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Memory, Nostalgia and the Search for Self: A Study of Mahesh Dattani's *Where Did I Leave My Purdah?*

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Abstract

Mahesh Dattani's *Where Did I Leave My Purdah?* (2012) clearly ignites the flame of horror and the holocaust of partition by the subtle and effective use of time and memory. He tends not just to the personal memories during and after partition, but juxtaposes the public memory over and over with it. In this play, the playwright awakens all the sensory organs of the audience to startle the memory as did the mythical Shakuntala in the court of Dushyant. There is a fascinating amalgamation of the past and the present. We feel the omnipresence of the past within the present, and the memories that give birth to a new reality. Almost all the actions and reactions of the characters are chained and governed by the traumatic memory of a particular incident. So, taking into consideration all these aspects this paper will attempt to show how Dattani in his play *Where Did I Leave My Purdah* places his characters in such locales where they are bound to scrutinize themselves in the light of the memories of their lives, but unlike the characters in his other plays, the characters of this play accept their past and move on to the new lease of their lives, transcending the boundaries of troubled memories.

Keywords: experience; memory; nostalgia; partition; past; trauma.

> "Mahesh and I share a Junoon; an all-consuming passion called theatre. It maddens us, delights us, frustrates us, exhilarates us, nourishes us and agonizes us in equal measure. But it also imbues our lives with a special meaning and lights it up, literally and metaphorically!"
>
> -Lillete Dubey ("A Note on the Play", *Me and My Plays,*47).

And yes, it is Mahesh Dattani's that *junoon* (passion) that not only brought him the prestigious "Sahitya Akademi Award" but also made his plays able to generate and circulate an all-consuming emancipatory potential through the foregrounding of Indian politics, subaltern counter publics and their reactions to those political issues through the channel of different times. Dattani's plays focus on the subalternation of ordinary people based on physical, sexual, psychological, economic, and communal subjugation, which the audience persistently faces and attempts to escape from those memories. His plays are acclaimed for the thematic variations and the dynamism of the plot. The gripping entertainment reflects the issues of 'othered' sections of society, like eunuchs, women, gay, and minority communities. Furthermore, his plays also make us aware of those characters within and around us who rekindle the modern myth of suffering in our minds.

The embeddedness of the characters, their struggle to connect the missing links to find their own space, and then again, their scuffling to cope with the newfound reality gives the audience the strength to make life more substantial. In this whole endeavor, memory plays a very substantial part as Dattani successfully constructs a sense of shared cultural and political memories. The psychological actions that take place in the dramas are always more powerful and meaningful than the physical ones.

The communal sentiments and communal collective memories are not new in his writing. In his essay, "Me and My Plays", Dattani is reminiscent of those early days of his theatre life. By the time the 1990s rolled in, his theatre group 'Playpen' was established in Bangalore. Initially, the issues of communal problems in India slipped his attention. He recalls:

> I began working on my new play *Bravely Fought the Queen* and was putting the finishing touches to it when I got a call from Alyque. He asked me if I was aware of the motion in Parliament by the VHP (Vishwa Hindu Parishad) about building a temple in Ayodhya in place of the existing mosque...Alyque was most concerned with the rise of religious fundamentalism and was confident of a pogrom brewing that would destroy the cultural harmony of the country yet again. I wasn't too sure of doing a play on the Hindu-Muslim divide (xiv).

Sensing his hesitation, Alyque invited him to Mumbai and arranged a meeting with two Muslim boys running away from the mob that was out to kill them. The traumatic memories of those boys were improvised

and reverted, and his first drama with communal memory, *Final Solutions* (2007), was born.

