2.0. Social Structure and Mobility

It is needless to emphasize that the study of social mobility is fundamental to the study of social structure and relationships. The process, which inhibit and facilitate social mobility play a vital role in constructing and transmitting social inequalities. The factors that affect an individual’s life chances include virtually every aspect of social life-including labour market processes, the family, education, locale, social network, gender, ethnicity and race. Finally, people’s experience of mobility through social space is encoded in their life styles, attitude and actions, both individual and collective. In short, the study of social mobility is central to any social scientific analysis. However since 1945, the study on social mobility was a highly specialized branch of social inquiry.

However, most common approach study of social mobility is class structure approach. But from the end 1970s, in the United States of American mobility research was fragmented into number of approaches. Firstly, White (1970) attempted to remedy the neglect of structure within status attainment research by considering how vacancies, within organization as social factor, lead to enforced mobility as people are recruited to fill the vacant position. Secondly, Granovetter (1974) studied social mobility with the study social network by exploring how the individual’s mobility embedded within the network they belonged. Thirdly, Levine (1990) in his inductive perspective did not conceptualize mobility between the pre-defined categories such as ranked or based on class schema, but grouped people according to similarity of their mobility profiles. Fourthly, leaving aside the intergenerational mobility, it focused on more dynamic approaches more attentive to complex twists and turns as individual can experience in their lives. In the vicissitudes of the aforesaid
perspectives, the study accepts a synthesis of the aforesaid approaches in contextualizing the social mobility in caste based social structure.

2.1. Caste in Social Stratification and mobility

In every society, ancient or modern, democratic or otherwise, the positions which individuals come to occupy vary in terms of power, privilege and status. This has its definite impact on the dialectical interaction among individuals—their social prestige, influence and importance. In Sorokin's phraseology, its essence consists of unequal distribution of rights and privileges, duties and responsibilities, social values and privations, social power and influences. In fact, such differentials act as motive force behind mobility. The fundamental basis of this phenomenon inevitably lies in the manner in which, societies are lacerated into layers and their hierarchical ordering. Thus, primarily social stratification in which various strata are composed and the manner and degree of movements among them is important in contextualizing social mobility that the individual or group experience.

One confronts different philosophical conceptions regarding the above problematic. As for example, one usually comes across much of a juxtaposing of the unidimensional construct of Marx and Engel with the multi-dimensional construct of Weber, Runciman and Sorokin. The former rests on the pedigree of class i.e., place of individuals in the system of production and property relations. While later, in addition to class conception includes status groups and parties (Weber 1968) or power in lieu of parties (Runciman 1966) and economic, political and occupational conception in stratification (Sorokin 1959). Hence, such multidimensional construct provides a social and political dimension to class, which otherwise is an economic construct\(^1\). However, this does not undermine the centrality of economic factor but such multidimensional construct put forth the salience of social and political factors in contextualizing the study and analysis of social mobility, more particularly to Dalit community.
The social stratification not only occurs in terms of assets or property but it also may occur on the basis of caste, gender or religion. Based on their position within the stratification scheme, individuals and group enjoy differential access to rewards. The four-fold caste (Varna) system or more precisely the caste system is associated with Indian cultures, forms a ubiquitously deprecating stratification scheme (Pal 1992). While defining caste, Mitra (1953) espoused ‘to an Indian, the word caste need no definition for he is born in it, dies in it. Thus, any attempt to define ‘caste’ ends in describing the characteristics of caste system, which the particular writer wishes to emphasize. Hence, in the study of social mobility, caste may be considered as a class of community which disowns caste connection with any other class and can neither intermarry nor eat or drink with any but persons of their own community (Nesfield 1885). Hence, the exclusionary principle through which caste operates tends to constrain the intra group movement. Therefore, it is a close system that tends to restrict inter and intra-stratum traffic.

However, Inden and Marriott (1977) suggested that in the socio-anthropological reading the meaning of caste in academia as an ‘institution of ranked, hereditary and endogamous occupational groups’ was actually ‘foreign’ to the way of meaning of caste was understood in South Asia. There is no word in the Indian language that connotes caste in the sense the social anthropologist understands it. The Indian term jati roughly stands for genera or species in its most expansive sense. As they put it, the term is inclusive of elements from both secular and non-secular domains. Such description of jati cannot but exceed the secular, sociological category of caste in European thought. Further even, the terms ‘genus’ or ‘species’ are only rough translation of jati. In India, caste and jati is synonymously used and in this study the word jati bears the same connotation.

Caste system is status principle, containing both structural unit of social stratification as well as a system. It is an autonomous form of cultural system, consisting of institutionalized inequality, closure of social system in respect of social mobility, an elementary level of division of labour legitimized on ritual
basis of reciprocity, an emphasis on quality (ritual or racial purity) rather than performance. An important implication of this view as found in the writings of Desai (1966), Bose (1968) and Davis (1983) that being a structural reality, caste would disappear when society of India evolves to higher level (Singh 1968).

The functional significance is one of the basic features of caste system. In the caste system the relationship is conceptualized as one of the ‘economic interdependence’ resting on the bonds of co-operation, the hierarchies are organically linked in the system. The relationship between the classes is, on the other hand, one of competition or in the Marxian sense hostile opposition. The complexities in the class structure are ultimately expected to be reduced into binary opposition between the two classes, the haves and have-nots. Bailey (1958) therefore distinguish between the two systems of stratification by describing the former as a ‘closed organic stratification’ and later as ‘segmentary stratification’, cooperation and competition being the two principles determining inter-group relationship in the two system.

However, in caste system, if there is any cooperation at economic level, it was more imposed than voluntary, as was also the acceptance of the cultural attributes of rank and of social roles indicated by it. The ‘co-operation and interdependence’ would appear as acts of subordination and compulsion, not of violation and therefore products of specific relations of power. This becomes possible as in most cases there was a close correspondence between the secular and ritual ranks of individuals; the class situation in Indian society according to some scholar are often expressed itself through the religious idioms of caste; or one could find class content in caste forms. According to Ambedkarite perspective, castes were ‘enclosed classes’ and in the sense it is even worse as it restricts mobility or dynamic social interactions.

The proponents of structural functional model consider since caste is an ideal type of stratification system, it could exist forever, either alone or in co-existence with other form of stratification. Dirks (2002) argued that caste has
always been a political—it had been shaped in fundamental ways by political struggles and processes. Omvedt (1994) discerned Indian caste feudalism was consolidated through an alliance of Brahmanism and State power. Colonial rule used this caste structure, transformed it and to a large extent strengthened it to its own benefit. In other words that secular power is the final arbiter of caste. Hence caste may therefore be defined as cultural construction of power. As cultural construct, it tended to continually change to reflect the actual relation of power in Indian society, even though colonial rule changed the context within which these power relations were located. (Bandyopadhyay 2004)

The contemporary theoretical concern of caste based social stratification has been categorized into—Structural functional, Structuralist, Structural historical and Historical materialist or Marxist. There is considerable debt over theorizing caste as structural or cultural and universalistic and particularistic phenomena. Since the topic has its own geographical limitation, therefore both the structural-particularistic and cultural-particularistic approach of caste system have been used, which would be useful in focusing on the structure and process of social mobility in West Bengal.

Leach (1960) instead of offering the definition of caste has only identified five distinctive features of caste system, such as hierarchy, endogamy, hereditary occupation, untouchability and restriction of commensality. Deliege (1993) espouses untouchability as denial of control of the means of production perpetuating the permanent state of economic dependence. But, Shah et al. (2006) find three institutional constituents of caste system, namely, hereditary (as one inherits the caste of one’s parents), closed (because intermarriage and often sharing of food is prohibited), systematic (as it is interrelated structure in which each caste is linked to all other parts). Generally, three explanations are offered for emergence and continuation of caste system, such as racial theory, religious theory and economic theory. The ideal society as expounded by Brahmanism is based on denial of individual liberty and preaching of graded inequality (Kamble
The ‘Chatur Varna’ division of society is synonymous to class division, a social division of labour (Sardesi 1986). Therefore caste is not merely a principle of social division but also a comprehensive system pervading all aspects of life dealing with food, marriage, education, association and worship (Ghurye 1969).

Unlike Adivasis, Dalit have always been an integral part of the dominant culture, society and economy, but placed firmly at the bottom, below the ritually sanctioned ‘line’ of pollution. The Hindu theology-the notion of Karma (duty) and the Dharma (moral code), has further reinforced the hierarchical caste system. Since deprivation of Dalit is closely linked with the process of caste and ethnicity based exclusion, therefore it is imperative to discuss such deprivation to understand the concept of social mobility in general and the trajectories of social mobility various castes among Dalit, in particular, which is seen as causative factors for the deprivation of these groups. Bailey found caste as an exclusive, exhaustive and ranked group system, which is closed and relation is organized by summons of roles; cooperate and does not compete without any necessary connection with Hinduism. Whereas, Dumont (1972) argued that caste is a stable and powerful social system presenting a value system necessarily connected with Hinduism. In the present study, caste based social mobility has been examined in combination of above two approaches.

### 2.2. Dalit-A New Identity

Throughout the recorded history, the lowest tier of Hindu society has been variously called roughly describing their social status. Since, they said to have not born from the body of Brahma; they are called Avarna or Panchama (the fifth) or Antaja. As their social status is low and is considered despised or impure so they are called Aspisya (untouchable) or Pariah or Atisudra. The name itself describes the extreme form of exclusion they experience. Chandal is contemporary opprobrious term, whose social commensality is severely restricted as could be traced in the historical account of Fa Hien of fourth century A.D. Again, based on their occupation, they were variously called as Muchi or Chamar in Bengal, Bihar
and Uttar Predesh, Hadi or Bhangi in North India, Mahar in Maharasthra, Kanjar etc. During the late nineteenth century to early twentieth century to assert their ontological existence, these lowest tier of Hindu society started mobilizing by forming Adi Dravida, Adi Hindu, Adi Andhra etc. movements. Similarly, Chandal of Bengal recognizing them as Namasudra started mobilization for their emancipation.

