

(Re)Making of Identity: A Socio-Cultural Analysis of David Mamet's *American Buffalo*

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ABSTRACT: *This article delves into the assertion of identity in David Mamet's famous play American Buffalo. Mamet has revealed a rich variety of possible variations of identity in his creative opus, not only in the field of drama and theatre but also in the film, through the portrayal of a variety of different characters and situations. The identity will be discussed in his play as a unique cultural text outside of which there is nothing. America, its myths and contemporary cultural industry, its class, racial, and gender conflicts, and the author establish a mutual set of influences that help characters formulate their identities. By using Stuart Hall's idea of identity in flux, this qualitative research explores the effects of industrialization on psychology, the concept of success of the people, and their identity in general. The change from 'Who am I' to 'What do I have' is the concern of the American people in this post-modern era so it has been given special focus. To some extent, the identity of the characters, if it means material success in his plays, is linked with the American Dream. The research also aims at the means i.e. language, lies, maltreatment, double-crossing, and cheating, the Mametian characters adopt to formulate their identity. The analysis shows that if identity means material success, they never succeed in making their identity. They keep on making, remaking, and re-remaking their identity proving that identity in the world of Mamet is in flux.*

KEYWORDS: identity in flux, *American Buffalo*, qualitative, American Dream

INTRODUCTION

Born on November 30, 1947, David Alan Mamet is an eminent American playwright, director screenwriter, novelist, and essayist. The Theatre of Atlantic was founded by him, and he serves as one of the founding members. Before Eugene O'Neil (1888 -1953), drama was in critical condition. He gave it strong footing and Mamet gave it variety and multi-dimensions. There is no doubt that no significant work was produced in the field of drama in the first century after the independence of America. But today, American drama has playwrights like David Mamet who has given deep roots to American drama and theatre and presents the true picture of the art and culture of America.

Though Mamet writes fiction, screenplays, and story books for children too, his plays are the best medium to understand the philosophy he wants to convey to the readers. The themes of most of the plays are business and the concept of success with certain moral and spiritual loss. He depicts his characters striving to attain their national identity, no matter what it costs, most probably their friends. The characters in David Mamet's world are consumed by materialism and relentlessly pursue the mythical dream of success. The words of Christopher

William Edgar Bigsby (b. 1941) about *American Buffalo* (1975) can be taken as the true picture of the whole of his plays. In almost all the plays, Mamet shows his characters striving for worldly and material power. They do so by cheating and double-crossing their near ones without any prick of conscience. They endeavored for success and yearned to achieve apex in their business and related fields matches the notion of the American Dream. They steal in order to gain power, manipulate language to their advantage, and are willing to assert their identity in any way possible. The element of spirituality and morality, though non-existent, some indirect hints and a type of propaganda literature can be seen in his plays.

Mamet, having different perspectives in his plays, focuses on the crucial point of identity of the characters. They always seem to be trying to insert their identity in all possible ways: money, gender, race, or ethnicity. In the play *Glengarry Glen Ross* which is Pulitzer Prize-winner for David Mamet, first time premiered at the National Theatre, London in 1983, Shelly Levene adopts a Machiavellian way to achieve success as well as identity in a world where nothing but money and social status matters. The world of *Oleanna* (1992) is the world of words where the characters assert themselves through the use of language. The identity can also be found in the shape of the racial and gender slurs in *Sexual Perversity in Chicago*. The characters' names, particularly their nicknames, play a crucial role in establishing their identities. Common names include Bobby/Bob and Donny/Don.

