

‘The Final Solution’ by Manik Bandopadhyay (Summary)

‘The Final Solution’ is one of the acclaimed works of Manik Bandopadhyay. The plot of the story revolves around a poor family who migrated to West Bengal after the Partition and turned them into destitute, homeless vagabonds, anonymous, strangers into non-scripts. The story of Partition subsequently brings stories of suffering, indecency, rape and sexual violence. Apparently the story deals with the helplessness of a young mother, Mallika, who struggles to keep herself and her body in the face of horrific events.

The story reveals the phenomena of insanity, contempt, decaying human values, spiritual purification, and indifference to human existence. The story depicts an astonishing note, 'Chaos, the insanity of a time when we have fallen from the human world of language, customs, rituals into a percentile world of hatred, anger, selfishness and insanity. Bandyopadhyay writes that since in reality displacement and settlement is an important topic of discussion, even a few days ago one saw homeless people, spending their days and nights, herding goats like cattle and being confined together in the shelter of goats.

In contrast to the popular androcentric male discourse on the history of partition, the story reaches the goal of feminist historiography in the language of Joan Wallach Scott because it "made women the focal point, subject, and narrative agent of women's investigation." It also brings to the fore massive disruptions and crises after the split and projects women as active agents rather than passive recipients of this change.

The story captures the experiences of women in the department that further illustrate and reinterpret the important turning point in history from a women's perspective, thus providing an alternative history where women are portrayed not only as subjects of study but also as subjects and participants. The facts of sexual abuse, profanity, disrespect, obscenity, violation of dignity, transgression are questions that hit the narrator hard. According to Suranjan Das, "Riots are a transformative as well as a historical event. It shapes and changes perceptions and desires. People have changed: their attitudes towards each other and their thinking about themselves have changed. "In light of the above statement, one can easily capture the change that has taken place in people's lives during and after partition.

In the story, Manik Bandopadhyay clearly reminds the survivors of the essential impact of the Peace Committee, the rehabilitation program and the inhumane conditions of the refugee camps. The story depicts the struggle of a female protagonist against capitalism, hegemony, and masculinity, the capital of a frustrated society. The story details the economic deprivation and uncertainty for the immediate lower classes of the country. It also contains the nature of

ruthlessness, intolerance and manipulation of exploiters-moneylenders or capitalists. The story also observes the tendency of the oppressed to accept their oppressor as an inevitable evil of nature - a satanic incarnation, by which there is a strong desire to make him all heartless and diabolic. The story makes subtle comments about the hypocrisy and inconsistency of the middle class.

The story is notable for its utterance of female subjectivity and its rejection of male protection / humiliation in the female body. Mallika has compromised her self-esteem and integrity by choosing prostitution to feed her little boy. Mallika's husband is a short stature, exhausted failure, a feminist of her opponent, disabled and unable to hold her family. Mallika decided to choose prostitution as a way to feed her young son when all the doors to find a suitable job were closed and she was able to resist her son and family when she saw her family standing on the brink of death. She aggravates her maternal instincts by denying her constant humiliation by choosing prostitution as a way to save her family from drowning and destruction. He thwarted Pramatha's plan to exploit her and other women in a state of helplessness, and dared to strangle Pramatha to death. Mallika's courage in adversity wins the minds of the readers as she stays away from the final disaster and reaches the final solution through her strong will and presence of mind.

How does Manik Bandhyapadhyaya story, *The Final Solution* show women's response to the cataclysmic episode of Partition? Give you answer with the light of Mallika's Character.

The story is remarkable for the articulation of female subjectivity and for rejecting male protection/desecration upon women's body. Mallika's chooses prostitution to feed her little son compromising on her self-respect and integrity. Mallika's husband is a minuscule figure, turns out to be an abject failure, a feminization of her counterpart, incapacitated and unable to sustain his family. Mallika's resolution to take prostitution as a means to feed her little son comes as a last resort to be able to fend for her son and family when all the doors to finding suitable occupation get closed and she finds her family standing on the verge of death owing to starvation. Her choosing for prostitution as a way to save her family from sinking and perishing accentuates her maternal instincts in defiance of her constant humiliation by Pramatha.

She is a figure of courage as she thwarts Pramatha's plan to exploit her and other women in their state of helplessness and daringly impedes Pramatha's advances towards her by

strangling him to death. The final revenge brings an apt closure to the tale of misfortunes heaped on innocent, gullible female victims by spiteful, stony-hearted racketeer. Mallika's bravery in the face of difficulties wins the hearts of readers as she stays undaunted by the final catastrophe and reaches the final solution through her strong will and presence of mind.

