



**RESEARCH PAPER**

**A Raisin in the Sun: The Impacts of Racial Segregation and Identity Crisis**

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**ABSTRACT**

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The article is an effort to reflect the phenomenon of racial discrimination and identity crisis in Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*. The play foregrounds the problems of binary power relations, institutional discrimination and ghettoization for Black community in America. The paper aims to understand the core issues Black community faced during 1960s and the ways they adopted to resist the suppression and humiliation in White society. The research is Qualitative in approach employed the theoretical framework of Homi K. Bhabha's theory of Identity Crisis in terms of Hybridity, Unhomeliness and Third space. The paper concludes that Racism is the root cause for disillusionment, deterioration and destabilized Post-Colonial identities of Blacks living in American land.

**Introduction**

*A Raisin in the Sun* is a creative writing of African descent in America, Lorraine Hansberry. The play is about the oppressive culture of demarcation, deculturation and dehumanization. The play is universal in appeal because it deals with impact of racism and its side effects on Black consciousness. The play has historical significance because it won the popularity, prizes, critical claim and strengthened the organized struggle for self-identity and self-reliance for African Americans in 1960s at the time of the Black Civil Rights Movement (1954-1968) to end up Racial Segregation and disenfranchisement. It was the first great achievement for Blacks as the playwright is an African American Women and the play became the first play in history to be premiered on Broadway. The family is searching for self-identity as dignified persons facing the changes and challenges in 1960s to show effects of racial discrimination towards Africans as marginalized and subordinate people. "Life is. Sure enough. Between the takers and the token" (Hansberry, 1994, p. 141).

Michael Harrington noted in the *Other America: Poverty in United States*, "The American economy, Society and unconsciousness are all racist" (1997, p. 150). The origin of Race as African American phenomenon is interlinked aspect of slavery and colonial expansion. The Concept of Race in America is tied with visible markers of skin color, ethnic origin and bioregional heritage. The ideology encourages Whites to systematically subordinate the Blacks to their values in social system at individual, institutional and governmental level to deny Black minority equal access to opportunities. Hansberry wrote in *Freedom* (1955) that, "Black Youth is waiting for their identity in American life which distorts and disfigures them" (Ghani, 2011, p. 51). The history of racial segregation is deeply embedded in American society since the proclamation of Independence in 1776. George Washington in 1786 commented that, "some strategy is needed by which slavery may be abolished by imperceptible degrees" (Rehman, 2004: 107). When the constitution was drawn in 1787 it ignores the slavery. The slavery became more profitable factor than it had been before 1790. When Abraham Lincoln became president in 1860 eleven southern states begun to secede from union so that they could continue their slavery and control over trade. The American Civil War in (1861-1865) fought between Norths and south was a long standing controversy over Black enslavement. Abraham Lincoln declared that, "We all declare for liberty... We do not mean the same thing... Plainly the sheep and wolf are not agreed upon the same definition... Precisely the same difference prevails today among us human creature" (Rehman, 2004, p. 41). Abraham Lincoln became the President and announced abolition of slavery. The brutal bloody Civil War ended with the Confiscation Act of 1862 and Emancipation Proclamation in 1863 that made slavery illegal. The Whites adopted Jim Crow Laws (1870-1965) for enforced Racial Segregation in all public domains, transportation, schools, restaurants and restrooms. Lowe observed that various systematic devices were used to deprive Blacks from their votes and discriminated to take lowest paid jobs (2007, p. 518). Stokely Carmichael originated the term Institutional Racism in 1960s and argued that racism is institutional form of attitude including segregated housing, schools, churches, transportation, and discriminatory employment and promotion policies. It has been evident through history that the thirteen amendment abolished slavery in 1865 but little has changed for Blacks till 1960s due to indirect effects of slavery, viewed as second class citizens. Hansberry commented in *African American Review*, "I'm a product of segregated Chicago school system... This is what meant we speak of scars, the marks that ghettoized child carries through life" (Gordon, 2008, p. 132). In 1920s Chicago's South side stretched the term ghetto for dilapidated and overpopulated apartments neglected by government due to institutionalized racism of Redlining Policy which stopped the approval of investments and loans by banks for ghettos to improve their condition (Ghani, 2011, p. 608). The National Association of Real Estate Boards in Chicago is another name in list of institutionalized segregationist Boards that announced, "It is illegal and unethical to sale home in White neighborhood to Blacks" (Domina, 1998, p. 24).

