

## (Re)tracing Resistance from a Culture of Silence: An Alternate Reading of the 'Jele' (fishing) Community

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### Abstract

*Bengal—a land of rivers and natural resources—has been the abode of the “jele” community (fishermen) for centuries. But hardly have we come across the life of the fishermen in Bengali literature before Manik Bandopadhyay and Adwaita Mallabharman. In fact, these two noteworthy novelists, in their novels, The Boatman of the Padma and A River Called Titash, poignantly depict the poverty, hunger, suffering, and exploitation of the fishermen. However, both novelists portray this community as passive victims of all socio-economic exploitations and nowhere in their narratives is there any trace of resistance from the side of the afflicted. Therefore, in this paper, focusing on Harishankar Jaladas’s Sons of the Sea I will re-read the novels of Bandhopadhyay and Mallabharman in search of the forces that dissuaded this community from fighting back. Moreover, shedding light on the life of this subaltern group, in Sons of the Sea, I will attempt to trace the root of resistance so that breaking the age old culture of silence may create a new future for them.*

I.

*It is necessary that the weakness of the powerless is transformed into a force capable of announcing justice.*

—Paulo Freire

The Jele, or fishermen, generally known as Koi-borto, divided into castes like Malo, Rajbongshai, Jaladas in Bangladesh, can also be viewed as religious outcasts, socially marginalized, and an economically exploited people. Being underprivileged and illiterate, they have “no history and cannot speak,” (Spivak 83); therefore, the outcry of their agony remains unheard and unnoticed. In fact, it is only in the era of “Kallol,”—the avant-garde of Bengali literature—when the Bengali litterateurs started to focus on themes regarding the life of the common people, like class exploitation, poverty, and deprivation that their plight was noted. In an oblique way, this era has “moved away from Rabindranath ... into the worlds of the lower middle classes ... into the neighborhoods of those rejected and deceived” (qtd. in Chakrabarty 157). In this era of transition, Manik Bandopadhyay and Adwaita Mallabharman, in their realistic novels, projected the lives of the “marginal people, such as boatmen and fishermen of the riverine delta of Bengal ... who were earlier excluded as subjects in Bengali novels” (Biswas 15). Between the two, the name of Manik Bandopadhyay is noteworthy because, for the first time in Bengali literature, he sheds light on the life of the people of such a class—fishermen—who had hardly been presented earlier. In his famous novel *The Boatman of the Padma* (*Padma Nadir Majhi* 1936), he brings the nexus of poverty, hunger, suffering, deprivation, and

helplessness of the fishing community into visibility. It is a pioneer work as well as a landmark for the realistic novel in Bengali literature. After a long pause of two decades in 1956, Adwaita Mallabharman—a man of this very community— portrayed the diversified grandeur of struggle and hardship of the fishing community living along the river Titash. His novel *A River Called Titash* (*Titash Ekta Nadir Naam* 1956) depicts the life of the fishermen in such a way that every socioeconomic and cultural aspect of this community is focused upon. It essentially stands as a microcosm of the life of the fishermen. In fact, in this novel “with an insider’s insight he illuminates the soul of the community and its culture—presumably for us, outsiders to the Malo fisherfolk” (Bardhan 1-2). Since 1936—when *The Boatmen of the Padma* was first published—to the present, with the passage of such a long time, significant changes have come to the socioeconomic and political strata of this country and it may be assumed that the same has happened for the fishermen. Therefore, in this paper, focusing on Hrishankar Jaladas’s *Sons of the Sea* (*Jalaputra* 2008), I would like to re-evaluate the life of the fishermen from Bandopadhyay’s depiction to Jaladas’s, to explore whether, with the passage of nearly six decades (1936-2008), any significant change has come to the socio-economic life of the fishermen or are they still entrapped in the same clutch of poverty and the very mechanism of exploitation as depicted in the earlier novels. Moreover, I will examine the causes constituting a negative consciousness whereby these fishermen tolerate all injustice in silence. I will also attempt to trace the apparatuses of resistance that may give them the impetus to fight back.

