



Research Paper

Alienation, Identity Crisis And Trap Of Memory: A Probe Into Mahesh Dattani's *Final Solutions*

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ABSTRACT: Mahesh Dattani's *Final Solutions* touches upon one of the most burning issues of the contemporary society- antipathy and maladjustment of two communities leading to violence. The problem of communal disharmony has been a never-ending evil threatening our nation's unity and prosperity since independence. Dattani in his play has brought out how identity crisis leads to alienation as a result of which individual desperately grabs the past memories that keeps the cycle of hatred and violence rolling. Nobody is ready to forgive or forget. As a result they are trapped in past. Even in the same family, the members are psychologically alienated from each other; their ideological differences lead to conflicts. Dattani with realistic characterization demonstrates how identity crisis plays major role in creating religious fanatics who are easily manipulated by cunning politicians. The playwright has also highlighted the fact that when past memory begins to determine the action of the present, the results can be disastrous. In this article I have tried to examine critically the issue of identity crisis, the theme of alienation and analyze the role of memory in shaping identity and personality of the characters who try in vain to get rid of the trap.

KEYWORDS: Identity, Alienation, Disharmony, Insecurity, Memory

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I. INTRODUCTION

Mahesh Dattani's groundbreaking work *Final Solutions* that was first performed at Bangalore on 1993 is a play about "transferred resentments" as Alyque Padamsee in the Director's Note puts it, "about looking for a scapegoat to hit out when we feel let down, humiliated." The play focuses on the age-old problem of Hindu-Muslim communal disharmony the seed of which was sown long back during the partition of India at the time of Independence, but the ever-growing poison tree is casting its evil shadow that threatens the peaceful coexistence of the two communities even today. Though the play is mainly concerned with the communal violence and how it leaves permanent scars passing off to generations after generations, there are many other dimensions that make the play even more striking. Each character of the play is suffering from alienation and identity crisis. Each of them is trapped in their distorted memories of dreadful past. When they are desperately trying to cling to an identity that gives them sense of security, the tension arises, as that identity confines them in a sphere that does not allow any room for consideration of others' faith and belief. As a matter of fact, that identity has only hatred and mistrust as its basis. Each member of the Gandhi family is alienated from others; the intrusion of the two outsiders brings the tensions to light. The mother and the son, the husband and the wife, the daughter and the mother stand polar apart. The intellectual incompatibility makes them even more alienated. Bobby and Javed, the intruders also suffer from the pain of alienation and the fear of insecurity, while Javed wants to hold on to his own faith and religion to overcome those feeling, Bobby seeks an escape from his own religion as he finds it shameful. Every character of the play is in search for an identity that would give them firm ground to stand upon. As the quest fails, crisis begins. Everyone clings to the distorted past to retain an identity, thus fails to bring any final solution to the age-old problem.

II. DAKSHA'S ALIENATION AND LONGING FOR COMPANION:

Daksha is the fifteen years old newly married girl who reads out her diary at the beginning of the play. There are six incorporated diary entries of Daksha that form the texture of the play. As she reads the diary, the audience and the readers are taken back to 1940s at the tension period following Independence. Daksha through her diary communicates her life story, the fragmented tales from her childhood, her experiences of her new

home with her in-laws and her growing friendship with Zarine, a girl of the neighbourhood. From the very beginning, readers can sense her loneliness that made her writing diary to convey her feelings as she has no friend to share her experiences with. Her father had been killed in a communal riot just after independence. That same day a fanatic mob threw stone in their ancestral house at Hussainabad destroying her favourite gramophone and collections of records. The two incidents left an abiding wound on her mind. At her new home she is not allowed either to sing or to listen to her favourite songs of Noor Jehan. She yearns for companion like any other girl of her age. As she finds the girls of her age in the locality, the prospect of her friendship with them excites her: "There are five-underline five-sisters from five to sixteen living in our locality. I couldn't believe it! Kanta, our maid servant, told me all about them! So once I make friends with them, I won't be needing you very much." (Dattani 14) She looks for opportunity to make friendship with them especially Zarine whom she likes most- "I have never met anyone as prettier as her!" When she hears songs of Noor Jehan from window of Zarine's house, her amusement doubles. The enchanting songs bridge the gap between the girls from two different backgrounds. And as Niladri R. Chatterjee observes in his essay "Daksha, Music, and Transgressive Identity Formation in Final solutions", the songs of Noor Jehan becomes the only way for Daksha to transgress her own religious identity. She is not allowed to have her own identity, even her name changes from Daksha to Hardika to suit her husband's name Hari. As far as her religious identity is concerned, she is taught to look down upon the "other" people, those "wretched people, horrible people." This teaching along with the tainted memory of her father's death inspire fears as she steps to Zarine's house. "It seemed so long while I waited, trying not to feel uncomfortable. I was frightened." (Dattani 48) Yet it could not prevent her alienated soul from enjoying the warm human relationship with the one who shared the same taste if not the same faith. "She asked me what I would like to listen to. Noor Jehan, of course! She seemed pleased with my choice.... We both listened and sang along with Noor Jehan. Three voices singing together in perfect unison" (Dattani 48) The barriers melts, though for a short times. As her friendship with Zarine ends with disastrous results, her alienation deepens. She is locked in her room "like a dog that had gone mad", loses respect to her husband and becomes an outcast in her own family. Hardika, her older self can never get rid of the sense of alienation and clings to her past memory.

