

Manik Bandopadhyay's "The Final Solution": the Feminine Emancipation and Post-Partition Hyphenated and Distressed Condition

Arunava Roy

English Honours (1st Class 2nd), MA (1st Class), UGC NET Qualified, Berhampore, Murshidabad, West Bengal, India

Abstract:

The immanent reality of the Indian partition and the consequent aftermath that it evoked, in terms of displacement of the living and the consequent dehumanisation of the human subject, is the subject of Bandopadhyay's short story "The Final Solution". The refugee exodus, prompted by the partition of India in 1947, had generated a wide range of literary and visual representations, which are depicted in this short story. The protagonist, Mallika's act of killing Pramatha is inhuman, yet it is only her complete departure from humanity that she is able to emancipate her agency from the oppressive modes of subjugation and commodification.

The refugee exodus, prompted by the partition of India in 1947, had generated a wide range of literary and visual representations, which is brilliantly depicted in the story "The Final Solution" by the radical, avant-garde Bengal writer Manik Bandopadhyay, who is renowned for his critical interrogations into the human condition and his consistent literary endeavours to address the politico-social condition and its effect on the humane and humanity. The vision of humanity which Bandopadhyay cherishes is imbibed in the immanent and the immediate and his little regards for the sublime ideals of truth, justice, ethics which the transcendental man seeks to embody. The story is centred around a refugee family which has taken shelter at a railway station and in all possibilities, has migrated from East-Bengal, which post 1947, was incorporated into the geo-political milieu of East-Pakistan. The plot ushers the readers into a sinister world of human exploitation as Mallika, the house wife, who is burdened with an ailing husband, a child and a widowed sister-in-law, is lured into prostitution by the pimp Pramatha. The story begins with a description of the plight of the refugee and portrays the hyphenated state that the displaced have been subjected to. They have constructed their home on the railway platform—the length of one spread mattress—a hetero-topic space where possibilities of recuperation are muted by the immediate and immanent dystopia. The refugee infested station becomes a heterotopia, is no longer the public-space used for commutation. Instead, it is now a habituated space—a habitus of "bare life" (Agamben). Bandopadhyay compares the dispossessed refugees to "herds of cattle and goats". Mallika's family suffers from starvation; the little child whimpers and drowsed as the day advanced. They expect nothing from societies, association and Government, but have some hope on Pramatha of 'Help and welfare society'. He is a parasite who feeds on the apparent suspension of the juridico-political apparatus in this climate of exception and is the perfect manifestation of the petty bourgeoisie. The author describes him as a *Pater familias* (The law of the father) and the ideologues of patriarchy and seeks to protect or

valorise the woman as the weaker sex. Yet, he is also the pimp who is contemplating to engage Mallika in the flesh trade and what is more, has located Mallika's femininity within the economy of desire. In such helpless circumstances, Mallika accepts the role of breadwinner forgetting self dignity. The motherly proclivity and the duty of a responsible house wife are focused. The geo-political locale of the railway platform, which is contingent within the politico-social epoch of partition, is thus in a concurrent 'state of exception'

The writer problematizes the structure of the story by refusing to present it as a mere chronicle of woman subjugation and exploitation, an overt reality of partition, 1947. Instead, he enhances the possibility of an emancipation of the feminine stature with a climatic turn. In return to the rehabilitation of her family, Mallika is coerced to solicit Pramatha, the manifestation of petty bourgeoisie. This is a crucial epiphanic juncture in the story. The already commodified agency of Mallika fails to locate Pramatha as the client. She is disoriented and disturbed realising that she has now been unconditionally commodified as the object of sex. Both locate her sexuality within an economy of desire and this unconditional objectification of her sexual identity is a grotesque truth which she fails to negotiate with. Hence, in her fit of anger she hits Pramatha with the bottle of whiskey and later strangles him to death. It is the climactic moment where the feminine-self seeks to transcend all economies of oppression, i.e. the ethical, the ideological and even the sexual. Mallika's moment of de-humanisation paradoxically becomes the moment when she finally transcends the ordeal of patriarchy, for history of humanity is genealogically patriarchal and phallogocentric. Mallika's act of killing Pramatha is inhuman, yet it is only her complete departure from humanity that she is able to emancipate her agency from the oppressive modes of subjugation and commodification. Mallika's body becomes the only medium through which she can transcend economic oppression. Her sexuality is no longer confined within the possibilities of a Governed transgression through which it can become her means of sustenance. Her body which attracts the libidinous 'sharks' becomes her final solution to the 'state of exception', which partition has ushered into. Mallika's revolutionary stance thus, symbolizes an anti hegemonic body-scape to reterritorialise her identity. The story celebrates a deviant femininity in the backdrop of a socio-political state of exception, the motherly proclivities, the responsibility of a house-wife and finally shows Mallika's final solution—the juridico-political emancipation.

Keywords: politico-social, plight, dystopia, de-humanization, responsibility.

References:

1. Sengupta, Debjani, "Partition Literature. An Anthology", Worldview critical Edition, New Delhi, 2018.
2. Sarkar, Joydeep and Mukherjee, Rupayan, "Partition Literature and cinema. A critical Introduction", Rutledge, South Asia Edition, New York, 2020
3. <https://elearning.sbssmahavidyalaya.ac.in/files/B4B3E61B16231338020.pdf>
4. <https://www.the-criterion.com/V13/n3/CM02.pdf>