## II.

In his noteworthy work *Prison Notebooks*, written between 1929 and 1935, where Gramsci for the first time used the word “subaltern,” he only had in mind “the workers and peasants who were oppressed and discriminated by the leader of the National Fascist Party, Benito Mussolini and his agents”(Louai 5). Later in *Notebook 25* entitled “On the Margins of History (The History of Subaltern Social Groups),” Gramsci identifies, “slaves, peasants, religious groups, women, different races, and the proletariat as subaltern social groups” (Green 2) which actually supports the claim to think of the poverty-stricken, afflicted and marginalized fishing community of Bangladesh—who lives miserably beside the rivers and shores of the Bay of Bengal—as subaltern. Being victims of systematic marginalization the hapless fishing community of Bangladesh has no voice; therefore, they “cannot speak” (Spivak 104). Moreover, the historiographic “representation” of the subaltern class is problematic because, “[i]t is easy to blur the truth with a simple linguistic trick” (Barghouthi 177). In her seminal essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” criticizing the failure of Foucault and Deleuze to “acknowledge how subaltern critique must be presented within the privileged structures of Western epistemology” (Bignall 21), Spivak, in fact, advocates the need of a dual dimension of “representation”: “representation as ‘speaking for’... and representation as ‘re-presentation’” (Spivak 70). Taking both of the modes of “representation” into account, in this paper I will review the novels of Bandhopadhyay, Mallabharman, and Jaladas and attempt to portray the fishing community of Bengal from these two representative angles.

Unlike Bandhopadhyay and Mallabharman, Jaladas, in his award winning novel *Sons of the Sea*, brings forth the life of the fishermen whose “life and living ... are tied to the sea” (SS13).

Harishankar Jaladas—a member of the fishing (jele) community—taking the life of the marginalized as the inspiration for his writing, in his novel, not only brings forth a distinct insight of the fishing community but also tells an unknown story that we had never come across. These fishermen live in the southern belt of the Bay of Bengal, and are constantly fighting with the forces of nature. In other words, “[t]heir survival depends on the whims of the sea” (SS 13). Even in the midst of storms, the fishermen dare to venture into the turbulent sea as their spirits yield to abject poverty. In reality, their life is filled with strange dichotomies. They have “festering sores of deprivation on their faces,” (SS 10) and in their looks there is helplessness. Their habitats bear the testimony of “poverty of hundreds of centuries” (SS 10). They are exploited both in the hands of nature and by the nature of man. Their risk and toil in the sea have no effect on the abject poverty they live in; indeed, “the fishermen are horribly poor and uneducated and most of them live from hand to mouth” (Billah x). The extract from Bandopadhyay’s *The Boatmen of the Padma* connects the sea fishermen to the plight of the fishermen who lived by the gigantic Padma in the mid-twentieth century:

[t]he cries of babies in the fishermen’s huts never stopped ... On the one hand the Brahmins and the lesser gentlemen kept them pushed back; on the other the destructive forces of Nature were determined to annihilate them; rain water seeped in to their huts and their bones tingled in the biting cold. Diseases came and so did bereavement ... here the reception of birth was sullen, non-celebratory and cheerless. Here the flavor of life consisted nearly in the satisfaction of hunger and thirst. (13)

Actually, it was useless to look for God here. God does not even listen to their outcry. They are God-forsaken. While depiction of the fishermen of the Padma is heartrending, in *A River Called Titash*, at first, we are introduced to a self-sufficient fishing community with economic stability and vibrant culture. But the gradual silting of the river (Titash) exposes the fishermen to the exploitation of the moneylenders and landowners and the ensuing “social splintering brought alienation from their own culture” (Bardhan 2). Eventually, the communities of fishermen “lose their livelihood and gradually fall prey to starvation” (Biswas 30). The novel ends with the death of both the river (Titash) and its inhabitants. From the discussion, it is apparent that the lives of the fishermen are unaltered by any change either socio-economic or political and the stroke of poverty is always the same.