Hansberry's ancestors for two generations lived in densely crowded ghetto in South Chicago. Most Blacks hoped to live in facilitated places but Blacks were

enforced by housing policies to live in demarcated ghettoized colonies. Ghetto riots in 1960s were investigated by the National Advisory Commission which sums up that, "American society as nation is pacing towards two discriminated societies, White and Black; separate and unequal" (Feagin, 1994, p. 6). The play is a memoir for the wounds her soul received in public and private life both, "When the world gets ugly enough a woman will do anything..." (1994, p.65). Her father Carl Hansberry was courageous man who shifted his family to a house in Washington Park in 1938 and incurring the Wrath of Whites who threw bottles and bricks in their house. Carl waged a war against Institutionalized Segregated policies to desegregate it but Hansberry's family was dislodged from their house by Illinois Court. Her father suited the case in US Supreme Court and honored to win it. The case became a milestone in Civil Rights Movement for Blacks and banned segregated housing contracts. The play shows that Blacks have same need to achieve as other people in the west but they lack basic opportunities for better jobs and higher social status, "Cure the Great sore of Colonialism - with the penicillin of Independence -!" (Hansberry, 1994, p.133).

Each character in the play is drawn from rich African cultural heredity having ethnic loyalties and identities appeared to be very powerful basis for resisting pressure of foreign culture, "On our Great West African Heritage!... the great Ashanti empires; the great Songhay civilization; and the great sculpture of Benin... the word heritage!" (Hansberry, 1994, p.81). The depiction of this black family within the play renders that many indigenous Africans predisposed to practice superimposed culture to reform their lives which led to the loss of cultural and ethnic identities, "I'm afraid that they need more salvation from the British and the French" (Hansberry, 1994, p.57).

The Rationale of writing this research is to judge the behavioral standards of Binary Power relationship (Whites VS. Blacks) and the ways Blacks resist the authority's influence and humiliation in American Society at personal and institutional level that marked phenomenon of Identity Crisis.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Post-colonialism is an ideology to analyze the impacts of cultural legacy of Colonialism in dichotomy of Binary Power Relation (Racial Segregation) Post-colonial Identity Politics and the ways Africans (as Colonized) resist it. The Colonization by a kind of penetrated logic distorts, disfigures and destroys the past of uprooted people. The Post-colonial Literature examines the social and political power narrative which is mainly derived from two perspectives: The Colonizers awareness and understanding of Native Culture and secondly, the influence of dominant Western Culture to subjugate Non- Western into their domain. The Theoretical Framework of the study is bound within notion of Cultural Identity and Hybridity presented by Homi K. Bhabha (1949-present) in his post-colonial work *The Location of Culture* (1994). According to him identity is something that is created internally in terms of realities as an effect of external things around us. This phenomenon consists of observable realities and condition of existence by which

person experiences something and in turn makes her/his new reality. It is a way to protect cultural heritage to differentiate those in racial categories. Bhabha in *Signs taken for Wonder* (1994) an essay in *Location of Culture* (1994) defines Hybridity as a problem associated to culture of both Colonizers and Colonized, no one has the power to control or resolve the matter. (p. 63). Thus, Hybridity appeared as Cross - Cultural phenomenon of Colonization discourse of Racism. According to him Hybrid identity is positioned within Third Space engendered New identity which is different and unrecognizable, "interruptive, interrogative and enunciative" (p. 96) having no unity nor fixity. In this in-between Space and Liminal Space Cultural Identities are formed and reformed and remained in state of Becoming and Unhomeliness. The concept of Unhomeliness represents demarcation of marginalized Culture and Dominant Western Culture that undermines personal and collective identity. The paradigm of Home becomes Third Space for Displaced Diasporic African Families suffered in past which led to Identity Crisis. The Hybrid Identity never belongs to dominant nor to subversive but creates new culture interrelated to Third Space.