III. HARDIKA'S PREOCCUPATION WITH PAST AND SUBSEQUENT ALIENATION:

Daksha is Hardika's Memory. Her agony and sufferings have taught Hardika to remain watchful and never to trust the "other" people. Hardika could never be able to forget the humiliation and torture both physical and mental she had to suffer due to her friendship with Zarine. Ever since she remained alienated in the house. What is more painful to her is that her own son does not share her views. She tells Smita, her grand-daughter about old days but her son Ramnik does not want Smita to hear that possibly because he knows that Hardika is unaware of truth. "I don't like her listening to Baa.... Baa doesn't tell her everything that happened" (Dattani 11) When Ramnik allows Bobby and Javed to enter the house in spite of stiff opposition from her mother and wife, Hardika is outraged. Their presence reminds her of the unpleasant memories of past. "Why did he do it?... Didn't he have any feelings for me?... How could he let these people into my house?" (Dattani 19) To her Javed and Bobby represent all that is bad in their community that was responsible, as she assumes, for her alienation and misfortune:

It was those boys running away who frightened me. Those two who were begging for their lives. Tomorrow they will hate us for it. They will hate us for protecting them. Asking for help makes them feel they are lower than us. I know! All those memories came back when I saw pride in their eyes! I know their wretched pride! It had destroyed me before and I was afraid it would destroy my family again! (Dattani 11)

She has grabbed the past to get rid of her identity crisis. Her memory keeps her alive yet it is the memory again that drives her to alienation. "Days have passed since that night and not one of us has forgotten. One more memory? We do not speak to each other. We move in silence. And I-I remain confined." (Dattani 74) At the end, Ramnik finally tells Hardika what actually happened forty years ago, how her husband and father-in-law burnt the shop of Zarine's family in the name of communal hatred just because they wanted to grab the shop. The entire world of Hardika is shattered. Her past that she clung to for retaining an identity is smashed. All that she cherished as truth throughout her life received a severe jolt. As Suman Sigroha argues, she has no memory to rely upon, still she desperately clings to the fragmented past as she wants to retain an identity. She is not "willing to forget" and as Sigroha says, "It is not the forgetting that is important here, it is rather the selection of prevailing memories and her identification with them. If she forgets, she will no longer be able to know herself. She remembers because she wants to retain an identity, any identity that is available to her."

IV. JAVED'S INSECURITY AND HIS SEARCH FOR IDENTITY:

Javed is a victim of memory, the "neighbourhood hero" who turned into "hired hoodlum." Bobby relates the incident of the single day that changed Javed's life. Javed was moved when he realised his touch was impure enough to contaminate a letter that had to be wiped along with the place it was lying to save it from

defilement. He had to turn to his religion to secure his identity. The prayer bell that he suddenly distinguishes from other sounds makes him realize his own alienation. He needed to do something to save himself from the identity-crisis. He decides to become the rabble-rouser and starts to take pride in his deeds as he thinks he is serving the cause for his people, the minority of India. He cries to Ramnik, "I believe in myself. Yes! What else have I got to believe in? It's people like you who drive me into a corner and I have to turn to myself and my faith." (Dattani 42) He is thrown out of his house as his deeds are revealed, his family alienates him. What he wants is to get back his identity; the fellow "volunteers" who are also brainwashed by demagogues give him sense of unity and therefore security- "On the bus there were a dozen of them. And I told them I was prepared. Everyone approved. We were one. United. I really felt proud....And I became a hero once again. We hugged each other for being true son of our mothers. In the vans, I was with several other youths like me." (Dattani 51) He is again shattered when he realises that this cannot give him security, he is not defending his identity nor serving cause of his people, rather his emotions are being used for making personal gains. "Why am I here? What am I doing here? The joyride gets over and you get off. And you are never sure again...It is a terrible feeling. Being disillusioned...Now that I am alone...I hate myself." (Dattani 50) His sense of security disappears, he is isolated again. His whole life is devoted to search for security as his mind is possessed by the idea of being minority, "being small in number" that he became aware of by a single incident of childhood. His monomania leads to a trance-like state during the riot at Rathyatra. But just at the moment he lifts the knife to kill the priest, his senses return- "Why am I here? What am I doing here? Get me off! I want to get off!" (Dattani 54) His hard-made identity is endangered. Disillusionment leads to further alienation.