In *Sons of the Sea*, we see, for their livelihood the fishermen work as gaur<sup>1</sup>, paunna<sup>2</sup> on other men’s boats and some make their living by selling fish from door to door. From a Marxist point of view, although we can classify the contemporary socio-economic picture between “the haves and the have nots,” (Tyson 54) in fact, from time immemorial a very similar exploiting class stratification is found existing in the community of the fishermen. Hence, in Jaladas’s *Sons of the Sea*, we are introduced to the “Bahaddars”—the solvent and the powerful fishermen—who have “boat, nets and hands to work for them” (SS 14). Even when there is more demand for labor they can hire gauras from different villages. During fishing the gauras, “risking life in rain, storm and thunder ... toil in the tumultuous sea but the bahaddars pocket the profit” (SS 14). Thus, being the apparatuses of the hegemonic power structure the bahaddars exploit

the labor of the other fishermen. This exploitive treatment of the bahaddars resembles the heartrending events of “Russian serf labour, American slave labour, Irish agricultural labour and the metropolitan labour in London trades” (Linebaugh 374). Although apparently the bahaddars directly exploit the other fishermen, actually, like the Bourgeois—who “control the world’s natural, economic, and human resources” (Tyson 54)—the dadondars (moneylenders) are the lord of this fishing community. In the monsoon, to be prepared for fishing and “to buy necessary articles” (SS 51) the poor fishermen feel the dire need to borrow money on any condition from the moneylenders and thus they are doubly exploited both by the bahaddars and the dadondars. In *Sons of the Sea*, Jaladas portrays the fishermen who borrow money on two conditions: either they have to “pay ten percent per month on the money [they] took or they ... have to sell all the fish they caught at the fixed price by the dadonder” (SS 51). In fact, both of the conditions secure the lion’s share of profit for the dadonders and the fishermen accept silently what they get. Like the monopoly of the capitalists, in this novel, Shukkur and Sashibhushan—men of two different religions but the same in exploiting the poor—maintain the hegemony of advancing money (dadon). Unfortunately, the fishermen have no other alternative to this hegemonic exploitation because “[i]f other moneylenders tried to lend money to the fishermen on softer terms, they had to retreat in the end because of the wiles of Shukkur and Sashibhushan” (51). Moreover, the advance money is an irony of fate causing the borrower to become a “debtor for generations” (51). In reality, for the fishermen the clutch of exploitation never comes to an end. In both Bandopadhyay’s and Mallabarman’s depiction we see:

[t]he class of moneylenders who own the boats and nets exert twin pressure on the fishermen. While on one hand the moneylenders own fishermen’s labor power (or time) for a definite money value; on the other hand they take away the fishermen’s means of subsistence (for the fishermen no longer produce for themselves). Thus the river centric environment no longer remains the passive backdrop but emerges as a vibrant entity playing a significant role in the struggle for survival. (Biswas 27)

But, in this “struggle for survival,” both novelists depict the Malo folk as a passive victim of the natural forces as well as the evil forces of human nature. Moreover, in their narratives, there is no substantial form of collective resistance from the side of the afflicted. Therefore, in the context of the fishing community, focusing on *Sons of the Sea*, I will look for the answers to “[w]hy don’t the economically oppressed fight back? And what keeps the lower classes ‘in their place’ and at the mercy of the wealthy?” (Tyson 56).

