

Identity Politics and Insider vs. Outsider Debate in Mahesh Dattani's *Final Solutions*

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Abstract— *Identity, as a term, looks so simple at first glance. Nevertheless, it has far-reaching roots contributing diversity of meaning given to numerous social, psychological, cultural and geopolitical factors that come into play invariably. The field of Cultural Studies has identity politics as one of its most eye catching and engaging ground of exploration with an array of meanings to proffer that are conflicting and comprehensive rendering one's critical sensibilities a violent shake every now and then. Among a plethora of identity markers, Diasporic identity has recently invited a hefty amount of attention. Diaspora means mass migration from a layman's understanding of the word. However, this dislocation is generally not voluntary in nature as suggested by mass exile of Jews from Israel in pre-Christian era. Going by the length and breadth of time, a huge chunk of Jewish population got murdered at the hands of state brutality and this carnage left an indelible imprint on public consciousness for ages to come. It kick started a fuming debate on cultural identity where hybridity emerged as new normal struggling for a recognition in water tight social and cultural compartments.*

India waded through troubling waters during partition when huge exodus happened across border and the paper at hand is a sincere attempt to gauge that dark experience. It movingly displays a disheartening picture of post partition dilemma. Mutual distrust was so deep-rooted that even people who migrated to the land of identical culture, caught up in confusion of that insider vs. outsider debate.

Keywords— *Homelessness, Diaspora, Memory, Representation.*

Derived from Greek roots, the word 'Diaspora' means scattering of seeds'. Thus it suggested dispersal or spreading of a big slice of population both intentionally or involuntary. However, this term celebrates multifold of semantic proportions counting through years and decades. In words of Hem Raj Kafle, "Diaspora carries not only its two historical meanings but also other acquired significations. It retains the idea of dispersal and productivity from the Greek roots. It equally signifies the condition of forceful dislocation of people and resultant experience of bitterness associated with the Jews." (137) He further adds that the versatility of meaning owes its origin to creative and critical application by different scholarly initiatives. Thus, the usage has gained impetus while floating around diverse classes and cultures across the world. Still, it majorly highlights the murky side of human experience inviting associated feelings of trauma, homelessness, and identity politics.

Mahesh Dattani's play 'Final Solutions' is written in the background of Bombay of early nineties, the time when

the place was a seething pot of cultural disharmony resulting in soul stirring Hindu-Muslim riots. The title of the play makes you ponder at the onset only for its conspicuous association with Nazi Sponsored massacre. Pinaki Roy comes up with a well-built remark in this regard, "Adolf Hitler's cronies used the singular 'Endlösung' or 'Final Solution' as a codename for the extermination of particularly the Jewry, the Bengaluru-based

Indo-Anglican dramatist's appendance of a's' adds to the multifariousness of the communal clashes" (111). While the Holocaust was more like a methodical slaughter of millions of Jews by Nazi Germany through pogroms, gas chambers and mass shootings etc., the Indian incident of partition portrayed different dimensions of this sad and painful experience. Declaration of partition triggered feelings of anxiety, uncertainty, and mutual distrust on both sides that lead to riots and killing of copious innocent lives. However, Dattani does not advocate the kind of 'solution' that Nazis opted for, he leaves things to public

wisdom as his trust on his audience is unflinching. His message is clear and loud, and entails humanity on priority.

Identity is a composite phenomenon, in a land of ethnic diversity. No culture can exist in absolute isolation with rapidly changing lifestyle where consumer needs are no more restricted to just local production as well as consumption. Everywhere a hybrid culture is sneaking in, adding flavors further into a classical distinctiveness that reflects through mutual harmony and co-existence over time. In fact, one's marked cultural identity comes to a defensive front under threats of political and social destabilization only in such cases. Daksha's transgressive behavior in choice of music and friends, in her earlier days, elucidates clearly her stand as an individual who favors local identity over a larger political and cultural affiliation. "The electronically disseminated voice and body of Noor Jahan becomes a template on which Daksha moulds her own gendered identity as well as an identity which resists the cultural strait-jacketing that her family tries to squeeze her into." (Chatterjee, 2012: 159) She does not kowtow a Hindu penchant in aesthetics as expected by her in-laws. Music happens to be a bridge between two assorted cultures here and Daksha sings in 'perfect unison' with times. Chatterjee further adds, "The prohibition that Daksha is subjected to in the matter of her musical tastes clearly echoes the way a Teutonic taste in music was being prescribed for Germans in the early 1940..." (163) However, It is her apprehensive self that makes her feel like a Diaspora intrinsically in her later years, as she is not able to come to terms with her torn psychology and finds herself an outsider at a place that she is thought to identify with otherwise.

