



# **SURVIVAL OR SUBJUGATION? THE COMMODIFICATION OF WOMEN DURING THE PARTITION OF INDIA IN *THE MAROONED AND THE FINAL SOLUTION***

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**Abstract :** In the aftermath of the Partition of India in 1947, women became the silent victims of a new form of exploitation, suffering not only physical violence but also systematic commodification under the guise of rehabilitation. Protiva Basu's *The Marooned* and Manik Bandyopadhyay's *The Final Solution* offer searing critiques of this era, exposing how women were doubly victimized—coerced into the flesh trade and misled by deceptive schemes promising homes and employment. This study delves into how Partition shattered communal trust and religious solidarity, creating a betrayal that deepened the trauma of displaced women. Through a comparative literary analysis and historical contextualization, the research illuminates the systematic commodification of women and their journey from victimhood to agency, highlighting moments of resilience and resistance as they confront oppressive structures. By examining the role of space—how it confines and liberates—this study sheds light on how these texts frame physical and psychological boundaries within the Partition landscape. Employing postcolonial feminist and trauma theory, this research reveals the fractured identities and psychological toll endured by women in search of stability and belonging, adding a nuanced dimension to Partition literature that underscores the complexity of trauma and survival amid displacement.

**Keywords :** Partition of India, Exploitation of Women, Flesh Trade, Deceptive Schemes, Postcolonial Feminist Theory, Psychological displacement

## **Introduction**

In the wake of the 1947 Partition of India, women became the silent casualties of a fractured society, enduring profound vulnerability and exploitation as communities fractured and systemic support crumbled. Protiva Basu's *The Marooned* and Manik Bandyopadhyay's *The Final Solution*, seminal works in Bengali literature, confront these harrowing aspects, unearthing the double exploitation faced by women coerced into the flesh trade and ensnared by deceptive promises of safety and livelihood. These narratives delve into the brutality faced by female refugees who were rendered invisible, their struggles ignored in a nation torn by chaos.

The *Marooned*, a translation of Basu's *Dukulhara*—meaning something stranded or detached from its source—reveals the tragic plight of Bindubasini and her family as they journey from East Bengal to Hindustan. Disowned by their homeland and estranged in their new country, Bindubasini, along with her daughter-in-law, Uttara, and granddaughters, Bulu and Milu, fall prey to deceit and betrayal, each step marked by exploitation. Without any male member to protect or assist them during the Partition displacement, the family's vulnerability becomes even more pronounced. Bulu's death, the assault on Milu and Uttara, and Bindubasini's own demise

encapsulate the relentless despair and futility of their search for safety, underscoring the traumatic costs of displacement and loss. The title *Dukulhara* poignantly reflects the family's sense of being "marooned"—cut off from their homeland, suspended between two worlds, and left vulnerable to betrayal, exploitation, and abandonment.

In *The Final Solution*, Bandyopadhyay presents Mallika's desperate measures amidst the devastation of Partition. Confronted by hunger, a critically ill husband, and the burden of protecting her young son and widowed sister-in-law, Mallika is pushed to the edge. When Pramatha, a lecherous tout masquerading as a welfare worker, attempts to exploit her plight, Mallika is forced to consider prostitution for survival. Her response, however, turns into defiance when she kills Pramatha, vowing to protect herself and other refugee women by resisting future attempts at exploitation. Through her drastic measures, Mallika reclaims her agency and exposes the depth of betrayal faced by women forced to navigate treacherous societal fissures. The title *The Final Solution* bears a chilling weight, encapsulating both the protagonist's personal act of resistance and the broader, more violent solutions society imposes on vulnerable women during such crises. It implies the tragic, final recourse available to Mallika, and by extension to many women, who, pushed beyond their limits, are forced into drastic actions for survival in the face of systemic exploitation.

