengal Chief Minister, Bidhan Chandra Ray, who demolished the princely state of Coochbehar, which used to be the centre of the Rajbanshi history and culture. This forms an imperative for the Rajbanshis to engage in the enterprise of social and cultural re-signification. Political commentators like Naren Das, Lalit Chandra Barman and others have pointed out how the acceptance of about 16 lakh Bangladeshi refugees in 1949 by the Bengal government and their accommodation in Bengal was one of the vital factors behind the jealous campaign of both Bidhan Chandra Ray of Congress and Sarat Chandra Bose of the opposition party to annexe Coochbehar with Bengal, thwarting attempts to keep Coochbehar a separate state or its merger with Assam with which Coochbehar had historical and cultural proximity. The annexation of Coochbehar in 1950 was followed by the imposition of the state language of Bengal upon the people and the quick removal of all historical references to the Rajbanshis from the official history texts of the state, besides disfiguration of historical and cultural sites of the people, which were the living testimonies of a past of the community beyond the claims of newly adopted official textbooks. Bengal went for forced confiscation of land

documents and rights of the Rajbanshis by imposing land ceiling as part of the dubious land reform drive in Bengal. The Rajbanshis, who sustained primarily on agriculture on the land they had inherited from their forefathers, found themselves virtually landless in no time and became either labourers in the same plot of land which they once owned or had to earn their livelihood by pulling rickshaws or working as maidservants in the houses of the migrants from south Bengal or Bangladesh.

III

After a phase of economic and cultural devastation the Rajbanshi consciousness is trying to rebuild its identity picking on the severed ends of their history and memory. This process, however, creates a mode of identity category. Paula Moya points out the exposition of the organizing principles of the ethnic, which claims that formulations of identity categories do not necessarily devolve into essentialist programme. It rather “provides modes of articulating and examining significant correlations between lived experiences and social locations” (2001: 4). In the process, they underline the need to prioritize the emotional and psychological features, which might seem to be irrational at times in relation to the reformulation of their social identity. Ethnic studies scholar Lola Romanucci, nevertheless, calls this as a justified response (1996).

In this journey from the oral to the written and from folk songs to poetry, the Rajbanshi consciousness encounters and accommodates alien urban realities and the entire contour of these verses transforms and bears testimony to these changing exigencies. It becomes imperative for them to redeem their collective memory of a lost landscape which was their collective belonging. The poems, therefore, manifest the subdued pain and agonies they are smarting from the turmoil of their inner desperations:

Let the sky crush on the earth  
 And the earth crush over the sky  
 I want just this much  
 .....  
 Let the adamant Himalaya  
 Stand up proud  
 And laugh and clear  
 ....  
 I want just this much.

‘I Want’ by Dharma Narayan Burma. Tr. Pradip Acharya

These poems are a body of lyric that inadvertently aim at heralding a change. Change, as an idea, has a threat perception to those who are ensconced in the comfort of certainties. Historically the attempts of dissolving self within the territory of the governing class resulted in further disfiguration and fragmentation of their native identity. The young disjunctives, therefore, to redeem their wounded souls, take up this project of change in earnest. This is the juncture when they embark on the search for their receding address:

No, I don't want anything else  
 The fecund field of my adolescence  
 The green expanse of emptiness  
 .....  
 Give that back to me  
 I don't want anything else, not me.

‘This Land, This People’ by Ramakanta Ray. Tr. Pradip Acharya

The poems essentially take recourse to the folk hinterland and are dominantly engaged in the ritual of reconfiguring the past. This mode is an imperative for a Rajbanshi writer for he is a liminal entity, and such entity is necessarily creative because it has to negotiate with the conditions of perpetual challenges to redescribe itself. It encounters the traumatic necessity of constant recovery in a liminal space of identity, which quite often needs collectivisation:

I beat the drum  
 And it blows as glass  
 In the search of diverse claims  
 The ink pot is veiled  
 I feel I know it  
 But I don't