Gandhi, while working for the emancipation of untouchables, called them as Harijans, son of Hari (another name of Vishnu), which is now considered patronizing or condescending. The term appears to be disgraceful for its necessary connection with Hinduism. In Hindi Harijan means a boy whose father’s name is unknown, hence ‘children of God’. In Hindu temples, there were the devdasis, the girls who took part in worship ceremonies and served the priests. Sometimes they gave birth to children and these children were called ‘Harijans’ (Isaacs 1965). Calling someone as Harijan is now punishable offence in India. However, the term had been used by the medieval philosopher Ramanuja, who uplifted many backward castes or untouchables, called them as Thirukulattar or People of Holly clan. In the 1931-Census, such untouchable castes had been described as ‘depressed classes’. Ambedkar vehemently contesting the term Harijans first used the term Dalit5 (Ganguli 2005). The word ‘Dalit’ is a Sanskrit term with Hebrew origin meaning the oppressed or broken or both, which gained wide usages with the anti-caste movement of ‘Dalit Panthers’ in 1970, similar to Black Panthers of North America. It has acquired a new cultural connotation meaning ‘those who have been broken, ground down by those above them in deliberate and active way’ (Zelliot 1978). Zelliot (2005) further clarified that Dalit is not caste.

‘He is man exploited by the social and economic traditions of this country. He does not believe God; re-birth, soul, holy books teaching spiritualism, fate and heaven because they have made him slave. He does not believe in humanism. Dalit is symbol of change and revolution’ (Gangadhar Pantawane cited in Zelliot 2005, p. 268).
Its’ meaning has thus shifted from simply describing a condition to identifying a process and a set of social relations (Shah et al 2006). Hence, the term does not merely express identity-a sense of who the Dalit are but conveys their aspiration for change (Guru 2001). Despite of preference in using the term-scheduled castes by National Commission for Scheduled Castes, in the present study the term Dalit is preferred to share the aforesaid contention for change. Based on the context, the word Dalit is either used to mean individual caste group or jati or to denote conglomeration of individual caste group or jati who are constitutionally called as scheduled castes. It is used for both a singular and plural.

2.3. Contextualizing Caste in West Bengal

The rigors of the caste system, as prevalent in the heartland in Aryan Civilization, were not strict in Bengal (Mitra 1953). This was mainly because of the late beginning of the process of Aryanization and simultaneous existence of a more liberal indigenous tribal culture, which constantly interacted with the orthodox Varna culture and diluted it, even after establishment of an Aryan State in the fifth century A.D. The dominance of Brahmanical religion was further contested by Buddhism under such ruling dynasties such as Palas between the eighth and the twelfth centuries, the Kambojas of the northern and eastern Bengal in the tenth century and Chandras in the eastern and southern Bengal between tenth and twelfth centuries. However, during the Sen-Barman rule in eleventh and thirteenth centuries, with the resurgence of Brahmanism, the Varna social organization was formalized into rigorously structured by a number of orthodox smritikaras, including the Sen King Ballala Sen himself, who is known for introducing kulinism as another from of social differentiation. In the thirteenth century, when Islam began to spread in the frontier regions of Bengal, peasants residing at the periphery of the Varna society adopted it as the religion of the plough, rather than as an emancipator ideology breaking the bonds of caste. Later in the fifteenth century, the Bhakti movement offered a platform, where the highest and the lowest might stand with equal right. But during fifteenth-sixteenth
century, the age of Navyasmriti under the influence of the dominant Gaudiya Vishnava tradition became more orthodox. But Sahajya Vaishnava cults under non-Brahman gurus successfully interrogated caste hierarchy in eighteenth century.

Pre-colonial Bengali society, in other words, was never so rigidly structured or hopelessly immobile as textualized by some of the conservative mediaeval smritikars. However, Roy (1966) conclusively showed that since the Gupta period as a settled agricultural economy expanded in Bengal, the linkages between caste and class become more visible, with those providing physical labour loosing status to those who refrained from it, but controlled land such as the Brahman, Kayastha and Vaidya, the three traditional uchajati of Bengal7. Sanyal (1981) argued that occupational specialization, not just ritual differentiation, helped in caste formation in the pre-colonial Bengal through a constant process of fission and fusion. So, Bengali Hindu society permitted occupational mobility in keeping with the changes in the opportunity structure. Breaking new wasteland, technological innovations or commercial successes resulted in social mobility that could be incorporated into structure of the society. Although, such castes were closely knit together in the system of co-operation and interdependence. Sanyal (1981) argued the high ritual ranks of the upper castes were related to the material power and prosperity.

Inden (1967) argued that the central role played by the king in maintaining proper order’ in a caste society, where performance of the appropriate codes of conduct or jatidharma determined the rank of each group. Where deviations took place and new castes emerged through improper mixing of bodily substance, it was only the king, acting on the advice of the Brahmans, who could legitimize such a disorderly situation by accommodating the new groups in hierarchy. But the caste system, in other words was never been static or ‘rigid’ system of stratification to be distinguished from the class system, which is supposed to be ‘fluid’. Indian caste society, as Lynch (1968) argued always maintained a
‘dynamic equilibrium’ between ritual and secular status. Discipline and order in pre-colonial Bengali society were thus maintained through this power structure of the Raja-Pandit nexus.

However, such Raja-Pandit nexus continued into the early colonial period, but gradually started replacing by its more modern variant, a new institution called dal (social fraction). The dals having network stretching from Kolkata into interior province performed the same functions of social control as the older samajas, with their reach now being regional rather than local or territorial as in the olden days. Advised by the knowledgeable Pandits, the powerful dalapatis, many of whom are wealthy Zamindars or new rich of Kolkata, exerted an informal yet substantive control over the realms of caste rules and customary laws. The colonial courts were seldom antagonistic to this authority. As the colonial state tolerated such indigenous focuses of power, they continued till the end of the nineteenth Century and gradually with the development of the capitalist economy, such network of relationship started breaking down.

In colonial Bengal, accesses to higher professions or greater opportunities in life were restricted only to the upper stratum of the society, constituted by the three higher castes of Bengal-Brahman, Kayastha and Vaidya. In other words social mobility as generated by the colonial rule was nevertheless very restricted (Mukherjee 1958). The caste system continued into the colonial period not only because the early colonial administrators patronized Brahmanism for their political benefits, but such system could dovetail itself into the new economic structure under British rule. Mukherjee (1970) combining class and caste espoused the three fold classification of rural colonial society, such as (a) the pre-colonial ‘usurper castes’, who previously lived on taxes and tributes moved into new Class-I of the wealthy ‘landholders and supervisory farmers’, (b) the former ‘producing castes’ fitted into new Class-II of the ‘self working artisans, peasants and traders’ and (c) the previous ‘serving castes’ could find place only at the bottom as a Class III of the sharecroppers and agricultural labourers.
The class based patterns of social stratification of advanced capitalist societies cannot fully explain the values of social interaction govern the relationship with Bengalis with Dalit. Nor are the rules based solely notion of purity and pollution could explain it. Most of the Indian social scientists emphasized on the inter-linkages of class and caste, kinship and family systems. But in Bengal, there is yet another notion in organizing society. Though the cultural dictum does not remain static but an understanding of the cultural milieu is essential for the analysis of the social mobility of Dalit. It is constructed through their interaction with dominant Bengali culture. The specific cultural pattern that guides the mode of inter-group behavior of people of West Bengal is the great divide of bhadralok (respectable people) and chotolok (lowly people) (Sinha and Bhattacharaya 1969). Here, the word chotolok is used rather as a cultural term denoting scheduled castes. The elites of Bengal use this term to express their superiority. This term is used in this text with the intension to portray their daily humiliating existence in the mainstream society.

Bhadralok (bhôdrolok, literally ‘well-mannered person’) is a Bengali term used to denote the new class of ‘gentlefolk’, who arose during colonial times (approximately 1757 A.D. to 1947 A.D.), drawn from the upper caste pre-colonial Bengal. The term is multivalent but means most of all ‘respectable people’. The bhadralok were distinguished by their refined behavior and cultural taste, but did not necessarily possessed substantial wealth and power. A major characteristic of bhadralok came to be their aversion to manual labour. The term so far has had a somewhat ambivalent legacy of definition. It has been denoted variously as a class in the Marxist sense (Mukherjee 1970), a status group in the Weberian sense (Broomfield 1968), and even as a ‘mere category (Ghua 1978). This problem of definition is tied to a subjective historiography. Sarkar (1999) identified a near precise analysis of the constituent elements of the definition. In their own perception this was a ‘middle class (madhyasreni, madhybitta), Bhadralok world which situated itself below the aristocracy’ but ‘above the lesser folk’ engaged in
manual labour and distinct from the lower castes or Muslim. A hierarchy of elite emerged through the operation of ‘dals’. Mukherjee (1970) grouped them into ‘Abhijat Bhadralok’ and the ‘Madhyabito Bhadralok’.

