



## Tracing the Motive Behind Violation and Abuse of Untouchable Women's Bodies in the Post-Partition Narrative of Jatin Bala's "The Poisoned Lust"

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### **Abstract:**

The issue of Dalit migrants from East Pakistan during the traumatic Partition of 1947 has been excluded and not given any recognition in the official discourse of Partition history, aiming to camouflage the deeds of the ruling power. The traumatic experiences, sufferings, the crimes committed against the doubly disadvantaged Namasudra refugees in the name of rehabilitation went unnoticed and brushed aside from 1947 up to the present day. Born in Jessore, erstwhile East Pakistan, Dalit refugee writer Jatin Bala portrays the stark reality of the Dalits in Bengal and the social scenario through his literary works. Jatin Bala himself experienced the caste atrocities that were common in those times and faced the hardships of being a Dalit refugee in an independent India after being forcefully displaced from his homeland. His fictionalised representation of the tragedy of Dalits aims to highlight their terrible state in society as a refugee during the 1947 Partition in Eastern India. Jatin Bala's short story "The Poisoned Lust" (2017), points out how the Indian subcontinent is not only divided on the basis of religion, but the birth-based social hierarchy system also divides and segregates this land into countless fragments. The main objectives of this article involve examining the horrifying social reality of the lower-caste Namasudra community in the wake of the Partition of 1947, negligence on the part of authorities towards their grievous situation, the politics behind ignoring this community by looking upon them as liabilities of the nation, and consequently leaving them at the mercy of fate to fend for themselves. The paper also strives to locate how Jatin Bala portrays the oppressive and dehumanizing ordeals faced by a Bengali Dalit woman in his narrative.

**Keywords:** Partition, Dalits, Refugee, Women, Atrocities



Independence in India was achieved in 1947 but it was achieved with the horrors of Partition violence that has eternally scarred the memories of the land. Bengal witnessed waves of migration right after the Partition of the subcontinent, and ‘in 1947 more than 2,58,000 refugees came to India who were largely upper-caste Hindus belonging to middle-class service holders.’<sup>1</sup> Though the upper-caste refugees were forced to leave their homeland, many did not face much difficulty in settling in different parts of India, especially West Bengal. This was due to their privileged position in society as rich upper-caste Hindus, good educational backgrounds, networks of family and friends, and the availability of more opportunities for alternative occupations in India.<sup>2</sup> It was mainly the marginalised lower-caste Hindus who were deprived of their basic requirements to survive. Even today the attitude of the society is such that hardly anyone remembers or wishes to recount the atrocities the Dalits had to undergo during the country’s Partition. Hence, the marginalised have always been silenced in the historical discourses through the strong traditions of patriarchy. The authority neither wished to take people’s collective opinion of whether they wanted a division or not, nor did they attempt to establish any responsibility for the millions of refugee influx that burdened a single state of West Bengal. The plight of the Hindu lower-caste communities was ignored, and they were made to feel unwanted both by the State as well as the Centre. The struggle for survival was difficult and different according to individual refugees, but the condition was nonetheless worse for the Dalits. The only driving force of the political authorities that pushed the Partition of Bengal was ‘to fortify upper-caste Hindu domination in Bengal politics’ states Halder<sup>3</sup> which would otherwise have been impossible in an undivided Bengal with its Muslim majority population, and collective indignation of both the lower-caste Hindus and Muslims against the tyranny of upper-caste Hindus.

During Partition, the lower-caste Hindus could not immediately migrate leaving their homeland behind owing to a lack of all those opportunities and skills required to enter the job sector, to start a new life afresh. The lower-caste Hindus along with their Muslim counterparts were the underprivileged and poverty-stricken sections who earned their livelihood as cultivators in East Bengal. Unlike those who were connected to the soil of their land, the upper castes were ‘seriously concerned about their social hierarchy and left; lest their superior social position and the dignity of womanhood of their female members (*ma-boner ijjat*) were compromised.’<sup>4</sup> Therefore, they started migrating as soon as Partition was declared and not due to any ‘immediate threat of Hindu-Muslim riot as such.’<sup>5</sup> The Hindu marginalised sections of



East Pakistan started migrating in bulk when communal riots took a horrific shape and swept the entire region of East Pakistan in 1949 causing 'the influx of another 11,82,000 refugees in West Bengal' in 1950 as per the official record.<sup>6</sup> Apart from West Bengal, migrants also dispersed in the North-eastern states of Assam and Tripura in another wave of migration which is estimated to be 15,82,000. These refugees in the later stage of the migration process predominantly consisted of the Dalits in Bengal, primarily *Namasudras*, the peasant community and *Rajbongshis*, the tribals of East Bengal.

