

Lives of Individuals Aftermath of Partition in *Where Did I Leave My Purdah?*

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Abstract

*Partition has been a violent phenomenon where the migration and casualties of people are always high. Partition not only affects one individual physically but psychologically too leading people to distress, depression, and trauma. Post-partition text shows the havoc, disillusionment, and confusion of people searching for a 'home' where they could live peacefully. Mahesh Dattani's *Where Did I Leave My Purdah?* has clearly shown what had happened to the theatre, the life of theatre artists, and the suffering of women in the hands of rioters across the border. Nazia, Zarine, Suhel, Ruby, and Nikhat have faced the consequences of partition and migration. Here it's not just an individual's trauma or death but it has passed down to the generation silently without much notice. The division of India led them to separate their soul and body, making them go through. In this paper, an attempt was made to highlight the consequences and lives of Individuals during and aftermath of Partition.*

Keywords: *Partition- Life of Theatre Artist- Migration, Communal Riots, Nazia, Purdah, Molestation, Trauma and Depression, Search for the Love of Mother.*

Introduction

Mahesh Dattani, the modern Indian English dramatist needed no introduction to the theatre as he brought a new vision and visuals to the English drama. Dattani was born on August 7, 1958, in a Gujarati family he took an interest in watching the theatrical performance as a child and was inspired by Edward Albee's *'Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?'* Neela Kamara's adoption of Madhu Rye's Gujarati play *Kumari Agashe* inspired him to write about societal issues. Though he is not from a literature background he took an interest in scriptwriting and in 1984 he started a group 'Playpen' where he carried out his ideas. He wrote his first play in 1988 'Where There is a Will'. Dattani's notable work is *Final Solutions* and other plays for which he got The Central Sahitya Akademy Award. In other plays like *Dance Like a Man*, *Bravely Fought the Queen*, *Do the Needful*, *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai*, and *Seven Circles Round the Fire*, he dealt with issues faced by the modern urban middle-class family where the socio-cultural changes are in flux and where the impact of society is seen. Dattani also wrote more than a dozen radio plays

and directed the movies too. With his diligent work, he made the modern drama a mirror to the society where his plays are realistic and talked of various issues caused by psycho-cultural changes. The themes of Dattani range from gender discrimination, struggles of middle-class women, LGBTQ, sexual abuse, the aftermath of partition, and many other themes to show the audience how they have been struggling to meet their ends rather satirically.

There were psychological issues during and following the partition of India. It was also depicted in the works of many writers of the time and Mahesh Dattani is one among them. There was political turmoil outside and inner turmoil experienced by the Indians. It was a dangerous, distressing, and life-threatening event for the common people. Most of them were displaced from their home and separated from family and many women, like Nazia and Zarine in *Where Did I Leave My Purdah?* Were the victims of rape and immolation. The survivors of the events like Nazia suffered savior depression and mental problems.

Dr. Asaduddin Writes

The Partition of India, a momentous event in Indian history, continues to tantalize historians, haunt the Indian psyche, and cast its shadow on our social and political life. It is closely linked with the chronicle of our freedom struggle that made the actual liberation of the country from foreign yoke an experience of violence, slaughter, and exile for many. One of the most massive demographic dislocations in history, with its attendant human tragedy, it defies chroniclers to come to grips with it in all its dimensions. Tomes of analysis and exegesis by historians and bureaucrats have not led us anywhere closer to a definitive understanding of the phenomenon, even though the recent works of Bipin Chandra, Ian Talbot, Ayesha Jalal, and Mushirul Hasan have brought fresh insights into the field. Historical accounts and official documents, despite their apparent transparency' and factuality,' can tell us only about the statistics - at least one million deaths, ten million refugees, and so on.

