

Milan Mandal,

PhD Research Scholar,

Seacom Skills University, Department of English.

West Bengal, India.

milan.mandal77@gmail.com

Caste Atrocities on Double Marginalized Dalit Refugees of Bengal and Their

Unfinished Traumatic Pangs: Its Unburial by the Literary Artists Jatin Bala,

Manoranjan Byapari, Adhir Biswas, and Amitav Ghosh.

Abstract

The Partition of India in 1947 engendered a violent socio-political and demographic massacre in the bifurcated segments of Bengal – East and West. The Hindu minorities of East Bengal were forced to flee from their ancestral home and to take shelter in West Bengal before, during and the following decades of partition. The ‘upper caste’ refugees of them got legalized colonies and Government assistance here. Rather, the ‘dalit’ sector among the refugees were to live “prisoners’ life” in resettlement camps and majority of them were also exiled in the hostile ‘alien’ lands of other states. Their dual identities of gaining a new global nationality of a newly formed country (India) and the simultaneous loss of the local identifier in the vernacular as ‘desh’ (the village in East Bengal which had their roots) is the site of trauma. This traumatic pangs are increased manifold when despite the new identity (albeit without identification) there is marginalization on two aspects – one for being a refugee and the other for being a dalit. Yet, the voices of pangs and sufferings of these double marginalized refugees are kept silenced in the caste Hindu dominated literature. The paper, therefore, attempts to dig out the pangs of the double marginalization of these neglected dalit refugees through the literary reflections in the works of Jatin Bala, Manoranjan Byapari, Adhir Biswas, and Amitav Ghosh.

Key words: Partition, displacement, refugees, atrocities, dalit, marginalization, pangs.

India was partitioned into two nation- states: Pakistan (with two wings – West Pakistan, now known as Pakistan and East Pakistan, now Bangladesh) and India in 1947. Bengal Province was also then split into West Bengal and East Bengal which was merged with East Pakistan. Riots broke out like wildfire in the two Bengals. The indiscriminate killing of human beings, looting, brutal atrocities on minority women during the Noakhali riot of October 1946 and the severe riots of 1950 in the districts like Mymensingh, Comilla, Chittagong, Rajshahi, Noakhali, Sylhet and particularly Khulna where the horrific communal atrocities were unleashed on Dalit Namasudra peasants, as Jawaharlal Nehru narrated it:

There was arson and looting on a large scale, men were murdered and women ravished. There were also forcible conversions and desecration of places of worship (Amrita Bazar Patrika, 24 February 1950).

forced Hindu minorities to flee from their ‘desh’ (place of origin in East Bengal) and to take shelter in West Bengal. The Indo-Pak war of 1965 and mass slaughter, massacres, brutality of rape by the Pakistani army during the Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971, the Islamisation of Bangladesh by Zia ul-Haq, the demolition of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya in 1992 also caused a massive exodus of Hindu minorities to flee to India and the flow of migration remain streaming which keeps the wounds of Partition of Bengal burning till today. As Bashabi Fraser states –

“There is the reality of the continuous flow of ‘economic migrants’/ ‘refugees’/ ‘infiltrators’/ ‘illegal immigrants’ who cross over the border ...keeping the question of Partition alive today” (40).

The dual identities due to their painful banishment from their “fixed point of origin” and the nostalgic memories for their “mother Earth” (desh) along with their social isolation as refugees in the post migratory host nation make them fragmented and traumatized. The philosopher John Locke, states in the “memory theory of personal identity” in his *Essay*

Concerning Human Understanding (ed. P.H. Nidditch, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), that memory which is “consciousness of present and past actions” is an elementary determinant of personal identity (275–276). The philosopher David Hume in Book 1, Part 1 and Section 3 of his *A Treatise of Human Nature* also introduces the concept of memory as a faculty that retains “a considerable degree of first vivacity [experiences of past life]”. The scars of memory for their lost ancestral home traumatized the refugees psychologically. This pangs became more acute for the the ‘dalit’ sector among them. Dalit denotes “one who has been repressed, crushed, persecuted, harassed and dominated” (Bala, 167). They are “crushed” marginalized community in the Hindu society and “all the historically discriminated groups in India” (Sarbani Banerjee, 20-22). The ‘upper caste’ refugees got legalized colonies and Government assistance in the post partition West Bengal. Rather differently, discrimination and oppression by both Government and even local people made the dalit refugees double marginalized.

