

Glossary

Kula The term *kula* is different from lineage or caste status though not entirely exclusive of either. The closest English word for it would perhaps be clan. It refers to all the male descendants of a common ancestral male together with their female family members. The word *kula* also however accreted significations related to honour and prestige which had to be guarded at any cost, especially in upper-caste families and of course the site of the women's bodies, hedged in by the iron laws of absolute chastity before marriage, unquestioned fidelity during wifehood and austere widowhood was a prime locus for such *kula*-related honour. Needless to say any attempt at displaying even the slightest bit of autonomy or deviance in such matters was seen as an irredeemably sinful act which jeopardised not just the woman's honour but also those of her *kula*.

Kulin Kulinism would be a difficult concept to explain in a few lines. For the purposes of this book it would suffice to say that among the Brahmins (the so-called highest caste) of Bengal, the *kulin* Brahmins considered themselves as the most superior group and it produced an extreme form of hypergamy as marriage of their daughters to *kulin* bridegrooms was an object of aspiration to all Brahmins. A *kulin* Brahmin's status in nineteenth century Bengal depended on his family's record of ritual purity. In nineteenth

century Bengal, *kulin* polygamy assumed a horrifically exaggerated form as *kulin* girls could not marry a non-*kulin* and therefore very young girls could be married off to old, near dying men. *Kulin* Brahmins could make a living out of marrying young girls of *kulin* families who were desperate that their daughters not remain unmarried beyond the age of 10.

Shastras The *shastras* refer to the vast body of *Hindu* scriptural texts which were held in high regard by the upper caste/class sections of *Hindu* society and were seen as laying down dictums for the regulation of women's lives. Public debates over women's reform in nineteenth century Bengal would often also centre around the extent to which shastric dictates ought to be challenged.

Hindu/Hindu Ramani The word "Hindu" encompassed enormous diversities related to caste/class/gender/tribes and regions, but more often than not writers of tracts, plays, farces and didactic literatures would merge Bengali/*Hindu* and Indian identities into an indissoluble whole and talk about *Hindu* identity, *Hindu griha* (homes) or ideals of *Hindu* women (*ramani*) in monolithic, upper class/caste terms.

Amrita bazaar Patrika (ABP), Hindoo Patriot, Som Prakash All names of newspapers in the late nineteenth century Bengal. *Anusandhan* (Investigation) was a fortnightly periodical that was started in 1890 with the purpose of cases related to criminal fraud in Bengal. This periodical also carried some of Priyanath Mukhopadhyay's case accounts before they were serialised separately as *Darogar Daftar* from 1892.

Bhadra/Bhadralok The term *bhadralok* came in usage in Bengali society around the beginning of the 19th century as a Sanskritised synonym of the English "gentleman" and is used in Bengali newspapers and periodicals from the early 19th century. The term is literally derived from the Sanskrit word *bhadra* which carries connotations of *shishhta* (cultivated) *marjita* (refined), *sambhranta* (aristocratic) and *sabhya* (civilised). The word "babu" would often accompany names of *bhadralok*. Often characterised as the middle class in Bengal, this social section was actually heterogeneous enough to bring very diverse people within its fold. Opposed to *chhotolok* or *itorlok* (low born), the *bhadralok* was supposed to be *satbangshajato* (of good lineage) and therefore it was largely upper caste (though exceptions were at times possible based on landholding patterns in specific rural areas and even in Calcutta. The success, for instance, of "men like Motilal Seal and Gaurchand Basak who though belonging to low "ritual" background could emerge as leading *bhadraloks* of Calcutta" suggests that it could encompass

caste categories other than dominant castes.)“Abstinence from manual labour, belief in the importance of education, radical potential for change and heterodoxy as well as reverence for traditionalism were some of the obvious markers of the *bhadralok*.” The emphasis on a common cultural identity based on cultivated taste and manners rather than wealth and power allowed for the “multiple class character” within the *bhadralok* section and very different kinds of people such as absentee landlords, deputy magistrates as well as impoverished junior clerks and schoolteachers could all be *bhadralok*. See Sharmila Purkayastha, *Towards Freedom*, 124 and Rajshekhar Basu, “The ‘Abhijat’ and the Urban Ambience: Baboo Ramnath basu Mullick and his times” in Ranjit Roy ed., *Retrieving Bengal’s Past: Society and Culture in the nineteenth and twentieth century* (Kolkata: Rabindrabhavan University, 1995).