To further elaborate the phenomenon of Identity and Hybridity the theory is supported by post-colonial theory of Stuart Henry McPhail (1932-2014) *Cultural Identity and Diaspora* (1996). He argued that the condition of Diaspora and uprootedness from origin (Africa) aroused trauma and turmoil of maladjustment in terms of homelessness and displacement from origin, essence and purity. The Diasporic people felt themselves trapped in psychological, cultural, identical and political dilemma of two Worlds. His essay *Cultural Identity and Diaspora* presents two types of Cultural Identities.

1. Cultural Identity as a sort of essential identity as internalized, stable, unchanging, and continuous frame of reference. It becomes a collective sense of Oneness with shared similar history of past experiences and reality of truth.

2. Cultural Identity as a process of discrete phenomenon due to continuous undeniable exposure to dominant culture. Cultural Identity is not fixed due to constant transformation and repositioning to reproduce a new identity.

Hall describes Cultural Identity in three presences namely, African, American and European. The African Presence is Unspeakable Reality and repressed by Slavery and impacts of Colonialism. The motherland is the name given to missing entity that represents loss of identity and rift of separation as Otherness. Second presence he defined is European presence which became an inextricable part of stateless and rootless identities. Lastly, he described American presence as the place and territory of colliding fatal encounter of African people in American land. Hall elaborated the American presence in terms of Hybridity to reinvent identities by mixing and creolizing.

The present paper aims to explore the deep-rooted cause of Identity Crisis in the context of Racial Segregation. Furthermore, the in-depth discussion is carried

regarding the Chrono topes of Hybridity for instance Third Space and Unhomeliness to investigate the dislocated culture of Africa in America following American Dream of upward mobility.

### **Literature Review**

The multifaceted dilemmas based on vision of Hansberry are discussed in the research. She stated for the play in, *The Negro writer and His Roots: Toward a New Romanticism* that the issue she highlighted in the play is the clash of old and new values but prominently she held a focus on unflinching courage of the Blacks (Hansberry, 1981, p. 7). She stretched the domestic drama of indirect slavery to include universal aspirations, dreams and struggle as well as fears and hopes. The three generations in the selected text depicted unified heroic defiance toward White hostility and threats that imparts a forceful need to change oppressive system that points to tragedy of American Dream. The review of the literature deals with all obtained literature pertinent to the research topic help to develop logical rationale for authenticity of research. Hansberry as the playwright juxtaposed the detrimental truth of reality of real Black experiences of Personal and Public life through literary figures of selected text. The play has the background of Racial Segregation that creates the phenomenon of Identity crisis in the lives of Younger Family settled in South side of Chicago bringing on national stage of theatre the problems of ghettoization due to institutional Racism affected every aspect of Black Consciousness. The Washington post critic David Richard in *Shinning Raisin in the Sun: A Powerful Production of Great American Play* (1986) viewed the text as Memoir evolving binary race interactions and class stratification which makes the play Universal in appeal. Harold Cruse in *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual* (1968) asserted the same fact that the play is artistic, aesthetic and class inspired culmination to achieve sense of integration and sense of identity with black consciousness against racism. The New York drama critic Frank Rich observed on 25th anniversary of the play (1983) that the play changed American Theatre forever with greater realism by pushing Whites to recheck their interferences in the dreams differed for Blacks. Margaret Wilkerson in *The Sighted Eyes and Feeling Heart of Lorraine Hansberry* (1982) noted that the theatre was a laboratory for Hansberry to reach out to a White world with undeveloped hearts for Blacks. Hana Ghani in *I Have a Dream* (2011) takes this text as a tale of resistance to White Oppression suggested that Blacks were exhausted due to their listlessness living in America that is not over by abolition of Slavery but transferred to new generations in new ways of identity crisis. Christopher Bigsby noted in *Modern American Drama* (2004) that the play is representative of the plan of action of the Civil Rights Movement for which the desegregation of housing, education, transportation and all major services were major concern. Thus, the play has been analyzed by most of the reviewers as the representative of Racial Discrimination and Loss of Black Identity due to White oppression and humiliation.