The plays of David Mamet do not fall exclusively into a single category. There are elements of modernism as well as post-modernism in his plays. However, he may roughly be called a poetic realist or neo-realist. The pauses and broken sentences in his major plays are matchless. There is a type of density in the dialogues like the Absurdist, which gives new dimensions to his plays. Mostly it is the use of the words that tell the readers as well the audience in the theatre about the assertion of their identity which is never fixed and goes on changing with the changing circumstances.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Identity which is never stagnant is an important perspective of any man's personality that shows his/her worth in society. In fact, words and worldly success are means to get one's identity. The identification of God cannot be gained unless one knows about his own self and his own identity. It is a leading force that pushes a man toward action whether it is right or wrong. As far as identity in David Mamet's *American Buffalo* is concerned, it is always in flux, changing from one angle to another. Identity plays an important part in the life of a person as it constitutes certain characteristics of the person in society. The identity crisis in the post-modern era has raised major concerns about the psychological and behavioral aspects of the characters in *American Buffalo*. It is very important to demarcate the aspects of identity in order to understand the characters in different situations. Previous researchers have analyzed the plays of Mamet in a general way, extrapolating and comparing the damage to the souls of characters of different plays done by American business and the characters' endeavor to maintain that identity to comply with the social hierarchy built on that economic system. This research specifically endeavors to focus on the characters of the play *American*

Buffalo and try to dig out the real identity of the characters of the aforementioned play which is in flux. This study is important because it will contribute to further studies in the specific area of the doctrine of identity.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- To throw considerable light on the features of identity as it is supposed to be made by the American people.
- To highlight the different aspects of the identity of the characters of the play *American Buffalo*
- The research brings to the readers, why emphasizing one's identity becomes important in certain situations

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How do the characters of *American Buffalo* struggle to make and remake their identity?
2. What is the relevance of identity with the American Dream and capitalism?
3. How do the characters in the play of Mamet use unfair means and street language to make their identity?

LITERATURE REVIEW

In modern America, multiculturalism makes it difficult for both critics and the American people to define their identities in a comprehensive and concise way. It is obvious that any person residing in America can be referred to as American, regardless of differences in race and religion. Should both White and Black people be called American? Why are there differences in their ways of living and standards of life? These questions have been searching for a suitable answer for a long time, and they remain unanswered. Hence, the main concern is identity, whether asserted by groups or individuals in conflict, struggling to find a solution. Undoubtedly, literature is often created in rebellion and protest. Every old generation thinks it appropriate to influence the new generation which often rejects the old values and traditions of the past. The new generation of America, in a similar way, rejects the rules and laws set by the old generation, and the old generation, as well as the writers of contemporary America, seems reluctant to accept the overindulgence of the modern man in commercialization and materialism. The result is the conflict between the sense of self of the character and the role that he has to perform in his society. In this way, the above-mentioned conflict forces him to identify his true self/identity.

As the topic of identity in David Mamet's major plays is concerned, it has been dealt with by few known or unknown critics. However, some lovers of literature have explored the making of identity in some of his major plays. Identity plays a crucial role in David Mamet's works as it explores the boundaries of the American Dream. One should not get the impression that America does not have as many strong roots as England and English Literature has. So, the writers and the other people belonging to different departments of life, struggle hard to get their identity. Almost all the known writers in America have the theme of identity in their works. They seem to have the purpose of making people realize their worth and get the proper status in their lives. While many critics have analyzed the American Dream and

discussed the use of language in David Mamet's plays, none have thoroughly explored the theme of identity creation and re-creation present in his works.

The American Dream is a recurring theme in David Mamet's plays, especially *American Buffalo*. The dream is to secure an exceedingly successful life in a deluxe and luxurious way as well as having a family life which is serene. Werner (2002) deduces the resemblance of dreams of Teach and Donny Dubrow. According to Richard White, the two main characters in *American Buffalo* share a common desire for personal success. In American society, having money is crucial for achieving success in life. This is what happens when the negative aspects of the American Dream affect the lower middle class or the underclass. Teach knows that Donny dreams of having strong relationships with others. He takes advantage of Donny and demands both respect and money for his self. This situation continues and both pursue their dreams.

The two characters in the play *Oleanna*, depict the whole story of the education system of America and the freedom that is given to the students. In reviewing the play, Chris Westgate (1994) comments on the play that the theme of the play and the messages conveyed by the play were the subject of hot discussion before it was opened in Los Angeles. In the productions of Mamet and Pinter, the role of John was played by a white but in the Tiffany Theatre, a black- Smith was the main character which raised some racial issues too. However, whoever the male character is, white or black, he got his position after great labour. He got his identity and he was actually proud of getting the fruits of his efforts. It was difficult for him to award good marks to a group of students just because a leader of theirs is saying him so. Thus a group of students snatched from a man the reward of his labor of years to get their own identity.