Combining the class and caste, Bose (1986) found a tripartite system of social division in rural Bengal, which he termed ‘demnse labour complex’. It consists of a few major landowners i.e. ‘bhadralok’, often of high or at least clean caste at the top, a broad section of owner cultivator or ‘chashi’ i.e. Mahisya, Sadgop and Aguri etc at the middle and a large number but not the majority of landless labour or ‘majur’ or ‘chotolok’ mostly low castes i.e. Bagdis, Bauri, Namasudra and tribal people at the bottom. Ruud (1999) in his typical urban centric view classified the rural world into two social groups, i.e. bhadralok and chotolok, which is vastly oversimplified. He emphasized on the social differentiation among the part of the population ranked below the landlord classes. The distinction between the chashis and that of ‘chotolok’ becomes particularly clear in Rajat Ray’s readings of Tarashankar Bandhopadhyay’s novel, set in Birbhum district in the early decades of twentieth century. Roy (1992) found tripartite system of social division with distinct emotional patterns. The romanticism of the bhadralok is contrasted with the frugal restraint of the chashis, which again contrasted with the abandon of chotolok. In Bandhopadhyaya’s novel the life style of chotolok has been portrayed with few eating inhabitations, practiced extensive commensality, drinking heavily had a defiling caste occupation. Economically, they were poor and dependent and entangled in endless webs of debts and patronage.

The outstanding feature of social interaction in contemporary Bengali society is that people interpret an outwardly poverty stricken appearance with being chotolok, indicating the ambiguity and changing nature of bhadralok culture itself. In Nadia, the Dalit experienced the contempt and disdain of some bhadralok due to their poverty rather than their caste, which a priori defined and demeand them as chotolok (Ganguly-Scrase 1995). Needless to say, the Dalit
have come to occupy a lowly position, which had its origins both in the pre-modern and the contemporary system of social stratification. They were illiterate and their religious beliefs were of a world of spirits of dead and animals of ghosts and erratic way of wrathful and vengeful Gods. Liberal sexual mores of *chotolok* has been contrasted with frugality of *chashis*. Sexual favours could not be sold freely to anyone with money only to the Babus and ‘Mandals’ of the locality. Roy (1992) argued that the sexual mores specifically pertaining to women were central to perceptions of caste ranking and construction of subjectiveness within the larger construct of ritual hierarchy.

Now a day consumption of material goods has become an important determinant of status. Conceptually, this reinforces the transition from the emphasis on refined behaviors to focus on material wealth. At the same time, although economically the *bhadralok* have declined, they maintained their ideological dominance in West Bengal. The over all behavior of the *bhadralok* may be explained in terms of Bourdieu’s notion of a ‘legitimate culture’ that is the process by which the dominant classes and class fractions seek to universalize their cultural tastes, language and bodily representations (Bourdien 1984). Thus, Ruud (1999) espoused that *bhadralok* and *chashi* functioned as the models for cultural reform processes. The *chashi* was stereotypically a sturdy cultivator of his own lands, frugal, morally upright and conscientious in his religious observance.

2.4. Dalit Composition in Nadia

In Nadia district, 29.66 per cent of total population is Dalit. In terms of the concentration of Dalit population, Nadia ranked 5th position among the districts in West Bengal9. Out of 59 scheduled castes enumerated in West Bengal, 57 castes were enumerated in Nadia district in census 2001. Among the Dalit, Namasudra represents the second largest Hindu caste in Bengal, constitutes 59.34 per cent of total Dalit population of Nadia district. Next to Namasudra, Bagdi, the second populous caste, shares 7.70 per cent of Dalit population followed by Jhalo Malo (7.20 per cent) and Chamar (6.92 per cent). In exploring the trajectories of social
mobility among Dalit, Namasudra, Bagdi and Chamar caste, having distinct behavioral patterns and social locations, are studied. The caste Jhalo Malo is consciously excluded in the study, as their social and behavioral pattern is similar to that of Bagdi caste. Among the three castes, Namasudra has had a history of mobilization during colonial period. Now, a brief of ritual, social and political locations in modernist perspective of those castes would help in contextualizing the study.

Namasudra represents the second largest Hindu caste in Bengal and the largest group of Hindu agriculturists in its eastern districts. They are numerically dominant in Nadia. According to Risley (1891), Namasudra is a non-Aryan caste of Bengal engaged for the most part in boating and cultivation. In Manu Smriti, the Chandals are depicted as the ‘lowest of the mankind’-as out castes and helots of the society. The description hardly applies to the Bengali Namasudras, who are for the most part peaceful, hardworking, cheerful cultivators. Some are shop keepers, traders, carpenters and a considerable number now follow the various so called learned professions (Mitra 1953). Prior to 1947, almost 90 per cent of Namasudra lived in East Bengal. A substantial chunk of Namasudra population migrated to Nadia district. In this district, the Namasudra population increased to 72,179 in 1951 census from 26,891 in 1941. Subsequently, in 1960s and 1970s, especially after the Bangladesh war of independence in 1971, Mujibur Rahman’s assassination in 1975 and Zia-ur-Rahman’s coming to power, the fear of communal violence drove low caste Hindus, who had remained in East Bengal, to sought refuge in West Bengal. During this period, in 1971, the Namasudra population increased to 2,33,941 in Nadia district. Thus an organized and cohesive community got fragmented and lost its strength10.

In 2001 census, Bagdi constitutes 7.70 per cent of Dalit population. Bagdi population steadily increased from 1872 to 1901. In 1872, Bagdi population was 35,576, which increased to 40,054 in 1931 but reduced to 36,536 in 1951. The traditional occupation of Bagdi caste are fishing, cultivation, palanquin-bearer etc.
and in caste precedence, they rank very low, being in the last group but Gait remarks of them ‘this caste gave its name to, or receive it from, the old division of Ballal Sen’s kingdom know as Bagri, or South Bengal. Oldham is of opinion that they are sections of Mal community who accepted life and civilization in the cultivated country as serfs and coreligionists of Aryans’. The distribution of Bagdi is very local, their habitat being practically confined to the Burdwan Division and two of the adjoining district of Presidency Division.

While describing the behavioral pattern of Bagdi caste, Ruud (2003) espoused that they filled the roles of the fighters and recalcitrant subordinates to one or the other village leaders. They were known for their active interest in village politics, which helped them in enrolling themselves as local vigilantes of CPI(M), subsequently they were also enrolled themselves in contending political parties such as INTUC, INC, AITMC etc. Bagdi take pride in calling themselves by their caste. Though, they are poor and low caste in contemporary social parlance and until recently they were considered dirty and uncivilized. In the phase ‘We are Bagdi’, their ethnocentric identity seems to clear. In fact, the Bagdi in general as group does not feel shame in hiding their jati identity as would otherwise have benefited an untouchable community at the bottom of the ritual hierarchy. On the contrary, they are portrayed in oral history as proud and defiant towards others, as fierce and quite willing to live up to all the stereotypes about them. These were stereotypes about darkness, wildness and violence-for this they were feared for their badmaisi (mischievousness). They were known for their fight, steal and drinking habit. Even among the British they were known to be fierce and warrior like and at least one report termed them ‘criminal caste’ although they were never officially branded as such. Not all Bagdis are mischievous some also adopted bhadralok values in their life style.

Chamar or Charmakar, a tanner caste of Bihar and Upper India found in all parts of Bengal but were no where numerically dominant. In 1872, Chamar population was 57,375 in Nadia, which dwindled to 31,877 in 1931 and 23,359 in
1951. Whilst the name Muchi had been widely used all over the Indian sub-continent to refer to those associated with leather works, the ‘Samsad Bengali Abhidan’ refers to the word ‘Muchi’ as Charmakar or Chamar, meaning ‘someone who removes or detaches causes to come away or to come off’ (Fagan 1979). The ‘Muchi’ is derived, according to Crooke (1896) from Sanskrit mochica. Muchis were doubtless originally a branch of the Chamars though they claim to be distinct caste of somewhat higher position. They do not eat carrion and their touch is considered less defiling than Chamar. However, Risley (1891) classified Muchi-Rishi as the Bengali Charmars, who tried to pass incognito as Rishi, added this last name to their caste occupation. Wise and Risley seem to follow Dalton (1872), who maintained that Muchi belonged to Bengal and Chamar to Bihar. As a result, although they repudiated the name Chamar, Rishi and Muchi are synonymous of the same caste (Zene 2002). Many of them are by creed Sri Narayanis. Both infant and adult marriages are in vogue. Widows are permitted to marry again and divorce is allowed. In Bengal they have no Brahman priest, one of their elders serving as such. They are divided into barabhagia and chotobhagia. The barabhagia sect abjures beef and served by the degraded Brahmins. The chotobhagia sect eats beef. Most of them eat pork, foul and also dead animals. The Chamar of the study area belonged to chotobhagia. Their position in society is one of the lowest. The Chamar women are engaged as midwives in eastern Bengal. Chamars in their settlement were engaged in the tanning of hides, a ritually unclean profession. Usual occupations are tanning, making shoes, sandals, drums and baskets. They also act as musicians on festive occasions. Chamar, at present are in myriad varieties of occupations. A large proportion of daily laborers are forced to resort to other jobs since workers are not needed in agricultural fields. The same is true for musicians, who depend on the religious festivals and marriages for income. Given these cases, the proportion of those working at least part time, as Kuli or with leather (skinners, cobblers, traders etc.) is higher than as shown in statistics.
In the census 1871, 57,375 Muchi-Chamar registered in Nadia district which now increased to 94,580 as per census 2001. Unlike other low caste Hindus, the partition of Bengal did not seem to cause their migration from Bangladesh in Nadia and with all conjectures it attributed to their traditional caste occupation found more acceptable in East Pakistan\(^1\). In fact, in this district, the Chamar population decreased to 23,359 in 1951 census from 28,829 in 1941. But this does not mean, partition did not affect them. Though their association with Gandhian social reformers the Chamar were drawn closer to Bengali culture, in particular the dominant culture of the *bhadralok*. Their ideal lies in their submissiveness.

The three castes Namasudra, Chamar and Bagdi constitute 73.96 per cent of Dalit population. However, the details caste composition is shown in Appendix-III and their caste ranking, claims and ritual status are shown in Appendix-IV.

