

Book Review

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Amartya Sen, (2006). Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny. London: Penguin Books.(pp 215) Price: £ 14.99

Human beings associating only with singular identity in terms of religion, language, culture, and ethnicity are divisive and confrontational in nature. Most of the atrocity and barbarity seen in the contemporary world are based on the illusion of singular and one dimensional sense of identity. The advocacy and the understanding of person in a singular way harden the line of division. The solitarist, communitarian perspectives that understand and explain person only on civilization or cultural confinement, or in another word on the basis of merely one group membership reduce human beings into one dimension. The myth of civilization or cultural partitioning that sees and explains person in a way that he or she is affiliated only within one identity and with single group or community. Such kinds of solitarist perspectives look persons associating them only within one group membership and uniquely singular identical category. The way of understanding on the basis of singular identity ignores and hides his or her multiple membership and affiliation. A person patently belongs with many groups and identities. The illusion of singular identity hides and overlooks the multifarious attachments and memberships of a person in terms of class, political conviction, occupation, gender, region, place of origin, citizenship, believer and non believer on afterlife-before life, etc. The person has multiple and significant attachment with other groups and associations including with religion, ethnicity, and culture. The illusion of singularity undermines and hides the common plight and situation of persons.

Associating persons in only with one group membership either on the basis of religion, or language, or ethnicity, or and region has intention to harden the line of division. Sometimes such kinds of division can be used as a weapon by sectarian politician to promote the violence. It can be seen in the case of India, Pakistan, Rwanda, Iraq, Ethiopia, Somalia, etc.

The illusion of singularity that relates person only with one group membership and category obliterating other multiple attachments and associations cultivate and promote the violence. Actively and intentionally promoted violence spreads like wildfire. Hatreds and violence seen in Kosovo, Bosnia, Timor, Rwanda, Israel, Palestine, and Sudan can be the live examples of crude and coarse consequences of civilization partitioning. History also reveals us that such kinds of partitioned, divisive, and fragmentary way of understanding and explanation has heavy price. Civilization partitioning had divided India. The social vision that used to understand and explain the people of India merely in the belongingness either to Hindu or to Muslim was the seed behind the division of India. Cruel and barber Hindu-Muslim riot had occurred in 1943 during India's independence. The carnage is difficult to understand and explain on the basis of logic and human rationality. Hundreds and thousands of Hindus and Muslims were murdered by one another in that riot in favor of their own people. Most of the victims of that horror were from most impoverished sections of Hindus and Muslims. Unidentified Muslim wage laborers were killed by Hindu laborers and vice versa. The Indian, Asian, sub continental, labors, broad human beings of India were turned into merely ruthless Hindus and fierce Muslims at that carnage. It was the harrowing consequences of the civilization partitioning that classify and understand human beings merely on the basis of narrow one group membership i.e. religion or culture. The remarkable aspect on that violence was that most of the victims were from the segment of most impoverished and humiliated. At Hindu-Muslim riot, most of the wage laborers had lost their lives.

The same happened in case of Pakistan and Bangladesh. The east of Pakistan (Bangladesh) was separated in the name of language, literature, music, and politics from West Pakistan. Thousands were killed in that violence by the military of Pakistan. The divided Hindu- Muslim of Bengal became united on the issue of language, literature, music, and culture and fought with West Pakistan creating war brigade. So the division in between Pakistan and Bangladesh was also occurred on the basis of rigid and narrow belongingness.

The riot between Hutu and Tutsi is also a byproduct of civilization or cultural partitioning. Nearly one million people were killed in the conflict between Hutu and Tutsi in Rwanda and Burundi. The Hutu could not see himself as a Rwandan, as an African and a member of broad human race and same was seen in the case of Tutsi. It was the heavy price of segregation on the basis of all encompassing and engulfing bellicose community based identity. The division and confrontation produced by it also can be seen in the case of Shiya and Sunnie in Iraq. It is also found between Tamil and non Tamil. It can be also seen in the case of Serb and Albanian in Germany.

Aforementioned explanations and instances provide the evidences that the way of classification of people on the basis of belligerent and bellicose one group identity ultimately produces segregation and confrontation. The way of understanding persons within the confinement of religion, or culture cultivate the conflict. So the solitarist, communitarian perspective that understands and explains persons with in single rigid group membership sows the seeds of division and hatred. So the way of understanding that reduces persons merely into some religion, caste, ethnicity, and region from broad human beings makes persons loyal to particular community. It deepens the line of difference and division. Such kinds of solitarist and communitarian perspectives are not only against the belief that we human beings are all much the same but also against the less discussed and more plausible belief that we are diversely different. It ignores and keeps its mom silent on the issue of internal differentiation within particular religion, ethnicity, caste, and culture.