### III.

Karl Marx, in the Preface of “A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy,” asserts that “[it] is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being determines their consciousness” (2). The fishermen of Bengal being victims of poverty, hunger, exploitation, deprivation of human rights develop a sense of fatalistic consciousness in them, and “silently put up with the cruelty and injustice believing it was ordained by fate” (SS 133). In *The Boatmen of the Padma*, Bandopadhyay’s depiction of

Kuber<sup>3</sup> stands as a metaphor for the passivity of the fishermen. Kuber's reluctance to revolt against the false accusations and passivity to stand against "the cruel nexus of corruption and exploitation at the hands of the social elites," (Biswas 29) expose the reality of how creating a suppressed self-image the people of this community live in a "culture of silence."<sup>4</sup>

Moreover, in the context of the subcontinental countries especially Bangladesh, the fishermen usually belong to the lower caste Hindu sect. They are the outsiders of the fourfold Hindu Varna system—better known as the Untouchables—sometimes called Dom. Both the upper caste Hindus and the Muslims treat them brutally. Deliberately, the habitat of the fishermen is also kept "miles away from the village of the gentry" (SS 10). In *Sons of the Sea*, the insignificant social position of the fishermen becomes visible in an incident when Gangapado gets engaged in a fight, in Kamalmunshir haat<sup>5</sup>, with a Muslim who insults his mother in front of him. In that fray a group stands against Gangapado saying: "[h]ow do you compare between the Muslims and the Doms? A Dom<sup>6</sup> is a Dom. How dare a Dom lays hands on a Muslim?" (SS 133). From this incident, it is evident that not only the upper caste Hindus but also the Muslims treat them as outcasts. They are all alone in their distress. There is no one to stand by them. Hence, they develop a sense of haplessness that nothing can alter their misery and eventually they tend to tolerate all sorts of social exclusion silently. In another incident, one day, violating the deal of moneylending by wanting to purchase fish at a lower price than the market value, Shukkur the moneylender physically assaults and forces Kamini to listen to him. In a loud voice, Shukkur says, "Shut up, you son of bitch. You brood of malaun<sup>7</sup>. You will have to sell fish to me at whatever price I offer" (SS 66). The way Shukkur treats Kamini and forces him to abide by his desires not only portrays the helplessness of the low caste poor fishermen but also depicts how the dadonders devalue them. In fact, this sort of ill-treatment always dissuades the fishermen from feeling "fully human" and therefore, without resisting the injustices, they silently tolerate them.

Besides ill-treatment of the fishermen by taking advantage of their illiteracy and blind beliefs, the dadonders exploit the fishermen to the extreme. Jaladas in his semi-autobiographical novel, *Sons of the Sea*, poignantly portrays the mechanism of exploitation that entraps the illiterate fishermen. It is an unavoidable fact that the fishing community considers education a luxury. Here, no one thinks of sending their children to school. It is "an unusual choice" (Billah ix) for them. Actually, the turbulent sea is their only destiny so, before or after becoming teenagers, the sons of the fishermen start to accompany their fathers to catch fish in the nearby canals, marshes or in the sea, in case "they can add to the family kitty!" (SS 11). Thus, education remains a myth for the fisher folk, and they fall easy prey to the hypocrisy of the dadonders who exploit them year after year keeping the payments of dealings unsettled. In *Sons of the Sea*, we see how they whimsically note down the figures and promise to work out the calculation at the end of the season. Blindly believing the dadonders, the illiterate fishermen keep the accounts in their heads but at the end of every season they find a great mismatch between their claim and the calculation of the dadonders. In fact, "[p]resenting a false calculation" (SS 116), the dadonders disregard the claims of the fishermen every time. In the face of such whimsical claims, "[t]he fishermen fall silent. They think that possibly the

dadonders are right. They are unlettered, so they could miscalculate” (SS 116). In this way, presenting a false calculation the dadonders not only usurp the fortune of the fishermen but also bankrupt them at the end of every season. Furthermore, through their deceptive words, like “[w]hat’s the point of cheating poor folks like you? Aren’t I afraid of hell? ... God won’t forgive me if I cheat you. You must have faith in me. I will never cheat you,” (SS 116) the dadonders cajole the illiterate fishermen in the name of God. Moreover, with the power of improvisation, the dadonders create such an illusion of honesty that the fishermen find no reason to disbelieve them. Actually, this has been going on for centuries and so the condition of the fishermen remains unaltered. It seems as though they are destined to be exploited unendingly at the hands of the upper class. The temporal and spatial changes do not alter the story of their exploitation. Actually, the upper class, like the colonizers, considering the fishermen outcasts and “less than fully human,” justify their right to exploit them. In the face of such dehumanizing exploitations, the illiterate fishermen cannot think alternatively because their ideas are “the reflection of the thought and expression of the director society” (Freire 1). The exploited think in the way they are made to think by their exploiters. Therefore, instead of retrieving their identity they live “under the circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past” (Marx 187).