The huge waves of refugee influx in India from East Pakistan during the 1947 Partition were tackled inhumanely since the government was not prepared to rehabilitate millions of people. Apart from the refugee camps being set up by the government at Sealdah, Dhubulia and Ranaghat, the refugees had also seized lands and made space for themselves wherever they got an empty space after crossing the border. However, life at these camps and squatter colonies was horrendous and agonizing, and each day was like a challenge thrown at them to survive. Amid the issue of East Bengali refugees, the valiant resistance put up by the womenfolk, and their countless suffering owing to the political turmoil is a traumatic story. During the trauma of mass displacement and the ongoing communal violence around the time of Partition, the East Bengali women had to carry forward with their domestic duties.<sup>7</sup> Later, these women went out into the public sphere to educate themselves and earn basic livelihood to support their families against impoverishment which 'formed the majority of the working women of West Bengal.'<sup>8</sup> This historic struggle of women refugees of East Bengal from trauma to triumph during the arbitrary division not only encouraged the women of West Bengal to come out into the public sphere and enter the job sector but also unlocked 'the doors that had remained closed to women all these years.'<sup>9</sup>

The economic and social status of both the Dalits as well as the ordinary Muslims in the eastern part of Bengal were similar since both 'were firmly attached to agriculture for their livelihood.'<sup>10</sup> The authorities of the subcontinent jumped to the conclusion of partitioning the entire country to maintain peace and stability between Hindus and Muslims, without taking into consideration 'their life, property, ethnicity and culture.'<sup>11</sup> The upper-caste Hindus were the land-owning class on whose lands the Dalits and Muslims worked as cultivators who were economically, socially, and educationally backward. The Muslims and Dalits faced rigorous economic exploitation and deprivation at the hands of the upper-caste Hindus, who considered Muslims and low-caste Hindus as equally untouchables and their social inferiors. The



hegemonic attitude of the Bengali *bhadralok*<sup>12</sup> toward the Dalits coming from East Pakistan is a serious infringement of human rights not only during Partition but also after that, ‘which has not changed even to-day, goes a long way to explain the plight of the latter.’<sup>13</sup>

The 1947 Partition of the Indian subcontinent caused severe damage to the identity of the lower-caste victims, especially the Namasudra community of East Pakistan. At such terrifyingly vulnerable times of violence and bloodshed, the upper-caste Hindus took this as an opportunity to eliminate the Dalits who were oppressed in the Indian society for centuries, and whose condition has not been addressed or improved till date. Carrying the sole identity of ‘untouchable’, the Dalits were exploited in every aspect of life in Indian society where the caste hierarchy has always reigned supreme since times immemorial. Their difficulties mounted with a twofold effect as soon as communal violence was unleashed in the entire subcontinent with the declaration of the Partition plan along religious demographics. The only identity of belongingness that this deprived class had was their place of birth which was ripped off at once, the moment they were conferred the status of ‘refugee’. They were oppressed, neglected, and annihilated post-Partition from all facets of life not only by the common people but also by the authorities in power. During the Partition in 1947, the violence in Eastern India did not receive much recognition compared to Western India. The demand for stability by the East Bengali Dalit refugees who had to migrate from East Pakistan to West Bengal was rendered invisible and consequently sent to another form of exile as a part of the rehabilitation project, both by the state and the centre. Uprooted from their homes, and simultaneously from life, the trajectories of the East Bengali Dalits were barbaric and miserable.

