

THE PROBLEMATICS OF THE IDENTITY IN MANJU JAIDKA'S: *SCANDAL POINT*

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to analyze how Manju Jaidka in her novel *Scandal Point* has dealt with this theme of identity crisis or loss of identity. The term identity is used in the fields of sociology, psychology, philosophy and literary criticism. Yet, it is hard to define it precisely. Identity implies a sense of being conscious about one's self. It is a concept which can be understood by one's identifications with significant others. His parents, his friends, his race, his religion, his country form this significant other. An identity is formed by the beliefs, attitudes and values of the place to which one belongs. When anyone tries to adopt new customs and culture which were alien to him earlier, then the crisis begins and restlessness sets in. *Scandal Point* is a historical novel laced with entertainment. It can be referred to a historitainment. Maharaja Rajinder Singh alias Rajen falls in love with an English girl who is none other than viceroys daughter Betty. They meet in the ideal setting of Shimla hills and elope. The place becomes the landmark Scandal Point. The paper explores the broken identities of various characters. Jaidka delves into the minds of the characters and gives voice to their feelings and experiences. As we approach the climax there is the final dissolution of personalities of various characters. Jaidka has artistically peeled layer upon layer of this intricate problem of identity.

KEYWORDS: Dissolution, Historitainment, Identity, Personality

INTRODUCTION

The term 'identity' is used in the fields of sociology, psychology, philosophy and literary criticism. Yet, it is hard to define it precisely. 'Identity' implies a sense of being conscious about one's self. It is a concept which can be understood by one's identifications with significant 'others'. His parents, his friends, his race, his religion, his country form this significant 'other'. An identity is formed by the beliefs, attitudes and values of the place to which one belongs. When anyone tries to adopt new customs and culture which were alien to him earlier, then the crisis begins and restlessness sets in.

Erikson says, "Identity crisis is a time of intensive and exploration of different ways of looking at one self". When identity is threatened or lost, the person feels marginalized, alienated and lonely. In the words of Keniston, "Most usages of alienation share that some relationship or connection that once existed as 'natural', desirable or good, has been lost". This definition makes it clear that some type of severance, breaking or splitting takes place. The idea of some kind of violence and use of force is inherent in these words.

Manju Jaidka in her novel *Scandal Point* has dealt with this theme of identity crisis or loss of identity. *Scandal Point* is a historical novel laced with entertainment. It can be referred to a historitainment. Maharaja Rajinder Singh alias Rajen falls in love with an English girl who is none other than viceroy's daughter Betty. They meet in the ideal setting of Shimla hills and elope. The place becomes the landmark 'Scandal Point'. Betty becomes chhoti Maharani Harnam Kaur

after marrying Maharaja Rajinder Singh. The palace intrigues and Queen's wish make them part ways. Their son Kaka alias Kartar loses his identity and has to live as adopted son of Bibi Bachtiar Kaur and S. Jivan Singh of Lahore and has to forgo his rightful place in the state of Patiala. Rajen dies as a result of inner politics of the court of Patiala and Bhupinder Singh becomes de jure Maharaja under the control of the council.

Scandal Point starts with a proclamation of narrator whom we identify later as Kartar and he says:

I am no Oedipus but my life seems to have followed the same pattern. In Oedipus's story there were three roads that met at a fatal point, determining his destiny. One led from the temple of Apollo, another from Corinth and a third took him straight to Thebes – to his doom. Fleeing from his destiny Oedipus headed straight into the inexorable clutches of his fate.

Oedipus did not know about his 'identity'. Abandoned by his parents he is raised by others. This is not a coincidence that Kartar finds himself in the same predicament when he tries to piece together scraps of information to help him decipher the identity that was written for him.

In Four Quartets, T.S. Eliot says, "Time the destroyer is time the preserver". It is 'time' which brings about a change in the lives of the characters in the novel. The relationships he used to have as a child undergo a drastic change when he learns the truth. The novel deals with the transitions in identity that takes place. He has a family comprising bibi, baba, brothers and behen-ji. He is the baby of the family considering the age difference with his siblings. Bibi at her deathbed instructs him to go to Amritsar to meet Sardar Attar Singh. In 1912 he is a nineteen year old boy living in a secure cocoon of his family and then a turn of events makes him a puppet in the hands of time.

Whom are we talking about? He is christened Sri Richard Ram Rahim Singh alias Kaka by his biological parents. His name is symbolic of the merging of the cultural boundaries. He is neither a British nor an Indian. His name highlights his in-between state. Jaidka points out, "It was a name that was different..." (139). Rajinder Singh (Rajen) comments, "He looks every bit an angrez, doesn't he?" (138). He doesn't look like an Indian as if some connection has been severed or forgotten.