Unfortunately enough, the trauma of pangs of these ‘dalit’ refugees due to dual identities and double marginalization remain silenced almost in Bengali testimonials. The progressive authors and film makers like Nemai Ghosh’s Bengali film *Chhinnamul* (*The uprooted*, 1950), Dakshinaranjan Basu’s *Chhere Asa Gram* (*The Abandoned Village*, 1953), Narayan Sanyal’ novel *Bakultala P. L Camp* (1955), the partition trilogies by Renwick Ghatak, *Mege Dhaka Tara* (*The Could Copped Star*, 1960.), *Komal Gandhar* (*E-Flat*, 1961) and *Subarnarekha* (*The Gold Thread*, 1962), Prafulla Roy’s Bengali story “Father” (1970, translated by John W. Hood), Atin Bandyopadhyay’s *Nilkantha Pakhir Khonje* (1971, *In Seasch of the Blue Jay*), Sunil Ganguly’s novella *Arjun* (1989) have not raised their voice against the atrocities of caste on dalit refugees. The article, therefore, leads to concentrate in order to explore the pangs and sufferings of these dalit refugees which are reflected in the works of Jatin Bala’s anthology *Stories of Social Awakening: Reflections of Dalit Refugee Lives of Bengal* (2017), Manoranjan Byapari’s *Itibritte Chandal Jibon* (*Memoir of Chandal Life*, 2012, Bengali), Adhir Biswas’s memoir *Deshbhager Smriti* (*Memory of Partition* 2010, Bengali) and Amitav Ghosh’s novel *The Hungry Tide* (2016).

The author Jatin Bala attempts to unveil the untold pangs due to dual identities of these untouchable migrants gaining the identity as refugees and the simultaneous memory of lost ancestral home. He was born in Jossore (now in Bangladesh) in 1949 and migrated to India in 1954. Partition of Bengal forced his family to migrate to India, and take shelter in different

refugee camps (9). Bala was stamped as refugee and suffered a life of pain and oppression: “My life as an orphan refugee child was full of anguish and torment (166). In his story *Resurrection* (translated by Marino Pramanick), Bala has chronicled how hundreds of thousands of Hindu minorities of East Bengal like Atul Mistri, Ananda Mandal crossed the border “with broken health, with dying hopes, having lost everything in the riots”(34) and gained new identity as refugee in India. The uprooted people faced frantic miseries:

They fight with death every moment...A huge corpulent mass – no shape, no colour. They have only open mouths – it means they’re hungry (28).

In his another story *The Two Ends of a Broken Bridge* (translated by Suranjana Banerjee), Bala has vividly drawn the trauma of leaving the houses the refugees like Ratan lived in, the lands they owned, the trees they planted, the cows and calves, cats and dogs they had domesticated, the people with whom they had deep bonding. Ratan had passed fifty years in India but the past memories of East Bengal are bright now and make them emotionally traumatized:

Uprooted though I was, love for the land of my birth was still strong in my veins, in every

pore of my body. I will not be able to serve this bond in my lifeline. Incessant rise and fall

in the minds of it, the river of life has flown afar, traversed so many tears – the current of the rivers source, though, is still quite strong. Even when the river dies, the creek remains (83).