The Namasudra community has been subjected to severe caste-based discrimination throughout the ages. As soon as the country was partitioned on religious lines, they encountered horrific violence from the Muslim community with whom they once co-existed peacefully for decades. Their situation drastically transformed, and their life completely turned upside-down post-independence. With each incident of communal disturbance, their tragic circumstances escalated, and this prompted a mass exodus. Dilip Halder in *Atrocities on Dalits Since the Partition of Bengal: A Human Rights Question (2008)* puts forth the extent of violence the Namasudras had to undergo at the hands of police, military, and local Muslims prior to their mass migration in the chapter titled “Exodus and Plight of *Dalit* Refugees”<sup>14</sup>. An example of one of the incidents Halder mentions in the chapter:



in Digharkul of Gopalganj Sub-Division, where a *Namasudra* fisherman family was brutally tortured by Muslims with the help of police on the basis of a fake complaint lodged by a Muslim fisherman. The torture was so severe that a pregnant woman member of the family aborted on the spot.<sup>15</sup>

There were other similar incidents of cruelty being perpetrated on the Namasudras where they used to be frequently beaten up, tortured, killed, women were raped, and their properties destroyed completely. The communal hatred aggravated to such unimaginable levels that people migrated en masse even in the 1950s and after that. In the process of rehabilitation and resettlement, these people were betrayed and played upon by authorities on both sides of the border. Nowhere to go they surrendered themselves to the fate of misery and humiliation at every step of their lives with nothing left to support their tragic existence. This blatant hypocrisy and indifference on the part of both the Hindu upper-caste citizens and the representatives of the nation with an intention to drive them away proved monstrous and appeared as ‘a severe punishment to a large section of human beings, productively settled in peace and amity in their traditional hearth and home, for no fault committed according to any code of justice anywhere in the world.’<sup>16</sup> The unwanted attitude towards the Namasudra community to ensure their removal from West Bengal gave undue advantage to the upper-caste locals to taunt, bully, pass distasteful remarks, attack, assault, and outrage the modesty of women in this community as they were considered a burden as well as a threat to the state of West Bengal. The Partition of the subcontinent was already a communal event where Hindu-Muslim enmity was at its peak. This agony of bloodbath and brutality was not enough for people to settle matters at hand and increase their tolerance level to co-exist peacefully. On the contrary, their sense of intolerance increased and gained momentum, as is evident from the carnage the helpless, homeless Dalit refugees faced throughout this ordeal after migrating to a land where people of their own religious community resided. Thereafter, the trauma and suffering endured by the economically disadvantaged Namasudra community during and after the Partition is a distressing reality as they were compelled to ‘pay a heavy price for the reciprocity of political interest of the Centre and the State.’<sup>17</sup>

Women, irrespective of whatever background they belonged to, sustained prolonged and torturous sexual violence during this communal frenzy of 1947. The female body has always been a battleground for men during the war. Violence against women was carried out during Partition to avenge the rival community’s honour since it is a woman who carries the burden of honour of their community and nation together. In Bengal, the condition of women was no



different from that of Punjab in terms of sexual violence, abuse, kidnappings, and starvation, irrespective of their classes. Partition had ruptured these women's lives in an unprecedented way, and those who survived had to live with bitter and traumatic memories. This tragic situation of women was not only silenced but they were also consciously forgotten. However, women eventually ventured out into the public space and earned to support themselves and their families.<sup>18</sup> The East Bengali refugee women in West Bengal emerged 'as the tireless breadwinner' profoundly reshaping traditional notions of femininity and the societal roles of Bengali *bhadramahila*, thereby altering the 'social landscape irrevocably.'<sup>19</sup>

Before Partition, the Dalit refugee women, the majority of whom belonged to the Namasudra community were not just sexually exploited on a regular basis by the upper-caste Hindu community of East Bengal, but they were also sexually assaulted by the said community of West Bengal after they migrated in 1947. Post-Independence, the Dalit women were brutally raped by the local police and authorities in a state-sponsored massacre during the process of their rehabilitation and resettlement. Therefore, these lower-caste women refugees were doubly marginalised in the monumental event of Partition. Apart from being reduced to mere physical bodies, these Dalit women's bodies were violated to impose a greater amount of domination, power, and retaliation by their upper-caste counterparts. Though the Namasudras were regarded as the untouchable ones, nonetheless when it came down to dishonouring and violating their agency and body, the upper caste did not think twice since they were poor and powerless. It was a stark display of caste supremacy that exposed the dark side of humankind. Viewed as 'filthy', the upper castes refrain from touching or associating with the Dalits by ostracizing them. But while satisfying their sexual lust these 'untouchable' women become the easiest target in the society. The silencing of the marginalised refugees passed from one generation to the next who do not have the luxury to either reminisce their past or fight back against the atrocities meted out to them even in recent times.

