

**Aestheticization Of Communal Violence in Mahesh Dattani's Plays
"Final Solutions" and
"Where Did I Leave My Purdah?"**

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Abstract

When we discuss about Indian Drama written in English, the great luminary who stands at its centre-stage is none other than Mahesh Dattani. As one of the doyens of the Indian Drama in English, he has been whetting the research appetite of many a scholar like me. He belongs to the tradition of those Indian playwrights who expressed their views on human life relating to numerous social, political and cultural evils and maladies. In this regard, this paper is an attempt to critically look at the Dattanian aestheticization of communal violence demystified in his plays "Final Solutions" and "Where did I leave my purdah". Despite his focus on communal violence, along with its luridities, Dattani has never been a dysthymiac. In the contrary, he has been a staunch crusader of communal harmony, communal amity, and holistic growth of humanity. That is why, it is more logical to call him an integrationist with unclouded harmonious vision. Essentially, this paper aims to show how in his plays like "Final Solutions" and "Where did I leave my purdah?", Dattani has chanted the "mantra" of peaceful coexistence, even in the midst of the drone made by the vultures of communal violence.

Keywords: Mahesh Dattani, violence, communal violence, harmony, coexistence.

Introduction:

Unfortunately, violence happens to be the most familiar word in our everyday life. But it becomes very difficult to define it, as it is not limited to a particular area, person, caste, creed, colour, class, gender and to specific causes. Violence is a broad term that generally refers to deliberate conduct or behaviour which causes or intends to cause injury to people. Violence is not containable. It overflows its supposed constraints. We have noticed how in our societies there are many forms of violence. The different kinds of violence that can be marked under the umbrella term "violence" are societal

violence, political violence, somatic violence/ physical violence, sexual violence, psychological violence, and sacral/ spiritual violence. Under the category of political violence, one can put such kinds of violence as communal violence, civil violence, riot, anarchy, and war / genocide.

Communal Violence:

Communal violence is essentially impersonal, collective and ethnic/ tribal. So it includes inter-community conflicts, riots and demonstrations involving communities of diverse religion groups, sects, tribes and ethnic groups. That is why violent civil unrest, minoritarian unrest, racial strife, inter-communal fracas and ethno-religious violence, and mob-frenzy come within the range and domain of communal violence. In the opinion of scholars like Colm Campbell, Kimuli Kahara, D. L. Horowitz, G. Kynoch and L. Mancini, communal violence is principally caused because of degradation of rule of law, radicalization of anger among one or more communities, violent mobilization, and discriminatory application of jurisprudence, ethnic segregation and widespread mistrust among communities. So communal violence/ ethnic violence/ non-state conflicts/ mass violence/ social-inter-communal violence/ ethno-religious violence/ massacre/ sectarian violence is the outcome of people's aggressive denunciation of and reaction to horizontal inequality. Hence communal violence is a type of organized violence/ crime and hence a type of group violence. With reference to the brief meta-critical analysis of communal violence just actualized, it is proposed to study how Dattani has trans-scripted communal violence in "Final Solutions" and "Where did I leave my purdah?"

Communal Violence in "Final Solutions": A Demystificatory Study

Dattani scholars like Beena Agarawal, Asha Kuthari Chaudhury, Tutun Mukherjee, E. Ali, Gautam Sen, Ibrahim Khalilulla, Bipin Parmar and R. K. Dhawan have studied *Final Solutions* from the perspective of communal violence. Carrying forward the discursive analysis, Alyque Padamsee has studied *Final Solutions* from the perspective of "transferred resentment" (161). Yet "Final Solutions" is immensely amenable to an analysis from the perspectives of communal disharmony, religious fanaticism, sectarian intolerance, communal distrust and group violence. In this play, one can notice how acts of violence on communal lines can disturb the audience. The violent act is narrated by Javed as follows:

...I saw the poojari ringing a bell! There was chaos all around. I saw the poojari's frightened face...And I watched men, fighting, distorted face not making a sound. And I watched someone pick up the knife and pierce the poojari...The poojari fell on the ground... (*Collected Plays*208)

Here we notice how the *poojari* is pierced with the knife. This can be called the "theatre of cruelty", as it is clearly a disturbing act of violence on display.