Moreover, the “sons of the sea” (fishermen) are helpless even in the hands of nature because “[t]he deltaic region of lower Bengal is annually affected by floods and often by cyclones. Nowhere is the struggle for survival and resilience, more evident than in this part of the world” (Biswas 20). Like the ebb and flow of the sea, the fishermen live a life of unstable economy. In the seasons, “Falgun, Chaitra and Baisakh the canals, rivers, other water bodies and the sea itself run dry of water-crop” (SS 13); hence, hardly any fish can be found in the sea. Therefore, there comes a severe food crisis in their life. In fact, “the scarcity becomes so acute that it won’t be wrong to say that they have a famine indeed” (SS 13). For the sake of survival, although many fishermen go to sea, practically most of the time they return empty-handed. As the fishermen do not get enough fish, the fish sellers also find no way out to keep their body and soul together. With the inception of Baisakh, although nature turns benevolent and yields fish, unfortunately the mercy of nature cannot redress their misery because, with the end of the dry season begins the season of the bahaddars. The following lines can exactly describe the plight of the fishermen:

[d]uring monsoon to a large extent relief from poverty, in autumn living from hand to mouth and during spring and summer scourge of poverty. During summer getting ready for fishing with their small savings, and the hapless fishermen sinking up to their neck in debt by borrowing money from dadondars. (SS 141)

Apart from all these sufferings, sometimes the sea behaves very violently. The strong currents of the sea not only damage the boats but also wash away the fishermen. For this reason, premature death is very natural in this community. Jaladas, in this novel, depicts that even in stormy weather the fishermen risk their lives because in the high tide of the storm fish can be caught in plenty. For the fishermen, nothing is more intimidating than poverty. Therefore,

the fear of food crisis makes them fearless. In such a stormy expedition, Bhuvoneshwari loses her husband Chandramoni. Like Bhuvoneshwari there are countless widows in this jelepara<sup>8</sup> who have lost their husbands to the sea. For survival “[t]hese widows live by selling fish ... in the nearby neighborhood carrying the fish on their heads” (SS 15). Here, thinking of the fatherless children, most of the widows refuse remarriage. In the absence of husbands, women hold the helm of the family. With their dauntless spirit, they face all adversities and endure indescribable hardship. The vulnerability of this community is also evident in *A River Called Titash* where Adwaita Mallabarman along with the demise of the vibrant river Titash poignantly depicts the bankruptcy of its dependents (fishermen). Titash, once a source of “livelihood and identity” gradually dries up and with the death of the river “its inhabitants on the banks gradually die out” (Biswas 30). This novel clearly epitomizes how the natural forces are inevitably linked with their cycle of life. Apart from the unavoidable natural forces, their unending struggle for survival, the extreme economic and religious exploitation, affecting simultaneously, never let them feel their worth as human. Therefore, developing a sense of self-abnegation and passivity to resistance they live in a “culture of silence.”

#### IV.

According to Foucault, true sense of identity is “not to discover what we are but to refuse what we are ... to promote new forms of subjectivity through the refusal of this kind of individuality which has been imposed on us for several centuries” (216). But the community of fishermen who are the focus of this paper never got the chance to realize their true sense of identity. From time immemorial, they were not only cruelly exploited in the name of caste system but also awfully deprived of their rights as humans. The consequences of these psychosocial deprivation and dehumanization create such a sense of “self-denial” in their psyche that without a second thought they accept every adversity as their destiny and dare not fight against their fate. In the narratives of Bandopadhyay and Mallabarman, it is evident how, without attempting to “recover their lost humanity” (Freire 44) for centuries, they have been living with “their belief in ghosts-specters, incantation, superstition and prejudices” (SS 141). Although it is assumed “[w]hen people have been thoroughly beaten and have their backs at the wall, they turn around” (SS 143) deplorably for the fishermen it has seldom happened. These fishermen must rise to the consciousness that being victims of a systematic marginalization, “they can reject the powerful’s definition of their reality—that they can do so even if they are poor, exploited, or trapped in oppressive circumstances” (hooks 92). What they “need is courage and cooperation” (SS 142).