2.5. Social Mobility and Classificatory Schemes

Human societies are divided into various hierarchically arranged social strata. This has definite impact on the dialectical interaction among the individuals, their social prestige, influence and importance. Individuals or groups are normally engaged in endless endeavor to enhance their statuses, move from lower position to higher position and vice versa. Simplistically, such movement across the strata constitutes social mobility, which Sorokin (1955) defined as transmission of an individual or social object or value-anything that has been created or modified by human activity-from one social position, such as economic, political and occupational to another. In caste stratified society, such definitions become problematic more so in case of upward mobility as it becomes meaningful only when the consequent change of social status is accepted by the larger society more particularly by the peers in new stratum. But in caste based society, such social acceptance of achieved status of neo-mobiles by the larger society is seriously limited. Lipset and Zetterberg (1970) viewed social mobility
as shift and ranking occupations, consumptions, social power and social class composed of individual accepting each other as equals and qualified for intimate association. Their view appears to be more amenable to understand social mobility in caste based society. But qualifying for equal treatment and intimate association alone won't suffice our need. It is also crucial that the mobile individuals are accepted and accorded due respect befitting their newly acquired positions by their subordinates in the official hierarchy and the larger public outside, irrespective of their caste status. This may be termed as social acceptance. Suitably modifying the aforesaid view, Prabhash (2001) described social mobility as a positional shift of individuals in the social, economic, occupational and political structures in such a manner that the new incumbents qualify for social acceptance irrespective of their caste or ascribed ties.

However, based on changes in position in social hierarchy, direction and time span, the term social mobility has been further particularized. Sorokin (1955) classified it into horizontal and vertical social mobility. Horizontal Mobility means movement within the same stratum and level with hardly any ups and downs in status. Contrariwise in vertical mobility involves transition of an individual from one social stratum to another. Caplow (1964) defined social mobility as movement of individual upward or downward with a gain or loss social rank. Parenthetically speaking, it may be noted that it is Vertical mobility and its various forms which are important than horizontal mobility. On the basis of the time involved, social mobility has been classified into inter and intra-generational mobility. Again, based on direction and units involved, several typologies describing social mobility have emerged. Four types of mobility are commonly identified, namely, ritual, secular, contest and sponsored (Prabhash 2001). Ritual mobility is often initiated through group efforts aiming at a higher ritual position or rank in a society, where ritual status forms one of the important criterion of social stratification. Secular mobility, on the other, is movement in public sphere, particularly educational occupational and political and deals with
the exercise of state power. Turner (1969) distinguished mobility in the term of contest and sponsored mobility. Lynch (1968) pointed out that political participation as an important channel of this type of mobility. When mobility is the product of open competition between individuals it becomes Contest mobility. The contest is judged to be fair only if all players Compete on an equal footing and victory here is solely by one's own effort. Under sponsored mobility, however, competitiveness as well as own efforts are at a discount. Here, the mobiles are chosen and sponsored by the established elite. Recruitment of Dalit and other backward classes (OBCs) to the Government service under the Indian Constitution also, in a sense, belongs to this category as they enjoy the sponsorship of the State in the form of reservation. Further, two other classification as coined by Tumin et al (1965) and Sharma (2006) are being progressively adopted in analyzing social mobility. In correlation with parental status and their progeny, Tumin et al (1965) classified social mobility into four categories, namely, high stationeries (high social status children having high status of fathers)-horizontal, upwardly mobile (high social status children having low status of fathers)-vertical, downwardly mobile (low social status children having high status of fathers)-vertical, low stationeries (low social status children having low status of fathers)-horizontal. Sharma (2006) concentrating on downward mobility, classified it into general decline (total decline of a unit of society-individual, family etc.) and domain specific (decline of a unit of society-individual, family etc. in a particular aspect-economic, occupation etc.). Domain specific decline as the one to affect the depressed classes very much since all their attempts at mobility in caste hierarchy are frustrated by the forward castes consequent to which they lose their traditional occupation and find themselves in a state of unemployment. The both were further divided into structural decline and positional decline. The classification finally ends with the division of structural decline into primary structural decline (radical change which may be due to pressure from above, for example, from the threat of war by a big power
and or from elites and reformative policies or pressure from below, for instance, a Maoist revolution) and secondary structural decline (indirect and immediately less effective changes to which individuals and groups are exposed).

2.6. Process of Social Mobility

Besides typologies, the processes of the social mobility in caste structure differ widely. Theoretically, there were only two obvious means of improving status. ‘One way was by opting out of society and becoming an ascetic. The other was by ensuring rebirth in higher social status [caste] in one’s next life...’ (Thapar 1974). The two extreme poles of hierarchy were said to be rigid, and mobility, both upward and downward, was possible only among the middle ranked castes (Bailey 1963). Despite of close system, limited degree of mobility in caste structure is evident (Pannikar 1955; Thapar 1974). The important channels of social mobility during the ancient period were (i) Sanskritisation (ii) conversion to Buddhism, Jainism and other heterodox sects, (iii) migration and (iv) renouncing the world and taking to the life of mendicant and preacher. The Dalit along with other lower castes took the advantage of various available avenues both at individual and corporate levels, on a limited scale during this period.

In medieval period, two additional avenues such as conversion to Islam and the Bhakti cult opened up to Dalit (Stein 1986). However, such conversion did not benefit much except a ‘psychological revaluation’ for them (Ansari 1960; Ahmad 1978). The Bhakti movement provided another avenue of social mobility for the Dalit along with others. But an overwhelming majority of them continued to suffer from traditional disabilities and deprivations during the medieval period.

The establishment of colonial rule not only opened up some new avenues of social mobility, such as new economic opportunities, education, westernization, conversion to Christianity and politicization but also quickened the traditional process of mobility through Sanskritisation. Some of the Dalit jatis such as Nadars of Tamil Nadu, Mahars of Maharashtra and Jatav Chamars of
Agra in Uttar Pradesh benefited economically from the exigencies of the British rule and became upwardly mobile by taking new economic opportunity successfully (Hardgrave 1960, Patwardhan 1973, Lynch 1968). Further, caste census gave a fillip to the process of Sanskritisation. Many Dalit *jatis*, such as Jatavas and Nadars claimed higher status in the caste hierarchy. But such emulation earns the upper caste wrath and often violent antagonism. Westernization also brought changes in society and culture. The upwardly mobile Dalit adopted the life-style implied in Westernization. Conversion to Christianity provided an additional avenue of social mobility to the Dalit, which was prompted by the hope of improvement in social status through education, health facilities, job opportunities and financial support provided by the Christian missionaries. In pre-independent India, the leaders who helped for social change can be classified into reformists, nationalists, reformist-nationalists and revolutionaries. The reformist believing the social reforms a priory to national freedom and had their roots in various ‘*Samajis*’ and Missions. But their movement could not generate fully a sense of reorganization and restructuring of Hindu society or of the Hindu society as a whole. These efforts left the core of the traditional beliefs practically intact. Rajasekhariah (1971) argued that the reformist movement, therefore, remained essentially as fringe movements. The second trend was generated and advanced by the nationalists, agglomerated from the diverse social backgrounds. Their major concern was the transfer of political power and social reforms in their strategy were to be carried out later. Tilak, Gandhi and Nehru were pioneers of this trend of change. The third trend was led by Ambedkar and his supporters including the Maharaja of Kolhapur, who put both the issues of social reform and transfer of power together and laid major emphasis on the former. Through bitterly criticized by the nationalists, they fought for social reform as well as for a share of the deprived people in the existing power first and freedom from British imperialism afterwards. The fourth trend, i.e. revolutionary activities, was led by those who believed in an overall change in the structure and functioning of Indian
society to be brought about not through negotiation but with revolts and violence against British imperialism. Ambedkar laid emphasis on horizontal mobilization of the Dalit and made them a political force to reckon with. He emphasized secular avenues of politics, education and administration for social mobility of the Dalit. In Bengal, the Namasudra movement and Rajbangsi movement are the culmination and continuation of such process (Bandyopadhyay 1997).

2.7. Pattern of Social Mobility

In post-independent India, Patwardhan (1992) and Sharma (2006) identified two broad pattern of social mobility. Firstly, the welfare measures have brought about the mobility among some selected section of Dalit in the field of education and employment simultaneously rising inter and intra castes competition and often antagonism. On the contrary, the other who perhaps due to their earlier weak position among the Dalit, had to choose the path of Sanskritisation for social mobility and this created tensions without much benefits in concrete terms. Sharma (1979) finds Dalit suffers not only because of the imposed social and cultural disabilities but perhaps much more because of imbalances created by the emergence of structural differentiation within them due to policies and plan undertaken ostensibly for the upliftment and welfare. Secondly, social mobility among the Dalit is also directly a result of certain socio-cultural movements, which in turn has created anti-upper caste attitude and awareness about their own low position. Bose (1981) identified literacy, education and employment are the important factors of social mobility among the Dalit and the geographical spread of violence is closely related to social mobility of Dalit affected in caste violence. Social mobility has a positive consequence, which is functional to an individual or a group of individuals and dysfunctional to others with a negative one. Such dysfunctional aspect is called as ‘conflict model’ of social mobility (Paswan and Jaideva 2003). Not that the above two pattern are mutually exclusive and independent. The two pattern of mobility on the one hand accentuated class like distinctions among the scheduled castes and on the other
hand demands of equality in relation to the mobile sections of the caste Hindus possibly explain the existential condition of Dalit. Lipset and Zetterberg (1960) argue that there are multiple dimensions through which a study of ‘total’ mobility can be made. These dimensions are: occupational rankings, consumption rankings, social class and power rankings. Of course, there is another dimension of social mobility, which is termed as psychic mobility. Such psychic mobility emanates when a few, who have attended a marginal social status than their early low status thereby attains higher psychological status. It expresses firstly, in psychological withdrawal of legitimization to the stigma of pollution and secondly in the ambivalent responses within Dalit cluster and finally in the violent group confrontation with dominant communities of the region (Paswan and Jaideva 2003).