Afterwards, he has time and again ventured through individual memories of communal bigotry to stir the public memory to exploit the best effect of time and space in mortals' lives. Almost all of his characters are haunted by their past. Their present actions are the chained reactions of the experiences of their lives. So do ours; the reader's or audience's present mental state is also conditioned by our personal experiences of horrifying memories of 1947 and its subsequent communal riots. As Bapsi Sidhwa said in one interview, "There are certain images from my past which have always haunted me. Partition was a very violent experience for everybody in the Punjab. Although I was very young then, I saw chance killings, fires, dead bodies. These are images which have stayed with me. There were also the stories I grew up with. There was a certain sadness in them" (292). While sharing her own experience of partition, Urvashi Butalia in her groundbreaking work *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India* (2000); wrote:

> how many times had I heard my mother speak with a sense of betrayal of her brother who had married a Muslim…It took 1984 to make me understand how ever-present partition was in our lives too, to recognize that it could not be so easily put away inside the covers of history books. I could no longer pretend that this was a history that belonged to another time, to someone else (01, Beginnings, 05).

And undoubtedly, these distressing memories are responsible for all their neurotic reactions afterwards. Through the nuanced and skilful use of time and memory, Mahesh Dattani's *Where Did I Leave My Purdah* (2012) recapitulates the shocking and catastrophic episodes of the partition. It is the last play of a trilogy preceded by *Dance Like a Man* and *Morning Raga. Where Did I Leave My Purdah* chiefly explores the lives and upbringing of Nazia from her early childhood days to her establishment as a stage actor who dedicated her life to the theatre for sixty years. Dattani himself informs us in his essay, "Me and My Plays", "The play is a tribute to the great actresses of company theatres, who were courageous enough to pursue their passion for the stage at a time when stage actresses were looked down upon" (40).

Dattani has beautifully combined the elements of the past within fiction along with historical facts and memories. He has amalgamated facts and

fiction into a close juxtaposition of time and memory. He asserts, "Time and Memory are important elements that provide a plot to my plays". Through this play, he has tried to offer a voice to the marginalized women, the victims of partition, who have been suppressed or silenced for a long time from exploring their miserable memories. Through the varied women characters, the play allows a rethinking of the alternative visions of partition, mainly from a feminine perspective.

> *Where Did I Leave My Purdah*? a story set against the backdrop of the theatre, tracing some of the theatrical forms that constitute our history, and recounting a tale that mirrored the stories of a multitude of women artists who were consumed with love for their craft, almost at the cost of everything else. These were dynamic women who were driven by a deep compulsion to fulfil their artistic needs, in spite of the fact that their work would live only ephemerally in memory. ("A Note on the Play," 48).

The play opens at the vanity van of Nazia, "a wrinkled, frail woman in her eighties; she looks like the quintessential widowed Dadi maa of Television and Bollywood movies". However, as the play progresses, we come to know that she is rather a feisty, self-absorbed diva who lives a good share of life in the theatre. The paper traces the obsession of Nazia, who during partition ignored the tradition of "Purdah of Muslim", and decided to shift to India in order to begin her own theatre troupe. She breaks through the patriarchal captivities as well, which is clear from the conversation:

> Zarine: Abu won't let you!
>
> Nazia: We are not going home. Get into your clothes. You are coming with us.
>
> Zarine: No! I-I can't. I want to go home to Ammi and Abu.
>
> Nazia: Zarine, they are waiting to do your nikah with that attar-wallah's son. Do you want that?
>
> Zarine: No, but . . .
>
> Nazia: Come with us Zarine. We will go to India! We can set up our own company theatre there. You do want to do that, don't you?
>
> Zarine: Can we go home first and at least speak to Abu?

> Nazia: Don't be so foolish! Always dithering. For once in your life, make a decision that will do some good. Obedient girls like you always end up in unhappy marriages. (taking off her burqa) I am going, and there are no two ways about that. (81)

She establishes herself as a dominant, resentful, and very mysterious and grotesque woman in her life; she lives and still wants to live her life on her own terms. She is never ready to compromise her artistic credentials at any cost. There is always a quest for breaking the boundaries of time within Nazia, as if she, time and again, wants to live an eternal life where some spell stops time to do justice to her love for life and all-consuming passion for theatre. This self-assertive artist remembers her golden days, and the moment the director Sanjay declines the suggestions of Nazia, she at once decides to leave Bollywood. She says, "This is it. There's always a time in your life when the truth strikes you. (A moment of realization for her) Why didn't I see it? What am I doing here? I don't belong here! (Taking off her wig) No more grandma roles for me. I am going back to the theatre! Dancing! This is it. I am leaving." (58).