Stephanie Tucker (1993) is in service at California State University. While commenting on the production of *Oleanna* in London, he is in all praises for the production of the play by Harold Pinter. He says that the play was not conceived well in the production by David Mamet but Pinter's production of the play unveiled the true theme and the true heart of the whole story. Tucker further says that the off-Broadway production of *Illy* marred the theme of the play and the play which can purely be termed as a tragedy becomes just a melodrama. Tucker very beautifully tells how the characters stress on their identities by showing their power and holding the space. The credit also goes to Pinter who arranged the whole scenario in a befitting and praiseworthy manner.

Savran (1990) points out the mystery of the self in David Mamet's plays. However, he believes that the characters are mostly male and the world presented in the plays is patriarchal. In this connection he says that the male characters have a strong desire to refer an authoritative masculine subject which refers to the idea that they do not give proper value to the female and try to assert their own selves to make their own identity.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Before delving into the post-structuralist methodology used in this article, it is important to understand identity from a different perspective. Only then will we be able to match the topic with the applied theory. Defining identity is challenging due to its multiple, contradictory dimensions. There have been various definitions of it provided by critics. These definitions are causing confusion for the readers instead of providing clarity. Additionally, one's identity is greatly influenced by their culture and geographical location. For the Eastern, it is related to the sense of a person for belonging to something while the Western it as hybrid and multiple. Different things like gender, race, ethnicity, class, nation and religion help us in shaping it. It is how we feel for ourselves and how the other people for us.

In the past, identity was believed to be unchanging and inflexible. However, in today's poststructuralist, postmodern, and globalized society, it is seen as multifaceted, evolving, and adaptable. It is now understood to be a characteristic of an individual that is shaped by societal influences and is constantly transforming over time. As society and culture are constantly changing, a person living within that society cannot have a fixed and inflexible identity. In fact, it is the name of a process that is all the time moving and changing from one shape to another, from one angle to another. From the poststructuralists' point of view, it is thought to be contextually driven and unstated which emerges with our interactions and discourse. It is not necessary that a person has only one identity rather he has identities and selves which are enough to prove that it is not predetermined.

The play of Mamet in this research is put under the lens of Stuart Hall's notion of identity. Hall (2015) in his influential essay *Cultural Identity and Diaspora* rejected the idea of identity as "eternally fixed in some past". He offered a more dynamic view of identity and placed it under the constant influence of "play of history culture and power". In this sense, identity is not something that is the production of some sources and has a complete shape rather identity is a kind of production that is always in process, never complete, and "constitutes from within, not outside of the representation". The research is qualitative. The research is to know about the different aspects of identity that the Mametian characters use to make and remake their identity. The primary sources for the dissertation have been the text books of his plays. The text books give apparent idea of something, so with the help of the obvious, hidden thoughts of the writer have been sorted out. The secondary sources include the print media and online critical material on the plays of David Mamet.

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

The history of identity is as long as the human history itself. However, it can roughly be divided into three stages. The first stage may be termed as the Platonic phase. In this phase, the identity was a matter of soul. The second phase as the Lockean phase focused on body as well as psychological elements. The third phase is the modern phase till date. It considers culture, society and psychology in the formation of identity. The present era, being multicultural and hence complicated, makes it almost impossible to give one single definition to the actual American identity. It is without any doubt that the Americans sing The Star Spangled Banner (the national anthem of America) and follow the rules set by government;

the people do not enjoy equality as their races are concerned hence they have to perform according to the treatment they receive from other people. Red Indians, Hispanics, Blacks and Whites all claim alike to be the Americans. Some of these races are oppressed whose representative writers have written literature which expresses their emotions, feelings, customs and traditions, and above all their identities.