The Age of Consent Controversy The most powerful expression of the Bengali *bhadralok*’s anger against what was perceived as the colonial government’s intervention in the private realm was the Age of Consent controversy that erupted in 1891 following the colonial government’s attempt to raise the age of consent from 10 to 12 for girls after an 11 year old Phulmani died as a result of marital rape by her 35 year old husband Hari Maiti. The colonial government hastily backtracked when its attempts at raising the age of consent was met with a storm of furious protests by large sections of Bengali men who saw it as interference in their private spaces. This horrific incident and all that it then led to, have been examined in great detail by Tanika Sarkar, *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation*, 119–225 and by Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity: The “Manly” Englishman and the “Effeminate” Bengali in the Late Nineteenth Century*(Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995),138–180.

The Rukmabai Case Anxieties about threats to the *hindu griha* and identity were also strongly felt and scathingly expressed by Bengali men when in 1884 in Bombay, a young 22 year old Maharshtrian *Brahmin* woman Rukhmabai refused to go and live in her marital home with her husband Dadaji who then filed a case for restitution of conjugal rights against her. Restitution of conjugal rights was a form of legal action that derived from the English law. Rukhmabai who had been married as a child to Dadaji refused to consummate the marriage or to go and stay with him after attaining majority. The case dragged on for some years with Rukhma declaring that she would prefer imprisonment to going back. Writings that reviled Rukhmabai appeared frequently in *Bangla* newspapers and journals.

The Elokeshi case Elokeshi, a young girl was murdered and decapitated by her husband Nobin Chatterji a Calcutta-based clerk. Elokeshi who stayed with her parents in a village had been seduced and raped by a powerful Mohunt/high-ranking temple guru. The girl's parents had connived with the Mohunt. When Elokeshi went to visit Nobin she related everything to him and Nobin then killed her in a fit of rage. He subsequently surrendered to the police. Tanika Sarkar has also drawn attention to the way in which the varied representations of the case of the murdered Elokeshi became an extremely important one in the cultural formation of the time.

Stridhan Hindu Scriptural prescriptions of what ought to be considered women's property. Under the Dayabhaga school of law followed in Bengal, *stridhan* would refer to the property that a Hindu woman owned at the time of her marriage (gifts, etc., acquired from her natal family especially in the form of ornaments) though there is considerable argument between interpreters over whether or not immoveable property inherited by women from their parents can fall into this category. Some interpretations have also included the gifts that women receive from the family of her in-laws or even at the time of the marriage or subsequently, as part of it. Immoveable and inherited property does not fall into this category.

Samaj Roughly translated as a social collective, it could accommodate different families, castes and regions under its rubric. The *samaj* was seen as having a regulatory role and regulated individuals and caste groups according to certain norms, notions of duties and responsibilities to family and society, codes of morality and rules. Needless to say, female conduct and character would be under unrelenting surveillance by the *samaj*.

Jhhi/Poricharika Female domestic workers in large upper class households and increasingly even in middle class homes in metropolises like Calcutta. While the word *poricharika* was perhaps used more often for female domestics who stayed in their employers' large feudal households and laboured exclusively for them, the *jhhi* seems to be used for the modern version of the domestic worker who stays independently and works in multiple employers' households.

Brahmo Samaj The Brahmo Samaj was established in 1828 in Kolkata at the initiative of the well-known reformer Raja Rammohun Roy and some of his distinguished friends and was initially known as the Brahmo Sabha. Members of the Samaj were called Brahmos. Largely upper-caste in composition, this was a group that grew out of Roy's passionately-held ideas of universal worship and believed in the Vedic form of worship alone. Brahmo

men were also increasingly associated with ideas of women's reform. Needless to say it met with enormous criticism from contemporary conservative Hindu sections of Bengal and was frequently accused of undermining and destroying Hinduism. Relations between conservative Hindus and Brahmos remained fractious. Brahmo men (as is evident from their satirical depiction in Bankim's *Bishbrikhha*) were popularly reviled as feckless individuals seeking a life of debauchery outside the codes of Hinduism. The rumblings against Brahmos and their heterodoxy reached a frenzied pitch with the passing of what came to be known as *Teen Aiin* (Act III of 1872) which allowed inter-caste and inter-community marriages to those who declared themselves as not belonging to any of the major communities. Despite differences and clashes of opinions and even splits within the Samaj, it continues to exist albeit in a somewhat attenuated state.

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