

“Partitioned Identities, Reclaiming Voice: Exploring the Intersections of Caste, Displacement, and Self-Assertion in Select Dalit Short Stories of Jatin Bala”

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Abstract:

This research paper critically examines the intersections of caste, displacement, and identity formation as represented in select short stories by Jatin Bala, originally written in Bengali and later translated into English. The analyzed narratives, taken from Bala's *Stories of Social Awakening: Reflections of Dalit Refugee Lives of Bengal* (2017), edited by Jaydeep Sarangi, include *Story of Social Consciousness*, *Resurrection*, and *Martyr*. The study attempts to explore how Bala's works challenge monolithic representations of refugee experiences and underscore the unique struggles and resilience of Dalit refugee communities of Bengal during Partition of India. Employing a multidisciplinary approach, the analysis draws upon postcolonial theory, subaltern studies, and identity studies to reveal how caste-based oppression intersects with displacement and the quest for identity in the aftermath of Partition. Through vivid literary techniques, Bala highlights the psychological scars and persistent resilience of his characters, contributing to a deeper understanding of the complexities of identity formation and the intersectional nature of oppression in post-Partition India.

Keywords: Refugee, Partition, Displacement, Caste oppression, Identity formation, Intersectionality, Resilience]

I. Introduction:

The emergence of Dalit literature stands as a watershed moment in the landscape of Indian literary discourse especially after independence. It marks a profound shift in the representation and articulation of marginalized voices that have long been stifled by the oppressive structures inherent in the caste system (Brueck, 2014; Limbale, 2004). This revolutionary literary movement is distinguished by its raw, uncompromising depiction of the Dalit experience which unflinchingly portrays the multifaceted struggles faced by these communities in their ongoing battle against deeply entrenched systemic discrimination, economic exploitation, and social dehumanization (Rao, 2009). Eminent scholars and literary critics, including Limbale (2004), Dangle (2009), and Teltumbde (2010), have underscored the pivotal role of Dalit literature as a powerful instrument of resistance, a means of reclaiming and asserting identity, and a scathing critique of the social order that has perpetuated their marginalization for centuries. Through their writings, Dalit authors engage in a process of narrative reclamation. It attempts to seize control of their own stories and experiences from the dominant upper-caste narratives that have historically silenced or misrepresented them. This act of literary empowerment serves a dual purpose: it not only challenges the hegemonic discourse perpetuated by upper-caste voices but also provides a nuanced, insider perspective on the complexities and diversity of Dalit identities. By doing so, Dalit literature illuminates the ongoing struggle for dignity, equality, and social justice that remains at the heart of the Dalit movement (Guru & Sarukkai, 2012). Through poetry, prose, and various other literary forms, Dalit writers paint a vivid, often harrowing picture of their lived experiences that compel readers to confront the harsh realities of caste-based discrimination and inspiring critical reflection on the nature of Indian society and its deeply ingrained inequalities. Bangla Dalit literature, though existing for over a century, has struggled for mainstream recognition due to social, political, and ideological factors obscuring Bengali Dalit cultural history (Paunksnis, 2021). It provides a significant platform for marginalized voices to record micro-narratives often excluded from nationalist histories (Biswas & Chakraborty, 2024). The emerging visibility of Bangla Dalit literature promises to enhance our understanding of power dynamics and canon formation in modern Indian literature (Dasgupta, 2021).

Running parallel to the emergence of Dalit literature, the monumental event of the 1947 Partition of India has left an indelible mark on the literary and cultural landscape of the Indian subcontinent. This seismic historical occurrence, which saw the division of British India into two separate nation-states, India and Pakistan, has become a wellspring of inspiration for countless writers and artists, thereby giving rise to a vast and diverse corpus of literary works (Butalia, 2017; Pandey, 2001). The Partition, characterized by unprecedented levels of communal violence, mass migration, and the fracturing of communities, families, and individual lives, has become a touchstone for exploring complex themes of identity, belonging, and the profound human cost of political decisions. The literature born from this traumatic period serves as both a historical record and an emotional testament to the experiences of millions who were caught in the maelstrom of this pivotal moment in South Asian history. Renowned authors such as Sadat Hasan Manto, known for his searing short stories, Bapsi Sidhwa, with her poignant novels, and Amitav Ghosh, through his sweeping historical