Bengali Dalit refugee writer Jatin Bala reflects on the harrowing caste atrocities and their struggle for survival especially during the Partition of the Indian subcontinent. The Partition had a significant impact on the Namasudra community as they were not entitled to seek proper refuge, and their position was diminished throughout the challenging times of the country's Partition history. Bala himself was a victim of caste atrocities since the time he was assigned the status of a lower caste by birth. Later he faced the horrific communal violence of the Bengal Partition which forced him and his family to migrate to India in 1954. His narratives mainly



deal with the tumultuous life struggle of the Dalit refugees and their inhuman ordeals during the transition period of displacement and re-settlement after the country's Partition. Along with showcasing the pangs of being treated as an inferior class by the Hindu upper-caste people, Jatin Bala portrays their determination to fight back and resist the dominant powers' growing oppression towards them. The resilient and revolutionary spirit is evoked in his depiction of the Namasudra refugees who were doubly marginalized for their caste and refugee status.<sup>20</sup>

Jatin Bala's story "The Poisoned Lust" depicts a painful picture of a widowed mother and her daughter living in Sonadangan, a remote village of Nadia district in West Bengal. Their hut is situated near Goddess Raksha Kali's temple, adjacent to a bamboo forest, and this forested area is 'so densely dark that it seems to be abandoned by the lights of sun, moon and even the blue above.'<sup>21</sup> The description of their place of residence is symbolically apt since the Dalits have been deprived of their basic needs of subsistence from the moment they are born. Stripped of even their most basic rights to live, they are indeed socially trapped in darkness from where there is no beacon of hope in a casteist country like India.

Bedana's husband Satish Das was a cobbler by caste, and in the Brahmanical system of inequality 'even the shadow of a cobbler is not permitted in Hindu society.'<sup>22</sup> Satish was a drummer in the Raksha Kali temple and the sole breadwinner in his family before his unfortunate death. His death has prompted vulnerability in the lives of his wife and daughter in myriad forms while living in a non-Dalit milieu. Hunger and starvation forced Bedana to take up the responsibility of cleaning the temple premises every day so that she is assisted with whatever minimum financial assistance to support herself and her daughter Tulsi in their hapless destitute life. Being an untouchable, Bedana is not only denied entry inside the temple, but she is also not entitled to receive fresh temple food in accordance with the inhuman Brahmanical norms. The segregation and caste discrimination run so deep in the façade of Indian tradition and culture that she 'picks up stale leftover food from the temple-floor'<sup>23</sup> and brings it home to satiate the pangs of hunger. Added to this routine distress of earning a living, Bedana broke her waist, leaving her with nowhere to turn for humanitarian assistance, thus making her situation even worse. Bala chooses the name 'Bedana,' subtly signifying her innumerable hardships for being a woman first, and then a Dalit. Bedana, as her name implies is the manifestation of all kinds of pain and affliction inflicted on her by the monstrous Hindu society which does not even stand by her family in such an excruciatingly painful time.





Worried at the feeble circumstances of her only daughter, Bedana decides to send Tulsi to the temple vicinity so that she can get herself involved in the same work of removing the dirt that her caste lineage was destined to do owing to their inferior social standing in the society. India's untouchables are looked down upon by all, and therefore their adversities go unnoticed, unacknowledged and are abhorred by humankind. Bedana is acutely conscious that 'in spite of being untouchable the women of this sect are never safe.'<sup>24</sup> Hunger pangs forced an unfortunate mother to send her girl child through such perils since the Dalits are not permitted an alternative way of living to pull through the structures and institutions of oppression. Much to her dismay and reluctance Tulsi undertook her mother's place and went to the temple so that she could appease her appetite with whatever little *onnovog*<sup>25</sup> she is spared by her oppressors. Tulsi's fearful frame of mind was justifiable because she is aware of the elite monsters lurking around in the society in the guise of a priest who ritually considered themselves superior to the other segments of society. While the Dalits will remain defenceless and subservient to their caste-assigned conduct and norms and are bound to 'struggle endlessly in order to survive, enduring hatred disgusts and oppressions.'<sup>26</sup>