Manoranjan Byapari’s autobiographical testimony *Itibritte Chandal Jibon* ((*Memoir of Chandal Life*) has also chronicled painstakingly the harsh reality of dalit refugees. Jaydeep Sarangi in his review on this ‘dalit autobiography’ *Itibritte Chandal Jibon* (2013) represents all those people who continue to survive in inhuman horrid circumstances and a chain of experiences of his life (2). While the communal riots had swept across the erstwhile East Bengal, his family migrated from Pirichpur, in the district of Barisal (now in Bangladesh) and as an untouchable young refugee, he was to face ceaseless fight for survival. He was bound to lead a life on railway stations, Shiromanipur Refugee camp in Bankura, Gholadoltala

Refugee Camp in South 24, Dandakaranya, Paralkot, New Jalpaiguri and Jadavpur as rickshaw-puller.

Adhir Biswas in his memoir *Deshbhager Smriti* opens the floodgates of memories of leaving his ancestral home in Jessore's Magura in 1967 due to communal unrest in East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) for 1964 riots and the Indo-Pakistan war in 1965 and the hidden wounds of being a dalit refugee in West Bengal. There is no protagonist in Biswas' memoir, no "story plot", only flashback mode of recounting of memorization of past life and suffering of dalit refugees (Srabani, 53-54). Biswas memorizes the hospitality of Christian nuns on the very first day in "India" at the Sealdah station (*Deshbhager Smriti* 34). He also memorizes their life of economic marginalization and struggle against poverty in East Bengal: They had nothing, neither any paddy field nor a fishpond. They owned only a very small homestead and a hut of two rooms made of hay (*Deshbhager Smriti* 24).

The pangs are also increased manifold for their double marginalization: one for being a refugee and the other for being a dalit. The stories of Jatin Bala's anthology also focus the various aspects of dalit and refugee life from abject poverty and suffering; social alienation and rejection. In his Editor's Note of Jatin Bala's *Stories of Social Awakening: Reflections of Dalit Refugee Lives of Bengal*, Jaydeep Sarangi states that

The 'refugees and dalits' reception by the host community (especially by the upper class

and upper caste people) is always a long and painful trajectory. The unique feature of India of India is the overlapping of refugee with caste issues. While refugees have always

struggled for stability and rootedness, low caste refugees have struggled harder being doubly disadvantaged – almost predictably they have been victims of the worst infringement of human rights (9).

Bala in his *Story of Social Consciousness* (translated by Suranjana Banerjee) has shown how Namasudra dalit refugee like Jahar Sarkar became victimized due to conspiracy of local people of upper caste who used caste barriers to sell their lands (19-20). The low caste

refugees, against whom there was ‘open’ malice in East Bengal, are also victimized of ‘Cold War’ relating on land or woman (Bala, 19) in India. The dalits as refugees are “the worst victims of Partition of India” (Bala, 173). In his story *Resurrection*, Bala manifests how Government also unleashed brutal negligency to the dalit refugees and marginalized them:

Government takes better care of animals in zoo than the refugees of East Bengal [of dalit

community] – they show no sympathy towards the refugees. Cruelty and inhuman treatment you can’t even imagine (32).

Only the Namasudras were punished. “Higher caste refugees were given land, shelter and jobs.”(Bala, 35) and there was no space for the untouchable refugees in West Bengal. They were sent to the rocky terrains of Dandakaranya. Many of them died on the road and more died of hunger than in the riots in East Bengal (Bala, 35). The agony of “old wounds” of the “broken man”, Atul Mistry who was sent to Dandakaranya and then escaped from there to live in B.G. colony bleeds him: Dear Authority,

I am rootless, I moved here and there, from one camp to another, stayed in slums, I broke stones; I dug soil for living. I am tired. I am just floating on the river of life (29).

Jatin Bala in his another story *Reminiscences of Life at Refugee Camps* (translated by Sravasti Guha Thakurta) has recorded his own the pangs in the refugee camps in Kunti Transit Camp, Bhandarhati Camp and the Balagar Refugee Camp. Each Camp was “a living hell – a hell into which the refugees were dumped by the authorities, and then left to fend for themselves” and a place of “the regular murder of the residents of the camp” (158):

The living conditions at these camps were terrible, ...the inmates of these camps suffered from malnourishment, were more often than not half-starved, and were forced to subsist amidst inhuman, hell-like conditions...distressed

young girls and women [were bound] into the flesh trade. Rape was not an uncommon

occurrence in the refugee camps (161-162).