This article throws light on the making and remaking of identity in David Mamet's play *American Buffalo*. The play seems to be a simple story of burglars. However, the writer fully throws light on the characters in the formation of their identity. They do not hesitate to pull legs of their friends to form a relationship for material gains. Foucault's idea of power is different from the conventional one. Traditionally it can be said that power is the ability to direct or influence the other person. It may be wealth or politics. But the idea of Foucault is new because its range is vast. According to him, power can be applied to sexual, racial, and societal relations unlike the belief of the other conventional theorists of power who think that it can affect only some specific class or field. Moreover, he does not consider power as a negative force as he believes that it changes hands from one person to another. Jana Swicki (b. 1952) in her book *Disciplining Foucault: Feminism, Power and the Body* (1991) states conflict gives birth to the use of power. It forces a man to take action against others when there is some purpose behind it (p 25). Danny's junk shop, in *American Buffalo* is not a simple metaphor that can be interpreted only in one way. It has many sides. Leslie Kane, a renowned critic on David Mamet describes it as a home where the reader can find parent-son relationship between Danny and Bobby. It stands not for junk shop only but for the whole business. There can be found some kind of conflict among all three characters in one way or the other. This conflict as mentioned in the above written quotation becomes the cause of the assertion of power. The conflict arises when all the characters do not realize the separateness of friendship and profession and mix up both the things. Hence, the conflict arises which forces them to show their power and in this way they are compelled to attest their identity and save their individuality.

The given title, *American Buffalo*, can in no way be ignored. The title of the play in no sense can be ignored to get to know the whole meaning of the play. *Buffalo* catches our attention as it is an animal as well as has the meaning "pressure" or "intimidate". Donny's junk store is the symbol of the marginal position of the characters in American society because all the things in the shop are old and outdated, sold by the people as useless for them. Don, Teach and Bobby all are marginalized. The first is the owner of the store, the second's profession and way of earning has not been mentioned and the third, a drug addict, is like a member of the family. All of them have no worth in real society and are trying to find some means and ways to reestablish their true worth and identities in the society they are living in. With the progress of the play it is noticed that these marginalized characters having self-respect and ego, try to show their power over the other. Mametian characters hide the workings of their minds. They never show what they hide in their sleeves. It happens off and on in his plays that they desire for faithful relationship in the guise of suspicion. Thus, knowing the

background of the characters as well as of the play is a must to know their inner thoughts. It goes without saying that for them friendship is business and business is friendship.

As the play progresses, it is to be noticed that these marginalized characters having self-respect and ego, try to show their power over the other marginalized creature i.e. women. It is important that no woman appears on the stage. The two women Ruthie and Grace are only talked about and discussed. However, it can also be seen clearly that they have a lot of effect on the male characters. Hall is quite right when he says about the women in Mamet's play that "Mamet's women are not only "mirror...[or] object of male desire; they have access to a revolutionary method which violates the dialectic designs of their male oppressors" (p 139).

American Buffalo deals with power and with the help of this power the characters, especially Don and Teach, want to put their identities in place of the others. Both the above mentioned characters know that once the power gained should not be let lose for the opponent to capture it. Both of them want to dominate instead of being dominated. When Teach has upper hand he decides to take his pistol with him. He wants to kick off Bob. Even he does not agree to have the company of Fletcher for this purpose. The case of Don is also the same. They do not care about the law or any institution which can be a threat to them. All the time they just think about their commercial gains for which they are ready to sacrifice their self-identities. For them, the action of stealing the buffalo head nickel from the customer is not something unlawful as the terminology they use for the theft is purely related to business affairs like 'job', 'business', and 'thing'.

Bob plays an important role in *American Buffalo*. He and Walter Cole want to accompany Donny in burglary. Though Bob is in his teens, he is drug addicted. Donny feels like a father for Bob. When the play opens, we see him Donny giving some instructions to the boy. Teach is in dire need of money as he has lost all his money, whatever he had in his pockets. He does not want to be mistrusted in the eyes of Donny. Both the character, Bob and Teach, strive their best to have strong relationship with Donny. They do so not for the sake of relationship but for their survival and their identity.