She aims to resurrect her own theatre company, "Modern Indian Theatre", to reverting retitles "Post-Modern Indian Theatre" by performing the post-modern version of Kalidas's *Abhigyan Shakuntalam*. She presents Shakuntala, the mythical character, transcending time boundaries in a very new light. Where Shakuntala, in the original tale, is nothing but a puppet in the hand of patriarchy, a victim of King Dushyant's utter impotence to take care of his pregnant wife, here Shaku (renamed by Nazia) does not wait for anyone's favor; she is liberated and modernized enough to make her stand in society. Shaku's character strongly suggests Nazia's yearning to break through the male hegemony and her long-cherished desire to establish a society that would be free from masculine authority. When the sponsor instructs Nazia to stage the original version, she at once rejects the idea, saying: "He doesn't want a modern version?... You mean you won't sponsor it? No, I don't want to do the original. He can take it or leave it...Okay! And tell him his Shiraz tastes like a mix of vinegar and cow piss anyway!" (84). Dattani very subtly employs the Shakuntala and Dushyant myth from the Sanskrit classic of Kalidas, *Abhigyan Shakuntalam*.

Here, he reinvents the myth in light of memory, nostalgia and an eternal quest for the self. He significantly entwines the lives and actions of his characters with the two protagonists of the classical myth. Nazia and Suhel, who play the characters of Shakuntala and Dushyant for the longest time, become more than mere actors playing the parts with the whirl

of time and fate. Exceeding all the ephemeral boundaries, they pour themselves into the scenes of the myth, and that is why they lose track of their memory in the whirlwind memory of the Shakuntala-Dushyant myth. Nazia discovers her traumatic memories are so much identical to Shakuntala's that she even became repulsive to the touch of Suhel (as Dushyant) while acting. In Act III of *Abhigyan Shakuntalam*, famously known as the court scene, where Dushyant fails to recognize his pregnant wife and denies any relation with her, Nazia loses the command over herself, as all these incidents trigger her damaging memories of being pregnant by gang rape, being married to her lover, which to her was nothing but Suhel's act of kindness towards a helpless lady. However, here lies the difference between Nazia and the character Shakuntala; while Shakuntala depends on Dushyant's solicitude, Nazia feels it way too insulting and disrespectful to depend on Suhel's gentleness. She says that she feels even in his embrace a touch of alienation, somewhere they had forgotten each other, and they only remember the pain.

She transforms herself into a proper coinage of timelessness. At the beginning and the middle of the play, it seems Nazia always runs ahead of her time. Whenever time compels her to compromise her "Self", she rebels. That tug of war against time is evident in her decision to leave Lahore, Bollywood, and also in renaming her theatre company or the creation of Shaku, leaving the original Shakuntala behind, but as the play progresses, we find she is the worst victim of time, and she is still frozen in the memory of a specific timescale. Manisha Sinha in her article, "An Existential Crutch? Interrogating Women's Silence in Select Plays of Mahesh Dattani" (2020) substantiates Nazia's claustrophobic yet silent suffering from the time: "For decades, Nazia deploys silence as an existential strategy to survive the violation of her body and the subsequent trauma, and to live "respectfully". She exhibits a rebellious streak, yet she decides to keep her past hidden from everyone" (4). The other characters, like her daughter Ruby or lover Suhel, were also stoned at the time. Suhel, though married to another woman, still preserves the poster of their company's most lavish production, where Nazia can be seen playing the protagonist, like the treasure of Yaksha. He also fondly remembers the moments that he spent with Nazia. Ruby lives in the horror of the troubled memories from childhood; she can never succeed in becoming a good mom for Nikhat:

> Ruby: I didn't abandon you! You haven't been through the hell I have. I made sure you didn't.
>
> Nikhat: I held the same anger against you. You didn't notice my

> anger because you were too angry yourself, at your mother for dying and leaving you (126).