### **Discussion**

The play opens up with Langston Hughes poem *Dream Deferred* in epigraph which becomes a setting to ask multiple questions to be replied. The answers differ in range and variety as characters in the text are varied to show that how they are handling their dreams and situations. The poem poses questions about the aspiration of black people and suggests that Afro-American cannot dream of success because of the surrounding environment of suppression. If they do dare to dream their aspirations will end up in complete failure. The utopian goals of American Dream produced dystopia for African families saddled with the legacy of slavery that renders them second class citizenship in America, "seem like God didn't see fit to give the black man nothing but dreams (Hansberry, 1994, p.45). The play is about Black family living in poverty in dilapidated two-bedroom apartment on South side of Chicago. After demise of Mr. Younger, the family was about to meet their dreams and expectations by receiving insurance money of 10000\$ which supposed to bring happiness, affluence and security for future to achieve American Dream.

Each of the members of Younger family has dream to invest money. Mama, the matriarch of family dreams to own a house in White neighborhood to bring change and betterment by escaping ghettoized living, "I had about buying that house... making... little garden in the back" (Hansberry, 1994, p.45). Hansberry addressed in 1964 to American Academy that Lena Younger (mama) represents Negro Will to transcend to own home as a metaphor of identity. Walter Lee is Mama's son dreams of opening liquor store to achieve upward mobility to escape crippling inferiority to earn his manhood, "thinks big... invest big, gamble big..." (Hansberry, 1994, p.84). Beneatha was Mama's daughter dreams to utilize insurance amount for medical school tuition, "to be doctor and everybody better understand that" (p. 50). Ruth, Lee's wife dreams to say, "GOOD-BYE MISERY... I DON'T NEVER WANT TO SEE YOUR UGLY FACE AGAIN!" (Hansberry, 1994, p.94). The expectations and hopes of big achievement of every character derives out of their insecure position in society, Mama and Ruth were working as maids in home of White families and Walter was working on low paid job of chauffeur for a White man Ruth describes the living as, "work twenty hour a day in all kitchens in Chicago... Scrub all the floors in America... We got to MOVE... we get to get out of here" (Hansberry, 1994, p. 114). Hansberry used the word move to refer Black Civil Rights Movement to reform, and reconstruct societal order for Black Identity. Mama puts the down payment for the house in Clybourne Park in entirely White neighborhood while the rest of money Mama unwillingly gives to Walter. American Dream brings out the ideas of self-reliance and self-identity in every individual that became the basic reason for downfall of many individuals, Walter is one of them. Mama belongs to African history of horticulture and pastoralist people opposed the idea of liquor store because alcoholic drinks in African heritage is not considered as honorable job, "so you butchered up a dream of mine..." (Hansberry, 1994, p.95). In this way Mama remained attached to Hall's Cultural Identity and diasporic values to remember Africa as absent referential in her vision. She thought she belongs to rich African heritage that provided her roots and identity while Walter belongs to fluid part of American hybrid identity and culture to adapt, grow and nourish. The family moves

to home in Clybourne Park in order to get better environment and sound stability but in signifying present something comes to be repeated, relocated and translated in the name of systematized authority and racial demarcation.