Mahesh Dattani talked of partition and communal riots in *'Where Did I Leave My Purdah?'* where the migration of people from Pakistan to India turned violent and led to the death of Zarine and a train full of people when the train was set on fire by Muslim rioters. Dattani's play deals with the life of theatre artists Nazia, Zarine, and Suhel and how migration to India led to traumatic events in their lives. Nazia, a young theatre artist wants to leave Pakistan along with her lover Suhel, and her sister Zarine is worried about her safety. Zarine too joins them in their journey as they plan to form a new theatre group after reaching India. As they started their journey they were attacked by Muslim rioters. Zarine saves her sister's life by giving her purdah to Nazia and dies hands of rioters. Nazia is molested while entering the Indian border as she wears purdah. Nazia was lost in the thought of her sister and couldn't show love and affection to her daughter Ruby, as it reminded her of traumatic incidents where she lost herself and her sister too. Nazia couldn't act as Shakuntala as she promised Zarine that she would be playing the same role once they reached India. Though Nazia acts as Shakuntala, she couldn't accept herself. Suhel tries his best to help Nazia but tries to avoid all of it as the mere sight of him reminds her of what had happened to her. Thus, she fails to fulfill

her role as a mother and wife. Unaware of past events Ruby blames Nazia for not taking care of her and believes the popular opinion that she was born to Zarine and Nazia took fame of her mother. This made Ruby have a negative opinion of Nazia. Though she was relative to her she was not taken care of and was left in the hands of other theatre artists where she still felt empty. Nazia tried her best to forget her past but she couldn't do it. Even though Nazia was away from Ruby, she used to check Ruby in between the break which was an unconscious act of Nazia. The trauma of Nazia has been passed from one generation to another without much notice. Nikhat, the daughter Ruby has a similar experience where she couldn't receive love from her mother. Nikhat couldn't understand the situation she was in but she got help from her therapist, which gave her a better understanding of her mother.

Nazia being a theatre artist couldn't confine herself to the grandmother role that she was offered. She wants to revive *'Abhigyana Shakuntalam'* as *'Shaku'* and Ruby is against it. Nazia was unaware of her love for Ruby as she was not aware of what she was doing. Ruby always tries her best to instigate Nazia, but Nazia remains silent to her questions. Ruby wants her daughter to act as Shakuntala as it is her mother's role and has to be played by Nikhat. Nazia was shocked to see Nikhat as she looked exactly like Zarine and was drawn back to the memory of her sister. As Nazia reveals the truth about her and her sister. Ruby was shocked to know it. Ruby's search for truth and search for her mother comes to an end when Nikhat tells of her conversation with Suhel.

Ruby's 'search for mother's love and affection' was transferred to her daughter Nikhat though she was there Nikhat couldn't get it as Ruby was immersed in her traumatic world. Nikhat became a victim at the hands of her mother without her mistake. But she spoke to her when she was falsely accusing Nazia and requested her to forgive her as she has done.

Dattani portrayed the characters with much care and we could see that it was not the mistake of one character or the other but it is the trauma, loss of a loved one, unable to express themselves was the main reason for their suffering. Nazia can't forget her past as everything happened in front of her eyes, the death of her sister, and

the people who reminded her of that incident. Though Zarine saved her sister by giving her purdah it became the reason for her abuse as she reached India. Thus, purdah became a paradoxical element in the play. Nazia's loss of her purdah and the sacrifice of Zarine to save her sister had turned the whole play and their lives upside down. Dattani gave a detailed description of the violence that happened during the course of Nazia's journey from Pakistan – India. Initially, they were attacked by Muslim rioters and they had to wear purdah to be spared by them but the Nazi's mistake made them pay for it. Though Nazia and Suhel escaped from them they couldn't find Zarine, as she was burned alive, Suhel recognized her because of the finger ring she was wearing, and she couldn't receive a proper burial. The idea of them migrating to India led to losing Zarine. Nazia entered India with a heavy heart and she forgot to remove her purdah which led Hindu rioters to abuse her sexually. Nazia was raped by them but she couldn't feel the pain, she became a livingdead body. Nazia felt relieved when she gave birth to Ruby it felt as if a tumor was being removed which was growing inside her. Even though Zarine was away from her mother Nazia went to her unconsciously during the break and Suhel had given them enough time to spend but it was all a waste as Nazia couldn't recognize this side of her. When she was playing her part, she couldn't reflect the same emotion as Suhel did which led him to sacrifice his role to others and Suhel recognized the pain in the eyes of Nazia. Thus, Suhel ended his relationship with Nazia, hoping that it may help her to build relation with Ruby.