Paulo Freire in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* says, “Without a sense of identity, there can be no real struggle” (178). Hence for the fishing community, the quintessential element of resistance is the rediscovery of their identity as humans. Unlike the depiction of Bandopadhyay and Mallabarman, in Jaladas’s *Sons of the Sea*, we can trace the spirit of resistance in Gangapado who, defying the age-old exploitive practices, emerged as a guiding spirit for his own community. He as a catalyst of change unites the other fishermen with the vision that “[h]umans can change their fate” (SS 142). Emphasizing the transforming power of education, Richard Shaull in the Foreword of Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* says:

Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity or it becomes the practice of freedom, the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world. (34)

Thus, Shaull identifies education as an instrument of freedom. Bhuvoneshwari believed in that transforming power of education and wanted to alter the fate of her family by educating Ganga. However, Bhuvon's dream was not fulfilled. To escape the ever-increasing embarrassment in school and to alleviate the suffering of his mother, in his ninth grade, Ganga decided to drop out. Though Ganga failed to complete his education, with the dim light of education, he could raise himself to the level of consciousness to discover the hypocrisy of the dadonders. So, half-educated Ganga, with the help of Dindayal, starts to keep an exact calculation of the dealings. One day, while settling Kamini's payment, the age-old trick of exploitation—the crooked calculations—of the dadonders come to light. The other fishermen realized the cause of their never-ending poverty. For this community, Ganga emerges as an “organic intellectual.” He, with his “active participation in practical life, as constructor, as organizer, ‘permanent persuader’ and not just a simple orator (but superior at the same time to the abstract mathematical spirit)” (Gramsci 10), unites the afflicted fishermen.

After the discovery of the machinations of the crooked calculations of the dadonders, Ganga in a gathering tries to awaken the other fishermen saying, “Should we be exploited all our life? The pirates plunder your fish. On the shore, there is another type of plundering. In the name of dadon, butcher Shukkur and Sashibhushan take away all our fish paying almost nothing” (SS 127). Actually, from the point of his own awareness, Ganga attempts to inject the spirit of resistance in the vein of other fishermen. To look at this humanely, the resistance of Ganga is justified because at a certain level of oppression “[t]he rebellious reaction of the working class ... half conscious or conscious—at recovering their status as human beings” (Engels 39-40) becomes necessary for survival. Education as a catalyst, thus, gave Ganga the impetus to recreate his identity with a distinct sense of “self-image.” Breaking the “culture of silence,” he started to believe in the power of the oppressed. Unlike the other fishermen, Ganga could realize “[i]f they wanted to live as humans, they must protest” (SS 134).

Therefore, to break all the shackles of exploitation and injustices, as a protest, he proposes to the other fishermen not to take advances from the moneylenders. He tries to convince some of the considerate bahaddars—solvent fishermen—to help the poor folk by lending them money at a low interest, and assist the other fishermen who do not have nets and boats and “[a]fter much consultation, it was decided that they won't take any advance next year from the moneylenders” (SS 128). In *Sons of the Sea*, we find Gangapado as the river Ganga which, dissolving all sins and dirt, purifies the human soul because he, along with other fishermen, attempts to end the mechanism of exploitation with solidarity and intelligence. According to the decision, in the next fishing season, the fishermen did not take an advance from the dadonders. Instead, they took assistance from their fellow bahaddars. The fishermen with the promise of cooperation with each other developed a model of self-sufficiency which enraged



