Kulinism (higher social status) refers to marriage of a kulīna girl to a man in the same class as well as marriage to one in a higher class. The essential thing of Kulinism is that a kulīna woman must not have her status lowered by marrying into a group of lower rank.

Kulinism, with all its evils, is now almost on the wane in Bengal, though it was a very popular practice in the 19th and the early 20th centuries. The practice is seen to be continued in a much lesser degree in the present times and certain Brāhmaṇa and non-Brāhmaṇa families (e.g. the Mukhopādhīyāya [Mukherjee], Vandyopādhīyāya [Banerjee], Caṭṭopādhīyāya [Chatterjee] and Gaṅgopādhīyāya [Gāṅgulī] among the Rādhāya Brāhmaṇas and the Ghosa, Vasu, Guha and Mitra among the Kāyasthas) are regarded as endowed with social prestige as kulīna.

In the present work, an attempt has been made to give an account of Kulinism in Bengal. Occasional writings on the subject have, no doubt, appeared in different places, but no systematic study on it has hitherto attracted the attention of scholars. As such, the present study attempts to collect material on the subject and analyse the available data on the same with the help of the writings of different scholars. This work, therefore, seeks to trace objectively the origin and development of a-time-honoured...
The kulapañjikāras state that king Ādiśūra of Bengal brought Brāhmaṇas together with the Kāyasthas to his country and Ballālasena (1159-79 A.D.) introduced Kulinism among their descendants and also among the Vaidyas. Hence, as it appears from the kulapañjikās, the tradition of Ādiśūra is the pivot around which Kulinism devolves. As such, no study of Kulinism can start without a discussion on the said tradition and, therefore, the aforesaid tradition has been dealt with thoroughly in Chapter I. The grounds on the basis of which the historicity of the tradition has been doubted by scholars have been examined. Reference has also been made to the attempt of scholars to identify the Śūra king who is generally taken to be a man of history. Further, on the basis of the material available from the different kulapañjikās discussion has been made in this Chapter on the genealogical position of Ādiśūra, the reasons for bringing the Brāhmaṇas, the date of the advent of the Brāhmaṇas, names and gotras of the immigrant Brāhmaṇas, the place from which they were received first, the condition in which they were seen at the time of reception and places of settlement of the Brāhmaṇas in Bengal. Moreover, the origin of the said tradition has been examined critically in this Chapter.
Chapter II contains an attempt to trace the origin of Kulinism among the descendants of the five immigrant Brāhmaṇas and Kāyasthas and also among the Vaidyas. Here is to be found an analytical study of the theory that Ballālasena should be regarded as the originator of Kulinism, the theories on the source of the origin of Kulinism and also of the view of scholars that Kulinism, at least partially, was borrowed from Mithilā (North Bihar).

Chapter III deals with the development of Kulinism among the Rāghīya and the Vārendra sections of Brāhmaṇas, among the Vangaja and the Dakṣīṇa Rāghīya sections of Kāyasthas and also among the Vaidyas.

In Chapter IV, abuses of Kulinism have been discussed. The practice of Kulinism led to the development of unlimited polygamy, in particular, among the Rāghīya section of Brāhmaṇas. Copious instances of the said polygamy have been collected and referred to in this Chapter. Besides, attention has been drawn to the unusual and mass-marriage, in one common ceremony and at one time, resorted to by the said section of Brāhmaṇas. It has also been shown that sometimes out of sheer economic interest some Brāhmaṇas married again and again. Further, it has been shown in this Chapter that Kulinism was, sometimes, practised as
a mere source of livelihood. Attempt has also been made to show that the practice of Kulinism led to bride-price, besides acting as a cause of suicide by some deserted wives. Moreover, attention has been drawn in this Chapter to the other ignominous evils such as early widowhood, illegal abortion, desertation of wives by husbands, a very early marriage of kulīna girls, dowry system, living of immoral life, etc. All this seems to have greatly vitiated the moral standard of the kulīna Brāhmaṇa society till the 19th century.

Chapter V contains information of an oath taken by some Brāhmaṇas to intermarry among themselves and reaction against the kulīna polygamy as reflected in the contemporary newspapers and appeal to the government to stop it by enacting a law. The agitation against the said polygamy was first started by some Hindus in 1815 and the movement for abolishing it continued through protests in writing from persons like Paṇḍit Iswarchandra Vidyasagar and others who approached the government with petition to put an end to the practice of polygamy by passing an Act. In the last quarter of the 19th century, Rashbehari Mukhopadhyay began to agitate against the kulīna polygamy through writings and by singing sarcastic songs in East Bengal (now Bangladesh). However, Hindu polygamy has been declared illegal by the Hindu marriage Act of 1955.
In our attempt to reconstruct a history of Kulinism in Bengal the sources that have been utilised are kulapanjikas, inscriptions, contemporary newspapers, information gathered from periodicals, biographical sketches, reports of Historical Records Commissions, Archaeological survey reports, travels and commemorative volumes. Further, as mentioned above, writings of earlier scholars published in different journals have also been fruitfully utilised.

While preparing this thesis, it has been seen that sometimes a view has been expressed by a scholar on the basis of a particular evidence without knowing that the same view had been held by earlier scholars utilizing even the same evidence.

Diacritical marks have been used for ancient names only and not for modern names including those of periodicals and books in Bengali.

The present work was taken up at the instance of and with the great Indologist, the Late Professor D.C. Sircar, who, however, later directed me to work under the supervision of Dr. Samaresh Bandyopadhyay, the present Head of the Department of Ancient Indian History and Culture of the University of Calcutta, and wrote a letter introducing me to Dr. Bandyopadhyay. Acting on the late Professor Sircar's advice, I have completed my present
work under the supervision of Dr. Bandyopadhyay who with his usual kindness and great patience has gone through every line of this work and made valuable suggestions regarding additions and alterations which have been incorporated in the thesis with great benefit. In fact, but for the constant help and guidance of Dr. Bandyopadhyay, it would not have been possible to complete the thesis. The late Professor Sircar also had been kind enough to encourage me all through and also to go through certain portions of the work and make valuable suggestions. Unavoidable reasons including that of the death of my father stood in the way of its submission for the Ph.D. degree of the University of Calcutta earlier and in the life-time of the late Professor Sircar.

In collecting the material of the thesis, valuable help has been received from the authorities of the National Library, Calcutta, the Asiatic Society, Calcutta, the Vañgiya Sahitya Parisad, Calcutta, the Library of the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Golpark, Calcutta, the Sanskrita Sahitya Parisad, Calcutta, the Central Library of the University of Calcutta, and the Library of the Department of Ancient Indian History and Culture of the University of Calcutta, and I express my gratitude to every one who has been any help.