And she finally concludes, "You gave what you got." Nevertheless, unlike her mother or grandmother, she does not dwell on the caged memories; instead, she bravely moves on to the bigger truth of life. That's why she says, "Your anger came out of your own unhappiness. Mom, it's okay to let it go. I am trying very, very hard!" (127). It seems Nazia's dream version of Shakuntala, the liberated, modernized Shaku, is none other than her granddaughter herself. She is indeed liberated from the limits of time.

In order to keep intact the continuation of the past in the present, the playwright chooses the singularity of casting in both the characters of Young Nazia as Shakuntala and Nikhat to display the slow but steady psychological expenses and freedom from the omnipresent past of Nazia Sahiba. At the same time, the characters of Suhel, King Dushyant, and First Assistant Director are portrayed by the same actor (The playwright himself mentioned that it has to be the same actor who will play these two roles, while giving the stage directions) which indicates the confined and stagnant plight of their psyche. Except Vinay, both the other two characters had failed to overcome their cowardice to emerge as a hero; neither Dushyant in the court where his pregnant wife came to seek his help nor Suhel, in 1948, when Nazia was gang raped brutally, in Nazia's term by "his people":

> Suhel (unbelieving): You still blame me for what happened?
>
> Nazia: You did nothing to stop it! Nothing (100)!

The play has a very recognizable and realistic structure. The present, the past and the play within play flow impeccably into each other, but in their own unique ways. The producer, director and the actor who played the character of Nazia for the first show of this drama in Mumbai, Lillete Dubey says, "Each segment mirrors and echoes the other, the whole coming together like one piece of music, underlining the trajectories of the protagonists on many levels, including off the stage and on." ("A Note on the Play", 48).

There is an exciting amalgamation of past and present in the play. The readers persistently feel that the past is ever-present and that memories are what people make of them:

> Vinay: Whatever it is, finish it.

> Nazia: You think it is so simple?... Things don't get finished. They hide in a dark corner like a ghoul and grab at you when you are not looking. And sometimes, you have to beat the shit out of the ghoul to make it crawl back into its dark corner. (129)

The readers always stay aware of the omnipresence of the past within the present. It seems like a flowing river where the past easily blends with the present, and then that blending gives birth to a new reality, which is again not free, but rather chained and governed by memories. Nazia and Suhel's relationship ends up only to pay the value of their horrible past. Nazia killed a person without any hesitation to save Suhel, who herself said, "I don't care. I would rather die with you than live without you" (96). The same Nazia said after some years, "How I wish I could just put my arms around you to wring your neck instead of pretending to love you! I can't love you anymore" (100). Time plays a significant role in this play, past, not in whole, but the selective past overshadows the present life of the characters, time and again. The omnipotence of the past engulfed the whole identity of some characters, as Suhel says to Nazia while he leaves her: "I-I am leaving you, Nazia. I am leaving you alone. You want to forget the past? I am your past. I was hoping we would have a future together that could somehow heal both of us... I hope the company will give you the solace you seek."

Written in the aftermath of the holocaust of the 1947 partition and the post-partition riots, this play essentially explores the 'communal' sentiment. The tension that exists among the Hindus and Muslims in India after the event of the partition of the country causes a chain of phobic reactions to even the most trivial incidents. In the play, the mob is a symbol of communal hatred. It deals with the burning issues of Hindu-Muslim bigotry, and the mindset of suspicion towards each other and tries to suggest that attributes of prejudice and misperception have much to do with escalating such problems. Communal unrest arises from highlighting the differences between these two religious groups. Once they are made to acknowledge their identity as human beings first and then as Hindus or Muslims, there will be no problems.