narratives, have delved deep into the lived experiences of those directly affected by the Partition. Their works not only chronicle the immediate aftermath of the event but also probe its long-lasting psychological, social, and political ramifications that continue to reverberate through generations (Kabir, 2005; Saint, 2010). These writers, among many others, have skilfully woven narratives that capture the complexity of human emotions and experiences during this tumultuous period. They explore themes of displacement, the arbitrariness of newly drawn borders, the pain of leaving ancestral homes, and the challenges of rebuilding lives in unfamiliar territories. Through their stories, they illuminate the ways in which the Partition disrupted traditional social structures, reshaped cultural identities, and left an enduring imprint on the collective psyche of the subcontinent. Moreover, Partition literature often grapples with the broader implications of this historical event by questioning notions of nationalism, religious identity, and the very concept of belonging. It serves as a powerful medium for examining the long-term consequences of the Partition, including ongoing territorial disputes, communal tensions, and the complex relationship between India and Pakistan. It continues to play a crucial role in shaping discussions about history, memory, and identity in South Asia and beyond.

Within the expansive realm of scholarly discourse on Dalit literature and Partition narratives, a significant lacuna persists in the exploration of the intricate intersections between caste, displacement, and the formation of identity (Nayar, 2012). While Dalit writers have produced a rich corpus of literature vividly depicting the multifaceted nature of caste-based oppression, and Partition narratives have delved deep into the complexities of displacement and identity crises, there remains a conspicuous dearth of academic attention devoted to the unique, layered experiences of Dalit refugee communities. These communities find themselves at the nexus of multiple axes of marginalization. Their narratives are shaped by the convergence of caste discrimination and the trauma of forced displacement (Kumar, 2010; Ganguly, 2005). It is against this backdrop of scholarly oversight that the literary works of Jatin Bala (b. 1949), a towering figure in the Bangla Dalit literary canon, assume a position of paramount significance.

Born into a Namashudra peasant community in East Bengal (now Bangladesh), Bala's life trajectory was irrevocably altered by the tumultuous events of Partition. He and his family found themselves uprooted from their ancestral lands, swept up in the tide of communal violence that characterized the Partition riots. This deeply personal experience of displacement forms the emotional and narrative core of Bala's autobiographical work, *A Life Uprooted: A Bengali Dalit Refugee Remembers* (Bala, 2022). This poignant memoir serves as a powerful chronicle of the harrowing experiences endured by Dalit refugees. The book vividly details their struggles with displacement, discrimination, and the daily fight for survival in an often-hostile new environment. Bala's short stories, collected and published in the seminal anthology *Stories of Social Awakening: Reflections of Dalit Refugee Lives of Bengal* (Bala, 2017), offer readers a profoundly moving and insightful exploration of the complex intersections between caste, displacement, and the ongoing process of identity formation in the wake of historical upheaval. His extensive literary oeuvre transcends mere storytelling; it stands as a testament to the traumatic experiences of Partition and displacement while simultaneously casting a revealing light on the intersectional nature of oppression faced by Dalit refugee communities. His narratives skilfully weave together the threads of personal experience and broader social critique that illuminate how the already oppressive system of caste-based discrimination became further compounded by the challenges of displacement, statelessness, and the relentless struggle for survival in refugee camps and resettlement colonies.

Through his evocative prose, Bala paints a vivid picture of how these intersecting forms of oppression worked in concert to deepen the marginalization and dehumanization of Dalit refugee communities (Byapari & Mukherjee, 2018). His stories reveal how the trauma of forced migration and the loss of homeland intertwined with pre-existing caste prejudices. This created a complex web of discrimination that Dalit refugees had to navigate in their quest for dignity and survival. Bala's work thus serves not only as a crucial historical record but also as a powerful call for recognition of the unique struggles faced by these doubly marginalized communities. By giving voice to these often-silenced narratives, Bala's literature challenges dominant discourses surrounding both Partition and caste. His work stands as a testament to the resilience of the human spirit in the face of overwhelming adversity, while simultaneously serving as a potent critique of the social, political, and economic structures that perpetuate such marginalization.