In this play, Hardika and Ramnik represent two different schools of responses to the communal divide or drift between the Hindus and the Muslims in India. Hardika is critical of the mob frenzy of the Muslims, whereas Ramnik, as a large-hearted and broad-minded humanist, is sympathetic towards the Muslims. If Hardika distrusts the

Muslims, Ramnik tolerates them, forgives them and goes for amity. He goes for revived re-bonding. He wants to clarify his father's, his grandfather's and his own acts of omission and commission so that the communal violence that disrupts the Hindu-Muslim amity can be bottled. Instead of pushing the unfortunate Muslim youths left in lurch in the disturbing hours of communal violence, he gives shelter to them. Though Hardika disapproves of his magnanimity, Ramnik flows against the stream of communal animosity and declares, "I have to protect them! I need to protect them"(*Collected Plays*182) and he has not thrown Bobby and Javed out to be butchered by the frenzied Hindu fundamentalists. Hence Ramnik is quite different in his attitude and aptitude from Hardika. Luckily Ramnik has a liberalist as his ally in his daughter Aruna. So Dattani seems to suggest that to solve the century-old Hindu-Muslim communal animosity/ violence, the past must be forgotten, a new beginning has to be made (by people like Ramnik) and the peace-keeping efforts made in the present should be carried forward and strengthened in the future (by integrationists like Smita)

Hardika has failed to forget how the Muslims had stabbed the Hindus in the back, how they had raped the Hindu ladies and how they had butchered the Hindu fugitives. Evidently, she has remembered selectively and has forgot ten the obnoxious activities of the Hindus against the Muslims, but Ramnik doesn't suffer from chosen/preferred amnesia. He remembers how Hindus had burnt down a Muslim property to force the Muslim owners to resort to a distress sale so that they could procure the desired property belonging to their Muslim victims. They had really duped and cheated the Muslims. So he has made up his mind to help Bobby and Javed so that he would be able to atone for his/ their past sins. Hence Ramnik has tried to voice his disapproval of religious fanaticism.

Initially, both Aruna and Javed have been equally prejudiced, but right from the moment of the entry of Bobby and Javed to Ramnik Gandhi's safety-nest, Smita has been an integrationist. So Beena Agrawal has inferred that right from the exposition Act, Smita has been behaving "like the instrument of solution in the play" (48). That is why, she is neither a radical nor a quitter; she is votary of peace, communal harmony. However, Javed has been a disrupting element. He has aroused the fury and frenzy of the Muslims against the Hindus. He has played a key role in the communal war between the Hindus and Muslims during the *Rath Yatra*. He has vitiated the atmosphere. As a professional rioter, he has pelted stones at the Hindu precisionists and he has masterminded the violences against the IDOL and against the *Rath*. So Javed is pulverized/ stunned when Ramnik shows compassion to/ for him. So he melts, his hatred evaporates away and his attitude changes, keeping pace with the cathartic changes in the attitude of Ramnik. He understands how because of his anger and frustration, he has swerved off the path of peaceful existence and communal amity to the communal violence-crazed zones of mutual bitterness and animosity. As he tries to gain back his calmness and composure, Aruna has also tried to maintain her poise. So Javed, Bobby, Aruna, and Smita go beyond the lines of communal divide. Nurturing their respective progressive ideas and fortifying their nascent love for humanity at large, they all create their own freedom. Bobby leads from the front and dandles the Hindu idol, without a trace of disinclination, distrust, scepticism, and mockery. He respects "the other", his

“other” and Muslims’ “other” and so he is accepted, not bothered. So *Final Solutions* is not simply about the ravages of communal violence but it is also about the desired and desirable emancipation of society from the trap of communal animosity or disharmony. That is why Aruna and Javed must shed their prejudices. So Smita has said categorically to Aruna:

I listened to you and I obeyed you. I tolerated your prejudices only because you are my mother. May be I should have told you earlier, but I’m telling you now, I can’t bear it! Please don’t burden me anymore, I can’t take it. (*Collected Plays*213)

So Asha Kuthari Chaudhury has inferred that with the intrusion of Bobby and Javed, Smita reveals her true sensibility and frees herself of the stifling prejudices of her mother, at the same time trying to be fair to her (40).