These stories do more than recount personal tragedies; they serve as searing critiques of the commodification of women during Partition, shedding light on the psychological and moral costs borne by women left "marooned" in a fractured world. In both *The Marooned* and *The Final Solution*, Basu and Bandyopadhyay bring to the forefront the intense vulnerability and exploitation faced by women, whose suffering is amplified by the collapse of societal structures and the cruelty of those in positions of power. The two narratives not only depict individual tragedies but also serve as larger commentaries on the systemic failures and gender-based violence that permeated the refugee crisis during Partition, while also showcasing their indomitable will to endure and reclaim their dignity in the face of an unforgiving world.

## Literature Review

This research aims to address the existing gap in the literature on the exploitation of women during the Partition of India, particularly in relation to their coercion into the flesh trade and victimization through fraudulent rehabilitation schemes. While the experiences of women during Partition have been widely studied, much of the scholarship focuses primarily on the physical violence, abduction, and communal assaults they endured. These foundational studies highlight how women's bodies became sites of conflict, manipulated by different communities to assert control in the post-Partition context. However, a critical gap exists in the analysis of the more subtle and systemic forms of exploitation women faced, particularly through coercive economic means, such as the flesh trade and fraudulent rehabilitation schemes. This research aims to fill this gap by examining these lesser-explored forms of exploitation within the context of women's experiences during Partition.

Protiva Basu's *The Marooned* and Manik Bandyopadhyay's *The Final Solution* offer valuable contributions to this discourse, exploring the multifaceted exploitation of women during this tumultuous period—both through physical coercion and manipulation by those promising safety and a new life. These works not only underscore the brutal violence women endured but also foreground the deceptive practices and false promises that led to their further exploitation in the aftermath of Partition.

Building on these foundational texts, this study applies postcolonial feminist and trauma theory to analyze the commodification and manipulation of women in Basu's and Bandyopadhyay's works. While much of the existing scholarship centers on the direct violence and trauma women experienced, this research seeks to explore the often-overlooked dimensions of their exploitation—specifically, the flesh trade and fraudulent rehabilitation schemes. By expanding the scope of Partition literature to include these forms of exploitation, this study aims to provide a more comprehensive understanding of women's victimization during Partition, while also highlighting their resilience and resistance in the face of overwhelming adversity.

This research also engages with feminist postcolonial theory, critiquing the intersection of gender, power, and colonialism. In doing so, it presents a nuanced perspective on how the displacement of women during Partition was not only a physical trauma but also a psychological and socio-economic one, underscoring the intersectional nature of their exploitation. Ultimately, this analysis seeks to extend the conversation in Partition literature, offering new insights into the commodification of women and the forms of survival and resistance that emerged from the trauma of displacement.

## Methodology

This study adopts a comparative literary analysis of Protiva Basu's *The Marooned* and Manik Bandyopadhyay's *The Final Solution*, placing these texts within their historical and socio-political context to examine the exploitation of women during Partition. The research employs postcolonial feminist theory to explore how both authors critique patriarchal structures and trauma theory to investigate the psychological impact of exploitation on women. By closely analyzing the portrayal of both victimization and resistance in these texts, this study highlights how these narratives reveal the systemic abuse women suffered. Through a combination of close reading and textual analysis, the research identifies the ways in which these works address the intersection of gender, power, and colonial legacies. Additionally, historical research and secondary literature on Partition provide the necessary socio-political context, enriching the analysis and deepening the understanding of the socio-economic forces at play in these literary depictions.

## From Victims to Warriors: Shattered Trust, Betrayal, and the Struggle for Liberation in Partition Narratives

The Partition of India in 1947 was not merely a political division; it was an emotional disintegration, particularly for women, whose identities and bodies were subjected to the dual assaults of violence and betrayal. The violence was not only physical but psychological—an erosion of trust within families, communities, and even religious groups. In Protiva Basu's *The Marooned* and Manik Bandyopadhyay's *The Final Solution*, the repercussions of this betrayal are starkly portrayed. These literary works expose how the brutal realities of Partition not only divided a nation but also shattered the social fabric of communities, leading to devastating violence and exploitation.