All the major characters in the play are petty burglars. They give least importance to the law and law abiding institution. It seems that money is everything for them and they can go to any extent in getting it. Teach, after knowing Fletcher is hospitalized, says very pathetically that no law exists here and there is no friendship in any "Fucking Thing" (Act II. P 103). It becomes interesting statement as a few moments ago he was talking about the robbery. In fact, it is socio-economic condition of the country that forces him to take U turn and act according to the situation.

Nadel commenting on the above lines says that Mamet's characters are inflated. They are pseudo heroes. They are the victim of self deceit. When they are disillusioned, the whole morals of theirs change as Walter Cole is ready to make the junk shop as debris (p 29). He

laments over the absence of law but he himself did not care about its presence. He first thinks like a person living in a society where there is none to ask him anything about the burglary. Even he is ready though to go without Fletcher, it is Don who does not agree with him in this context. No reader can forget his kicking out Bob from the robbery for his own benefits assertion of his own self in the whole situation.

On the other hand, Don does not care about his gopher with whom he had committed the partnership. He leaves him for his own benefits. Betrayal and cheating in the world of American business are nothing to be taken as serious in the world of *American Buffalo* as everyone is cheating everyone else. Power and identity are in fact interrelated in this play. The words of Don are very meaningful in this context. He says to Bob that actions speak louder than words (Act I. p 2).

Anne Dean in the introduction of her book, *David Mamet: Language as Dramatic Action* (1990) is very important and relevant here. She writes that in the plays of David Mamet, words are actions. The characters formally do not involve in any action. The whole action is in the form of discourse (p 33). This is the method that Teach uses in his relationship with Don. He controls him through words and does not let him be angry. In this context he says, “Bad feelings, misunderstandings happen on job” (*American Buffalo*, p 45). This method of exhibiting his so called knowledge tells about his nature that is egoistic as well as his struggle for identity. Anne Dean (1990) is quite right when concerning this aspect of Teach, she states that he, “can apparently conduct all the affairs in his life by means of speech alone; he can coerce and intimidate wheedle and confuse... he is linguistically so versatile that he constantly enmeshes other into his fantasies (p 100). He himself knows it as he says:

Teach: ...One thing. Makes all the difference in the world.

Don: What?

Teach: Knowing what the fuck you're talking about. And it's so rare. Don. So rare. (Act II. p 49)

But later he says, “nobody is perfect” (Act II. p 50) and it is quite appropriate to show that his show of all knowing is fake and hollow and he has yet to leave the world of words to enter into the world of action to prove his self.

The financial position which plays an important role in making the identity of a person in a capitalist society is very important. A society that fully focuses on wealth and material things only, the way of pursuing the material objects should be made known. But it is quite strange, possibly Mamet does so intentionally, that we do not know the earning source of Teach- a main character in the play. Bob is also a recovering junkie who has yet to hold his position in this biting and venomous world of greed and avarice. Only Donny Dubrow holds some

business even that is of no importance, at least in the play as he does not seem to be selling anything. So it can rightly be judged as true that all the characters in the play are just identity-less but a quest for identity can be seen in them.

The matter of the coin is a type of battlefield not only for Donny Dubrow and the buyer of the coin but also between Don and Walter Cole. There are two sides to the conflict as the whole matter between the two is concerned. First is the difference of opinion in business and personal relations, second it is the problem of domination and upper hand in fulfilling the business task: theft of the coin. Though both of them want to steal the coin, they are trapped in the net of dominator and dominated. The discussion between the two proves that power is a thing that produces new ways as well as it is unstable. It becomes a means for the people to assert their identity and show the intentions of the planners and followers. The conflict between the two major characters is the problem of business and pleasure. Friendship is also considered equal to pleasure. Teach considers both the things separate. But in some corner of his heart, he has the intention to get the position of the gopher, Bob, in the scheme of robbery. Along with it, he also wants to get a suitable position in the heart of Donny. When Teach comes into the shop, Don does not reveal him the plan of robbery. But when Teach asks him again and again forcibly in different questions, he lets him know the exact plan. For Teach, to be the member of the party of the theft is very important. He enters into the shop empty pockets. When he comes to know about the plan, he at once finds it an appropriate chance to fill his empty wallet. For this purpose he needs to minimize the partners in the deal so that he could get the maximum benefit out of all the action of theft. So he plans to establish his own confidence and shake the confidence of Don in his apprentice. On the other hand, Don resists the plan of Teach as he likes Bob and has parental type of affection for him. It forces Teach to use his charlatan attitude and he confuses Don with his confused idea by apologizing and making it clear to Don that he is not unclear to mix up business and pleasure. (Act I. p34)