This research paper aims to explore the intersections of caste, displacement, and identity formation in three short stories (*Story of Social Consciousness*, *Resurrection* and *Martyr*) from Bala's aforementioned collection. Employing a multidisciplinary approach drawing upon postcolonial theory (Spivak, 1988), subaltern studies (Guha, 1982), and identity studies (Hall, 1996), the paper analyzes how Bala's works challenge monolithic representations of refugee experiences and underscore the unique struggles and resilience of Dalit refugee communities. The central thesis posits that these short stories offer a nuanced, multifaceted exploration of how caste-based oppression intersects with experiences of displacement, uprootedness, and identity quest in the Partition's aftermath. By centering Dalit refugee community narratives, Bala's work amplifies doubly marginalized voices and challenges dominant narratives that have often rendered these experiences invisible or peripheral (Zene, 2011). By doing this, the present research attempts to contribute to a deeper understanding of oppression's intersectional nature and identity formation complexities in the Partition's aftermath. It seeks to amplify voices and experiences rendered invisible or peripheral within dominant

narratives, thereby expanding literary and cultural studies' scope to encompass the diversity and richness of human experiences (Pandey, 2001; Menon, 2004).

II. Methodology:

The analytical approach in this study combines close textual reading and thematic analysis of Jatin Bala's selected short stories. Close reading allows for a nuanced examination of literary techniques, symbolism, and narrative strategies used to represent multifaceted Dalit experiences, displacement, and identity negotiation (Tyson, 2015). Concurrently, thematic analysis identifies recurring motifs, patterns, and ideological underpinnings shaping narratives of caste oppression, uprootedness, and self-assertion (Braun & Clarke, 2006). While primarily grounded in textual analysis, this research situates Bala's narratives within broader socio-political and historical contexts, underscoring their relevance in elucidating marginalized identities and experiences in contemporary times (Bhabha, 1994).

This study employs an interdisciplinary theoretical framework drawing upon postcolonial theory, subaltern studies, and critical identity discourse to analyze intersections of caste, displacement, and self-assertion in Bala's Dalit short stories. Postcolonial theory provides a lens to interrogate lingering effects of colonial subjugation and marginalization of oppressed communities in the postcolonial nation-state (Bhabha, 1994; Spivak, 1988). The concept of subalternity, foregrounding voices and narratives of the oppressed, is particularly relevant in examining literary representations of Dalit experiences historically silenced and erased from dominant discourses (Guha & Spivak, 1988). Moreover, this research engages with critical identity studies to unpack complex negotiations of identity formation and self-articulation undertaken by Bala's characters (Mohanty, 1993; Brah & Phoenix, 2004). Their narratives underscore the multifaceted nature of identity, constantly reshaped by intersecting vectors of caste, class, gender, and displacement. By locating Bala's stories within these theoretical frameworks, this study aims to elucidate how literary texts can serve as potent sites for destabilizing hegemonic power structures, reclaiming marginalized histories, and asserting subaltern subjectivities (Spivak, 1999).

III. Partitioned Identities:

In *Story of Social Consciousness*, Bala (2017) depicts the protagonist Jahar Sarkar's identity as profoundly shaped by experiences of displacement and caste-based discrimination. The vivid imagery of farmers with "starving black hardened faces", "hungry lips" and "dry disheveled hair" symbolizes their physical and psychological struggles (Bala, 2017, p. 16). Jahar's articulate resistance which highlights the plight of these marginalized individuals, reflects deep-seated despair and disenfranchisement (Byapari & Mukherjee, 2018). *Resurrection* follows Atul Mistri whose narrative encapsulates the relentless hardships of a Partition victim. The colony's description as "darker and more suffocating than a cell in any jail" (Bala, 2017, p. 26) underscores oppressive conditions exacerbating Atul's fractured identity. Bala uses the setting to symbolize entrapment and stagnation experienced by the displaced (Ganguly, 2016). *Martyr* presents Shri Dam Mandal's partitioned identity, with his severed hand symbolizing physical and emotional scars. His declaration of survival encapsulates the resilience required to navigate a life disrupted by displacement and violence (Pandey, 2001). It is now indubitable that Bala's stories intricately weave together caste, class, and gender to explore their collective impact on partitioned identities. In *Story of Social Consciousness*, caste-based discrimination intersects with displacement experiences (Teltumbde, 2018). *Resurrection* illustrates the intersection of class and caste through Atul's experiences, while his daughter Maya's struggle underscores gender vulnerabilities (Rege, 2006). *Martyr* extends this exploration by presenting communal violence as both a caste and class issue (Menon & Bhasin, 1998).