The upper-caste, especially Brahmins, are very conscious about associating with the lower-caste people. The superior castes believed these untouchables were not eligible to receive food from the upper caste as their extension of touch while offering food to the Dalits would defile the purity of the upper class. However, these same oppressor castes would not re-evaluate their actions while sully the modesty of Dalit women or girls. Standing on a holy place in his priestly attire, Sadhan Chakraborty ogle at every inch of Tulsi's youthful female flesh with his lecherous intent. Tulsi could sense her impending danger, prompting her to quickly escape the temple vicinity that was about to turn ominous, especially for the voiceless underprivileged Dalit girl. Yet an empty stomach compelled her to anxiously hold on till she was given her due share of spoiled food despite plenty of it inside the temple, which the untouchables have no access to.

Sadhan Chakraborty was desperate to quench his lust by feeding on docile Tulsi's youthful femininity. After the auspicious night of Kali puja, before daybreak while carrying out the remaining task of puja alone in the temple, Chakraborty notices Tulsi anticipating some food to be provided to her after cleaning the temple premises. Perceiving the time is ripe to fulfil his uncontrollable carnal desire, he uses his manipulative tone and lures famished Tulsi to receive the abundance of last night's Kali puja prashad<sup>27</sup> inside the temple. Apprehensive of the





depraved priest, Tulsi eventually gives in to her hunger pangs and advances towards the temple where she is destined to encounter her doom in the hands of the priest who grabs her and thrusts her inside Goddess Raksha Kali's temple. Before the idol, Sadhan Chakraborty, a worshipper of a female deity, 'continued smashing kneading the budding virginity of the untouchable; of the one who is not permitted to enter the temple; the cobbler's daughter, Tulsi, right inside the 'holy' chamber of the temple.'<sup>28</sup>

Through "The Poisoned Lust" Jatin Bala presents a juxtaposition of two different aspects of upper-caste demeanour. On one hand, Bedana and Tulsi are forbidden to enter the temple because of their inferior caste which would pollute the sacred space while on the other, the priest never fails to stare at Tulsi's body 'from behind her torn attire by his poisonous voluptuous glances.'<sup>29</sup> The touch of Dalits defiles the upper castes as if they are some sort of despicable creatures. Dreading an untouchable's touch Chakraborty customarily tosses out the temple food to Tulsi since touching her would besmirch Chakraborty's lofty Brahmin status, one that seems so fragile. He, for once, did not hesitate to glance at her through his lecherous eyes nor did he ponder to think about his supreme, untainted priestly status while raping Tulsi inside the temple. At that moment, her status of untouchability did not matter to him in the slightest. Ironically, while raping her, Sadhan Chakraborty hauls her inside the temple, lays his supposed "pure" hands on her body and devours every inch of her flesh like a monster as if to satiate his libido 'there is no bar of untouchability.'<sup>30</sup> As lamentable and tragic as it could be, even Goddess Raksha Kali, the divine protector as her name indicates, failed to protect Tulsi, a marginalized, ill-fated Dalit girl from an upper-caste monster since he is privileged by birth with a Godly stature in the society.

Jatin Bala's narrative tries to bring out how the concept of untouchability is entirely paradoxical and opportunistic. When it comes to fulfilling libidinous desires, there are no restrictions on touching or violating an untouchable woman. Dalit women seem to be the easiest target since they belong to the lower strata of society, and hence they do not have a voice or an agency of their own. In a society where Brahmanical patriarchy is still a predominant factor of India's harsh caste hierarchy, Bala's story echoes the misery of these powerless women through the mother-daughter characters, Bedana and Tulsi. His narrative also sheds light on how the lower-caste communities are dehumanized in society by the upper castes, who aim to teach them a lesson so that they carefully adhere to the caste hierarchy without showing any dissent towards the caste structure. Violating the body of any woman is a recurrent phenomenon in a



patriarchal society but in the matter of assaulting a Dalit woman, upper-caste perpetrators exhibit an attitude to overpower these lower-caste people, to remind them of their inferior social status, with the purpose of keeping the entire Dalit community under their control perpetually. The motif behind their sexual assaults and violence is to constantly make these Dalits aware of their inferior position in society and to shatter their self-esteem each time they strive to resist, rise, or emerge from their destitute and miserable circumstances. The untouchable Dalit women become touchable, and their bodies act as a vengeance ground for the upper-caste men to remind them of their lowly footing in society. Women have been victims of oppression and sexual violence all over the world since the dawn of time. In the Indian patriarchal set-up, while women have always struggled to make an identity by fighting the demon called patriarchy, low-caste marginalized women have battled harder to simply survive the oppressor castes' barbarity and sexual assaults towards them.



