



MANIK BANDOPADHYAY'S 'THE FINAL SOLUTION': A STUDY IN THE PERSPECTIVE OF PARTITION

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Abstract

Following the two-nation theory propounded by Muhammad Ali Jinnah and others, Bengal suffered partition and its aftermath. The nationalist discourse suppressed the real suffering of the people faced in two provinces in Punjab and Bengal. On the other hand the independence was glorified in such a way that the trauma and sufferings of the millions of refugees got suppressed. As alternative history we can look at contemporary literature. Manik Bandopadhyay's 'The Final Solution' depicts the inhuman suffering of a woman along with many families and her ultimate resisting spirit that she shows at the end of the story. The purpose of this paper is to analyse the story from the perspective of Partition and to show how women suffered in multifaceted ways during and after the partition. The paper aims to point out the sexual exploitation that women had to face through even in their distressful situation as refugees. The character of Mallika in the story 'The Final Solution' fell in the trap of Pramatha, a dishonest man who tried to exploit her sexually and commercially. But she proves that she is no less strong than a man in fighting against him and winning over him.

Keywords: Partition, women, exploitation, refugees, Bengal

Partition of India has remained as a very unfortunate event in the history of India. A substantial painful body of history and literature were born in India and Pakistan out of this catastrophic event. It has become an area of study in the academic field. It was a dream of all Indians that India would be free from the British rule. It brought so much happiness to the people of the country. People celebrated the event and the national history is full of glories written about the sacrifice of the freedom fighters. But along with independence came the division of the country on the basis of community. Leaders played a very bad game in this irrecoverable match with a poor foresight. The history of gaining independence was so glorified that another side of suffering, loss and pain has remained outside the purview of the national leaders and the dominant ideologies prevalent at that time. Partition was done on the basis of religion. It was not followed by any systematic exchange of people and belongings. It was declared as if suddenly and people were confused what to do. Immediately the border areas became hotspot of religious animosities and violence. Ismat Chughtai in his book *Friend, My Enemy: Essays, Reminiscences, Portrait* has written 'It wasn't only that the country was split in two- bodies and minds were also divided. Moral beliefs were tossed aside and humanity was in shreds' (3). There were spasmodic and sporadic riots killing many people on both sides of the border. Dr Asaduddin in his article "Fiction as History: Partition Stories" has written:

The partition of India, a momentous event in Indian history, continues to tantalize historians, haunt the Indian psyche and cast its shadow on our social and political life. It is closely linked with the chronicle of our freedom struggle that made the actual liberation of the country from foreign yoke an experience of violence, slaughter and exile for many. One of the most massive demographic dislocations in history, with its attendant human tragedy, it defies chroniclers to come to grip with it in all its dimensions (313).

Partition played havoc on women. Women were the symbol of honour in the society. They were targeted by both the communities. They were raped, abducted, tortured, and exploited in whatever way men could. Urvashi Butalia writes, 'as always there was widespread sexual savagery: about 75,000 women are thought to have been abducted and raped by men of religions different from their own (and indeed sometimes by men of their own religion)' (3). Many women lost their husbands, children, and relatives. On the one hand they suffered the trauma of loss and on the other they faced violence over their own bodies. All these stories of women's suffering came down to some extent through oral tradition of family storytelling. Literature has revitalized those painful events in the lives of women. The pains of partition are unforgettable. To go over in the memory of the pains and sufferings of partition the prime minister of India Narendra Modi in a twitter post proclaimed 14th August will be observed as Partition Horrors Remembrance Day.

West Bengal and Punjab were the worst sufferers. Many people lost their relatives. With the division a family also got divided. They were unable to meet their relatives. In fact, the actual history of Partition remained in the stories of each displaced and suffered family. Partition literature came with those stories even after seventy years of the disastrous event. Partition literature is written in many languages such as Urdu, Punjabi, Hindi, Bengali, and English. In English some of the great writers wrote on partition are Manohar Malgonkar, Chaman Nahal, Khushwant Singh, Salman Rushdie, and Bapsi Sidhwa. Writers in other languages include Saadat Hasan Manto, Bhisham Sahni, Intizar Hussain, Joginder Paul and others. It is often said that Bengali writers have not written much on partition. A large part of partition literature has been produced on the division in the Western border. But if we look carefully we can well understand that a substantial amount of writing we can get from the Bengali writers also. But this is a fact that this has not gained sufficient publicity due to the negligence of critics and translators. Jyotirmoyee Devi, Pratibha Basu, Manik Bandopadhyay, Sunil Gangopadhyay, Shirshendu Mukhopadhyay, Prafulla Roy are some of the writers from West Bengal. From Bangladesh there are Syed Waliullah, Hasan Azizul Huq, Rizia Rahman and others. In Bengali Jyotirmoyee Devi's novel "Epar Ganga Oper Ganga", Saroj Kumar Roychowdhury's "Neel Agun", Satinath Bhaduri's short story "Gananayak", are some of the writings depicting the psychological and social effects of partition.

