

Communal Concerns in Mahesh Dattani's *Final Solutions*

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Abstract

Mahesh Dattani's *Final Solutions*, first staged in Bangalore in 1993, focuses on the problems of communal disharmony between the Hindus and Muslims in India, especially during the riots in the post-partition period. While tracing the communal disharmony, Dattani tries to make a balancing of certain elements responsible, both in Hindus and Muslims. Paid people cause riots or politicians play with the emotions of people of both communities on certain Key issues. The chorus, in the play, is embodiment of mental and emotional upheaval of both the communities. The message of the play is loud and clear: The perpetrators should not be allowed, at any cost, to disrupt harmony and Kill innocent people. Moreover, a self-analysis and introspection may be helpful in minimizing our anger and hatred for each other.

Keywords: Communal, Disharmony, Post-Partition, Shelter, Riot, Holocaust, Embodiment, Upheaval, perpetrators, Introspection.

Mahesh Dattani won the Sahitya Akadami award in 1998 for his book of plays *Final Solutions and other Plays (1994)*, thus becoming the first Indian playwright to win this prestigious award. Dattani's *Final Solutions* which deals with religious, communal and political issues was first staged in Bangalore in 1993. It focuses on the problems of communal disharmony between Hindus and Muslims in India, especially during the riots in the post-partition period. The Sordid aspect of this communal and political acrimony prevails till today and we are paying heavy prices for that. Besides, the play also deals with the theme of transferred resentments, in the context of family and society. The analysis of the cause of friction, between the two communities, offered by Dattani carries a lot of conviction as alyque Padamsee says in the note on the play: "The demons of communal hatred are not out in the street.... they are lurking inside ourselves."¹

In the Indian context, the word 'communalism' is almost often used in a negative and derogatory sense. In Indian usage, communalism is defined as 'secular conflict between two

religious communities' or it can also be defined as "an attempt to achieve secular goals through religious means."² Communalism is often perceived as the phenomenon of antagonism between two or more than two communities. It also implies a reactionary social outlook. It is an ideology that pits one religion against another, highlighting their religious and cultural distinctions. It has also come to be closely linked with Indian socio-political evolution and is considered to be negative phenomenon having disastrous socio-economic, cultural and political consequences. It has also emerged as a major hindrance in the way of India becoming a secular and democratic nation in the real sense. It implies thinking and acting in a manner based on a narrow religious and sectarian viewpoints, rather than on broader national and societal interests.

As pointed earlier, *Final Solutions* is the only political play written by Mahesh Dattani so far. Javed and Babban are two muslim boys who take shelter in the house of a Hindu businessman named Ramnik Gandhi while there are communal riots in the streets. During their conversation we come to know about Ramnik's confessions that his father and grandfather had burnt down the shop of a rival Muslim businessman in a communal riot forty years ago. Ramnik's mother, Hardika, also brings to her mind the bitter experiences of partition and how both Hindus and Muslims suffered in the fire of communal massacre. Hardika carries resentments for her in-laws and her community, as she has been maltreated and oppressed in the worst traditions of Hindu joint-family. Moreover, Ramnik's daughter Smita feels repressed at home when she responds to her mother:

"Aruna: Does being a Hindu Stifle you?
Smita: No, living with one does."³

Interestingly enough, Smita sees a lot of wrong with the way Aruna lives her life. Besides, Aruna's husband is also on the disapproving side. He has an exchange of hot words with Javed but neither of them is much wiser as a result. Outwardly, the play focuses on the Hindu-Muslim classes but inwardly it carries a lot of mutual distrust and doubts amongst the family members. Bobby /Babban tries to defuse the tensed conversation between Ramnik and Javed all the time. Smita already knows Javed and Bobby when they take shelter after being chased by the mob outside. She knows Javed's sister Tasneem and also knows what Javed does. This is one thread of plot; the other is about the shop that was burnt down which generates a feeling of guilt in the mind of Ramnik Gandhi. Smita has her own resentments as she would not like her father to use Aruna's ways as a means of suppressing her though dominance.

Undoubtedly, anger has harmful effects on our mind, body and soul. Sometimes it can lead to violence and can also ruin our personal and social relationships. When we are angry, we try to give a vent to our anger on somebody closest to us. This is a general human tendency to pass our resentment on others. Alyque Padamsee writes in the note on the play *Final Solution*:

“As I see it, this is play about transferred resentments. About looking for a scapegoat to hit out at when we feel let down, humiliated. Taking out anger on your wife, children or servants is an old Indian custom”.⁴

Most of the characters in this play remind us that exacerbated spurts induce chain reactions. The play starts with Daksha reading something from her diary. Daksha who is infact, Hardika, often seen as a 15-year-old on stage, thinks:

“I am just a young girl who does not matter to anyone outside her home. May be I should talk about more important things. Like last year, in August, a most terrible thing happened in our country. We... (tries hard to read her handwriting) ...gained independence” (F.S. P.166).

Now Daksha closes her diary and Hardika, the grandmother of Gandhis, appears on the stage and speaks: “After forty years... I opened my diary again. As I wrote. A dozen pages before. A dozen pages now. A young girl’s childish scribble. An old woman’s shaky scrawl. Yes, things have not changed much” (F.S. P.167). Partition of India leading to hatred and Paranoia amongst the Hindus and Muslims is reflected in Daksha’s words. She is not able to digest such disgust as she is a close friend of Zarine, a Muslim girl. The violence which took place during the period hits hard all the characters in the play. Ironically speaking the idol of Lord Krishna to which Daksha clings seems to her just ‘a painted doll’ due to fear of being chased and attacked.