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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Halder, Dilip. *Atrocities on Dalits Since the Partition of Bengal: A Human Rights Question* (New Delhi: Mittal Publications, 2008), 16.

<sup>2</sup> Dilip Halder in his book mentions certain historical reasons why the rich upper-caste Hindu refugees faced relatively fewer difficulties in their resettlement and the reasons behind their early migration to the Indian subcontinent. See Dilip Halder, *Atrocities on Dalits Since the Partition of Bengal: A Human Rights Question* (New Delhi: Mittal Publications, 2008), 15-16.

<sup>3</sup> Halder, Dilip. *Atrocities on Dalits Since the Partition of Bengal: A Human Rights Question* (New Delhi: Mittal Publications, 2008), 14.

<sup>4</sup> Halder, Dilip. *Atrocities on Dalits Since the Partition of Bengal: A Human Rights Question* (New Delhi: Mittal Publications, 2008), 15.

<sup>5</sup> Halder, Dilip. *Atrocities on Dalits Since the Partition of Bengal: A Human Rights Question* (New Delhi: Mittal Publications, 2008), 15.

<sup>6</sup> Halder, Dilip. *Atrocities on Dalits Since the Partition of Bengal: A Human Rights Question* (New Delhi: Mittal Publications, 2008), 19.

<sup>7</sup> Sen, Manikuntala. "Partition: Streams of Refugees," in *No Woman's Land: Women from Pakistan, India and Bangladesh Write on the Partition of India*, ed. Ritu Menon (New Delhi: Women Unlimited, 2004), 72.

<sup>8</sup> Sen, Manikuntala. "Partition: Streams of Refugees," in *No Woman's Land: Women from Pakistan, India and Bangladesh Write on the Partition of India*, ed. Ritu Menon (New Delhi: Women Unlimited, 2004), 72.

<sup>9</sup> Sen, Manikuntala. "Partition: Streams of Refugees," in *No Woman's Land: Women from Pakistan, India and Bangladesh Write on the Partition of India*, ed. Ritu Menon (New Delhi: Women Unlimited, 2004), 72.

<sup>10</sup> Halder, Dilip. *Atrocities on Dalits Since the Partition of Bengal: A Human Rights Question* (New Delhi: Mittal Publications, 2008), 2.

<sup>11</sup> Halder, Dilip. *Atrocities on Dalits Since the Partition of Bengal: A Human Rights Question* (New Delhi: Mittal Publications, 2008), 2.

<sup>12</sup> *Bhadralok* status was given to the privileged upper-caste Bengali men 'whose prosperity was obviously derived from the land' and furthermore is associated with 'possessing the goods of education, culture and anglicisation.' See Dilip Halder, *Atrocities on Dalits Since the Partition of Bengal: A Human Rights Question* (New Delhi: Mittal Publications, 2008), 8.

<sup>13</sup> Halder, Dilip. *Atrocities on Dalits Since the Partition of Bengal: A Human Rights Question* (New Delhi: Mittal Publications, 2008), 2.

<sup>14</sup> The Namasudras who constituted the entire workforce of the agricultural sector of East Bengal (now Bangladesh) suffered series of adversities during post-Partition communal tensions. See Dilip Halder, *Atrocities*



on *Dalits Since the Partition of Bengal: A Human Rights Question* (New Delhi: Mittal Publications, 2008), 19-27.

<sup>15</sup> Halder, Dilip. *Atrocities on Dalits Since the Partition of Bengal: A Human Rights Question* (New Delhi: Mittal Publications, 2008), 19.