The Association of Clybourne Park sends Karl Linder as representative of society to make a deal with Youngers to reimburse the payment by purchasing the house in order to evict the White surrounding, "our association is prepared through collective effort... to buy the house from you at financial game to your family" (Hansberry, 1994, p.118). Brandon Colas in *The Ghetto Trap* symbolizes Karl Linder to Bob Danning of Deerfield in 1959 and stated that Bob Danning denounced to deny the rights of Negroes to be settled on next door neighborhood to any White in America (2006, p. 1). American society places hypocritical plan of action that is a reason American dream differed for accessibility of a Black and White. Karl Linder is the mouthpiece of Bob Danning and White Racism, hostility and violence. Linder reminds to Walter their marginalized position in society; it is a matter of Clybourne Park... For the happiness of all concerned that our Negroes families are happier when they live in their own communities. (Hansberry, 1994, p.118). This is point of consideration and it reveals the true identity of colonizer as having tyrannical history of domination and authority over Blacks. According to Bhabha, "The objective of Colonial discourse is to construe a Colonized as population of degenerated types on the basis of racial origin in order to justify the conquest" (1994, p.107).

The stated statement is the pivotal reason of demarcation for creating sense of Unhomeliness and Displacement in the selected play while characters are staying at home (America). Walter is torn in-between (liminal space) of appearance and reality of radical Black Consciousness. First, he announces to take money from Linder being betrayed by William Harris (White) runs off with the amount 6500\$ Walter provided him for Liquor Store. He undergoes a dilemma to choose high sense of dignity or winning a fortune and gaining higher status by accepting offer of Karl Linder. Mama rejects his decision by saying, "from five generations of people... never let nobody pay 'em no money... a way to tell us we wasn't fit to walk the earth" (Hansberry, 1994, p.120). Hansberry puts her own aggressive voice and hopeful vision in character of Mama illuminated the interconnectedness of Collective assault and Black's effort to acknowledge full citizenship in America as a way to Black identity.

Bhabha defines Hybridity as, "new, neither the one nor the other" (1994, p.25). The pivotal percept of Bhabha's Hybridity is Unhomeliness (caught between two cultures to show mixed Ness). The desire of owning a part in foreign culture shaped Walter's state of mind, dreams and hopes for dislocated African Identity. Although the pride and dignity of being Black is deeply embedded in his consciousness, "what I mean is that we come from people who had a lot of pride" (Hansberry, 1994, p. 148). Bhabha says, "Culture should be marginalized for other to consolidate its power" (2013, p.12). All the characters in selected text undergoes the sense of Unhomeliness because their culture is counted to dominant other. Here Hall supported Bhabha by giving the perspective of American Presence. The America