the dadonders because they found their “easy source of huge income ... dried up” (SS 154). In fact, for the dadonders, the stroke was very heavy. So they took the hard line approach to silence the resistance and eventually killed Ganga to restore their hold on the fishermen. By killing Ganga, they tried to stop the voices that could be a threat to their dominance. But the dadonders failed to dissuade the oppressed. The brutal killing of Ganga, instead of intimidating the fishermen, spreads a new spirit of revolt in them. The agitated fishermen set Shukkur’s farm house on fire in a body. The fire could, on the one hand, stand as a metaphor for resistance and, on the other, the birth of a conscious class. This had been Ganga’s aim from the beginning: to unite the fishermen and resist all the injustices perpetrated against them. The killing of Ganga does not signify the supremacy of evil over the weak; rather the death beckons the beginning of a new day. In his novel, *Jaladas*, unlike Bandopadhyay and Mallabarman, portrays the birth of an illiterate but a conscious class who will blow a new wind of change and create a hard line of resistance.

In *Jaladas’s* novel, we can see that, along with Ganga’s call to awaken, the afflicted fishermen started to unite against the injustices. Although the picture of exploitation in the hands of the dadonder is very common, there are exceptions such as when Shukkur inhumanly assaults Kamini for not allowing him to take an undue privilege, the other fishermen did not let the incident go unsettled. They resisted Shukkur in a body “[b]e careful, if you ever dare to lay your hands on ... any of the fishermen, then we in a body will crush your hand” (SS 66). This incident intimidated the moneylenders and the fishermen discover the strength of their unity. Eventually, they decide not to “[s]ell fish at the price offered by the moneylenders. If anything untoward happened because of their decision, they would resist in a body” (SS 68). They arrive at the uniform conclusion to return the advance money as early as possible. Facing all odds they realize, there is no law or justice for them unless they resist unitedly. Apart from depicting such a resistance, *Jaladas*, in *Sons of the Sea*, even gives voice to his female characters who also rise against their humiliation. When Jonab Ali’s Bap (father) assaulted Bongshi’s Maa (Mother) by knocking her to the ground, “[t]he three other fisherwomen didn’t stand by idly ... slapping him, they knocked him on the ground” (SS 88). Saving his life, Jonab Ali’s Bap escapes from the hands of these fisherwomen. It is a big blow for the Muslims who in the name of cast frequently humiliate and abuse the fishermen. In this way, *Jaladas’s* novel is vibrant with the voices of the voiceless.

In tracing the multiple layers of resistances of this subaltern group in *Sons of the Sea*, it can be argued that especially for the jele (fishing) community, the shackles of the age-old silence is broken. The sparkling flame in Shukkur’s farm is the spark of the wrath of the oppressed class that will burn all the hegemonic exploitations into ashes. A closer look reveals a shadow of *Jaladas’s* personal life in this novel. Having been born into the fishing community, fighting against all economic and social adversities, *Jaladas’s* endeavor—to be educated—is itself a revolt. In fact, *Jaladas* in his novel, *Sons of the Sea*, voicing the voiceless not only became a mouthpiece of his community but also portrayed this subaltern group with the dormant power of resistance, which explicitly reintroduces the fishing community to us from a different vantage point. Although the novel ends with the death of Ganga, it also anticipates Ganga’s

yet to be born son, Banamali. It can be predicted that Ganga's son may continue the legacy of the struggle of his father and add a new dimension to the subaltern resistance. While one half-educated Ganga brought the wind of change, many educated Gangas will hopefully transform the picture of the fishing community one day.

### Notes

1. A hired boatman who helps in fishing.
2. Someone allowed to cast a net in the sea riding a boat owned by another person.
3. The protagonist of *The Boatmen of the Padma*.
4. A state of submissiveness which is opposed to the development of the critical awareness necessary to break the pattern of oppression.
5. A big market that meets on fixed days of the week.
6. Someone of low birth especially untouchable.
7. A derogatory term for a Bengali Hindu used in Bangladesh.
8. The neighborhood of the fishing community.

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