Basu's *The Marooned* poignantly captures the psychological fallout of this division, focusing on the suffering of women who were forced into lives of vulnerability and displacement. The narrative, particularly through the character of Bindubashini, illustrates how violence, often perpetrated by those within one's own community, compounded the sense of betrayal. Women like Bindubashini, displaced from their ancestral homes, find themselves not only abandoned but also violated by men they once trusted. This brutal betrayal, both personal and communal, is encapsulated in the painful imagery:

“...some clawed at the female bodies in the crowd, some picked pockets, taking away the meagre cash one carried for the road.” (Basu 161)

This captures the brutal transactional nature of trust during Partition. For Bindubashini, the very act of seeking refuge in a new land becomes fraught with the violence of betrayal. The refugee camps become microcosms of a larger, fractured society, where humanity gives way to base instincts, and trust becomes a casualty of survival.

The scene where Uttara's daughter, Milu, is nearly pulled away in the dark by an unseen hand, starkly illustrates the pervasive sexual violence that even young children were not spared from during the Partition. The rough, masculine hand that draws away from Uttara's trembling touch symbolizes the betrayal of not only familial and community trust but also the collapse of moral and social order during this traumatic period. The helplessness Uttara feels as she clings to her daughter in the face of such assault reflects how the Partition shattered not just physical borders, but also the very fabric of safety, leaving even the most vulnerable—women and children—exposed to unimaginable horrors.

In contrast, Bandyopadhyay's *The Final Solution* emphasizes the complexity of betrayal through Mallika's journey. Unlike the passive endurance seen in Basu's characters, Mallika's story reveals her internal struggle against both physical violence and the disillusionment wrought by Partition. The violence against women in this story—especially the exploitation of Mallika under the guise of assistance—reveals how religious and community boundaries are blurred when survival becomes the ultimate goal. As Bandyopadhyay writes,

“Everything, everyone was squeezed there... tin suitcase, beddings, bundles, pots and pans,” (Bandyopadhyay 51)

the chaos that followed Partition laid bare the betrayals within communities, where women, already broken by displacement, became the ultimate victims of exploitation.

Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin, in their work *Borders and Boundaries: Women in India's Partition*, assert that women's bodies became sites of conflict, manipulated by men seeking dominance and religious superiority. This manipulation left deep emotional scars as women navigated a landscape marked by fear and exploitation. Their insights align with the depictions in both Basu's and Bandyopadhyay's works, where women not only faced physical violence but also psychological trauma that shattered trust within their communities.

Both Basu and Bandyopadhyay illustrate how the shattered trust between communities during the Partition led to a psychological scarring that was as profound and enduring as the physical violence. Women were not only



victims of communal violence; they were often abandoned by the very systems they trusted, creating a cycle of emotional betrayal that was harder to escape than the external violence they suffered.

Partition not only imposed physical boundaries but also emotional and social ones. Yet, in the face of unparalleled suffering, women found ways to resist and reclaim agency, embodying a transformation from passive victims to active agents. Both Basu's *The Marooned* and Bandopadhyay's *The Final Solution* reflect this shift, but in different manners.

In *The Marooned*, the tragedy of women like Bindubashini and Uttara is profound, but their resilience surfaces through quiet acts of survival. Basu's portrayal of women in the refugee camps is marked by an underlying resistance that is not always overt but is deeply present in their endurance. While women like Uttara are victimized by black-marketeers and abandoned in brothels, their survival itself becomes a form of resistance against their circumstances. Despite being brutalized, their refusal to succumb to total despair becomes an act of defiance. However, it is through their endurance—surviving the worst of human cruelty—that these women assert their agency.