The upper caste dominated Government then also unleashed “constant harass, callous and insensitive treatment” (162) to those rootless and “unwanted” dalits who were forced “to immigrate to an alien and inhospitable land [Dandakaranya] (163). Those double displaced marginal dalit refugees for whom neither the government who applied merciless paramilitary force, nor the ordinary citizens were concerned about the endless suffering:

...the wretched refugees [dalit refugees]...were doomed to suffer in silence. The

agonies of these marginal men knew no bounds (165).

In the section *Jaydeep Sarangi in Conversation with Jatin Bala* (translated by Suranjana Banerjee), Jatin Bala has mentioned his autobiographical novel *My Uprooted Life* which portrays the painful tragic experiences of Namasudra refugees: “We, [Namasudras] the uprooted dalits, were the worst victims of Partition” (174) and “many Namasudras, the victims of Partition, are homeless to this day (176). These politically trapped untouchable refugees are yet to be granted citizenship and are identified as ‘illegal immigrants’.

Manoranjan Byapari in *Itibritte Chandal Jibon* ((*Memoir of Chandal Life*) has also portrayed how these dalit refugees became victimized of caste atrocities and these marginalized people became acute marginalized. The upper-caste refugees were allotted more than one plot in colony and valuable lands in Calcutta for free (Byapari, 32) but there was no space for those hapless refugees even in Marichjhanpi, a place of tigers and crocodiles:

because they were not the Chatterjee-Mukherjee-Banerjees, or the Ghosh-Bose-

Guha-Mitras, towards whom the leaders were ever sympathetic; these were the

Biswas-Byapari-Mandal-Bala-Mistris. Dalits, *chhotoloks* (“Ananta Ratir

Chandal” 214, 216, translated by Sarbani Banerjee, 73).

When they fled from different “concentration camp, or a prison” and came to Marichjhanpi, an island on the southern edge of Sundarbans, only to settle on, the Left Front Government unleashed brutal killings, rapes, incendiary and pilfering on these dalit refugees in 1979 (Byapari, *Itibritte*, 42). Byapari has also focused his own pangs as a marginal untouchable rickshaw- puller (*Itibritte*, 363).

Adhir Biswas captures that partition endangered not only the pangs of social and political division, but also the site of trauma due to breaking up of the community and families of the marginal refugees because of “overcrowded accommodations or due to fission beyond the chance of reunion”:

“There are people, but no family. Some are in Behala, some in Shyamnagar, others in Bongaon. Then another is missing...a few years back, the Ichhamoti flood had divested

several families of their houses, yet I don’t know any whose household has been ruined

as much as these people’s homes” (*Deshbhager Smriti* 16-17, quoted, Srabani, pp 69).

Sekhar Bandyopadhyay in his article '*Partition and the Ruptures in Dalit Identity Politics in Bengal* (2009) also focuses on how the “tight-knit geographically integrated peasant community” was dispersed across eastern and central India and perished (460). Biswas also recounts about the impasse of the Dalit refugees who are a uniquely deprived people. A licence for running a small shop in West Bengal was not issued to Biswas’ father due to missing out a border slip (*Deshbhager Smriti*, 31-32).

Amitav Ghosh in his novel *The Hungry Tide* has also focused on the dalit refugees stating that:

In Bangladesh they had been among the poorest of rural people, oppressed and

exploited both Muslim communalists and by Hindus of the upper castes. (118).

Those refugees came from East Pakistan and later Bangladesh to West Bengal and became victimized of caste atrocities. Those “intruders” were forcefully sent to Dandakaranya deep in

the forest of Madhya Pradesh to be killed. “The local people treated them as intruders, attacking them with bows, arrows and other weapons” (118). The helpless people fled from the government ‘resettlement’ camp of Dandakaranya and came to Morichjhapi only to have “a little land to settle on”(119). Brutally enough, the Government unleashed the inhuman atrocities and tortures on those marginalized people.