When Ramnik Gandhi gives shelter to the two Muslim boys - Javed and Bobby, his mother objects. She feels uncomfortable and insecure in the company of these boys as she says “Where were our own people when we needed them?” (F.S. P.191). Her father was killed in Hussainabad, soon after the partition of the country. She further comments:

“That night I couldn’t sleep. I listened I was angry, that Ramnik was blinded by his ideals. Why did he offer that boy a job in our shop? What was he doing? How did he know they were innocent? Couldn’t he see there was more violence in that boy’s eyes than those stone throwers’ threats? He was not just saving two from getting killed. This was something else Ramnik was trying to do” (F.S. P.191).

The difference between Ramnik and Aruna is that Ramnik tries to suppress prejudice while Aruna articulates it clearly. Tolerance followed by prejudice becomes dull and boring virtue. Alyque Padamsee rightly remarks in, a note on the play, Final Solutions.: “Can we shake off our prejudices or are they in our psyche like our genes? Will we ever be free or ever-locked

in combat...Arabs against Jews, Whites against blacks, Hindus against Muslims? Are they any final solutions?"⁵ His family had burnt down the shop of Zarine's father in the name of communal – riots. Later on they bought it on cheaper rates. But he is sensitive enough to consider Javed as representative of those who were wronged by their forefathers. When Ramnik comes to know that Javed is one of those who were brought to Amargaon to participate in communal violence, he could not help himself blaming him:

“Ramnik: Why do you distrust us?
 Javed: Do you trust us?
 Ramnik: I don't go around throwing stones!
 Javed: But you do something more violent.
 You provoke! You make me throw stones!
 Everytime I look at you my bile rises!
 Ramnik (angrily): Now you are provoking me!
 How dare you blame your violence on other people?” (F.S. P.198).

Javed feels that he belongs to a minority. He makes Ramnik realize that he is not as liberal as he pretends to be. Javed is intelligent enough to understand the double standards of Ramnik. Moreover, had Ramnik not been guilty, he would not have given shelter to the two Muslim boys, which is his humanitarian aspect. While on the other hand, Javed is a radical Muslim and it is his belief in aggressive Islam which has led him to the path of violence. The following dialogue from the text will help the argument:

“Ramnik: What did you get out of it?
 Javed: I believed it was a cause for my people.
 Ramnik: How much did they pay you?
 Javed: Thousands! I got thousands, Lakhs for doing it!
 Are you satisfied? That is what you want to hear!” (F.S. P.197).

The climax of the play comes in Act-III, When Bobby picks up the idol of Lord Krishna from the pooja room of the Gandhis. He holds it in his hand. He least bothers the cries of Aruna who says - if there is nothing left that is sacred in this world? Without bothering even about the anger of the mob, Bobby here, stands for humanitarism. It also reflects his broader view of the religion, which is also the need of the time, when he says:

“See Javed! He does not humiliate you. He does not cringe from my touch. He welcomes the warmth of my hand. He feels me. And He welcomes it! I hold Him who is sacred to them” (F.S. P.224).

Although Mahesh Dattani does not give any final solution to these communal concerns yet what is said by Bobby, perhaps, can be taken as the final solution to Contemporary communal and religious tensions. We can try to understand, believe, forget and tolerate. Solutions if any, are embedded in the text which the readers will have to deconstruct. Bobby further says: “If we understand and believe in one another, nothing can be destroyed. And if you are willing to forget. I am willing to tolerate” (F.S. P.225). Ramnik reveals that they did not burn the shop only for communal reasons but for economic ones. These words mark the culmination of self-realization in Ramnik which is a must for creating order, peace and harmony between two communities.

Moreover, self-realization on the part of Ramnik suggests the futility of non-violence. Born of mutual distrust and nurtured by vested political and economic interests, communalism is a bane to any civilised society. While tracing the malady of communal disharmony, Dattani tries to make a balancing of certain elements responsible in both the communities. Only the nectar of reaching out and understanding the others’ point of view can perhaps, wash out the rancour and hatred so deeply embedded in our hearts. Only the balm of understanding can soothe the frayed nerves. Ramnik and Bobby, after a turmoiled introspection, come to realize this aspect, even if hesitatingly, though other characters in the play are still groping not finding any ray in the utter darkness of the tunnels of their diseased minds. However, in this desperate scenario, Ramnik and Bobby and even Smita present a ray of hope making us realize that there is, after all, a dawn even after the longest and the darkest night. In this sense, *Final Solutions* is a play of awareness and hope and- hope sustains life.

References/Endnotes:

1. Alyque Padamsee, “A Note on the Play”, *Final Solutions* in Mahesh Dattani’s *Collected Plays* (New Delhi: Penguin, 2000), P.161.
2. Asghar Ali Engineer, “Religious Fanaticism and Communalism,” *Economic and Political Weekly*, April, 1995, P.9.
3. Mahesh Dattani, *Final Solutions in Collected Plays*, P.211. All subsequent references to the text of this Play are from the same edition with relevant page numbers given with in parentheses immediately after the quotation.
4. Padamsee, P.161.
5. Padamsee, P.161.