Most of the middle and lower castes tried to enhance their status both in class and caste hierarchies and thus achieve social mobility within such framework. Members of these castes through the adaptation of reference group behavior, tried to achieve social mobility within framework of caste ranking in a particular region. This was possible in terms of both the micro and the macro level consensus, establishing firstly, correlation between caste rank and interaction, and between different contexts of ranking, and secondly, consistency of rank criteria in historical as well as contemporary and rural as well as urban perspective.

Mobility in the class hierarchy occurred in the form of improving one’s socio-economic position: one claimed and sometimes also succeeded in getting a claim accepted from an enhancement of one’s initial class position to the subsequently higher one. Thus mobility which occurred in the class hierarchy was in some context mobility between lower, middle and upper classes found in each caste (Beteille 1966), and in some other context across the sub-castes (Atal 1968; Chhibber 1968) but within the caste system. In yet another context, it consisted of bourgeois and proletarian classes based on economic interest (Patnaik 1972).
the first case, they certainly improve their class position but could not succeed in interacting on equalitarian basis with members of same or similar classes drawn from another caste. Similarly in case of mobility in class structure of second type the different sub-castes of a single caste closer on the basis of their class position. Finally, over a period of time a type of class polarization, exactly not identical to that envisaged in the Marxian frame of analysis, has emerged. This has caused in certain ways upward and downward mobility of people in class hierarchy.

However, the dominant pattern of social mobility in India has been that of caste. The hierarchies of class and caste have not functioned in parallel direction. Consequently, mobility of person in the class structure has not always led to his mobility in caste structure. This has happened more to the lower castes and particularly lowest castes who have suffered a lot from numerous social and religious disabilities in the past. Also complete social mobility has occurred neither in past nor is occurring in present.

After independence, more systematic attempts have been made by the government to deal with the problems of Dalit. They have been provided with the special rights and privileges and their interests is safeguard through various provisions made in the constitution. These provisions have been made in the form of i) protective measures, such as prohibition of discrimination, of forced labour and of untouchability, ii) welfare measures, guaranteeing representation in various categories of public services, in State Assemblies and in Parliament and iii) development measures, providing grant in aid and other facilities for social and economic development. In the light of the above one can raise several basic questions about the success or failure of such provisions. Have Dalit made any significant changes in their educational, economic and occupational conditions? Have the various laws promoted a new interaction pattern between them and the caste Hindus? To what extent the social and ritual distances the two receded? Whether the status of Dalit in caste hierarchy has been affected by their status, if
improved at all, in class structure? Lastly, what are the levels of their status identification?

The negative consequence of social mobility of Dalit has placed them into number of dilemmas, which together with their stigmatized ethnic (caste) identity is likely to obstruct even their partial assimilation in Hindu social system (Berreman 1979). The process of industrialization and urbanization has not helped them much in escaping from stigmatized identity and desegregating into the main social stream. So, on net balance, Singh (1987) finds social mobility among the scheduled castes is far from satisfactory. Even a limited amount of social mobility of Dalit is restricted by the caste Hindus, resulting into conflict between them (Ram, 1977). Hence, social mobility among the Dalit has been opposed by a number of educated and political conscious members of these caste, who find this process not very helpful in getting their status in the caste system raised as equal to that of other castes (Moffatt 1975).

2.8. Social Mobility of Dalit in West Bengal-A historical continuity

It is mentioned earlier the Bengal, the rigors of caste system is not visible. Social mobility in various degrees and forms has been present in Bengal’s social life since pre-colonial times. In fact caste system was able to survive for such a long time because of the inner dynamism or ability to accommodate upward social mobility and thereby absorb tension from below (Sanyal 1981). What is now ubiquitous was a desire to move up the social ladder and to have that mobility legitimated through reorganization in the decennial census reports. The colonial state not only encouraged such tendencies but also actively helped the process through its policy of ‘protective discrimination’. Apart from the questionable altruistic motives, it had clear political agenda too. An increasingly unpopular rule could be easily legitimated through the support of lower castes at a time when nationalism was in the grips of powerful bhadralok elite, belonging primarily but not exclusively, to the three traditional upper castes of Bengal. In place of the earlier multi caste dals or exclusive caste association began to
proliferate during this period, with the specific purpose organizing self-improvements, and also sharing power within the ambit of new colonial institutions. The devolution of power started gradually from 1909, separate caste representation became the minimum non-negotiable demand (Bandhopadhyay 1997). The motive force behind such movement was two folds firstly, the social and political aspiration of the socially mobile groups resulted in such movements. They used the caste identity as political capital to gain advantages in the newly emerging institutional political structure of colonial India. Secondly, it was a protest against the ideology of hierarchy and the monopoly of the power the caste system sanctified. Hence they were anti-systemic and tried to subvert the status quo. Bengal has had her equal share of this historical debate.

During the colonial period the caste mobility in Bengal followed the usual social mobility model that usually originated from theory of Sanskritization and Westernization. The neo-mobiles sought to legitimize their new position by publishing journals preaching refinement of social behavior and adaptation of purer ritual symbols like the wearing of sacred thread, or prohibitions on widow remarriage, introduction of dowry and child marriage and finally claiming to census authorities for recognition of higher ritual status. Sanskritization only implied emulation of the upper castes. It aims the appropriation of certain exclusive symbols of power and divesting them of their symbolic significance. The effect of Sanskritization manifested into greater restriction on women, as they represent the honour of the community that needed to be protected; the un-freedom of women thus become more widely prevalent across all social strata in late colonial Bengal, frustrating the reformist attempts of Bengali liberals. Simultaneously, westernization were reflected in the demands for reservation in education, jobs and the legislature and finally in opposition to nationalism in the support of a benevolent British Raj that had supposedly overturned the rule of Manu Smriti.

However, the majority of peasants, particularly the lower caste remained
untouched by the colonial modernity. Dipesh Chokroborti (2000) espoused that the peasants stand for all that is not bourgeois in the Indian capitalism and modernity. The lower caste rejected the *bhadralok* modernity and its concept of brotherhood as the twentieth century wore on. Rajat Roy (2001) espoused the lower caste did not respond so visibly to new ideas, which influenced the higher caste gentry in the early twentieth century. These ideas were only imperfectly transmitted to intermediate peasant castes and remain completely incomprehensible to the untouchable, who remained at periphery of village community. In fact these classes readily accepted the hierarchy of castes and sought to define their social location within the teleological boundaries. Even, the ‘integrationist’ policy of National Congress ultimately ended up in seeking only positional improvement for themselves within the existing caste structure and thus endorsing the ideology of hierarchy enshrined in that system.

However, there was no uniform rejection of modernist *bhadralok* project of brotherhood, nor did such ideas appeal only to a lower caste ‘counter elite’. Sarkar (2004) argued that the lower caste were quite open oppositional, but hardly ever autonomous in the sense of being free from high caste religious, social and historical assumptions. The high caste religious assumption that sustained the Indian caste system did not certainly offer an indigenous alternative of harmonious social order to an oppressive and exploitative colonial modernity. The difference that survived was also based on asymmetrical relations of power, which adjusted and adapted well to the new paradigm of modernity. In other words, the relationship between caste and modernity is much more complex than has been allowed in the existing historical literature of Bengal.

Contrary to general beliefs, caste in colonial India were often very differentiated and caste movement resulted usually from convergence of various streams of consciousness, ambitions for social climbing as well as protest, reflecting the plurality of the group. All these various sections within a caste had however one common aspiration, such as reworking the relationship of power in
society and polity. In their differentiating perceptions, they hoped to achieve this through divergent means, which ranged from constitutional agitation to direct action, sometimes even violent action. Such a convergence of differing mentalities led to formation and articulation of a unified caste identity at a given point of history. But this did not preclude the possibility of divergence or fissuring of community at subsequent stages.

Since, the caste system here was never been rigid, but it was perhaps because of this greater fluidity in the caste structure compared to other parts in India, caste movements were not so strong in Bengal. Indeed, caste organizations did little to enhance the social and economic conditions of their fellow members. Admittedly, the intellectual renaissance in nineteenth century Bengal initiated a process of social reform, but the progressive culture was confined mainly to urban areas, unlike in Kerala, where reformist ideology had a powerful impact in both rural and urban areas (Nag 1989). Social mobility of this period was very limited and rarely was there a movement from the bottom up. Sizeable section of the population could still be found in their hereditary caste occupations, implying the differential impact of development. Therefore, if there was a restricted mobility, it was certainly individual and not corporate, and as a result class lines cut across caste boundaries.

In post colonial period, India witnessed three models of development- Nehruvian Congress model, Dravidian Shudra model of Tamil Nadu and the Left’s model of West Bengal and Kerala. In Nehruvian Congress model, which West Bengal witnessed till 1967, Dalit were confined to Parliament or State Assemblies, government jobs and Municipal schoolings. But their presence in assets buildings, stock exchanges, business and trade, English medium school, higher education, private and autonomous public institution remain conspicuously absent. Despite of being oldest political party, Congress has not able to draft a cultural or intellectual policy for Dalit. In 1967, Congress in West Bengal received firsts jolt in its hegemonic regime and since 1977, Left parties are
continuing to rule without facing any difficulties. In fact Left’s intervention in West Bengal’s policy evokes much expectation on the development of Dalit, on three grounds- firstly, ideologically communists seek to address the social proletariat at priority basis, secondly, Left front headed by single leader had ample opportunity in completion of development projects unhindered and thirdly, remarkable stability for concentrating on development and governance. In fact, despite of long Marxist regime, the presumption that class consciousness will eradicate the caste antagonism is seemingly to eluding. The caste question has taken a peculiar form in West Bengal. The political leaders rarely talk about it as there is a general feeling that caste is no longer an issue in the State. Any reference to caste identity is considered as taboo and people consciously avoid caste name in view of the age-old stigma attached therein (The Statesman 24 July, 2004). Therefore, politicians consciously avoid caste in their political agenda of any political party.