The scene in *The Marooned* where Bindubasini seeks advice from her Muslim tenant, Jamir, highlights the devastating impact of religious manipulation during the Partition. Jamir explains how external leaders incited violence, urging the Muslim community to

"...get hold of Hindu women, young or old, and marry them." (Basu 160)

This statement reflects the dehumanizing exploitation of women during times of religious conflict, where they were reduced to trophies of war, serving as instruments of religious conquest and dominance. It shows how the Partition did not just tear apart territorial boundaries but also manipulated communal identities, creating a fertile ground for the systematic objectification and victimization of women.

In *The Final Solution*, Mallika's resistance is more pronounced. Unlike Uttara's passive endurance, Mallika actively challenges the oppressive forces around her. Her struggle is one of psychological resistance, where her defiance is a direct rejection of the societal structures that seek to confine her. Mallika's resistance is not simply about survival—it is about reclaiming her autonomy, as seen in her words:

"...That gangster! He thought he had got me to carry on his clandestine trade. What did he take me for? Am I weak just because I'm a woman?" (Bandopadhyay 61)

Her journey reflects not just the resistance of a woman surviving Partition but one who is fighting for her identity and dignity within a patriarchal system that seeks to reduce her to nothing more than a symbol of communal loss.

In *The Partition Holocaust and Women: A Study of "The Final Solution" and "Bitter Harvest"*, Dr. Vinod Kumar Chopra and Dharmendra Devi highlight the shockingly unexpected yet justifiable ending of *The Final Solution*, where Mallika's transformation from a victim to an empowered agent is fully realized. Her final words, after murdering Pramatha, capture the unsettling yet resolute nature of her actions:

"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 the sure... But this time I'll be carrying a sharp knife with me, you understand Thakurjhi." (Bandopadhyay 61)

These words reflect her resolve to navigate the dangerous world she inhabits on her own terms, carrying both a weapon and a newfound sense of agency. This shift in Mallika's character underscores the drastic lengths to which women were pushed in the aftermath of the Partition, illustrating the resilience and survival instincts they had to cultivate amidst the devastation and betrayal.

Dr. Md Humayun Sk., in his article *Partition and Women Refugees: A Comparative Study of Protiva Bose's The Marooned and Manik Bandopadhyay's The Final Solutions*, highlights how women's resistance during Partition was shaped by their roles as caregivers and survivors. In his analysis, Dr. Sk emphasizes the duality of women's experiences during the Partition—how they navigated violence while simultaneously claiming agency through their resilience, as seen in the character arcs of Mallika and Bindubashini.

Through these characters, Basu and Bandopadhyay show that resistance does not only take the form of direct rebellion; it can also be found in survival, in endurance, and in the defiant reclamation of one's agency amid suffering. These women resist both the violence imposed upon them and the societal structures that attempt to define them by their victimization.

In the aftermath of Partition, the very concept of space became a powerful metaphor for both entrapment and liberation. The shifting of physical boundaries marked the end of one world and the beginning of another, particularly for women. The refugee camps depicted by Basu in *The Marooned* and the internal struggle for freedom in Bandopadhyay's *The Final Solution* underscore the role of space as both a site of suffering and a potential for liberation.

In *The Marooned*, Bindubashini's connection to her ancestral home represents more than mere ownership; it embodies a sense of safety and continuity amidst the chaos of Partition. Her iron chest, filled with precious belongings, and her sprawling, albeit fading, mansion are symbols of a bygone era of affluence, now shrouded in uncertainty and isolation. The once-vibrant home—adorned with chandeliers, throne-like chairs, and reminders of her family's aristocratic past—becomes a sanctuary in a world turned hostile. Despite the increasing violence and her fears, Bindubashini's Muslim tenants convince her that staying in her own space, however fragile, may offer a more secure horizon than the unknown. Her house, although now surrounded by desolation and terror, is transformed into a boundary against chaos, offering a semblance of liberation by anchoring her to her memories and dignity amidst the encroaching turmoil of the outside world.