HARDIKA. After forty years. . . I opened my diary again. And I wrote. A dozen pages before. A dozen pages now. A young girl's childish scribble. An old woman's shaky scrawl. Yes, things have not changed that much. (Dattani, 167)

This unchanging nature of time has many secrets to draw curtains from. It shows how prejudices never die a natural death. Daksha is at loggerheads with her identity as a Hindu as well as a woman. The conflict inside has not died down yet though twilight of life is approaching fast. The haunting memories of her past where all her dreams and desires are lying buried clearly reflect the predicament of a migrant, who is double-ditched by existing political wisdom that promised a secure and all-embracing stay on both sides yet never worked for it the way as promised.

Memories, an overbearing nostalgia for an extensive past, and homelessness all these three contribute to shape the

person Hardika is today and her Diary is a gateway to her identity both in past and present to a great extent. Just like Ann Frank's *The Diary of a Young Girl*, Hardika has also harbored this habit of recording her past events into fragments as if she is confiding in a close friend. A warm address like 'dear diary' also twins with Frank's emotional appeal to diary in fact. Hardika's pain as a refugee is unfathomable. Her identity crisis is not something very simple to be put in white and black so casually. As a woman, she is nothing more than a bundle of anxiety. Because of the dilemma of right or wrong choices in life, she is still not able to decide which path to chose. Moreover, to add to her worries, her sentiment of nationalism is not acknowledged publically as she is none but a migrant to many:

Cross-cut to Hindu Chorus.

CHORUS ALL (in hoarse voices). Our future is threatened. There is so much that fading away. We cannot be complacent about our glorious past seeing us safely through. Our voices grow hoarse. Our bellowing pales in comparison to the whisper of a pseudo-secularist who is in league with the people who brought shame to our land! Half-hearted, Half-baked, with no knowledge of his land's greatness. He is still a threat. (Dattani, 212)

This 'troubled relationship with the host society', as suggested by Cohen, speaks volumes about how identities have been fashioned over time with derogatory tags of 'refugees' and 'muhajir' on both sides. These tags have labeled them as outsiders in their own land, always questioning their fidelity towards their respective countries. Whether it is about assimilating with native people of similar cultural backdrop or about negotiating marital alliances, a refugee is always last preference till date. And a muslim is always looked at with an eye of suspicion no matter if he is an Indian citizen. The incidents like disruption of rath Yatra and attack on Muslim girls' hostel with a bomb in the play, remind one of happenings like Godhara massacre and Bombay riots, and reverberate the attacks on minority in Germany during mass exodus of Jews as well. Without going far, recent pandemic like Covid 19 has brought to light the hidden racial divide entrenched in psyches of developed countries even today. World powers like America and other countries have expressed their unwillingness in providing aid to immigrants residing there since long. Various print and digital news agencies have reported cases of xenophobic pestering of Asian community in developed countries.

Nylah Burton from Vox.com reported in its podcast on Feb. 7, 2020 several such incidents under news title "Coronavirus fears have unleashed a wave of anti-Asian

racism” where non-residents were made a target mistaking them as a danger to otherwise peaceful living. Thus this idea of hyper-nationalism is an instant pick as situation gets alarming, no matter whether emigrants have any connection with the crisis or not. Our narrow nationalism surpasses every logic as fanned by politicians to nurture their selfish goals.

Identity is a cultural construct and to decipher that in relevant context, symbols have a great role to play. In this play, Dattani has made an impressive use of masks and chorus that become mouthpieces of dominant society. Mask literally stands for ‘a cover’, ‘a hide’. Dattani beautifully utilizes them to show the hypocrisy of torchbearers of restricted religion that stand for non-violence in preaching but practice exactly opposite. The quick swing from one type of masks to other by the Chorus with changing situations heightens the suspicion, innate in mass psyche for minorities on both sides.

(Chorus wearing Hindu masks)

CHORUS 1. How dare they?

CHORUS 2, 3. They broke our rath.

They broke our chariot and felled our Gods!

CHORUS 1, 2, 3. This is our land!

How dare they?

CHORUS 1. It is in their blood!

CHORUS 2, 3. It is in their blood to destroy! (Dattani, 168)

(Chorus wearing Muslim masks)

CHORUS 3. They say we razed their temples yesterday.

CHORUS 2. That we broke their chariot today.

CHORUS 1. That we'll bomb their streets tomorrow.