2.9. Towards a Reflexive Approach

Bourdieu (1984) insists on the importance of a reflexive sociology in which sociologists must at all times conduct their research with conscious attention to the effects of their own position, their own set of internalized structures, and how these are likely to distort or prejudice their objectivity. The sociologist, according to Bourdieu, must engage in ‘sociology of sociology’ so as not to unwittingly attribute to the object of observation the characteristics of the subject. She or he ought to conduct their research with one eye continually reflecting back upon their own habitués, their dispositions learned through long social and institutional training. It is only by maintaining such a continual vigilance that the sociologists can spot themselves in the act of importing their own biases into their work. Reflexivity is, therefore, a kind of additional stage in the scientific epistemology. It is not enough for the scientist to go through the usual stages (experiment, repetition, falsification, peer review, etc); Bourdieu
(1984) recommended that the scientist purged their work of the prejudices likely to derive from their social position.

In this study in assessing social mobility of Dalit, one needs to explore the complexity of inter and intra groups social relationships. The ethnography based study in this methodological framework may prove pertinence. The understanding of concreteness of everyday life and the aspects of the quotidian practices of socially situated individuals is important in exploring the social mobility of Dalit. However, such correctness of everyday life needs to be filtered through ideas and values, which give meaning to the data (Foley, 1998). The reflective aspect of sociology, thus considered significant. Until mid 1960s, it was widely assumed that the sociologists remained fairly objective observers on the subject, which they were researching. Since then, however there has been a marked shift in the mode of inquiry in the social research. There has been a tendency to move away from a scientific, supposedly dispassionate approach to one of self-reflexivity. This process implies that fieldwork does not merely involve observing and recording ‘facts’-it is rather highly complex interpretive process. Rather claiming universal validity for representations, sociologists now recognize the relationship between ‘knower’ and the ‘known’, which substantially shapes the findings. In fact, anubhava (experience) takes precedence over anumana (speculation). Such appraisal of fieldwork has given rise to two divergent areas of analysis. The first relates to a self conscious fieldwork practices (Hymes, 1996) and the second deals with the crisis in representation of ‘other’ through the writings (Clifford 1986; Marcus and Fischer 1986). Here, this study focuses the former arguing that the representation of self to those whom studied has influenced the collection and interpretation of data. Therefore, the researcher starts with a brief examination of some of the recent contributions to the debate, followed by an exploration of the significance of the notion of self as an instrument of research. Although, this researcher worked in a society that was familiar in some sense as he has over sixteen experience in rural development administration in different parts of
Bengal. However, during the fieldwork it was found impossible to maintain the role of an objective observer. The interpretation was significantly shaped by his continual awareness of the ambiguities of his experience and his role as field workers. This researcher would like to further examine how his identity influenced his access to data on various castes among Dalit.

While a generalized suspicions of sociologists is a common feature in many field work locations, in many poor, urban neighborhoods in West Bengal there is often an outright rejection of outsiders associated with ‘voluntary work’ or ‘study’. Such an attitude has developed partly in response to the way in which research is conducted on people who are labeled in Indian official discourse as ‘weaker section’, ‘backward classes’. Fieldwork in West Bengal has in fact come under attack in recent years by the people who are being studied. They are gone tired of being the subject of academic and administrative inquiries, which have not led to improvements in their conditions. There are now resentments against the surveillance. Political mobilization of urban neighborhoods has given voice to people hitherto denied avenues for making their objections known to administrators and academics. Sometimes it has also resulted in summery dismissal of bonafide outsiders.

In doing field work in Nadia district, where political consciousness and participation are high, Ganguly-Scraser, (1995) poignantly mentioned that each neighborhood is under the effective control of one political party. The neighborhood based antagonism and inter and intra party political struggles mean that all outsiders are invested with an ulterior motive (of a ‘taken over’ by a rival political party or fraction) and are as such treated with suspicion. As a result a field researcher has to seek the approval of the local leaders in order to carry out any work. No outsider can simply visit, talk or indeed rent a dwelling without the sanction of the power brokers in the neighborhood. One of the essential features of establishing researcher’s credibility is verification by powerful insiders.
The researcher’s encounter was shaped by power relations between the subjects and self. The vague categorization of researcher was unfamiliar to people who operated largely in terms of personalized relations. In their world view, the individual had to be placed in a concrete set of relationship. Often collection of census details raised suspicions as government official recording their assets. However, among the middle class Dalit, who understood the role of social scientist had no inhibition in repaying the questions. So, constraints were placed in the field upon researcher’s personal contact as a consequence of his gender, social status, class and ethnicity, which Emerson (1988) portrayed as elements of the field worker’s personal biography are not only socially relevant to those studied but also fundamentally shapes the researcher’s interpretive and theoretical interests in the field setting in ways that are not usually examined.

This raises the question whether in absence of such awareness, it was possible for a researcher to understand the people satisfactorily, whom he was studying. If practice of reflexive sociology is in focus, an active participation in developing an intense relationship with the ‘other’ and the researcher needed to be constantly aware of how his bias shaped the other’s reactions and how this in turn affected the depth and quality of his understanding. Since, the Dalit are socially located in margins of dominant Bengali culture. In social schema of *bhadralok*- *chotolok* distinction, it is very much difficult to a *bhadralok* researcher to understand, who were clearly designated as *chotolok* in society at large. Given the background of the researcher was allowed certain roles and disallowed others. Each role, given the specific Dalit cultural notions, facilitated certain methods of data gathering and impeded others. Though it is not possible for any researcher to see everything because no self, no matter how multi faced, in the field can be every thing. Nor did the informants allowed the researcher to be everything. Nevertheless, recognizing the partiality of the truth did not mean that the researcher claimed the impossibility of generalizing. What are emphasized here the acknowledgement of the methodological biases and the clarifications of the
position adopted in describing the social mobility of Dalit. Khan (1990) has shown an escape from the theoretical frame works and own pre-supposition is neither feasible nor desirable as a solution to the dilemmas posed by reflexive approaches. Hence, the whole work is embedded with theories concerning the focused constructs. Blind spots and omission of data were an inevitable aspect of research but it was filtered through the various roles which the researcher’s complex self made possible. As for example, besides easy accessing official records, a very significant was the version of reality that accords with rural Dalit’s view, as well as the reality that the researcher perceived as a Dalit.

2.10. Theories of Social Mobility

From the aforesaid historical accounts, conceptually following theories are identified, which would possibly explain the process of social mobility, in part or full. Firstly, Srinivas (1966) emphasized the need of Sanskritisation and Westernization as conceptual tools for understanding mobility in caste structure. He holds that ‘corporate mobility’ remains basic at the caste or jati level as familial mobility does not obtain public recognition. Srinivas (1966) put forth the primacy of culturalogy in understanding the structural aspects of the caste system. The concepts of dominant caste and Sanskritisation remain central to this view. However, his construct is constrained by its applicability to group or corporate mobility only; it’s long and protracted period and its limited applicability i.e. unhelpful to Dalit hails below the ritual barrier of pollution. The process of Sanskritisation explains the mobility of intermediate castes, which after economic and political mobility attempt for corresponding change in the ritual hierarchy. Secondly, Merton (1957) conceptualized mobility with the help of three conceptual categories, namely, relative deprivation, reference group and anticipatory socialization.

A person’s status, besides its objective manifestation, is related to the self-image he projects to others. But he generally derives such self-image from others. In other words, a person internalizes life styles and behavior patterns of certain
groups and or individuals and projects them before others. Merton (1957) has called such internalization ‘anticipatory socialization’, based on values and styles of life of reference group or individuals. Such an approach is applicable to the mobile persons of Dalit also. Therefore, derivation of their self-image has been analyzed in Merton’s frame of reference group or individual behavior. It aims at systematizing the determinants and consequences of those process of evaluation and self-appraisal in which individuals take the value or standards of other individuals and groups as comparative frame of reference. The theory is based on the following premises, such as, a feeling of deprivation by mobility aspirants relative to some dominant groups (relative deprivation); an endeavor to identify a group or groups, whose behaviour is considered worthy of emulation (reference group); and finally the adoption of its or their norms and values in anticipation of its acceptance by the referent group or groups (anticipatory socialization). In his framework Merton developed four types of reference groups, such as normative-group or groups providing a frame of reference; comparative-group or groups providing a comparison relative to which one's deprivation is evaluated; positive-group or groups involving the motivated assimilation of norms or standards of the group as a basis of self-appraisal; and finally the negative reference group-one involving motivated rejection and the formation of counter norms. He also acknowledges the possibility of plurality of Reference Groups, more so in the case of Normative and Comparative Groups. However, his theory of social mobility becomes functional only in open system of society, where the individuals on adoption of norms and values of reference group get accepted by dominant group. In caste based society such acceptance of neo-mobiles does not come. But, openness or closeness is relative than absolute therefore anticipatory socialization, which is otherwise dysfunctional, would be functional relatively (Prabhash 2001). Damle (1968) in his study observed the occurrence of anticipatory socialization even without absorption or inclusion of neo-mobiles in higher status group. The paradox of caste lies in the fact that although lower caste persons cannot expect to
be included in a higher caste (jati) and also because higher caste persons need not fear their exclusion, positive orientation for reference and imitation is permitted and even encouraged. Anticipatory socialization can thus occur and even if it does not ensure ultimate absorption or inclusion...it can be functional for the persons concerned...where a higher varna is used as a reference model. Many studies have also shown utility of this theory, even in caste based society (Lynch 1968/1992 and Alexander 1968). However, how to transform a ‘cultural bond’-an ad hoc concept of Sanskritisation into structural one and how to explain structural changes and their implicit and explicit consequence on caste mobility through reference group theory, remain unclear. Though, both the theories help a lot in analyzing the process of mobility but failed to explain the consequence of failed attempt at mobility, such as, a person who lacks social acceptance.