Bala employs various literary techniques to convey psychic dislocation. Vivid imagery and symbolism in *Story of Social Consciousness* reflect pervasive despair and loss of identity (Brueck, 2019). In *Resurrection*, metaphor and narrative structure mirror Atul's fragmented sense of self (Kumar, 2010). *Martyr* utilizes direct address and autobiographical narrative to create immediacy and personal connection (Zene, 2011). Through these stories, Bala highlights fragmented identities resulting from Partition displacement and critiques intersecting oppressions of caste, class, and gender. His literary techniques effectively convey deep psychological scars and persistent resilience of his characters, offering a powerful exploration of Dalit experiences in post-Partition India.

IV. Displacement and Marginalization:

The exploration of partitioned identities in the selected short stories of Jatin Bala extends into a deeper examination of displacement and marginalization experiences. The multifaceted dimensions of Dalit experiences, illuminated through fractured identities shaped by caste, class, and gender, find further expression in themes of uprootedness and statelessness that Bala's characters endure. Through close textual reading and thematic analysis, this section delves into the hostilities and discrimination encountered by these characters due to their caste and displacement, as well as the physical and psychological impacts of their displacement.

The sense of uprootedness is poignantly illustrated in Bala's *Story of Social Consciousness* through Jahar Sarkar's character. His forced migration during the Partition results in profound dislocation. This narrative captures the turmoil

and uncertainty faced by refugees, echoing what Pandey (2021) describes as the “long shadow” of Partition on displaced communities. Jahar’s recollection of the harrowing journey underscores the violent rupture of lives and communities during this historical event (Butalia, 2017). His settlement in a new village symbolizes the arduous process of rebuilding lives, a theme extensively explored in refugee studies (Malkki, 2012). Despite these efforts, the stigma of being a refugee lingers, reflecting what Zetter (2015) terms the “labelling” of refugees and its impact on their social integration. In *Resurrection*, Atul Mistri’s story encapsulates the pervasive sense of uprootedness experienced by Partition refugees. His journey through various refugee camps aligns with what Samaddar (2016) describes as the “itinerant refugee,” constantly in search of a stable home. The precarity of their existence reflects broader issues of statelessness and citizenship in post-Partition South Asia (Roy, 2019). *Martyr* provides a stark portrayal of displacement trauma through Shri Dam Mandal’s character. His recounting of the riots aligns with what Das (2006) terms the “critical events” that reshape communities and individual lives. The enduring impact of this trauma on identity formation is a theme explored extensively in contemporary Partition literature studies (Kabir, 2018).

The intersection of caste and displacement exacerbates the hostilities faced by Bala’s characters, a phenomenon analyzed in depth by Teltumbde (2018) in his work on caste dynamics in modern India. In *Story of Social Consciousness*, Jahar Sarkar’s account of local animosity towards the refugees underscores what Guru and Sarukkai (2019) term the “layered marginalization” of Dalit individuals. The pervasive caste-based discrimination, highlighted through Jahar’s interactions with high-caste villagers, is perfectly in tune with Ambedkar’s (2014) critique of the caste system’s persistence in modern India. This incident illustrates what Rao (2009) describes as the “stigma of untouchability” that persists even in moments of crisis. In *Resurrection*, Atul Mistri’s experiences of displacement are compounded by systemic caste-based oppression. The narrative captures what Chakravarti (2018) terms the “graded inequality” inherent in the caste system, escalated more by the refugee experience. The description of camp conditions echoes Byapari and Mukherjee’s (2018) accounts of Dalit refugee experiences in post-Partition Bengal. *Martyr* extends the exploration of caste-based hostilities through Shri Dam Mandal’s recounting of communal violence. This harmonizes with Menon and Bhasin’s (2017) analysis of the gendered and caste-based nature of Partition violence. The psychological scars left by such violence, as depicted in the story, reflect what Kaur (2019) describes as the “afterlives of Partition” in South Asian communities.