The another dalit refugee Manohar Mouli Biswas’ (1943-) autobiography *Surviving in My World: Growing up Dalit* is, according to the review by Dr. Amit Shankar Saha, “not only a testimony of the early life of a Bengali dalit writer but also a tool to be used for the upliftment of the rather unacknowledged Bengali dalit community”(5-6). He has explored the state of marginalization of the dalit community whom “the higher caste Hindus usually avoided” in East Bengal (56) and the plight of more marginalization in West Bengal: “large sections of dalit still remain trapped in the conditions of dire deprivation” (79). Jogendra Nath Mandal “compared the conditions of the Scheduled Castes in India with those of the Black population in the US” (Bandyopadhyay, 462).

The silenced traumatic pangs and struggle for survival of the force-displaced East Bengali dalit refugees are, thus, explored vividly by these writers. Their identities explored in literary texts of Jatin Bala, Manoranjan Byapari, Adhir Biswas and others except Amitav Ghosh as refugees as well as a dalits are continued in non dalit milieu and they cannot escape from consciousness of these identities. The Lockean memory criterion takes a grotesque aspect where one’s identity itself becomes a matter of trauma. . If Hume’s theory is applied to this situation, it will seem that their experiences of leaving their place of origin and suffering as refugees as well as dalits never lose their first “vivacity” and become ideas which can be termed as “memory” rather than “imagination” and this memory make them traumatized. Amitav Ghosh, though not a dalit and a refugee, has also skillfully chronicled the first “vivacity” of the traumatic pangs of these ‘Harijans’(118). Debi Chatterjee, Ex-Professor of Jadavpur University, captivates the traumatic pangs of dalit refugees of Bengal due to dual identities and double marginalization unleashed by the atrocities of upper caste people truly stating that:

...the force-displaced dalits – the worst victims of the Partition....dalit refugees are

after all not just refugees, but dalits as well...(the back cover page of *Stories of Social*

Awakening: Reflections of Dalit Refugee Lives of Bengal).

While refugees have always struggled for stability and rootedness, low caste refugees have struggled harder being doubly disadvantaged. Truly, the texts are the real testimonials of unfinished traumatic pangs and sufferings of socially and nationally marginalized refugees.

Bibliography

- Bala, Jatin. *Stories of Social Awakening: Reflections of Dalit Refugee Lives of Bengal* (Ed. Jaydeep Sarangi). New Delhi: Authors Press, 2017.
- Bandyopadhyay, Sekhar. 'Partition and the Ruptures in Dalit Identity Politics in Bengal', *Asian Studies Review*, 33: 4, 455 — 467, 2009.
- Banerjee, Sarbani, "'More or Less" Refugee: Bengal Partition in Literature and Cinema" (2015). *Electronic Thesis and Dissertatio Repository*. Paper 3125.
- Biswas, Adhir. *Deshbhager Smriti* (4 Vols), Kolkata: Gangchil, 2010.
- Biswas, Manohar Mouli. *Surviving in My World: Growing up Dalit* Trs. & Eds. Angana Dutta and Jaydeep Sarangi, Bengali *Amar Bhubane Ami Benchi Thaki*), Kolkata: Samya Publishers, 2015, ISBN 9789381345092.
- Byapari, Manoranjan. *Itibritte Chandal Jibon* (Vol.1). Kolkata: Kolkata Prakashan, 2012.
- Fraser, Bashabi. *Bengal Partition Stories: An Unclosed Chapter*. New York: Anthem Press
- Ghosh, Amitav. *The Hungry Tide*. UK: Harper Collins, 2004.
- Saha, Dr. Amit Shankar. *Surviving in My World: Growing up Dalit in Bengal* Langlit, Vol. 2, Issue 2 6 November, 2015, Retrived on 21st June, 2018.
- Sarangi, Jaydeep. *Itibritte Chandal Jibon. The Challenge*, Vol.22 No.1 Jan – June 2013 ISSN: 2278 – 9499.