In this play, the incident of Lahore, when in the middle of a performance, a mob attacks the theatre people to kill Hindus, terrified Nazia asks the girls to wear their burkas and Suhel to wear a Muslim cap. The fear of death makes the women regret having Hindus in their troupe. Though Nazia tries to silence the woman, she goes on, "This can never come to any good; Hindus must leave! Go to India. This is no place for you" (102).

And Nazia shouts to the mob, "There are no Hindus here. Only us artists" (101). She tries her best to uphold the humanitarian approaches in front of a violent mob, but her good intention fails, and she is called 'a whore'. The central tragedy of such communal violence lies in the fact that no one is safe at this time. Neither the attackers nor the victims as a minimum sense of shared humanity, which gets ignored here. Nazia recalls the cursed day when she entered India with her lover, Suhel, and Zarine. The train was attacked by some reluctant Muslims near the border: "The rioters wanted to kill everyone on the train. A train full of Hindus" (130). And as soon as they entered the country, they encountered "a different set of demons" (132). After almost fifty years, she still can't forget the hate and anger in the eyes of those Hindus who brutally gang-raped her in a bush on that day. The whole event is nothing but dreadful. At some point, the lives of every character come at stake, and the memories it leaves give birth to lifelong psychosomatic chaos. Nazia and Suhel's dead relationship is nothing but a result of Nazia's one unanswered question from the past, "All I could think of was why isn't Suhel saving me? These are his people!" (132).

In Lahore, Nazia and Zarina's lives were saved by their religion, and the same religion became the cause of her gang rape in India. Whereas both times, Suhel saved his life by pretense. Zarine sacrificed her life because of these dirty religious prejudices. In Act I, Scene V, at the time of an argument between young Nazia and young Suhel in the green room, Nazia throws lipstick in his direction, saying: "Wear your caste mark. It comes off in all your sweat." (96). This very natural titbit of theatre life is also loaded with a grim sense of pointing fingers towards the religious favors Suhel got by pretending time and again.

Sternberg wrote, "Memory is the means by which we draw on our past experiences in order to use this information in the present" (99). Memory is a blessing for the creatures, but this memory can also act as a curse to ruin someone's present. Memory plays the most vital role in this drama. The experiential details of the partition stored in the psyche are the most brutal torture one can ever go through. We see how Dattani has shown the power of memory by Nazia's forgetting, remembering, dis-remembering specific episodes from her life. We know that it is the memory that doesn't allow the victims of the partition to forget the previous traumatic and painful experiences and this distressing memory is responsible for all their neurotic reactions afterward. We have seen almost all the characters here suffer from post-traumatic disorder entwined with anxiety, depression, and an utter identity crisis. As the scientific research goes, we can

easily find out that Nazia, the protagonist, was suffering from a particular medical condition called PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder). She has always tried to ignore the people (Suhel and Ruby), things (the costumes of her company) and other stimuli related to her past experiences, which can trigger the highly depressed and guilt-ridden memories of her life. She cries out, "And in the court- when you spurn me, the look at your eyes! You mean every word you say! I know where that comes from. It all comes back! I cringe at your touch. When you reject me in the court, I wish I could wipe out every memory of you, Zarine and … and … everything else!" (131).

We also see the way Nazia relentlessly tries to clean the cobwebs, which are nothing but symbolic of her traumatic past. She goes on, "Cobwebs! I hate cobwebs!" (69) and despite all her efforts not to look back on her past, just like those obtrusive cobwebs, her past comes back to her: "(pulling at a cobweb) Look at these cobwebs! No matter how often I clean them all, they keep coming back" (107)!