Bala’s narratives meticulously depict the physical and psychological toll of displacement on his characters. In *Story of Social Consciousness*, the physical impact of displacement is evident in the descriptions of the farmers’ bodies, “sun burnt faces lack the desired artificial smile and the glow of life” (Bala, Story 1). These descriptions not only highlight the physical exhaustion but also symbolize the loss of vitality and hope that accompanies displacement. The recurring imagery of hunger and deprivation further accentuates the physical hardships endured by displaced individuals. Jahar Sarkar’s psychological resilience amidst these adversities is conveyed through his articulate expression of the broader socio-political challenges faced by Dalits. His critique of caste and religious discrimination, “The greatest enemy of our country is religion and caste” (Bala, p. 18), reflects a deep awareness of the systemic nature of their oppression. This critical consciousness serves as a source of strength and sufficiently enables him to navigate the psychological dislocation caused by displacement. In *Resurrection*, Atul Mistri’s poignant declaration, “I am rootless, I moved here and there, from one camp to another, stayed in slums, I broke stones, I dug soil for a living. I am tired. I am just floating on the river of life” (Bala 29) serves as a microcosm of the collective trauma experienced by millions who were uprooted and forced to rebuild their lives amidst unimaginable suffering. His description of himself as “rootless” is a stark indictment of the Partition’s devastating impact on identity and belonging. The forced displacement from ancestral homes and communities resulted in a profound sense of disorientation and alienation. The image of moving from one camp to other underscores the precarious and transient existence of refugees, deprived of stability and security. Despite these challenges, Atul’s psychological resilience is evident in his continuous efforts to provide for his family and rebuild their lives.

The psychological impact of displacement is further illustrated through Maya’s experiences. Her engagement in exploitative labour, driven by hunger, reflects the severe psychological toll of displacement. Maya’s internal conflict — “Young Maya demurred at the beginning. She hesitated to open herself as a commodity of male sexual desire” (Bala, 30) — highlights the emotional and moral dilemmas faced by displaced individuals. This internal struggle underscores the dehumanizing effects of displacement, where survival often necessitates compromising one’s dignity and values. *Martyr* presents a profound exploration of the psychological scars left by displacement. Shri Dam Mandal’s recounting of the communal violence he witnessed captures the enduring trauma of these experiences: “Riots were on in villages and cities. And like every other riot – the same sequence of events – starting right from 1945- were again being repeated- the same, houses being set on fire, gutted, robbery, a complete collapse of rules, rape, murder and rampant killings without any rhyme or reason. A repetitive picture of India’s history, geography – a continuation of same things- separation-partition-riots, communalism-dispute-suicide” (Bala, 106). The vivid descriptions of violence and loss are also evident in passages like, “Somebody from the cluster of rioters shout out – “That one over there is the root of all problems, kill him!” As soon as I raised my right hand to vouch for my innocence a massive chopper swayed from somewhere and

scattered blood everywhere like a fountain” (Bala 109). These convey the deep psychological wounds inflicted by such events in the mindscape of the victims. Shri Dam’s narrative, filled with such other ample vivid recollections and emotional reflections, reveals the long-lasting impact of displacement on mental health. However, the story also explores the psychological resilience required to cope with these traumas. Shri Dam’s bond with Tofajel Bhai, a Muslim neighbour who saved his life, exemplifies the potential for healing and solidarity amidst adversity: “We live in houses that face each other. We have been living in these houses facing each other for the last forty-eight years” (Bala, 110). This relationship, forged in the aftermath of violence, symbolizes the possibility of overcoming psychological dislocation through mutual support and understanding.