<sup>16</sup> Halder, Dilip. *Atrocities on Dalits Since the Partition of Bengal: A Human Rights Question* (New Delhi: Mittal Publications, 2008), 22.

<sup>17</sup> Halder, Dilip. *Atrocities on Dalits Since the Partition of Bengal: A Human Rights Question* (New Delhi: Mittal Publications, 2008), 45.

<sup>18</sup> Using memoirs, literary works, documentation, and interviews, Bagchi and Dasgupta draw upon the communal tensions in the East, the issue of the East Bengali refugees, the valiant resistance put up by Bengal's women, and their countless suffering owing to the political turmoil. During the trauma of mass displacement and the ongoing communal violence around the time of Partition, women had to carry forward with their domestic responsibilities, and subsequently venture into the public domain to safeguard their families from destitution amidst the arbitrary partition. See Jasodhara Bagchi and Subhoranjan Dasgupta, *The Trauma and the Triumph: Gender and Partition in Eastern India*, ed. Jasodhara Bagchi and Subhoranjan Dasgupta (Kolkata: Stree, 2003), 6.

<sup>19</sup> Bagchi, Jasodhara, and Subhoranjan Dasgupta. "Introduction," in *The Trauma and the Triumph: Gender and Partition in Eastern India*, ed. Jasodhara Bagchi and Subhoranjan Dasgupta (Kolkata: Stree, 2003), 6.

<sup>20</sup> Jatin Bala discusses his experience as a displaced Dalit individual, the challenges they face, his account as a Bengali Dalit refugee writer, offers insights into his literary works, and sheds light on the broader context of Dalit literature in the interview titled "An Uprooted Life: Jaydeep Sarangi in Conversation with Jatin Bala", translated from Bengali by Suranjana Banerjee. See Jatin Bala, *Stories of Social Awakening: Reflections of Dalit Refugee Lives of Bengal*, ed. Jaydeep Sarangi (New Delhi: Authorspress, 2017), 203-17.

<sup>21</sup> Bala, Jatin. "The Poisoned Lust," in *Stories of Social Awakening: Reflections of Dalit Refugee Lives of Bengal*, trans. Barninee Mukherjee (New Delhi: Authorspress, 2017), 182.

<sup>22</sup> Bala, Jatin. "The Poisoned Lust," in *Stories of Social Awakening: Reflections of Dalit Refugee Lives of Bengal*, trans. Barninee Mukherjee (New Delhi: Authorspress, 2017), 182.

<sup>23</sup> Bala, Jatin. "The Poisoned Lust," in *Stories of Social Awakening: Reflections of Dalit Refugee Lives of Bengal*, trans. Barninee Mukherjee (New Delhi: Authorspress, 2017), 183.

<sup>24</sup> Bala, Jatin. "The Poisoned Lust," in *Stories of Social Awakening: Reflections of Dalit Refugee Lives of Bengal*, trans. Barninee Mukherjee (New Delhi: Authorspress, 2017), 184.



<sup>25</sup> Onnovog is a sacred offering of cooked rice to the deity at temples during ritualistic prayers or religious ceremonies. This holy rice is known as onnovog which is later distributed among the devotees as a form of divine blessing.

<sup>26</sup> Bala, Jatin. "The Poisoned Lust," in *Stories of Social Awakening: Reflections of Dalit Refugee Lives of Bengal*, trans. Barninee Mukherjee (New Delhi: Authorspress, 2017), 185.

<sup>27</sup> Prashad is blessed food items similar to onnovog, and not typically cooked holy rice.

<sup>28</sup> Bala, Jatin. "The Poisoned Lust," in *Stories of Social Awakening: Reflections of Dalit Refugee Lives of Bengal*, trans. Barninee Mukherjee (New Delhi: Authorspress, 2017), 190.

<sup>29</sup> Bala, Jatin. "The Poisoned Lust," in *Stories of Social Awakening: Reflections of Dalit Refugee Lives of Bengal*, trans. Barninee Mukherjee (New Delhi: Authorspress, 2017), 188.

<sup>30</sup> Bala, Jatin. "The Poisoned Lust," in *Stories of Social Awakening: Reflections of Dalit Refugee Lives of Bengal*, trans. Barninee Mukherjee (New Delhi: Authorspress, 2017), 188.



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