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## ❖ Theme of struggle in *The Final Solution*/As a partition short story/ Irony in *The Final Solution* / Significance of the title of *The Final Solution*.

The man, who drew the sketch of life with the practical experience of being burnt by blazing charcoal, was none other than Manik Bandopadhyay. Though the scar was healed with the passage of time, the mark became a life-long ornament to Bandopadhyay. Again, a wound, created by a Viking-shaped knife in his childhood, led him to anatomize the human life through pen and paper in the due course of his life. The stark reality of human life finds its best expression in the hands many writers. Manik Bandopadhyay was one of them. The struggle and angst of human life were dissected minutely in the hands of this charismatic figure. The present short story *The Final Solution (Upaye)* anatomizes human beings' relentless struggle for existence in the bare backdrop of mass-migration followed by Bengal's partition.

The overnight division of Bengal cast millions of people into utter dismay. Many people were hardly aware of their country. Due to the partition of Bengal, innumerable people had to leave their homeland both in India and Pakistan. The Muslims had to leave India and the Hindu people had to leave for India from Pakistan to avoid the onslaught of communal riot. Numerous Hindus from East-Pakistan took shelter as refugee in public places after overnight migration from their homeland. The present short story depicts the destitute and miserable condition of a Hindu family affected by the partition of Bengal.

The story opens *in media res* like any other short story in a railway platform. It portrays the picturesque description of the family of Mallika, the protagonist of the story. The condition of Mallika's family was very pathetic. The narrator's description puts light into the fact that, at the time of partition, the condition of the homeless refugees was no better than inanimate belongings of those very families. This is vividly discernible in the following lines:

“Everything, everyone was squeezed there— Mallika, her husband Bhushan, their two-and-half-year-old son Khokan and her widow sister-in-law Asha; tin suitcase, beddings, bundles, pots and pans.”

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The family of Mallika was suffering inhumanly since the family's arrival in the railway platform. The family was jobless, foodless and last but not the least, homeless. The condition of the family hints at the helpless condition of man after the partition of Bengal. There was no means of earning for the families affected by irrational and whimsical partition.

In that topsy-turvy condition after the partition, there were some people who presented themselves to be the representative of government or NGOs. They used to pretend to help the destitute. They were chance-seekers. In the present story Pramatha and his assistant Ramlochan were such chance-seekers. Pramatha was a pimp. He used to come to the destitute families in the name of help and would entrap the married women of those families into his clutches. Then he would compel those women to be prostitute. Those women also could not but accept the proposal of Pramatha to save the lives of their family members. This puts light into the heinous and brutal nature of human being in the post-partition era. At the time of partition some people even would treat others as commodity. Through this picture, Bandopadhyay presented the decadence of moral values in society.

In this story, Mallika, at first, tried her best to avoid the trap of Pramatha. But finding no way out for survival she gave her consent to be the puppet in the hands of Pramatha, the pimp. It was her motherly affection which compelled Mallika to keep a pace on the unjust path. This incident clearly shows human beings' struggle to keep existence. As most of the short story of Manik Bandopadhyay portray existential crisis, this is no exception. Mallika's struggle for existence is clearly visible when she said the following words to Pramatha—

“Okay, I'll do whatever you ask: dance naked if you so wish. But you'll find a room for us first, won't you? An enclosed space and a drop of milk for the child, otherwise he'll die.”

The heart-wrenching description of the plight of the inhabitants (erstwhile refugees) of the colony in which Mallika's family was shifted to by Pramatha, puts light into the hypocrisy of the national leaders after the partition of Bengal. After the partition of Bengal, much attention was paid towards northern India for rehabilitation, but the Bangalee refugees from East-Bengal got hardly any assistance on the part of government. So, the women willingly or unwillingly

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had to choose the profession of prostitution. The most pathetic fact was this, that most of the time the women would be the victim of venereal disease. This plight can be perceived in the following words of an unmarried girl to her jobless elder brother in the colony of refugees.

“Bring some medicines for Boudi. Can’t you see how long she is suffering? If you can’t get hold of medicines bring some poison.”

The story comes to its climax on that very day when Mallika’s family was rescued by Pramatha from the railway platform. Mallika was called by Pramatha in his private room of an exquisitely beautiful palace in the suburb of the city. Mallik was ordered by Pramatha to be refreshed by bath. She was given a light tiffin. After that, when Pramatha wanted to molest Mallika, she broke the bottle of wine on the head of Pramatha and strangled him by his neck with that very sari given by Pramatha. In this way Mallika killed Pramatha and came back home. Then she said to her sister-in-law, “... but I have found an excellent way out.”

It is very interesting to note that, when all the ways were closed to Mallika she thought murder to be the only way to keep the existence in this infernal world. Mallika was sure about the fact that she had to perform the role of a prostitute for the survival of her family members but she could not tolerate the exploitation of Pramatha. Through the killing of Pramatha Mallika got a way to escape the destitute condition of being victimized by the people like Pramatha. Though the way was not fair, murder was the one and only solution for Mallika. Thus, towards the end of the story Mallika says, “...I’ll go to the railway station every evening in my frayed sari, the sharks will come again to pick me up, for sure....”

Thus, Bandopadhyay in his present story, portrays the theme of ‘struggle for existence’ through the rising voice of Mallika. Like Draupadi in Mahasweta Devi’s short story *Draupadi*, Mallika, here, becomes a subaltern voice. She starts speaking against exploitation, suppression, oppression etc. So, it can be asserted that Manik Bandopadhyay, as usual, finds a solution to decrease the itchiness of his fingers through the rubbing of brush of stark reality on the canvas of the reality of bleak society and ironically prescribes ‘the final solution’ for the protagonist of the story *The Final Solution*.

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