Indeed, Jatin Bala’s short stories provide a rich and nuanced exploration of displacement and marginalization. Through detailed depictions of uprootedness, statelessness, and the hostilities encountered due to caste and displacement, Bala illuminates the profound physical and psychological impacts of these experiences on Dalit individuals. His narratives not only highlight the pervasive nature of caste-based discrimination but also celebrate the resilience and strength of his characters. By situating these stories within broader socio-political and historical contexts, this analysis underscores the enduring relevance of Bala’s work in understanding the complexities of marginalized identities and the ongoing struggle for dignity and self-assertion in contemporary society.

V. Reclaiming Voice and Self-Assertion:

The intricate depictions of partitioned identities and the harrowing experiences of displacement and marginalization in Jatin Bala’s short stories set the stage for an exploration of how his characters negotiate oppression and reclaim their agency. This section investigates the ways in which Bala’s characters assert their dignity and humanity in the face of dehumanization, and the crucial role of storytelling in archiving the silenced histories of the Dalit community.

Jatin Bala’s characters, despite facing severe socio-political adversities, demonstrate remarkable resilience and ingenuity in negotiating oppression and reclaiming their agency. They embody the concept of everyday resistance (Sammak 2011) as they confront various forms of oppression. In *Story of Social Consciousness*, Jahar Sarkar embodies this spirit of resistance. Despite being subjected to forced displacement and systemic discrimination, Jahar refuses to accept his marginalized status passively. His outburst at the prize distribution ceremony—“How do you think we can smile? Since this morning BDO’s men forced us to come here. We are very hungry” (Bala, 16)—is not merely a complaint but a powerful act of reclaiming his voice and asserting his dignity. By vocalizing the farmers’ plight, he challenges the authority figures and disrupts the façade of benevolence that they project. Critical race theory (CRT) argues that racism is not merely a matter of individual prejudice but a system of power that marginalizes certain groups (Delgado and Stefancic 2017). Bala’s characters, like Jahar Sarkar, challenge this systemic marginalization through acts of resistance such as public critique (Solórzano and Delgado Bernal 2001). Jahar’s subsequent efforts to rebuild his community in the new village further illustrate his proactive stance. He mobilizes collective action by transforming the wasteland into a thriving settlement. This transformation is both physical and symbolic and is representative of the reclamation of agency by a community that had been rendered stateless and voiceless. Jahar’s assertion, “I saw many things. Just the thought of it makes me shudder. But I never lost sight of my aim in life and I never gave up. I lost my firm foothold time and again but I managed to get it back every time. With all my strength I penetrated into the bowels of the earth and stood strong” (Bala, 20), underscores the ongoing struggle for survival and autonomy. This clearly highlights the active role of the oppressed in shaping their destinies. Their efforts to rebuild their communities and carve out a space for themselves echo the concept of counter-hegemony (Gramsci 1971), where subordinate groups challenge dominant ideologies.

In *Resurrection*, Atul Mistri’s life narrative is a testament to the resilience and agency of Dalit individuals. Despite the numerous hardships and the systemic oppression he faces, Atul continuously strives to improve his circumstances and provide for his family. His laborious efforts to secure a stable foothold in the refugee colony—“Breaking down makeshift shelters of refugee camps, inmates have made their own illegal colony” (Bala, 26)—reflect a determined reclamation of space and identity. Despite the extreme challenges, Atul’s refusal to succumb to despair becomes evident toward the end of the story: “The darkness that clouded his [Atul’s] heart has disappeared – Atul looks at the world with a new vision. Men look up to him. The new *panchayat* has chosen him as their spokesperson. He stands for all of them” (Bala, 37). This exemplifies the assertion of agency against a backdrop of dehumanization. Maya, Atul’s daughter, also embodies this spirit of self-assertion. Her engagement in exploitative labour, though driven by necessity, is marked by an underlying resilience and a refusal to be completely subjugated. Her internal struggle—“You have to eat the bait though you know that it is hanging from a hook” (Bala, 30)—illustrates the complex negotiations of agency within oppressive structures. Despite the degrading circumstances, her ultimate determination to support her family represents a powerful assertion of her agency and humanity.