The refugee camp represents a liminal space, a boundary that women must cross both physically and emotionally. Bindubashini and her family, forced to abandon their ancestral home, find themselves caught in a transitory space that symbolizes both loss and opportunity. While this space is fraught with violence, it also represents a chance for women to forge new identities, to reclaim agency in the face of despair.

Through these bonds, women resist the forces of exploitation and oppression, asserting control over their own destinies even within the confines of their displacement.

Similarly, in *The Final Solution*, Mallika's journey is marked by a struggle against psychological boundaries that limit her freedom. In the chaos of Partition, her body and identity become battlegrounds for competing forces. Her eventual liberation, however, comes not just through crossing physical borders but by transcending the emotional and psychological confines imposed upon her. Bandopadhyay captures this transformation in Mallika's assertion,

*"I've found a way out Thakurjhi - the final solution..." (Bandopadhyay 61)*

Her quest for liberation becomes a reclaiming of both physical and emotional space, demonstrating that true freedom is a complex interplay of personal, societal, and physical boundaries.

In *The Final Solution*, the railway platform becomes a symbol of displaced existence for Mallika and her family, reduced to a single mattress-length of personal space amidst a mass of dispossessed souls. Huddled together like livestock in this narrow boundary, their lives are stripped of privacy, security, and even sustenance. This confined space, filled with all they possess, underscores the stark contrast between a home's comforting stability and the transience of their current reality. The relentless cycle of hunger and exhaustion, set against the indifferent sunrise, reflects a loss of autonomy, where space no longer offers shelter but rather a bleak reminder of their forced helplessness. In this desolate setting, the railway platform blurs the boundary between survival and despair, marking not a horizon of hope, but a space where existence is barely maintained, making liberation seem distant and nearly unattainable.

The interplay between boundaries and horizons in these narratives reflects a broader commentary on women's experiences during and after Partition. While physical borders dictated movement and safety, psychological barriers often proved just as formidable. The refugee camps depicted by Basu become microcosms of society, where women navigate a landscape rife with exploitation yet simultaneously find pathways to empowerment. The transformation from victimhood to agency illustrates how women can carve out spaces of resistance even in dire circumstances.

The exploration of boundaries and horizons in *The Marooned* and *The Final Solution* unveils the intricate relationship between space, identity, and liberation. Through the experiences of Bindubashini and Mallika, Basu and Bandyopadhyay illustrate that the quest for freedom extends beyond merely crossing physical borders. It encompasses the reclamation of one's narrative, the assertion of agency, and the transformation of suffering into resilience. In transcending both physical and psychological limitations, these women emerge not only as survivors but as architects of their destinies, reclaiming their dignity in a world that sought to strip it away.

## Conclusion

*The Marooned* by Protiva Basu and *The Final Solution* by Manik Bandyopadhyay powerfully expose the profound suffering endured by women during and after the Partition of India. These narratives reveal how women were not only targeted by men from opposing communities but also exploited by their own. Through the contrasting characters of Bindubashini and Mallika—one passive and nurturing, the other outspoken and courageous—both authors illustrate the universal plight of women trapped in the violent upheavals of a patriarchal society. Bindubashini's tragic demise and Mallika's bold defiance highlight that regardless of their personalities, women were commodified, reduced to pawns in a patriarchal structure.

By challenging the notion that women simply carried the 'honor' of their communities, these stories dismantle the myth that misogyny is bound by religious or cultural lines. They expose the deep-rooted hypocrisy that exists across all communities, revealing that perpetrators of violence and oppression are found everywhere.

The tragic fates of these women underscore the lasting trauma of Partition, but they also underscore their enduring resilience in the face of unimaginable hardship. In doing so, both Basu and Bandyopadhyay emphasize the act of defiance that women perform simply by surviving, making their voices central to the larger narrative of resistance and the rejection of divisive, arbitrary boundaries.

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