We have also experienced her stern dismissal of the fact that Suhel is her ex-husband. She cries out, "I don't know any Suhel … I don't know any husband!" (139). She also calls him 'a Phantom' and finally comes to forgive him after fifty years by saying, "We are not who we were." (92). She also asserts that she thinks it is good; they are not the same person anymore. She wishes to retain their beauties- both the physical and their relationship, but everything seems pointless after "fifty bloody years" (92). It's over now. She fails to find meaning in all these years, their togetherness, their separated life, and after this huge gap, Suhel's incidental contact with everything to her becomes blurry with a sudden appearance of cobwebs, which symbolizes the negative aspects of the universe.

The dysfunctional relationships between Ruby and Nazia, and later Ruby and Nikhat, are all bound by specific autobiographical traumatic memories, which unknowingly are a part of the collective memories of a whole nation. Nazia's ignorance towards Ruby was a tethered reaction to her past. But Ruby could never get that as she was ignorant of the whole truth. She has frantically searched for the past, to know about her parentage, to find her own identity. She also tried to understand why Nazia could never love her. She complains, "You only looked at yourself. Never at the world around you. I didn't exist" (128).

Finally, her anger and frustrations erupt like boiling lava when she says that she hates the theatre, that she hates her father for deserting her like

this, and that she hates Nazia more than anyone else. Ruby screams, "You were so close to me, and yet you may as well have been thousands of miles away... I wish life would have been so different if you had died instead of my mother" (130)!

But the search for her past never ceases; she, again and again, asks Nazia the real truth of her birth. Who is her father? Where is he now? Why did he abandon her? Where is her mother? How did she die? Why does Nazia never want to talk about her parents? And so on. She lives in the present, where all her actions are governed either by the past or for the past. While dwelling on a horrible alienation and identity crisis, she loses control over her integrity and appears as a person she is too concerned not to become. It affects her marital relationship directly as well as her relationship with her daughter. Nazia's memory of personal insult, after being pregnant with the child of gang rape, overshadows Shakuntala's insult in the court of Dushyant:

> Shakuntala (angry more as Nazia): No! No! O Mother Earth! I can no longer bear such an insult. Please open your arms and accept me! Please take me away from this hell that consumes me! (opening her arms) Please! Take me away to someplace far away where I can forget my troubled past. Please. O Mother Earth, please listen to me! (138)

This shriek reminds us of Maa Sita's heart-wrenching prayer to Mother Earth in the court of Ramchandra after her *Agnipariksha* was taken by her husband. Such is the picture of Indian society, where people pass disrespectful comments on women, husbands do not hesitate to question their wives' loyalty, and girls are taught from childhood to obey Masculinity. Nazia wants desperately to break that tradition, but cannot as she is trapped in the memories of those insults.

As the play progresses, we realize Nazia loves her sister Zarine more than anything, and she holds Zarine within her soul. The tortured memory of Zarine's death, and just before death, Zarine's selfless sacrifice for Nazia, haunts her present. The guilt of an elder sister who could not save her sister appears to be a more prominent memory to Nazia than the fact that Zarine died in a communal riot. Her guilt-ridden mind constrained her to think she killed Zarine: "Yes, I killed her, but no one sees it that way. I know I did. She died on the train..." (132). She also asserts that Suhel is right; it was Zarine who played Shakuntala. Later, Suhel finally understood Nazia's dual personality after her sister's death and how Nazia's

'self' got battered by the presence of Zarine. Nazia acted on the stage as Shakuntala, but she was always disturbed by the thought that this role was Zarine's, and her tormented conscience finally led to the splitting of her personality.

Dattani sets the play against the backdrop of partition, the most catastrophic event in the history of recent India, to ignite the national memory of the holocaust in order to intensify the horrors of struggling against those caged memories. Public memory becomes a means to explain and justify personal grief and memory. The partition has played havoc with each character's life; the whole drama revolves around the memory of it. While on stage, Nazia is seen desperately trying to run away from her tortured memories, from her traumatic past, the audience or the readers do feel the same quest of breaking through their memories of partition.