In *Martyr*, Shri Dam Mandal’s recounting of his survival through the riots and subsequent displacement is an act of reclaiming his narrative. His vivid description of the violence—“Facing the murderer, humanity facing its death—oh how horrific it was there are no words to describe it” (Bala, Story 3)—serves not only to bear witness to the atrocities

but also to assert his enduring humanity. By sharing his story, Shri Dam resists the erasure of his and his community's experiences, reclaiming his voice in a society that seeks to silence it.

The characters in Bala's stories, thus, engage in various forms of resistance to assert their dignity and humanity against pervasive dehumanization. In *Story of Social Consciousness*, Jahar Sarkar's articulate critique of caste and religious discrimination is a form of intellectual resistance. His assertion that "The greatest enemy of our country is religion and caste" (Bala, Story 1) challenges the systemic ideologies that perpetuate oppression. Jahar's engagement in community-building efforts further exemplifies resistance through constructive action, as he transforms adversity into a collective empowerment. Similarly, in *Resurrection*, Atul Mistri's perseverance and adaptability in the face of extreme poverty and displacement highlight the resilience inherent in resistance. Despite being subjected to inhumane conditions in refugee camps, Atul's continuous efforts to create a semblance of normalcy and stability for his family reflect a profound assertion of dignity. His resistance is both physical—manifested in his relentless labour—and psychological, as he maintains a hopeful vision for the future despite the pervasive darkness of his circumstances. Maya's journey in *Resurrection* is marked by a struggle to maintain her dignity amidst exploitative conditions. Her internal conflict and eventual resolution to support her family, even at great personal cost, underscore the resilience and strength required to assert one's humanity in dehumanizing contexts. Maya's narrative arc illustrates the complex interplay between survival and self-respect, highlighting the agency exercised by marginalized individuals in their daily lives. In *Martyr*, Shri Dam Mandal's act of storytelling itself is a powerful form of resistance. By recounting his traumatic experiences and the injustices faced by his community, he resists the erasure of their histories and asserts their right to be remembered. Shri Dam's bond with Tofajel Bhai, a Muslim neighbour, also represents a form of social resistance against communal divisions. Their enduring friendship, forged in the aftermath of violence, symbolizes the potential for solidarity and mutual support to transcend systemic dehumanization.

Storytelling plays a crucial role in Bala's narratives. It serves as a means to archive the silenced histories of the Dalit community and assert their presence in the socio-political landscape. Through the act of storytelling, Bala's characters reclaim their voices and challenge the dominant narratives that seek to marginalize them. In *Story of Social Consciousness*, the narrator's engagement with Jahar Sarkar and the subsequent recounting of his experiences serve to document the struggles and resilience of the Dalit community. Jahar's articulate expression of his community's plight—"Mashai, we are literally fighting to live on" (Bala, 18)—becomes a part of the collective memory, preserving the experiences of those often excluded from historical records. The narrative not only highlights the systemic injustices faced by Dalits but also celebrates their resistance and agency, ensuring that their stories are heard and remembered. *Resurrection* employs a similar narrative strategy, with Atul Mistri's life story serving as an archival account of the experiences of Dalit refugees. The detailed descriptions of the refugee camps like "... scarcity of water in the camp, stool [is] overflowing from the latrine every morning, tents [are] already torn" (Bala, 32) and the daily struggles faced by Atul and his family provide a poignant documentation of their resilience. Atul's reflections on his journey—"Thirty five years have passed since then but everything seems to be written in blood" (Bala, 34)—underscore the enduring impact of displacement and the importance of preserving these narratives as part of the broader historical consciousness.