From the whole discussion above, it can be inferred that Teach is questing for his identity as a teacher along with getting the upper hand on Don. But Don is not a jelly to be moulded and twisted so easily. He knows that for his own identity his domination is a must. That is why he resists the ideas of Teach by stressing on the importance of friendship and loyalty over financial benefits. However, when Teach thinks that he has influenced Don and has now upper hand in the process of theft, the tone of Teach changes.

Teach: The shot. I go, I go in... I bring the stuff back (or wherever...)

Pause.

Don: And what do I do?

Teach: You mind the fort. (I. p 31)

Teach almost succeeds in trapping Don but when the latter comes to know his least physical activity and importance in the robbery, he suddenly realizes that he has been subordinated in the whole scheme of theft. So to assert his identity, he at once rejects the plan or Teach' intended trap.

Don: Here?

Teach: Well, yeah... this is the fort.

.....
Don: Well, hold on a second. I mean, we're still talking.

Teach: I'm sorry. I thought we were done talking.

Don: No. (Act I. p 36-37)

With the progress of the discussion, Donny Dubrow suddenly realizes that his role in the whole business of robbery is passive one and that he has been cornered by Teach, he at once rejects the plan of his so-called friend. If it had only been the case of getting back the coin, he might have accepted it. But here the matter is of self, self-assertion, being power showing and be the subordinate. That is why he does not agree with Teach in this regard. In fact, he comes to know about the plan of Teach and does not fall into his trap completely though he let him take the place of Bob in the deal.

When Teach takes his place, he tries to push himself above Donny in the matter of taking decisions. However, the latter smells the rat and plays some other game. He very wisely and not without reason, is dissatisfied with the plan of Teach as the breaking into the house is concerned. Don has yet another coin in his pocket. He throws the idea to call the "standup guy" i.e. Fletcher into the plan. With the arrival of Fletcher into "the business", the margin of profit of Teach will be lessened and his self-importance will also be decreased. That's why he says to Don that they should leave Fletcher too as they have left his gopher. He starts educating Don once again. But Don has the effect of the former "education" of Teach and hence wants to have business based relationship only with Teach as well as with Fletcher. Teach very cunningly says to Don that Bob and Fletcher have conspired against Don. He needs to show his loyalty to Don. In this connection, he says that he separates business from friendship. (Act II. p83). The readers are very much clear that he is a charlatan figure in the play. Douglas rightly comments on his character with the words, "When Mamet's charlatan says "business" or "loyalty" or even "senny-nine," he know less of his subject than of his desire" (p 49).

One is shocked by the words of Teach. Previously he stressed on the business-based relationship only. Now suddenly he puts forward his friendship to get the sole partnership with Don. He does not care that he is contradicting his own ideas. Either he thinks others fool that Don will not come to know the contradiction of his ideas or he himself has got out of his mind for not getting the results he wants to obtain. In either case, he is a man who wants to be the man of sole importance in the eyes of Don. He can go to any extent for this purpose. Because it is the matter of his self, self-esteem and his financial issues which are the base of identity in American society.

Mathew Roudane gives the reference of an interview of Mamet to John Lahr in his article "Betrayal and friendship: David Mamet's *American Buffalo*" which appears in *Cambridge Companion to David Mamet*. When asked where from he got the idea of writing *American Buffalo*, Mamet replied that during his stay in Chicago, he came across Macy to have some

gossips on play equipment. Mamet found some cheese in the fridge and started eating it. Macy came in and asked him “Hey, help yourself”. Mamet fumed and went away. Years later, when he became a writer and he came at the point when Teach enters the stage in an angry mood because there was someone who had asked him, “help yourself.” (p 65)

So we see that when first time Teach appears on the stage, he tells the story of Ruthie who said to him “help yourself” related to a piece of toast (p 8). On behalf of this harmless remark he uses the words for his friend as, ‘a Southern bulldyke asshole ingrate of a vicious nowhere cunt’ (p 9). He further says that she hurt “me in a way I don’t know what the fuck to do” (p 9). This remark having a U turn relation with a friend from a man on a petty issue is enough to tell about his self and true fragile nature.