Amartya Sen argues in his book *Identity and Violence*, social vision that separate human beings only on the basis of all encompassing identity religion, culture, and ethnicity downplaying the multiple belongingness and associations in terms of political conviction, class, gender, occupation, and other so many similar identical categories hardened the line of division and cultivate the conflict. The Author suggests arrogance, brutalities, and atrocities against one community by another can be reduced only promoting competing identities. It means that individuals should be recognized from their multiple belongingness one community to another. He suggests look individuals through the lens of common plight and shared humanity. From the lens of Amartya Sen each person belongs with many communities in terms of class, political conviction, gender, occupation etc. So persons should be understood on the basis of miseries, uncertainties, and common plight they face in their daily lives. Cultural analysts and communitarian thinkers create the illusion of singularity putting people into a rigid box of religion, culture, caste, ethnicity, and region which mystify the reality and misguide the public policy. Ultimately it led the violence widening the line of division and hatreds one group against another. A person can be associated with many groups and identities. A person can be an Indian, Asian, Sub continental, Hindu, Muslim, Christian, American, African, economist, political scientist, philosopher, bureaucrats, mathematician, believer in democracy and autocracy, atheist and non atheist, and vegetarian non vegetarian, etc. Each of us is belonged with many groups and communities. Any kinds of identity can be significant if it is justified intellectually. So, persons should not be seen only on the basis of obliterating bellicose identity. The illusion of singular identity makes persons loyal to one particular community and confines them within those narrow and rigid boxes. It promotes the belligerent and bellicose identity.

In the context of Nepal, people are being partitioned in the name of Madhesis and Pahadis, Brahmins, Chhetris, Janajatis, and Dalits etc. This kind of categorization is getting more height by Aid industry, communitarian academician, political parties, civil society and mass media. The trend seems that people of Nepal in nowadays are

recognizing either in the name of Madhese or Pahade, Brahamin-Chhetris or Janajatis, Dalits or non Dalits. In this way, Nepalese are reducing in belittle and narrow identity based on caste, ethnic background, and region. Aid industry, government of Nepal, cultural analyst, and communitarian thinkers are making worthy and relevant to this singular identity as their all encompassing and engulfing identity. Sometime this kind of identity becomes crude and coarse in some seminars, workshops, office, and daily sphere of life scolding and treating offensively one community by another. Once there was a riot in Kapilbastu and other Terai area in the name of Madhese and Pahade. Many of the people from the background of Pahade were forced to leave their home. Most of the displaced were from very destitute section in Kapilbastu. Most of the people living in Terai are feeling still insecure. Even the people from most impoverished section have the situation to leave their hut being blamed as a ruler. This kinds perspective and behavior reducing us from being a Nepalese, as human race, sufferers of same disease, hunger, illiteracy, poverty, and unemployment. It hides the similarities and common problems one to another community. What may be the difference between Pahade wage labor and Madhese wage labor and same can be applied in the case of other categories. Is Madhese a homogenous term? Are all Madhesis same in terms of class, caste, gender, occupation, and the place of origin? Do they have same interests, priorities, needs and purposes? In terms of life chances, in terms of access to resources, education, health facilities, food stuffs and other necessities of life what can be the differences between Madhese and Pahade? And what may be the differences between Brhamin-Chhetris, Janajatis and Dalits. Are all Brahamins, Chhetris, and Janajatis same? Do they have same goal, purpose, needs and priorities? Among all these categories Dalits seem most sidelined and oppressed by social structure but with whom these should be compared? In the case of Madhesei is it a homogenous term?

There is vast difference between Dalits of Madhes and other castes. Tharus and other castes are also different in terms of life chances and social condition. Are all Janajatis same? Nowadays it is frequently heard that they remained far behind because of the rule of Brahamin-

Chhetris. Were all Brahamin-Chhetris were ruller? What are the differences between a subsistence Brahimin farmer from Taplejung(Far eastern), Karnali,Seti-Mahakali(far western) and Newar farmer of elsewhere? What are the differences between most destitute Brahimin-Chhetris and most destitute Janajatis and Madhesis who always face food shortage, and have difficulties to educate their children and have no access with doctors and medicine? Some Nepalis are pushed to go in Iraq and Afganistan in search of job. They belong in same community in terms of their hardships and common plight. For them what could be the significance of partitioning in the line of caste, ethnicity, language, religion, and region? They can be the member of same human race in terms of their miseries and have not much difference. Most of the Nepalese have to go to India to meet their food need from all communities. Among all communities, Dalits are in more suppressed and oppressed condition. All categories have equal share behind the suppression of Dalits. In addition to it, large scale structural arrangements such as monarchy, caste system, public policy, bureaucracy, court, school, community, and societal values etc were responsible factors behind the miseries of all Nepalese.