Dattani has employed many theatrical devices to reinvigorate the past, the national memory of the holocaust in the reader's psyche. The outstanding stage directions of Dattani made it easy for the readers to simultaneously travel the different time zones, using red lights to intensify the bloodbath scenes while darkness and tiny lights denote the complexity of the characters' psyche. The purposive use of the sounds of the steam engine, the sounds of several gunshots, bombs, and screaming create a parallel reality in accordance with the past. The use of native languages as the mob shout, 'Maar dalo un haramion ko!', 'In sab ki talashi lo!', 'Stage pe kaun hain?',' Chalo! sab Musalman ja sakte hain!', ' Kafiron ko pakdo!' gives the chill to the blood of Hindi-speaking readers. The background music plays a functional role in the play. The heart-wrenching lullaby of a bereaved mother who has just lost her child in the communal riots strikes the national memory of violence. The gunshots and sounds of bombing create the fear and agony of the past, but the lullaby cleanses our hearts with a sense of deep pathos. The use of powerful graphics by the playwright (stage direction), like "the Zarine" dressed as Shakuntala, holding an infant, lays bare Nazia's tortured conscience. The picturesque projection of the bloodied lady with the dismembered body parts escalates the horror of partition in the public mind. The confinement of the sets within this crescent is a space suggestive of the vanity van of Nazia Sahiba; the confinement denotes the caged psychotic situations of the characters. All the different props used by the playwright (Stage direction) are the different psychological spaces that have a unique power in bringing together the people and creating collective memories and identity formation. By the end of the drama, we find all are shaken by the stirring of their memories, the same memory and yet different from each other.

Mahesh Dattani believes that his plays are the true reflection of his time, place and socio-economic background, and his "business is holding a mirror up to society". He is indeed successful in his 'business' as the drama revolves around the psychosis that prevails among the Hindus and Muslims in India. Dattani places his characters in such situations where they are forced to scrutinise themselves in the light of what happened not only in their lives but also in the lives of the people they are related to.

Towards the end of the play, Nazia's long Soliloquies, reminiscent of her past trauma in front of her daughter and granddaughter, purged her soul. The all-consuming power of truth lifts the dark Purdah from the tortured past memories. Nazia finally confesses for the first time why she hated Ruby so deeply for all these years, and the most amazing thing is that Rubina completely realises her wounds and soothes her by taking her mother in her arms. Just like the ring of Shakuntala plays the most significant role in order to break the curse of forgetfulness of King Dushyant, Ruby also shares a ragged memory given by Suhel to break the curse of Nazia's forgetfulness: "He told me that between acts and when no one was looking ... that you would suckle me... and Suhel Uncle would delay the next act to give you time to make sure I was well and asleep" (149). Nazia is touched by the memory, and the line between past and present blurs as all the characters physically and metaphorically become one in spirit. All the characters feel a loss of identity and then gain it in a different light. All the characters finally realise what Suhel said in a very introductory act, "We are all victims of our times" (112).

As the play resolves, the invisible resentments between them end, and accepting their past, the characters move on towards a new beginning with renewed vigour. Thus, we see that the past and present are amalgamated deftly in the play. The play reflects the trauma and horror of the memories and significantly participates in the reassessment of the traumatic experience of partition. Nazia's passion for a world created by her terms by denying the restricted roles given to her, both metaphorically and literally, constructively unveils her true vigorous self, which echoes in her bold proclamation: "I want more dances. Dances that nobody can take from me, Oh! This van is too small! It can't take my dancing. Your cinema is too small for me. My life is big. I am BIG and GENEROUS. Only the theatre deserves me" (59)! And finally, she moves on to find that eternal self.

By associating concocted scenes of Shakuntala, with the personal distressing experiences of Nazia, with the perpetual shifting of the axis from the existing life of the characters to their past and the other way round, Dat-

tani has thus evaporated the fine line between all the profound pains and memories of the characters and the audience, thus proving what Krishna Sobti has mentioned, "Partition is difficult to forget but dangerous to remember" (Quoted in Butalia 2000: 283).

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