became the land of multicultural, multilingual and multiracial sentiments. A land where heterogeneous myths collided, creolized and assimilated with each other. Beneatha is the main character with subject of assimilation to American culture. She is a Pragmatic African lady who wants to fulfill her dream of becoming doctor for which everyone in family is making sacrifice to send her school, "I'm just tired of hearing about God... What He has got to do with anything? Does He pay tuition?" (Hansberry, 1994, p.138). The conflict appeared between Mama's conservative and traditional African thought and Beneatha's Liberal American way of living in 1960s when Mama slaps her, makes her clear that God exists in her home. Mama played the role of bulwark for African legacy to support and protect in order to infuse these norms in psyche of her children. When Beneatha grieves of her dying dream making Walter responsible for it by calling her toothless rat Mama reminds her the lessons, values and morals she taught her. Beneatha informs Mama that she does not see any traces of humanity in Walter Lee and he is no more able to love. In respond Mama taught her, "there is always something left to love...it's when he's at his lowest and can't believe in himself" (Hansberry, 1994, p.139). Hansberry by stressing on these lines suggested unlovability towards Black being as inferior race is the root cause for Racial Segregation and exclusion from all Civil and Political rights. Walter Lee tried to make her understand the ways she adopted to attain American Dream is wrong, "Beneatha's (Assimilation) symbolizes "someone who is willing to... submerge to dominant" (Hansberry, 1994, p.112). Beneatha in respond says that the ways he wants to sale new home in Clybourne Park to Linder is another kind of assimilation in American Dream by selling one's dignity and desire. As she becomes more educated, it becomes harder for her to understand her family values. "I'm looking for my identity" (Hansberry, 1994, p.62). Her mutilated hair symbolizes Assimilation to American Culture trying to hide her African - Ness. In Nation and Narration Bhabha explains, "Interdisciplinary is the acknowledgement... Culture produced in ambivalent moment... Never simply harmonious addition of contents or context" (1994, p. 314). The characters in the play become stereotypical symbols of identity Crisis to reevaluate their selves. From beginning all characters are counter fighting to adapt Dominant culture or to change the native culture. Bhabha asserted that, "Hybridity a difference within a subject that inhabits the rim of in between reality" (1994, p. 13). Beneatha is too obsessed in living between reality needs revitalization in her character decides to go to Africa with Asagai to, "fix up the sick... make them whole again. This was truly being God" (Hansberry, 1994, p. 133). Walter Lee returned to realize his Black consciousness and rejected the demand and threats of Karl Linder. Mama moved to new house in new locality carrying a withering plant, highlighted a sense of Wretchedness and deterioration transferred to multi-generational experiences experiencing Systematic injustice and racism.

Hansberry in the play criticizes the false consciousness about American Dream for African family. The term African American itself is Hybrid term where all members of community can be both African and American. Therefore, home for Younger family becomes a Third Space where two extremes (Africa and America) can aptly meet and greet each other. The family presupposes that moving to White



neighborhood will change their status and identity however the idea ends in fiasco due to inherent resisting behavior of Whites. Hansberry in the opening pages of the text declares that the action of play sets in, “sometimes World War 11 and the present” (p. 1). Linking Interpersonal dynamics of Hansberry’s experiences to larger structural and institutional forms of injustice and racial discrimination in contemporary times is most glaring case of George Floyd. On 25th May 2020 Floyd got brutally assaulted by a Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin who knelt on his neck while he was handcuffed requesting for his life. Death triggered demonstrations, protest and Global unrest initiating the Black Lives Matter movement throughout world to show message of Black Consciousness and their solidarity. The movement was launched against institutional racism of police brutality and violence who supposed to serve and protect people regardless of their skin color. The entire African community in America was traumatized again and again in different facets of gut-wrenching incidents. According to Encyclopedia Britannica resources Barack Obama issued the statement over Floyd’s death that America is in need to be new normal that will end the legacy of bigotry and unequal treatment. President Bill Clinton stated that, Floyd’s death is recent amongst long listed sequence of injustice and painfully it reminds that individual’s race still predominates that how she/he will be treated in America. The binary power relations between Whites and Blacks since American Independence is fixed dilemma therefore need towards social justice is required. To sum up with Cheryl Higashida that Hansberry in *A Raisin in the Sun* calls for, “sighted eyes and feeling hearts” as the color of blood knows no bound it is red to every African and American (2008, p. 920).

## **Conclusion**

The basic research questions have been analyzed and evaluated thus research finally leads to conclusion that the dreams, hopes and fears of Younger family reflects universal appeal to desegregate the Racial Segregation in American ways of life. The play *A Raisin in the Sun* became the first African American achievement to represent unity, bravery and courage in standing up to insults, threats and violence against Whites discrimination. By applying theoretical framework of Bhabha’s Hybridity it is concluded that phenomenon of Identity Crisis in lives of African descents in America is emerged due to undeniable influence of American culture over Native traditions. Hansberry rebelled and claimed through *Raisin in the Sun* that Nostalgia of Vernacular Consciousness marked African American Literature with uniqueness and distinctiveness and African dreams are not deferred.

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