David Mamet is often blamed for the absence of female characters from his plays. His Obie winner play *Glengarry Glen Ross* and *American Buffalo* are devoid of female characters. There is not even a single woman who appears on the stage for a short span of time. But the role of women is not absent in the world of Mamet. In *Glengarry Glen Ross* though Mrs. Link is only discussed and does not happen to be on the stage, her role in the play is very influential. Same is the case with the two female characters Grace and Ruthie. They are off stage but always present in the minds of the main characters especially Teach who has been beaten by them last night in the poker game at the riverside. They do not seem to be real characters but just shadows. Teach is a loser. However, he thinks that the only way to get the upper hand over them is to abuse them. That’s why when he appears on the stage, the first words he speaks are, “Fuckin’ Ruthie, Fuckin’ Ruthie, Fuckin’ Ruthie, Fuckin’ Ruthie, Fuckin’ Ruthie” (p 08). This repetition of phrase is enough to show his disloyalty to his friends. He is ingratitude and cannot accept his defeat, especially from women as he considers them somewhat lower than men. But his act of abusing them in anger makes it clear to the readers that these two women have dominance over him. To emphasize on his self, he makes Don and Bob believe that she is not a good play. In this connection he says,

“She is not a good card player, Don. She is a mooch and she is a locksmith and she plays like a woman.

Pause. Fletcher’s a card player, I’ll give him that.

But *Ruthie*... I mean, you see how she fucking plays...” (Act I. p 12)

By mentioning the gender of Ruthie, he shares the idea that he is a man and thus superior to woman. He speaks in such a manner which shows identity is also related to sex and that masculine gender is better and more powerful than the feminine one. But the reality cannot be denied that he was “fucked” last night by Ruthie and Grace- two lower creatures in the eyes of Teach. Moreover, it is they who inform Don about the wounded Fletcher who is in hospital. It makes clear for the readers that the focus of the writer is on women too as Teach and Don do not believe the story of Fletcher being in hospital when it was told by a male-Bob but on Ruthie and Grace-the two women. The women in Mamet’s plays, thus, might have minor or no active role, they always have some importance and their absence is in fact deceiving. They have always their identity in one way or the other.

Ruby Cohn, a famous critic on David Mamet says that it is speech that gives power to the characters of the plays of Mamet and their silence is their defeat (p 63). Undoubtedly, this is an adept remark as the readers of his plays can find uncountable examples from his plays.

However, Bob in *American Buffalo* does not fall in this category. Though he remains silent most of the time and seems to be a passive listener, he clutches the attention of the two major characters. He overcomes and puts stress on his identity by being silent. By being silent, he has the upper hand on Teach and Don at the end of the play. The active characters teach him to face the hardships of life and make his identity in the life lying ahead, but he already knows a lot. He does not seem at some points of the play as the member of the “business”, actually a crime. This “business” is nothing but a means to get power and identity. He is deceived by his owner even. They feel themselves being deceived by Bob. Hence, they consider it their right to double cross him. They do not hesitate to use physical as well as psychological violence against him. The end of the play makes the things clear. The lie of Bob was, in fact, the savior of the two major and seasoned characters. It is only he who does not care about the material gains a lot, rather friendship and relationship are his priority. Bob is a foil to Teach. It is Teach who does not get anything at the end of the play. All his words for corrupting the mind of Don and instructing the innocent mind of Bob go waste. Bob wins the heart of Don and he does so not by his talks but by the value that he gives to friendship. Thus the table turns at the end of the play and the position of the bottom and top changes. American society gives much value to American Dream though it, sometimes, seems to be a myth. It is related the success of a peaceful family life and fulfill the social needs. There was a time when people used planning and intelligence to gain all the above-mentioned things in their lives. But the conspirators in *American Buffalo* amazingly use these qualities for the sake of negative and evil purpose of robbing someone out of his possession. The dialogue between Teach and Don is interesting in this regard.