CHORUS ALL. Why would we? Why? Why? Why? Why would we?

CHORUS 5. (emotionally). Why would we? (Dattani, 171)

Pinaki Roy's mention of Dattani's own note on the chorus makes quite an insightful reading here, as the playwright's idea and use of music to suit the purpose of the theme throws ample light on how polarization works in isolating minority in a motley culture:

“The chorus represents the conflict of the characters. Thus, the chorus in a sense is the psychophysical representation of the characters and also provides the audience with the visual images of the characters' conflict. There is no stereotyped use of the characterization of the chorus because communalism has no face, it is an attitude and thus it becomes an image of the characters.” (120)

R. Cohen's another addition to Safran's list in exploration of a diasporic Identity is ‘the memory of a single traumatic event’ (29) that feeds the trauma of Diaspora after dispersal. The Chorus with Hindu masks speaks for that sentiment in lines asserting, ‘it [back-stabbing] is in their blood!’ Thus, use of music in the play brings out built-in trauma and turmoil through multiplication and exaggeration. Both Muslims and Hindus out rightly reject ideas of mutual tolerance, as one's presence is assumed as an overlapping existence, a threat, to the organic fabric of the governing nature.

The minority culture that is already skeptical of its roots, feels alienated, and keeps oscillating between the idea of ‘homeland’ and host-country, looking for an approval and acceptance every now and then:

JAVED (screaming to Bobby). Stop defending me! Do you think he cares?

RAMNIK. I care. Yes! It is you who are indifferent. You don't believe in anything except yourself!

JAVED. I believe in myself. Yes! What else have I got to believe in? It's people like you who drive me to a corner and I have to return to myself and my faith. I have a lot to thank you for! At least now I am not ignorant of my history and faith. (Dattani, 198)

Javed faces twofold dislocation being a Muslim as well as an Indian citizen. A cultural and ethnic subaltern, his dilemma twins with Daksha in Hussainabad on the eve of partition. When her father says that British ‘let loose the dogs’ before leaving, at first, she despises the idea, but eventually she buys this logic under threat of attack by Muslim majority. Not able to see beyond their prejudices, both fall prey to their subjective interpretations of the situation.

This attempted self-actualization, derived by vested political interests, leaves Javed in an interminable misery after the Rath yatra debacle at one hand. On other side, Daksha, who is all absorbed in awe of Muslim female singers of the time, is struck by that sudden illumination [as per her thoughts] when ‘Krishna’ punishes her for her stance of a ‘non-believer’ by damaging all her music records at the hands of rioters.

“I felt that the idol I had grown up seeing my mother worship was just a painted doll. A doll no different from the ones I used to play with and think it was a real person. (Silence.) And then I knew it was Krishna slapping me in face, punishing me for being a non-believer. A stone hit our gramophone table, breaking it. Krishna chose to destroy what I loved most. My entire collection of records broken.” (Dattani, 167)

As a quick fix, both Daksha and Jawed turn back to restricted religion for repentance. This

instant shift resulted from the feeling of alienation, homelessness, and anxiety, definitely caters to the diasporic dilemma that emigrants face.

Dattani has effectively exploited 'bell' symbolism in elucidating how dominant culture indirectly works as a bitter reminder for minority through regressive assertions of a conformist culture. For Javed, the sound of 'bell' is a symbolic aide memoire of the bigotry that he met at the hands of a non-Muslim in his childhood for touching his stuff. That humiliation asks for much more as revenge years later, and as a result, he tries to disrupt and vandalize a Hindu procession. A bell, which is generally associated with pleasant and unifying sound, gets reduced to an annoying 'din', a regular reminder of being an unwelcomed sect. In negotiation with this hyphenated identity, his friend Bobby tries hard for cultural assimilation by hiding his real name 'Babban' but ends as a sorry figure only as he is not successful in surrendering to any ideologically. Putting it in similar context, one is reminded of Rushdie's observation where he makes a point about Indian Diaspora creating "fictions not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indians of minds (10). Therefore, both look for a cultural refuge through diverse channels but none comes to their rescue.

The play speaks volumes for the identity crisis of both the communities without taking sides. The playwright quite sensibly portrays how a migrant population with similar religious affiliation even, feels out of place in want of social acceptance. On flip side, a cultural minority experiences major emotional setback as it fails to identify with dominant social setup. Their respective inherent precariousness lavishly contributes to their diasporic identity and mannerism, as "they believe they are not – and perhaps can never be – fully accepted in their host societies and so remain partly separate" as observes Safran in understanding a Diasporic community. (83)

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