The state of non-congruence between the achieved status and accorded status led to disillusionment. Homans (1962) tried to explain this in term of status congruence or incongruence and status anxiety. Such status incongruity may lead to–firstly, progressive alienation, which Oscar Lewis (1966) termed as ‘culture of poverty’ and secondly, emergence of new group at the confluence of class and ethnicity or caste, which Gordon (1964) describes as ‘the ethclass’.

A person may identify himself or his status in three ways as stated earlier-at caste level, at class level, or beyond these two levels. If a socially mobile person identifies himself or his status at the level of his own caste, he may be proud of his caste background, as he believes in the demonstration effect of his achievement in relation to his caste background. Such identification is similar to ethnocentric identification or if he is shy of his caste, he will try to pass his caste background and identify at the other caste or class level or some other level, which is contrary to ethnocentric identification. The third type of identification occurs if he genuinely does not believe in any hierarchical system. Therefore, the level of identification has been measured in the light of Pranjpe’s theory of ethnocentric and contra-identifications. Pranjpe (1970) and Ram (1988) explain the possible
behavior of status incongruity based on the premise of contra-identification, ethnocentric identification and non-caste-class level identification. The theory of ethnocentrism was initially propounded by Sumner (1965) and developed later by a number of social psychologists. According to this theory, an individual or a group identifies with an ethnic group and claims ethnic superiority in comparison to other ethnic groups. In some cases, one hates and takes revenge on them. If in certain cases an individual or a group does not identify at ethnocentric level then identification may be at a level other than ethnocentric. Thus adopting the theory of ethnocentrism in Indian situation, Paranjpe (1970) has stated that individual may identify either with their ethnic group or contrary to this. This may be true also in the case of status identification of the mobile Dalit as stated earlier. In this framework, Paranjpe’s (1970) theory of ethnocentric and contra identification, adding the non-caste-class type of identification in the latter are adopted.

Thirdly, Stein (1968) while exploring the mobility of medieval India identified quite meaningful and new dimension to understand caste system. But his study undermined the strength of caste ethnocentrism or group solidarity. Fourthly, Marriot (1968) thinks that caste could be understood within the frame of reference, such as the rural versus metropolitan and traditional Varna versus modern national frames of reference for ranking. But such approach is confusing and its application remains understandable in terms of rural versus metropolitan caste categories.

2.11. Integration of Theoretical Framework

The framework of the study has been developed with the help of a series of theories pertaining to two broad areas of concern-caste and social mobility. In understanding the caste system Bailey’s view ‘an exclusive, exhaustive yet cooperative ranked group system’ is juxtaposed with Dumont’s ‘a stable and powerful social system presenting a value system necessarily connected with Hinduism’. In the present study, caste based social mobility has been examined in combination of above two approaches. Where as in understanding social mobility
the following two sets of four inter-related theories are found useful. Lipset and Zitterberg’s (1966) theory of social mobility; Homans’ (1962) theory of status congruence; Merton’s (Merton and Rossi 1968) theory of reference group behavior; Paranjpe’s (1970) theory of ethnocentric and contra identification. Social mobility among the Dalit, were analyzed within framework of the first two theories. More especially social mobility in class structure has been measured through a multiple approach suggested in Lipset and Zetterberg’s theory, with necessary modification. The above mentioned theories are linked with one another. In the first set of framework the occurrence of complete social mobility can properly be examined only when the changes in one’s caste status are taken into account along with changes in one class status. If there is change in one’s class status but no change in one’s caste status, then one’s status will be incongruent and social mobility incomplete. There are two possibilities of Homans’ theory of status congruence. If an individual finds his status incongruent, he will either develop status anxiety or pay the cost of accepting his status inferiority. Thus, there is sufficient ground to link Lipset and Zetterberg with Homans’ theory of status congruence and status anxiety. Again, an exchange of social behaviour and face-to-face interaction, he will learn the skills for achieving his status congruence. Thus, the second possibility of status congruence may be related to the theory of reference group or individual behaviour adopted in this theoretical framework. Similarly, the theory of status congruence can be related to Paranjpe’s theory of status identification because those who have congruent status may prefer contra identification more than those whose status is incongruent as mentioned above. Similarly these theories can be linked with Paranjpe’s analysis of status identification because as stated earlier the fully mobile persons of Dalit would prefer contra identification more than those who are not so mobile.

Therefore more qualified and accurate conclusions about mobility and stratification systems are possible only through multi-dimensional approach in
which one has to take all the possible dimensions together. Lipset and Zittrberg have suggested two sets of methodological approaches to study social mobility. In first set, there are comparisons of (i) the present with the past, (ii) one area or country with other, (iii) one model with another expressing equal opportunity. In the second set, there is conventional operational method of ascertaining mobility by comparing father’s and son’s position. Finally they have suggested analysis of social mobility in terms of causes of (i) supply of vacant statuses and (ii) interchangeability of ranks, followed by inquiry of political consequences. The second set of methodological proposition appeared to be more pertinent in this study. The social class dimension was excluded in this study because an inquiry into the willingness of the people of one social class to accept others as its members was beyond the purview of this study. However, two additional dimensions are included in this study namely, education and caste status. In India, education plays a pivotal role in social mobility. Moreover, mobility among the Dalit is a sponsored mobility, where the government has been providing them with various educational facilities (Schermerhorn 1978). Dalit is not a homogenous group. The hierarchical principle also segregates them in wide social ranks. Hence, to understand the trajectories of social mobility caste status found to be important.

Social mobility of Dalit is sponsored one. As regards cause of their mobility, their supply to vacant statuses in the class structure and latently in the caste structure and interchangeably of their ranks in such statuses are facilitated in principle, by the policy of preferential treatment accorded to them. However, it can be surmised that in most cases their social mobility, either sponsored or otherwise is the result of their higher aspiration and motivation including the various causes and political consequences. Social mobility of Dalit is related to their status in both caste and class system. For measuring this type of mobility in this theoretical framework Homans’ theory of status congruence is included. According to this theory if there are persons who have their status factors in an
organization ‘in line’, they claim their status congruity and those whose status factors are out of line do not. In Homans’s terminology, ‘in lineness’ may be a condition of relative and distributive justice for such individual whereas ‘out-lineness’ may lead to status anxiety. This theory is suitably adopted for measuring the congruence of achieved and ascribed status of mobile person of Dalit who may be in-line in their achieved status but out of line in their ascribed one, altogether their out of line status would mean here status within the line in the traditional status hierarchy. In such a case they might face a problem of status anxiety.

In the theory of reference group behavior and relative deprivation, Merton and Rossi (1968) suggested that certain individual and group tended to adopt the behaviour of other group or individuals in order to achieve a similar social position. But if they fail in their achievement they suffer from relative deprivation because they find others belonging to their group achieving success in similar situation. Further in the course of adoption of reference group or individual behavior one also identifies oneself with the reference group or individual. Therefore, in theoretical framework in this research work, an inquiry into the types of reference group, which the mobile Dalit may follow to achieve their respective social positions is included.

2.12. The Integration

Social Mobility of Scheduled Castes is analyzed in this study, by lacing together the following theoretical formulations: Lipset's and Zetterberg's theory of Social Mobility, Srinivas' Theory of Sanskritization, Homan's Theory of Status Congruence, Gordon's Theory of Ethclass, and Paranjpe's Theory of Ethnocentric and contra-identification. Based of the aforesaid theories, social mobility for the purpose of study has been conceptualized as a multi-dimensional concept involving change in economic, social and cultural and political status of Dalit of West Bengal at different levels namely family, group and individual. The study relies on multidimensional approach because a comprehensive study of social
mobility is not possible through the single dimension approach, namely, the
dimension of occupation. Heek (1956) argued that the multiple approach wants,
as fully as possible, to take the fact into account that society is characterized by
multiple, overlapping, and even contradictory criteria of status. In the aforesaid
conceptual frame of references, this research study described, firstly, the
horizontal and vertical mobility with reference to change or no-change in
occupational base with a view to understand its impact on their aspect like
performance, living style etc. It also included the influence of differential status of
Dalit in their internal hierarchy on the pace and direction of social mobility.
Secondly, the concept of Sanskritisation was examined in reference to the extent
of which the Dalit adopted the dominant caste role model. Thirdly, how the social
movement, caste association and Panchayat enabled or influenced the social
mobility.

It this situation, conflicting identities were woven around caste, religion or
nation in a complex cobweb of interrelationship. Any theory of essential otherness
of Dalit identity would not really help in understanding this paradigm. However,
this did not to suggest that the putative corporate status of caste was unreal or that
the Dalit did not face discrimination in Bengal. All the existing studies indicate
the contrary, beyond the details of articulate protest movements; very little was
available about the day-to-day ontological realities of the Dalit Bahujan
experience in Bengal, particularly during these tranquil days marked by overt
caste conflicts. Beyond the archival sources and Dalit literatures, this however
demanded moving into realm of anthropology to explore the life experience at the
grassroots level and study the significance of the agency of the masses in
interrogating the power-relations in orthodox Hind society-their everyday forms
of resistance’ to domination and exploitation.