Soon this identity is also taken away from him. Kaka is rechristened all over again. Kaka has a playmate named Kartar, son of Sardar Attar Singh of Amritsar. Kaka and Kartar look identical as fair complexioned, light eyed babies. The court intrigues don't spare even children. In a heart wrenching twist of events Kartar is found dead in the crib. This is a case of mistaken identity. Jaidka writes, "...the realization that the death that had struck so suddenly and viciously was actually meant for her child; that the baby that lay inert like a rag-doll could have easily been hers." (154). Kartar's story is over yet there is a new beginning of his story. Kartar dies because he is mistaken for prince. The prince loses his name as it is given out that Prince Sri Richard Ram Rahim is dead. He is given the identity of Kartar. The boundaries between living and dead become hazy. Kaka though alive is dead and Kartar, who is dead, lives on.

Kartar finds himself in a strange predicament. He is raised by his bua Bibi Bachtiar Kaur and her husband S. Jivan Singh. He looked like a Sovenir of the British Regency due to his facial features. There is a clause in the agreement that he will be a keshdhari sikh to camouflage his features. He is not given his rightful place in the Royal family. Kartar says, "...certain issues must be buried and some lives must be consigned to a living death. So they are assigned graves of anonymity" (226).

In an alien land with constant collisions caused by cultural transplants and leading to cultural alienation, Betty

finds it difficult to come to terms with the reality around her. Betty is introduced as daughter of viceroy of India who has recently arrived from London. She is introduced to Maharaja Rajinder Singh of Patiala, with whom she falls in love. The constant reminders from her mother to keep away from Indians do not deter the young girl from eloping with a married Indian Maharaja. Rajinder Singh brings her to Patiala. It is announced by Maharaja's confidant and employee Bryan that his daughter Florence is visiting them. Thus Betty becomes Florence. After her marriage to Maharaja she becomes Harnam Kaur. Her real identity is abandoned:

"Betty? I was told her name is Florence," she looked puzzled.

"Beeji that is what I wish to talk to you about. She is not Bryan's daughter, Florence. She is Beatrix..."

"And who is Beatrix?"(77)

Every time we notice a question mark after her name. Names have been related to identity. Tom McArthur says, "...people's names have been regarded as closely linked with their owner's inmost natures...Monks and nuns give up worldly interests and assume new names to mark a new life...A comparable reaction especially in the U.S., is the dropping of traditional names by African-American who, seeing them as 'slave names' adopt instead African or Islamic names, as when the American boxer Cassius Clay became Muhammad Ali."

Betty leaves her parents' home and by marrying a she sheds her ancestry and Identity. She has been uprooted. She has left behind her culture and she tries to learn the language of the land. She even learns the folk songs and dances. She dresses up like a Punjabi woman. She makes all these efforts to become one of them yet she is always referred to as 'gori'. Even Rajmata says, "Puttar, She is not from our own kaum or dharma. Our people will not accept her easily" (65)

While delineating the characters, author's main aim seems to have been to demonstrate the potential dangers of two cultures meeting in one and the same person and resulting in the unfortunate isolation. Betty is lingering between the two worlds- Indian and the British -without belonging to either, and finds herself a stranger to both. She remains an outsider and referred to as 'English Girl' again and again. She expresses her loneliness in her diary, "I can't go on living like this, in this uncertainty...Rajen and his mother, the rajmata, are both afraid of the common people and how they will react to the idea of having an alien woman for their queen...What kind of a world do I want my child to come into? I must bring him into a home that is rightfully his, rightfully ours" (100-101) she understands her position as a foreigner who cannot be accepted by people easily. She is yearning for the home that she has left behind. Home is the ultimate symbol of security and warmth of human relationships. This deep rooted need makes her barter her own identity. She again writes in her diary, "I embraced their faith and they gave me their maharaja. I am now his legally wedded wife. No longer is I Betty or even Florence. I am now Bibi Harnam Kaur, the second wife of Rajinder Singh, Maharaja of Patiala" (113)

Jaidka's subject is the loneliness of dislocation, Cultural displacement, sense of identity and belonging with one foot in both worlds. As long as one has roots, one survives, and if one's roots are injured or lost, one dies spiritually. There is a beautiful image of holding hands. Betty continues to hold her mother's hands in hers throughout the conversation when latter comes to meet her. It is an attempt to make a connection with her roots. She feels a kind of bond through her mother with her past. Then again she discusses her childhood memories with Rajen. She talks about the games she used to play as a child. She tries to remember the half-forgotten folk songs. When Bryan's daughter arrives from England, they at once get along like a house on fire. "For Betty it was like being in touch with her childhood again" (165). She may have accepted the faith, the customs or the language of India but her heart has associations with England.

Bryan's daughter is murdered in the room which was previously occupied by Betty. It is again a case of mistaken identity. The news is given that Bryan's daughter is dead. People thought that Betty is their daughter so she is considered to be dead. Meanwhile under the pressure of Queen, Maharaja signs an agreement. Betty is 'returned' to England, "- as though she were a piece of furniture that had been borrowed by the state of Patiala. 'Returned'-as though she had been forcibly taken to Patiala against her will" (203). This is the final dissolution of personality. Jaidka has artistically peeled layer upon layer of this intricate problem of identity.

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