Maya's narrative within *Resurrection* also contributes to this archival project. It highlights the intersectional challenges faced by Dalit women. Her experiences of exploitation and resilience add a critical dimension to the understanding of Dalit histories, the gendered aspects of marginalization and resistance. By including Maya's story, Bala ensures that the voices of Dalit women are integral to the collective memory and not sidelined in the broader discourse. Maya's internal conflict between self-preservation and supporting her family highlights the complex realities faced by marginalized individuals, particularly women, within oppressive structures (Spivak 1988). In *Martyr*, Shri Dam Mandal's act of recounting his life story to fellow bus passengers serves as a powerful means of archiving his and his community's experiences. His vivid recollections of the riots and the subsequent bond with Tofajel Bhai not only document the atrocities faced by Dalits but also highlight the potential for solidarity and mutual support across communal lines. Shri Dam's storytelling is an act of resistance against historical amnesia, an attempt to ensure that the experiences of Dalit communities are preserved and recognized: "Everything is true. Every single word is taken from my life. The old man was almost bursting with happiness on being able to recount a tale from his own life. The pains of walking the path, the path of life may be, got lost somewhere amongst these joys and sorrows" (Bala, 111). Evidently enough, his act of storytelling becomes a form of resistant memory, or what Vinson and Katherine (2010) mean to say as resistance contained within narratives of personal memory.

Storytelling plays a crucial role in archiving silenced histories, a concept explored in works by theorists like Michel Foucault (1972) who discuss the power dynamics inherent in historical narratives. The present analysis of these stories reveals that Bala uses storytelling as counter-narratives (Said 1994), ones that can provide a significant and substantial platform for Dalit voices to be heard and their experiences to be validated. By challenging dominant historical accounts that often exclude or misrepresent marginalized experiences, his narratives highlight the importance of preserving the histories of marginalized communities: to ensure that their struggles and triumphs are remembered and acknowledged.

This underscores the power of storytelling in reclaiming agency and asserting dignity. In doing so, the stories not only illuminate the past but also inspire future generations to continue the fight for justice and equality. Through these stories, Bala creates a space for what is known as Dalit testimonio (Das 2006), another significant genre of Dalit writing where personal experiences become a form of witnessing and truth-telling about the realities of caste oppression.

VI. Conclusion:

To conclude, Jatin Bala's short stories offer a profound exploration of the Dalit experiences in Bengal by portraying the community's abject poverty, limitless suffering of refugee life, their struggles, resilience, and quest for dignity and identity. The stories unfold many an unexplored territory of the marginalized both as refugee and as a member of Namashudra caste, traditionally looked upon as low caste. His narratives are marked by a deep engagement with social realities that help expose the entrenched caste-based discrimination as well as physical, spiritual and even economic hardships faced by the Dalits of Bengal during the Partition of India. Bala's storytelling, therefore, is not just an artistic endeavour but a form of social commentary, resistance and reclaim of agency. His aim is not undecipherable, to awaken the collective conscience of all towards the plight of marginalized communities. Through vivid portrayal of characters and constant threat of violence contexts, Bala illustrates the systemic socio-economic oppression that Dalits have endured. This not only underscores the socio-political dimensions of caste but also highlights the psychological scars and internalized inferiority that such systemic abuse inflicts on individuals and communities.

Moreover, Bala's work is significant for its nuanced representation of Dalit identity. He delves into the complexities of caste and class, and challenges monolithic perceptions of Dalit life. The characters he portrays often exhibit a strong sense of agency and resistance, and refuse to succumb to societal norms that seek to subjugate them. This is particularly evident in all the stories where characters challenge oppressive practices and assert their right to equality and justice, thereby embodying the spirit of Ambedkarite thought and the larger Dalit movement for emancipation. In addition, Bala's stories serve as crucial documentation of the cultural and historical contexts of Dalit life in Bengal. They preserve the oral traditions, folk narratives, and lived experiences of the Dalit community which contribute to a more inclusive literary canon. This is an essential step towards recognizing and valifying the contributions of Dalit writers and their role in shaping contemporary Indian literature. In essence, Jatin Bala's short stories are a powerful testament to the enduring struggles and indomitable spirit of the Dalit community. They compel readers to confront uncomfortable truths about caste and inequality, fostering empathy and a deeper understanding of the need for social justice. Bala's literary legacy thus not only enriches the field of Dalit literature but also serves as a catalyst for broader socio-political change.

Statements and Declaration:

The authors hereby solemnly declare that the article submitted is original and hitherto unpublished. No simultaneous submissions are made.

Conflict of interest:

There is no conflict of interest

Funding:

No funding was received for conducting this study.

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