V. RAMNIK'S STRUGGLE TO ESCAPE HAUNTING PAST:

Ramnik Gandhi appears to be a liberal educated person who has courage to defy the angry mob as well as family members to give shelter to two stranger muslim boys at the time of riot. However, as the story unfolds we learn that he is not what he appears to be, rather like Javed, he is another victim of memory. Throughout his life, he is haunted by guilt consciousness for the wrongdoing of his father and grandfather. This feeling directs his every move and action. Though he may be termed as "pseudo liberal", he cannot stand his wife's religious fanaticism as she is obsessed with rituals and religious practices. His mother also cannot understand his acts as she is unaware of truth. This adds to his psychological alienation. His identity does not give him any comfort. He tries hard to be liberal; he even offers Javed a job at his shop. But in off guard moments the truth comes up. Javed only can perceive the reality: "You don't hate me for what I do or who I am. You hate me because I showed you that you are not as liberal as you think you are." (Dattani 43) The identity or self-conception he has built up for himself is not a reality; it acts to cover his remorse. He makes strong effort to overcome the guilt feeling, but in vain. "For me there's no getting off. No escape"

VI. ARUNA AND SMITA, THE CLASH OF IDEOLOGY AND EMERGING CONFLICT:

Aruna is also religious fanatic like Javed, thus forming his Hindu counterpart. Javed discovers the similarity as she argues with her daughter. "You said the same thing. To her. What I told Babban, you told her....We are not very different. You and me. We both feel pride." (Dattani 61) But unlike Javed, Aruna's religious fanaticism is something inherent. She clings to religion to get sense of security- "who do you think is protecting this house?" Aruna and Ramnik appears to be maladjusted couple. Aruna adheres to her religion to retain an identity. But the base of that identity is too fragile to shatter easily as Smita recognizes- "Do two boys make you so insecure?" Being emotionally weak, she needs the protection of her so called religious faith that also rids her from isolation. Aruna receives rude shock when she learns that her daughter is ashamed of the identity that she wants to cling to so desperately. "I never felt like that. I have always taken pride in my religion. I never felt my mother was stifling me. I was happy knowing that I was protected." (Dattani 58) Smita's confession inevitably creates conflict.

Smita is rational enough to see clearly the problems of both sides. She cannot adjust to her mother's point of view. But as she does not want to hurt her mother, she remains silent. But the entry of Javed and Bobby exposes the conflict. She finally complains to make her "feel a rat in a hole. "Even Bobby notices the alienation of Smita. "I hardly recognized you when we first entered your house. What with you hanging your head down like this....Looking like a mouse in a family of Cats." (Dattani 66) Smita witnesses the dissension between her parents owing to conflicting standpoints; her isolation doubles as she cannot unveil her outlook. What she wants, as she tells Bobby, is to escape the home for a while to refresh her mind from burdens of life- "May be we should all run away from home like Javed. For five minutes everyday. So we can quickly gulp in some fresh air and go back in." Her mother cannot accept her radical thoughts, her parents have their own ideological clashes. Thus every member of the family who are supposed to be tied together "fall[s] apart; the centre cannot hold" leading to apathy and alienation.

VII. CONCLUSION:

While the members of Gandhi family are alienated from each other, the outsiders like Bobby and Javed are alienated from the society that treats them as "other." Every time they are reminded that they are outcasts; their mere touch can defile everything of the Hindu house. Gandhi family becomes the microcosm of the nation consisting people of various mindsets, liberals, pseudo-liberals, fanatics. Dattani cannot give any final solution to the evil of communal disharmony perhaps because, as Alyque Padamsee observes, "the demons of communal hatred are not out on the street....they are lurking inside ourselves." It is only the good will of the people that can bring any solution to the age-old problem. Only when we cease to shift our prejudices to younger generations, the nation can rise above the evils and truly prosper. Identity crisis becomes a major issue in the play. People like Javed and Bobby belonging to minority of India feels insecure that leads to tension between two communities. When Javed is determined to rediscover the identity, Bobby is ashamed to be one of the minorities and wants to hide his religious identity. "That's because I was ashamed of myself." He prefers to be called Bobby than Babban. That is where insecurity leads to. Their reactions are different but they suffer from the same crisis. The end of the play does neither give any way out of the crisis, nor any assurance of better time. As mentioned above, the only panacea can be the general good will of people. So long the people will hold on the bitter memories of past, the solution will remain far beyond.

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