I would rather ask:  
 Who are you  
 The whole realm is the clamour crows

The postmodern shelves  
 Glow with volumes of isms  
 And the mutuality of ads

I know they are protestants  
 The revolution was there  
 In clenched fists

The indigence of the rushing floods  
Is astounding  
Makes even the Dark Panchali  
Worry and deliberate

‘Atash Nagey’ (It Shocks) by Hiralal Das. Tr. P. Acharya

In the exercise of collectivising identity, individuation becomes a mere coincidental contingency, for there is an urgency to define and defend the collective self. Annihilating the history and language of the ‘other’, acts of disfiguring the sites that could endorse the legitimacy of the micro nations like the Rajbanshis, Gorkhalis, Adivasis, Bodos, and the Rabhas, whose systematic displacement from their geo-cultural spaces and marginalization in the spheres of politics, empowerment and education are part of the strategies that form the discursive feature of the dominant geo-cultural politics in Bengal. Incidentally, the rape of a Rajbangshi woman by the Communist cadres in a small village called Ghoksadanga<sup>3</sup> in Coochbehar district was legitimised by the general secretary of the CPI (M), Anil Biswas, by branding the victim as a ‘Nastha Meye’ (a girl with immoral character), hence she deserved what the party cadre did to her.

Another example of brutal state terrorism and absolute subjugation of the voices of the marginalised entities was the crushing with brute force the initiative of the Adivasis and the Rajbanshis under the banner of UTJAS<sup>4</sup> (Uttar Banga Tapashili Jati O Adivasi Sangathan) in Alipurduar. Against such challenges posed by the communist regime in Bengal, micro nations like the Rajbanshis find it a huge challenge to formulate the idioms of articulations. Against the backdrop of constant erasure they are impelled to reconstitute the lost politico-cultural constituencies. The Rajbanshis have been subjected to uncanny geo-political fragmentations and perpetually marginalised along the peripheries of the new territories of Assam, Bengal, Bihar, Nepal and Bangladesh. Hence, there is constant urge to reclaim the lost spaces and bequeath them to their progenies, thereby absolve oneself from the menacing scourge of guilt and hopeless inertia:

Hey son, come *kido* (young boy)  
Come and hear this, won’t you?  
The gazing lands gone forlorn  
The gardens and the fields the home fronting east

Tied to, attached  
The bonny lass with glowing skin

They are all yours, son  
And yonder river can you see it?  
I am that and no other

Come son, come *kido*  
Here massage my chest  
Can’t you see no one cares  
And I die screaming in pain  
See if you can  
Sprinkle some water  
To make the idler waken

And listen close, and remember  
All these are yours

‘The River of Wishes’ by Ramakanta Ray. Tr. P. Acharya

Rajbanshi texts have a task in hand, i.e., to authenticate its own tongue. There have been intellectual resistances primarily to deflate the exaggerated claims of the books like *The Origin and Development of Bengali Language* by Suniti Kumar Chatterjee, what the Australian researcher, Mathew Taulman described as a programmatic book. The Rajbanshis are making an effort to rediscover their own script by resurrecting the scripts of the texts written mostly during the 15<sup>th</sup> century reign of the Koch King, Maharaj Naranarayan. It may be noted that in comparison to the Rajbanshi literature produced in the Rajbanshi dominated districts like Dhubri, Kokrajhar, Bongaigaon, and Goalpara in Assam the proliferation of the Rajbanshi texts has been considerably high in the districts like Coochbehar, Jalpaiguri and North Dinajpur in North Bengal. They publish regular periodicals, weekly newspapers, even research journals, creative writings, pamphlets, biographies in Rajbanshi as well as translations of Bengali, Sanskrit and English texts into Rajbanshi language primarily because their sense of liminality, like the most other marginalised indigenous nations, has been the most poignant in the Communist Bengal. As a ritual of purgation they are discarding the Bengali /r/ with a dot and the same is replaced with the original /r/ with a diagonal slash, as used in Assamese script despite the fact that the Rajbanshis in Bengal have been conditioned to use the Bengali /r/ owing to the long processes of forceful imposition of Bengali language upon them. As Samir