Teach: Somebody watch for the cops... work out a signal.

Don: Yeah.

Teach: Safety in numbers.

Don: Yeah.

Teach: Three men job.

Don: Yeah.

Teach: A division of labour. Pause. Security. Muscle. Intelligence. Huh?

Don: Yeah. (Act II. p 52)

If we believe the words of Walter Cole true that they are cavemen, it becomes evident that he along with his two characters is leading a life devoid of any civility and mannerism. Then America becomes a country that is not the pride of the natives. But if we try to ponder over the words and the idea stated in the previous lines, it becomes crystal clear that the new business world of America is nothing more than the world of the people of the Stone Age. The time when ‘might is right’ used to be the only rule. The same can be seen in today’s America as has been truthfully presented by David Mamet in *American Buffalo* through these three characters. No one cares about others. They just harp on their own flute. They, like cavemen, are just trying to strive for their survival. This is what they are and this is what their real identity is. Their identity is nothing more than the worm which sucks the blood of other beings for its life. The same is done by all the characters whether he is a seasoned man like Walter Cole, Donny Dubrow or a young one like Bobby. The setting of *American Buffalo* is more than significant. It is a junk shop whose owner keeps thrown, used and extra things. It is situated at the South Side of Chicago. The goods present there were collected from the Great

Depression and the 1933 Chicago World's Fair. Only those things which have no use for the people of today are kept there. But it never does mean that they never had any importance. They might have been of supreme value for the possessor in some bygone days. But after seeing them, one can only guess the usage and worth of those things which could have been in some past time. Moreover, the setting of the junk store makes it clear that the things for the characters of the play are very valuable. For them, relations and friendship have no importance. Now friendship and relations are something abstract things while material things symbolized by junk shop are material. For the modern American man everything that is material is worthy to be achieved, not the abstract like virtue, societal relation and loyalty. The same is the case with the people and especially with the characters of the play. They have no worth and value. The junk shop can be taken as the condition of contemporary America. No doubt the Americans once had glory which has disappeared now from them. It might have happened after the depression age which wiped away with it all the glory and respect for the people. Now America is no more a place of opportunities and promises. The men with high identity of being American are gone and now only those people who are prey to hopelessness and depression are wandering in America. They just are proud of their glorious past but as they themselves are concerned, they are nothing but like an article in the junkshop- useless, unworthy and of no use and the land they are living in is like a junkshop. As a proof of this idea, it can be judged that during the whole play Donny Dubrow does not sell a single thing and the only thing he sold before the opening of the play, wants to get it back.

CONCLUSION

American Buffalo has a cyclic plot like the plays of Samuel Beckett. The plot ends from where it began. The characters plan for a robbery that never takes place till the end. Their thoughts and evil planning remain the same without any action. There is only one positive change and that is in the character of Donny who comes to know the true value of his relation. It is only his tree of identity that gets some fresh water to be bloomed and blossomed. For the other characters, there is no change in their fortunes. Their identity is cyclic, it ends from where it begins. They do not get anything socially and financially, if that is the tool for one's identity. They manipulate, cheat and tell a lie for the assertion of their identity giving least importance to spirituality. Mamet's characters are very tragic in the sense that some of them seem to be successful and confident, but in reality they are zero. They happen to live in a society that is stone-hearted and soulless. They cannot make their identity if they do not crush the other at the cost of humanity. Levene cannot be on the board if he does not steal; Bernie cannot regain the friendship of Danny if he does not persuade him to leave Deborah; Carol cannot get good grade if she does not suppress John; and Karen cannot get into the world of Hollywood if she does not push Fox's idea of a buddy film away. They are bound to act as they do because it is the only way for them to make and remake their identities. They cheat, lie and double-cross to get the world of Mammon. However, in their efforts they lose the moral and spiritual identities which have to be explored by the future researchers.

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