SUHEL: No. You cannot believe that you went through the same hell. That is not true.

The stained relationship of the mother-daughter duo Nazia-Ruby made them see each other as strangers and question each other's nature and their ethical and moral values. Even though Nazia knows the truth about Ruby's existence she doesn't want to disclose it either to Ruby or to anyone. She wants Ruby to hate her so they both can live a peaceful life. Ruby on the other hand wants to know about her mother and wants justice for her but she doesn't know to whom she has to ask. Ruby is one such character who wants to know the truth at any cost to relieve herself from guilt and pain from her past.

Nazia portrayed her as a strong woman, with her thoughts and living accordingly. We can see this nature when she rejects her role as the grandmother in a film where she has to be confined to a few dialogues and has to create sympathy with her character. She is against this idea, she wants to express herself freely, wants to live on her terms and conditions, and is independent to that extent. She is known for her strong and straightforward nature; it could be seen in scene 1 when she leavesthe movie set as she realizes she is not made for this small role and she has so much to do with her theatre where the scope of creative freedom is enormous.

NAZIA: Why didn't I see it? (Taking off her wig) No more grandma role for me. I am going back to the theatre! Dancing! That's it.

Her passion for theatre can be seen in the idea of reviving the play and the modern elements she wants to include in it.

Nikhat, the daughter of Ruby unknowingly admires Nazia as she is a great theatre artist and is even a member of Nazia's fan club. She was excited to meet her role model. She feels happy when her mother takes her to meet Nazia and is surprised to know that Nazia is her grandmother. Nikhat remains of Zarine in her looks which were shocker to Nazia as it was their first encounter. Though she lived with her mother, she didn't have a normal childhood as her mother hung in her thoughts. It had a huge impact on Nikhat as she couldn't figure out why her mother didn't look after her as normal mothers usually do, it took a great toll on her mentally and she had to reach for therapy to come out of it. Nikhat helps her mother by telling the truth that she learned from Suhel. Nikhat is a passive receiver of the pain of Ruby, which was transmitted without much notice. Ruby feels guilty for her behavior where she couldn't notice what her daughter was going through. Nikhat consoles her mother and requests her to forgive Nazia as she did to Ruby and further adds that it was not their mistake for whatever happened to them. Here Suhel is seen as someone who helped these women to relieve themselves from the agony and pain, they have been carrying for ages. Suhel is the one who understands Nazia's and Ruby's plight and accepts them as they are. He supported Nazia even though she insulted

him, deep down he knew the reason behind her behavior. He waits patiently for the love of Nazia but fails miserably as Nazia's pain is huge and cannot be forgotten. He accepts Ruby as his daughter even though she is not his child. Thus, Suhel remains a balanced one among all the other characters even though he was affected. The play ends with Nazia's revival of the play *Abhigyanam* as 'Shaku' where Nikhat acts as *Shakuntala* where the dream of all the women is fulfilled.

Conclusion

The Partition is a political phenomenon that affected millions of lives where confusion about settling, finding one own native land, and religious differences caused many to lose their family/ family members. The migration of people from one place to another due to their religious differences led to events that were depressing, distressing, and traumatic events in the people's lives just as Nazia was molested and lost her sister too. Even though not every other person didn't undergo the same situation they were still affected in one or the other. Dattani portrayed how partition had brought in a great deal of difference. Nazia after facing a lot of struggles remains a strong staunching figure with a strong personality. Ruby overcomes her grief and guilt. In this way, Dattani gave a detailed view of the whole characters and their suffering.

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