In the opinion of Sukanya Choudhury, Mallika's revolutionary stance symbolizes an anti-hegemonic body-scape to territorialize her identity. In her vengeful action lies her courage to question the dominant forces of the society, she blurts out in rage:

"...I've found an excellent way out. That gangster! What did he take me for? Am I physically -weak because I'm a woman? (p.46) "

Mallika has a strong sense of self personality and bravely subverts the gender centric norms by deciding to earn for her family. In her case of being a mother, she results in 'slow forgetting of the self.' Yet, she never gives up even when she is overwhelmed by anxiety and anguish. In the end, she makes full control over the inner struggle and the outer struggle.

The story shows women's response to the cataclysmic episode of Partition: sometimes with their wilful amnesia of the violation, the appropriation of male roles as breadwinners, as anchors to the family in the state of helplessness, transgression to sustain their family from the state of abject poverty and adopting changing gender roles and attributes as they flaunt courage, practicality and patience in the extremely intolerant times. Mallika, who doesn't give up in the face of misfortunes, turns out to be a heroic figure in the end though she was faced with violence by devilish capitalist forces hell bent to dispossess and degrade her identity.

The final act of revenge should be seen as the possible alternative to the disorder in the absence of the normal moral/social order. The ending evokes a sense of shock and bewilderment but has a plausible justification despite its unnaturalness and unexpectedness. In the end, her peaceful and calm reply puts to rest all misgivings about the appropriateness of her conduct.

"Have you all eaten? We'll never be hungry again, Thakurjhi never, ever... My son -will have milk four times a day. .. I'll go to the railway station every evening in my frayed sari, the sharks will come to pick me up for sure... '...But this time I'll be carrying a sharp knife with me, you understand Thakurjhi (p.46)"

However, practically, the story stands as an image of microcosm in a macrocosm. "Partition was surely just a political divide or a division of properties, of assets and liabilities. It was also, to use a phrase that survivors use repeatedly, a "division of hearts." (Urvashi Butalia).

‘The Final Solution’ as a Partition Literature

The female refugee subject in the subversive arena of Partition and attempts to understand the vulnerabilities of the female subject in the politico-patriarchal world of Partition, through a close reading of Manik Bandopadhyay’s short story, “The Final Solution”. Located within a suspended juridico-legal order, the considerations of the ethical are often nuanced for the refugee. The present chapter explores how the refugee feminine and her agency is threatened by the violating milieu of a pervert patriarchy and how in turn the feminine responds with an equally reciprocated rhetoric of counter-violence. The chapter further contemplates if the counter-violence can lay its claim to emancipation or if it remains a mere reaction formation to the violently oppressive and hegemonic patriarchal milieu of Partition

The Partition has been one of the most traumatic events in the history of the Indian sub-continent, leaving deep psychological scars that continue to haunt us within and without. As Ashis Nandy and many others have commented, silence became the main psychological defence of the survivors, which is why researchers have had to wait long and dig deep for partition narratives. Along with the oblivion of silence, women, especially mothers – as double-victims of both patriarchal power structures and the violence and violations of the Partition – have had to face erasure from the Partition discourse as well.

“The Final Solution” is a story by Manik Bandopadhyay, who is an Indian Bengali, writing about the destruction of values and the politics of power and sexuality in the spiralling refugee problem in Calcutta, which was a direct aftermath of the 1947 Partition. Many of the Hindu families who left their homes in East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) and came to West Bengal in India, could not find refuge in the overcrowded camps. They were forced to settle in any place they could find, including public places like the Sealdaha Railway Station.

The protagonist of the story, Mallika, resides on this railway platform: “Mallika’s family had a place, the length of a spread out mattress. Everything, everyone is squeezed in there – Mallika, her husband Bhushan, their two-and-half-year-old son Khokon and her widowed sister-in-law Asha; tin suitcases, beddings, bundles, pots and pans” (19). The very precariousness and transit-oriness of such a location foregrounds the family’s rootless and destabilised existence, and the irony of having a “mattress kingdom” is sharper in the context of the irreversible displacement suffered by them (19).

When the tout, Pramatha, comes to Mallika with the offer of “some jobs still available for women”, she understands the risk, yet one look at her child, “now reduced to a skeleton”,

makes her agree because, as she says, “There’s no other way out for us” (21). It is the compulsions of maternal love that prompt her to compromise her body and self-respect. As she says to her sister-in-law, Asha, “I would be ready to die if that could keep my child alive” (23). Yet she is repulsed when Pramatha makes sexual advances to her. “She had accepted the fact that Pramatha was going to engage her in prostitution, but she couldn’t tolerate the thought that he had planned to enjoy her first, before introducing her to the profession” (29). Whereas prostitution is like a humiliating, yet depersonalised and necessary act she must engage in to in the hope of a better present for her son, Pramatha’s violation of her body is like a personal betrayal of her trust in him. This act of betrayal breaks the boundaries of her patience, and she strangles him to death. The money she takes from the dead man’s pockets represents “the final solution” to her, as she says in the end, “We’ll never be hungry again...My son will have milk four times a day” (30).