Chattopadhyay writes:

We still are aliens  
 The thought sets my heart ablaze  
 Stiff are our hands like old bamboos  
 But they say: "we are king's inheritors"  
 We sold all our herds and homestead  
 To beg for alms  
 Like homeless monks  
 Mahajans sucked our bones dry  
 Good old days haunt as we close our eyes  
 Villages are now empty fields, bald cremating ground

Times, they are a changing,  
 Times, they are all new  
 Let a generation sprout in the northern croft.

'We still are Aliens' by Tushar Bandopadhyay. Tr. J. Prodhani

### Notes

- \* Rajbanshis have a dominant presence in West Assam, North Bengal, parts of Eastern Bihar as well as in Southern Nepal and the Rongpur district of present-day Bangladesh. They gained considerable visibility in recent times owing to the variety of emphatic enunciations they have made in connection with their demand for ST status in Assam, movements for their linguistic legitimacy, inclusion of their history in the state education curriculum and more recently owing to their articulation for a separate state in the form of Kamatapur<sup>1</sup>. The Rajbanshi national consciousness evolved through several forms of social movements that eventually graduated into strong political mobilizations seeking more complex set of legitimacies. Their major mobilization as a nation occurred in early 1960s with the onset of Kshatriya movement under the leadership of Panchanan Burma. This was a movement through which they sought to obtain a seemingly respectable social position for themselves in the wake of growing social segregation of the community in West Bengal where the Rajbanhis were looked down upon as the low caste people, the 'untouchables'.
1. Acharya said this at the national seminar held at Dibrugarh University on *Changes and Continuity in the Culture of North East*, on 24-25 March 2006.
  2. 'Kamatapur' is a recent political movement of the Rajbanshis in Assam and North Bengal demanding a separate state by this name bifurcating parts of

Assam and North Bengal, whereas 'Greater Coochbehar' is a movement spearheaded by the Greater Coochbehar Democratic Party under the firebrand leadership of Bongshi Badan Barman who was jailed by the Communist regime and is toiling as an under trial since 2003.

3. Eight CPI(M) supporters had raped a 34-year-old woman at the village of Unish Bisha Thakur Para on July 10, 2001. The local CPI(M) committee was reportedly "putting pressure on the victim to withdraw the police complaint". Allegedly the party leaders had also approached the victim with Rs 7,000 to withdraw the case, but she had turned them down. The CPI(M) zonal committee secretary Narayan Sarkar refused to comment on the matter. A Ghoksadanga police station officer, too, declined to comment. On the evening of July 10, 2001, the eight men accosted the woman at Jayantir *haat* at the Unish Bisha Thakur Para village and took her to a dark corner. "There she was gagged and tied up. Then all the eight CPM men took turns to rape her. She was left there naked throughout the night," a Trinamul leader said, adding that the woman had "walked home naked in full public view" the next morning. The woman was admitted to Ghoksadanga Hospital the next day. She was later transferred to Mathabhanga Subdivisional Hospital, where a medical examination confirmed the rape. (*The Telegraph*, Kolkata Edition, Wednesday, March 12, 2003)
4. UTJAS (Uttar Banga Tapasili Jati O Adivasi Sangathan or Scheduled Caste and Tribal Association of North Bengal), a non-violent dalit activist group formed in 1980s, demanded greater regional autonomy and social justice but it was virtually finished by the CPI(M) armed cadres in connivance with the state police on 10 January 1987 at Alipurduar by attacking the 50,000 strong supporters of the organisation who had gathered there for a rally. The policemen later arrested the victims and with the help of CPI(M) cadres hounded the UTJAS supporters. (See 'Between Nandigram and a party that swears by human rights and lofty democratic ideals lies vast hypocrisy: Party Games' by Yogendra Yadav published in *The Indian Express*, 21 March 2007, p 11, New Delhi Edition).

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