Manik Bandopadhyay is one of the noted Bengali writers who felt deeply the nuances of sufferings of the poor and the displaced. Born in 1908, during his forty eight years lifespan he has written many unforgettable novels and short stories. His novels are as many as thirty eight and short stories above three hundred. At the age twenty one he wrote his first novel *Dibaratir Kavya* (Poetry of the Day and Night). His works have been translated in many languages. His most famous novel *Padma Nadir Majhi* (Boatman of the Padma) has been translated thrice in English. His writings are imbued with the details of the hard life of the deprived and downtrodden. His short story 'The Final Solution' is translated by Rani Ray from its original Bengali version and it captures the disturbed world of the refugees during the partition. This article is intended to investigate and explore the various layers of negative impact of partition on human beings particularly women in and around partition time reflected in the story.

The story spans a day only and within it a woman transforms herself from a very weak feminine sufferer to a strong masculine fighter. A woman's resilience, fighting capacity, mental might which accounts never to yield has been delineated perfectly with many layers of painful tones. At the beginning the sense of homelessness grabs the attention of the readers. A large number of people with a few of their essential belongings huddled together in the occupied spaces in the platform of railway station. Manik Bandopadhyay writes, '...one could see the forlorn dispossessed people, spending their days and nights, huddled together like herds of cattle and goats in the shelter of a railway platform.'(36) The writer dehumanizes their condition by saying that they lived like cattle. The story portrays only one family among so many in the platform. One small mattress is the kingdom (space) of the family consisting of four members. The members are named with care Mallika, Bhushan, Asha, and Khokan, a two and half-year-old child. Many aspects of Mallika's life have been pointed

out in the story. The world, as if, stares like a bird of prey to the women like Mallika. Being a woman she is vulnerable to many traps and seduction. So the small world is painted as dark and ugly. Even the sun's light is befitting here. Only night fits their situation. If the sun had option not to rise, it would not rise to show these people daylight. With the paucity of spaces there is extreme hunger prevalent among the homeless people. The condition of the mothers and the small children is worst. The mother in Mallika feels agonizing pain watching the small child going without food. The child goes on whimpering for food all the time. She becomes desperate to find food and feed the child. But there is no scope for food.

The situation turned absolutely hellish: 'They had continued to live one hell of a life in the station...' The main male member of the family is suffering from malaria fever. There is no scope for treatment. The day when the story unfolds is an extremely bad one because 'Mallika's family had nothing to eat.' They were on the brink of fasting. The condition of the child is more heart rending. He 'had been whimpering since early morning,' 'He howled and dropped from time to time' (36). There was no help from anyone. Men from various organizations and societies visited the place but no changes came to their lives. People lost their hope to rely on the government. Only people left to aid them are the dishonest, capitalistic, opportunist touts like Pramatha. In this situation the mother in Mallika crosses the limit of endurance. She becomes desperate to save her child. One of the most valuable aspects of human self- the 'motherly self' becomes deeply traumatised in such situation. Belief in God loses ground consequent of degraded life. God is referred as 'disgraceful being' by Mallika when Pramatha says that God is responsible for making them so poor. They were used to live a respectable life with dignity. Women never would go outside for work. When Mallika was told that there was no job for male members and a few jobs still available for females she was shocked and hurt. As a habit she suddenly shouts out, 'Oh God, even this was in my fate!' The mention of God here is only habitual with no indication of appeal to Almighty (38).