The act of murdering Pramatha empowers her, and she says, “What did he take me for? Am I weak just because I’m a woman?” (30). She decides henceforth to carry a knife when engaging with men, because violence has become the currency of human negotiation during Partition. From a victim, she becomes an agent of her own and her family’s destiny. Any moral guilt that she might have felt is erased by the fierce mother-love that propels her. The text is open-ended; the writer does not judge her morally or punish her legally, and even the reader is compelled to withhold judgement in the context of the sheer desperation of the plight of the refugee mother.

Gender Politics in Manik Bandopadhyay’s “The Final Solution”

It is not quite often that we come across stories like “The Final Solution” which not only highlights the struggle of gendered violence in a catastrophic world like that of the Partition of the Indian Subcontinent, but also question the very essence of stereotypical behaviours and roles within the setting of a violent world. The politics of the land is laid down in terms of an anti-essentialist ‘act,’ that does more than just subverting identities, it relocates history and helps the ‘woman’ reclaim her ‘self’ and dignity in a scenario where the ‘motherland’ is violated. This paper will try to analyse the ‘performance’ that the protagonist

and other characters of the short story defile and then go on to construct for themselves, and make an attempt to map their 'body' and 'gender' as a site of 'power' and defiance.

According to Judith Butler, "We are acting all the time in the ways that we enact, repeat, appropriate and refuse the norms that decide our social ontology". And it is in the enactment, refusal and the difference of character, when it comes to Mallika and Asha and even her husband that Mallika comes to set herself, not as an object of patriarchy. Moreover, what Bandhopadhyay seems to accomplish with his story, is a radical rethinking of the ontological constructions of identity of the several 'women' characters of his narrative. His story highlights that there is no specific definition of feminism or no static 'subject' position that the category of 'women' occupy in a "postfeminist" world, "the very subject of women is no longer understood in stable or abiding terms". Bandhopadhyay and his characters do not only defy the stereotypical notions of 'performativity' but also that of 'gender' and 'identity' itself, and thus it can be said that Bandhopadhyay is both contesting and creating, "a subject of feminism".

In her essay "Transcending the Gendering of Partition: An Analysis of Manik Bandhopadhyay's Short Story 'The Final Solution'," Sukannya Choudhury focuses on telling or re-telling the narrative of partition through the lens of 'gender,' she sees Mallika as a breadwinner in a world where 'women' are subjected to "wilful amnesia" and says that her paper focuses on a "compulsive recovery". Her aim, primarily is to bring about the struggle and violence that 'women' had to go through, and particularly 'subaltern' 'women.' The positioning of Mallika, a refugee on the railway platform of Calcutta seems to be very contradictory at first. Mallika's character can be seen as an epitome of this statement, not only the protagonist who stands as the 'mother-nation' allows herself to be violated but also takes part in the body-politics and violates Pramatha's physical and conceptual entity. Mallika finds a solution, which is a rather roaring resistance to "masculine supremacy", she ends up strangling Pramatha, after "Pramatha went limp" as she hits him with a whiskey bottle.

Mallika in the story is shown in a different light as she steps out of the ingrained conception of women to be docile and submissive and men providing protection for the same. Mallika thus, creates a separate, if not new or in the least, a disrupted 'category' within the narrative and the narrative thus serves to highlight an anti-essentialist viewpoint of violence during the partition of the Indian Subcontinent. Manik Bandhopadhyay's purpose thus, lies to derive that the non-bhadrolok's gender, class, caste experiences need to be archived to welcome multi-dimensional viewpoint of Partition."

Bandhopadhyay highlights the difference in the subjective choices that Mallika and other 'women' make in the face of the very need for survival, the story thus considers, "the pervasive cultural conditions" along with social, historical and even economical while setting 'subjects' of patriarchy and even feminist discourse. When the story begins, Pramatha, Bhushan and the reader alike expect Mallika to behave in a set manner, and one can see other 'women' in the story doing the very thing, what they seem to be doing is enacting, a 'performance.' Mallika is forced down the profession of prostitution because she is a 'mother'. Mallika's agency to choose prostitution as a means to feed her little son highlights her maternal instincts and what becomes extensively essential to be noticed as we question the framework of gendered thought and behaviours, is that in choosing prostitution, not only is Mallika fulfilling her role as a 'mother,' but also regaining claim over her culturally constructed body. The Central argument here is that prostitution is a shackle that the structure of 'power' bounds Mallika within, her decision and choice to render her 'sexuality' as a means of survival is her limited emancipation and finally, the 'act' of murder is her questioning the categories of identity that contemporary juridical structures engender, naturalise and immobilize.

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