Amartya Sen seeks similarities between most destitute Pahade, Madhese, Brahimin, Chhetris, Janajatis and Dalits in terms of class, political conviction (believer in democracy and believer in autocracy), gender, occupation, and common plight they face in their lives. To uplift all there should be the especial focus and priorities on education, health care, and employment etc. State should invest a lot on these sectors to enable them to make choice and reasoning capacity.

As per Amartya Sen faith based, inherited illusion of singular identity overlook the reason, role of choice and multiple affiliations of persons. A person should have choice to choose his or her identity. Persons should have the freedom to choose their identity on the basis of reason. The illusion of singular identity Pahade versus Madhese, Brahimin-Chhetris versus Janajatis, and Dalits versus non Dalits are crude, coarse, and belligerent. These are fragmentary and

confrontational. History reveals that faith based inherited singular identity was overemphasized during the era of India's independence from British colonialism. British rulers had overemphasized on singular identity from the line of Hindu and Muslim during India's independence. The British ruler used divisive Hindu-Muslim identity as a weapon to cultivate and promote violence. The riot occurred in 1943 in Bengal between Hindu-Muslim was a part of that which divided India.

At present, why such kinds of divisive identity is gaining height in Nepal in a historical epoch of transformation after the prolong 10 years people's war and popular movement of 2006 downplaying other significant categories and identities? Once in Malayasia during its social political change the single community based identity was used to resist political polarization. Does it have same purpose in the present context of Nepal? Diverting people into some sects of caste, ethnicity, region, such as Brahmin, Chhetri, Janajati, Madhesi, Pahade, and Dalit is good way to divert the differences between rich-poor, capitalist-labor, landlord-landless, believers in democracy and believers in autocracy, believers in before life-afterlife and non believer on it etc. The faith based inherited identity is gaining height in Nepal in its period of fast social-political change. On the basis of past lesson it can be said that caste, ethnicity, region based identity is getting more attention from aid industry, and government to divert the issue of class and political polarization. The latent motto behind this is to avert social political transformation. At present context on the basis of competing identities people of Nepal can be categorized in much more ways including supporters of democracy and autocracy, atheist and non atheist, labor-capitalist, landlord-serf, religious orthodox and non religious, farmer-teacher-bureaucrats, political scientist, economist, sociologist, widows-non widows, family of disappeared and family of non disappeared etc.

In the same way, dividing whole globe into west and non west is also narrow and rigid line of explanation. Such kinds of identities are also segregation and confrontational. Dividing people in the name of west and anti west is also belligerent and bellicose. It also hardened the

line of division between west and east. Recognizing west as a natural home of liberty, placing it on some superior position and other parts of world in inferior position may also cultivate and promote conflict. The root of global democracy is in Greece (Athens), India, Japan, Iran, Egypt, etc. Voting system and elected government was first appeared in Greece but it was influenced by long practice public decision first seen in India, Japan, and elsewhere. Later the Germany, France, and Britain had adopted the elected government and voting system from Greece which were by Greece. So, the West is not a home ground of liberty and democracy and it should not get superior position in case of it and east should not be inferior on the issue of it which promotes errant identity. The history of the most of the invention also seems in many parts of the world such as in China, India, Arab, Egypt, Iran etc. Magnetic compass, gunpowder, kite, paper and printing machine were first invented in China. Decimal system was invented in India and the inventor was Muslim. The Greek civilization only became possible through Arabic translation otherwise it could be disappeared. So, the history of invention is rooted on other parts of the world also. Thus, it cannot be generalized that the home of most of the inventions and democracy is west. The history of other parts of the world should be honored and recognized.

In recognizing identity, the role of reason and choice should be in first place. The person must have right to choose his identity among multifarious belongingness and affiliations. It should be based on reason. The issue of which identity is significant and relevant either class, political conviction, religion, ethnicity, caste, region, occupation, or many more intellectually justified should depend on logic, reason, and human conscience. Only then, world can be a common home of human race. So, identity should be recognized on the basis of difficulties, common plight, and shared humanity.