Partition has made men insane in many cases. Incidentally Mallika's husband Bhushan is almost inactive in the story partly because of his illness and partly his mental disturbance. His behaviour points to his perching on the edge of insanity. Bandopadhyay writes about Bhushan: 'The world, his own existence, had turned remote, upside down. Everything had become muddled in his mind' (40). Taking advantage of their extreme situation many dishonest people came forward to commercially exploit their destiny. The government and the social service organizations failed to take care of them. In this situation men like Pramatha in association with the police cast their evil nets on women. The background of Pramatha shows well how he is an expert in accumulating wealth in a dishonest way violating and flouting the human values. Taking advantage of the topsy-turvy ambience of partition he occupied a two storeyed house at the brink of the city driving away the Muslim family by creating a riot in the locality. Manik Bandopadhyay writes 'The house had belonged to a Muslim family, who had fled when Pramatha managed to cause a riot in the area. (41). The house was used by him to keep the women like Mallika and their family in return of rents and sex. The man was carrying out multiple earning machinations simultaneously. He was collecting room rents from the women, giving cars in rents, taking commission from the earning of the women as prostitutes. He was running flesh trade openly. In a desert he seems to be the only oasis to many of the homeless refugee women. In exchange of their bodies they are getting a roof over their heads.

Partition created suitable atmosphere for appearing in the scene for such thugs. They dominated the women and women's bodies were taken by them as profitable and exploitable space. Pramatha in the story "The Final Solution" offered jobs to Mallika in exchange of food and shelter. The kind of job remained unknown at first but gradually it becomes clear to her. She came to know that Pramatha runs prostitution business with the women refugees who being helpless fall in his trap. In spite of knowing everything she takes him as God because she had no other way to save her child except accepting the offer of Pramatha. Pramatha, on the other hand, makes profit by renting rooms and cars to those women engaged in prostitution. Mallika says that she wants to do anything for the sake of her child. She goes to where Pramatha's assistant Ramlochan took her with his car. After getting a room and food for her child she became happy for a moment but this did not last for long. Pramatha wants to enjoy her. He needs her immediately to have a tea. But actually he wanted to exploit her sexually at first before engaging her in the profession of prostitution. Mallika however could not endure this idea of Pramatha. She became a tigress looking at him when to have the opportunity to pounce on him. The writer has used animal imagery to depict the violent aspect of human characters. Mallika's angry look has been

described this way, 'To Pramatha her emaciated hungry looks took on the form of a human tigress as she kept fidgeting. The way she looked straight at him, her head raised, it seemed she was about to pounce on him, dig her teeth into his flesh.'⁽⁴³⁾This is a way to look at human beings as beasts. Partition in fact made people beastly taking away the human values from them. When most of the women were ready to surrender to the situation Mallika stood to decide to protest this exploitation. She gathered courage and becomes strong and masculine.

Mallika's degrading humanity is perceived in Pramatha's attempt to make her clean and well looking. With an indistinct idea of what would happen to her Mallika had to respond to the call of Pramatha. She went to his gorgeous home in the city suburb. Mallika's 'grimy clothes', 'filthy sandals' and 'unkempt hair' have made her detestable to a tout like Pramatha. The hypocritical society gave her access to an 'aroma filled bathroom' only to make her sexually exploitable. She was going through a psychological trauma facing Pramatha at his house. First time she was watching someone drowning 'glasses of alcohol at one go'. She became ferocious when Pramatha drew and pulled her to his bosom saying that this way he wanted to get her. Mallika then leads the readers to encounter a counter violence which bespeaks of women's courage and fortitude in the atmosphere of hegemonic patriarchal violence. She uses the soda bottle as her weapon to strike the man who wanted to exploit her sexually. She does not lose her mental strength at the incident of Pramatha becoming unconscious at her strike. She does not rest until his death. In a cool mind inside the room Mallika thinks, plans and executes the last blow by killing him with the noose made of her sari. Even after all this she was able to take away all the money that Pramatha had in his pocket. Such an unbelievable fight was not expected from Mallika. Here she becomes different from all other women. She at least made an example of courage, protest and fight against the patriarchal power. It was an ominous and vicious power that engulfed the women who became homeless, were abducted and tortured after partition.

So the story 'The Final Solution' captures the essence of violent, exploitative atmosphere that partition brought to the people of divided Bengal. It ushered in the growth of capitalism at the cost of human values, respect and dignity of women in the society. People lost the meaning of life with extreme situations of homeless, foodless, health hazards and consequent mental anguish. Women could not protect their honour, self-respect and dignity.

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