2.13. General Argument of the Study

The present study is a problem focused study on social mobility of Dalit
community in rural West Bengal. Dalit occupy a lowly position, which has its
origins both in the pre-modern and contemporary systems of social stratifications. Upward mobility of lower castes is an important issue for Indian social sciences, which has been conventionally understood in terms of Sanskritization. Against this functionalist model, ethnographic evidence showed that the existence of complex and contradictory practices among untouchable community in North India (Ram 1977). Other anthropologists studying untouchable castes have demonstrated that acquaintance does not imply a shared cultural universe (Freeman 1979). Dalit is an agglomeration of various castes having differential social disadvantages in economic, political and social milieu. It is within such frameworks, this study explored how the differentiations in caste, culture, gender give rise to differential trajectories of mobility. The study also focused on the epistemological status of the data gathered for critical analysis. However, the role of researcher as a subjective agent and the implications for limiting and constructing knowledge was also noted. The detailed ethnographic and historical aspect at supra-local level pertaining to social mobility was also described. It also discerned that the subtle and seemingly inconspicuous link between the globalization and the changes in the lives of Dalit. There was a global logic to increase economic, social and political marginalization of Dalit but their success and failure were closely tied to higher localized processes. So, the present position of Dalit must be understood as an outcome of both their structural locations as well as their ideological and political circumstances.

2.14. General Arrangement of the Study

The study primarily examined the social mobility of Dalit in West Bengal, which included status and pattern of mobility various jatis of Dalit community experience in the social, economic and political domain in rural West Bengal. Nadia, a moderately developed district, which shared substantial chunk of Dalit population, was chosen for the study. In Chapter I, introductory part, the general approach of the study was described. In Chapter-II, the theoretical framework of the study is described. The various concepts and constructs used in the study were
examined in this section including the composition of Dalit. In order to understand the trajectories of social mobility, historiography of Bagdi, Chamar and Namasudra were analyzed. In Chapter III, the existing literatures pertaining to study of social mobility both at regional and sub-regional level were reviewed. In Chapter-IV, objectives, the hypotheses and methodological aspects such as research design, sampling, data collection process including analysis and limitations of the study were described. Though the study is basically a quantitative study but reflexive approach is used in understanding non-material aspects of mobility. In Chapter V, in order to contextualize Dalit’s experience, the economy and organization of society in Nadia district were examined. It also outlines the values of social interactions that govern Bengali society. More particularly, it focused the views on economic malaise resulting from retarded economic development, attitudes towards recent politics of economic liberalization and globalizing economy and the perceived difference between the East Bengal or Bangladeshi refugees vis-à-vis original inhabitants; the para rivalries and demise of cultural values etc. In Chapter VI, the field data are analyzed in economic, social and political domains of Dalit realities including the behavioral trajectories various Dalit jatis express in interaction pattern. The aspects of neo-mobiles or Harijans elites, Sanskritization were also discerned in this section. The hypotheses were tested either corroborating or contradicting the findings of earlier studies. In Chapter-VII, the findings from the analysis of field data were mentioned. The Chapter-IX, in concluding part, the broad findings in reference to the objectives of study is delineated.

Endnotes

1. However, the centrality of power relations binds all these schools. This, however, should not be construed that one is denying the salience of economic and social dimensions to the study and analysis of social mobility, more particularly to Dalit. Such differential power relationship, in fact, manifests into variegated economic, social and political consequences culminating into lacerated social collectivities.
2. In 1970, a paradigm shift was witnessed with the growth of structural historical approach of caste studies, which is strongly grounded in history and developed into two directions-Marxists and non-Marxist. Marxist analysis of social stratification is systemic and dialectical. Mode of production is the centerpiece of this stratification theory. While studies on agrarian structure and agrarian social movement, a variant of the Marxist approach has been used in the study of caste and class movements, focusing mainly upon the linkages between the caste and class structure, their role in stratification and evolution of their ideology. Both historical and observational data have been adduced to test the series of related propositions around the theme. In essence, these studies confirm the process of class polarization, increasing status differentiation and emergence of middle peasantry as dominant class of social stratification. It is observed that the exploitative nexus had expanded beyond landlord tenant relationships to between bigger and small tenants contributing to the process of politicalization. Desai (1976) in his study on social stratification in Gujarat found significant weakening of ideology of untouchability in the utilitarian domain. The non-Marxist studies further reclassified based on variety of theoretical perspective, structural orientation, historical evolutionary typologies and process analysis of structures as social movements. Some of the studies re-kindled the theory of origin of caste. The question of origin of caste stratification resurfaced over the long-standing controversy on ‘Asiatic mode of production’.

3. In the racial theory through contested by Dr. Ambedkar (1946), Herbert Risley (1908), Dutt (1931) and Prabhati Mukherjee (1988) offered explanation of Aryan and non-Aryan relations and even colour differentiation (Klass 1980) as evolution of caste and ‘Varna’. During the late Nineteenth Century to early Twentieth Century, a number of Dalit ideologues in different parts of country adopted some form of racial theory to assert their ontological existence. In South India, Adi-Dravidan Movement (1890-1930) and in Punjab Mangoo Ram’s (1886-1980) Adi Dham movement focused that Dalit are original people of this country and even the same was raised in United Nations World conference Against Racism in Durban in 2001 for consideration of caste as form of race. In religious theory, Jotirao Phule (1873) of Maharastra and Ghasidas of Chattisgarh found that in order to en-slave the Sudras, many spurious religious texts had been produced.

4. The Dumontian theory of ‘encompassing the contrary’ hardly stands in the face of such findings on the pre-colonial and early colonial Bengal. Using the empirical evidences on the Balahadi sect among the Hadis of Nadia District on their insubordination, Sudhir Chokroborti (1986) sought to disinter Dumount’s claim that the ideological force of Dharma always binds the individual caste to whole system and this ideal always actualizes in the immediate social realities of castes, can be questioned, he suggests, by showing that ‘the process of actualization necessarily contains a contradiction’. Here the contradiction is represented by the philosophy of the Blhadi sect, where the teacher among the Hadis defies the dominance of Dharma. Chatterjee argues that the preaching of novel theory of creation by constricting new cosmology and by imaging an inverted hierarchy of castes, where a Hadi, an archetypal untouchable caste of Bengal is placed at the top as the supreme creator and the Brahman pushed to the bottom. However, Chatterjee also acknowledges the triviality or marginality of such insubordination, which ultimately failed or alters the system. Similarly, Ratan Lal Chokroborty showed that
Bhuimalis in East Bengal during same period followed the familiar pattern of social mobility, within and not outside the ideological structure of caste system. This in fact brings the question of ideological hegemony of caste, which was constantly reproduced and reinforced by the power elite of Hindu society, who were dominant not just in religious sense, but in a temporal sense too.

5. Ambedkar possibly borrowed from the speeches of Swami Vivekananda: ‘Deena-Dalita-Dukhi Devo Bhava!’ (Service to the weak, the downtrodden and suffering masses itself is the worship of God) The usages of the term Dalit seems to have originated from the ‘dalitoddhara’ (upliftment of downtrodden) programme of Arya Samaj.

6. It has been used primarily to refer to ex-untouchable or scheduled castes through, more recently, Adivasi activists and others have embraced it to signify their solidarity with Scheduled Castes, thereby extending it to other oppressed groups, such as women, bonded labour, minorities and so on. Since, the scheduled castes face a different type of social ostracism, hence for the purpose of study the term ‘Dalit’ tantamount to the people, who are constitutionally recognized as ‘scheduled castes’.

7. There is no authentic mention of Vaidya or Baidya as a caste in any old authority. The occupational group of physicians must have formed itself very early and through the profession was looked down upon; there can be no doubt that many Brahmans belonged to this group. The usual occupation of the caste, Ambastha, was medicine. The traditional origin of the caste is that Ambastha was born of a Brahman father and a Vaisya mother. According to Usanas, in addition to medicine, fire dancing, heraldry and agriculture are also occupations of Ambashas. There is a long tradition at least dating from 16th Century that the Vaidyas are Ambastha. According to Vallalacharita, the Vaidyas are satsudras.


9. In Coachbehar district concentration of Dalit is 50.11 per cent, followed by Jalpaiguri (36.71 per cent), South 24-Parganas (32.12 per cent), Bankura (31.24 per cent).

10. Some argues even in rehabilitation, differential treatment was meted out against these Dalit refugees in West Bengal. The upper caste refugees were allowed to settle in 149 Kolkata suburbs like Jadavpur, Dumdum, Sodepur etc. but when Namasudra tried to occupy Marichjhapi, an island in Sundarban area, State took recourse by evicting them forcefully in 1979.

11. Revulsion against sacrifice, the economic usefulness of cattle, and religious symbolism all were factors contributing to the formulation of sacred cow doctrine, but it was ahimsa that provided the moral and ethical compulsion for that doctrine’s widespread acceptance in later Indian religious thought and social behavior. The use of the cow has become not only a cultural but has become a political symbol of Hindu resistance to Moslem power in India. The gorakshan or protection of cow, ‘receives further ethical and social sanctions from Hindu concept of dharma as the pursuit of righteousness, duty and virtue’ (Lodrik 1981).
12. When the lower castes started wearing sacred thread, the most authentic symbol of social authority, the Bengali *bhadralok* began to ridicule it as ‘*siki paysar suto*’.

13. The researcher is a cadre of West Bengal Civil Services (Executive) and worked more than sixteen years in various capacities in rural development administration. Further, he belongs to Dalit community and did his M.Phil on caste based social exclusion from TISS, Mumbai.

14. With a person of the same social class but of a different ethnic group one shares behavioral similarities but not a sense of people hood. With those of the same ethnic group but of different social class, one shares the sense of people hood but not behavioral similarities. The only group, which meets both these criteria, is people of the same ethnic group and same social class.
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8 Sarkar, Social History, p. 169.

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