Hardika is an old timer, cut in the mould of communal hatred. For her, the Muslims are marauders, “dogs” “let loose” (*Collected Plays*174). She has not forgotten how the Muslims had attacked them in the absence of her father. She fails to find any glint of humanity in the eyes of Javed and Bobby. She sees despicable pride in their eyes. She fears that they would rout them. So she tells Aruna to be careful as the dogs (Muslims) have been let loose.

Javed and Bobby are outsiders. They have intruded. They are grabbed by the Hindu mob, pushed and pulled, beaten and hounded. They are chased. Javed is wounded. Javed and Bobby cringe for pity, plead to be spared. Psychosis has mentally unbalanced the Hindus; so their actions and reactions are neurotic. They have been sheltered in Ramnik’s house. Now the Gandhis face the Hindu mob. They demand, “Throw them out! Give them to us!” (*Collected Plays*180). They pound the door of the Gandhi House. But Ramnik doesn’t open the door. Javed pleads and prays to Gandhi not to open the door. The Hindu mob threatens to break into, becomes furious, and calls Ramnik a traitor. Ramnik remains unfazed. He tells the mob, “There is nothing you can take from here without killing me first!” (182). The mob hangs about outside.

Ramnik is humble and sensitive. He is civilized, humane, rational, and compassionate. He believes that all those who are the members of the community having numerical majority must behave responsibly and must strive for peace, promote peace, and strengthen the peace-keeping forces because peace is “hidden inside the armpits of the majority” (*Collected Plays*191). The play under study has not only specified how the majority should behave while dealing with tricky issues but also has defined the role of the minority in any peace-keeping effort. The minorities should not distrust; nor should they be blinded by prejudice. They should separate truth from communal falsehoods. They should honour the sentiments of the “other”. Bobby does conduct himself with dignity, objectivity, and neutrality. Before entering the Puja enclave in the house of Ramnik Gandhi, he removes his footwear and picks up the idol of Lord Krishna and he lifts the idol with reverence, with veneration and exults:

Look how He rests in my hands! He knows I can’t harm Him. He knows His

strength! I don't believe in Him but He believes in me. He smiles! He smiles at our trivial pride and our trivial shame. (*Collected Plays*224)

So what is important is that both the groups, of the majority and the minority must get rid of their respective prejudices to reach some "final solution".

Dattani for whom, hurt and humiliation, assault and aggression, violence and viciousness have been stable subjects of drama is not a dysthymiac. Rather he has been a staunch crusader in support of peace, certitude and joy in the society, variously vitiated but not weakened beyond repair and redemption. In other words, "Final Solutions" has put the central spot-light on his harmonious vision, but not on his diagnostic temperament to trace the stink of violence threatening the dignified and graceful a society of the human society.

Communal Violence in "Where did I leave my purdah?"

In "Final Solutions", Dattani has given top-most priority to dramatization of communal violence, but in "Where did I leave my purdah", communal violence has been telescoped, that too among other things. If the former is a microscopic study of the Indian socio-politico-cultural miasma called communal violence, the latter is just symptomatic study of communal violence, that too with implicit references to the during-partition and post-partition naked dance of communal violence in the then India. Yet Dattani has made as much robust "a plea for tolerance" (*Me and My Plays* 31) as the one he has made in "Final Solutions". In this play, Dattani has taken elaborate care to show how communal violence has destroyed the cultural harmony of the country but in "Where did I leave my purdah? He has just glossed the issue. Yet in both the plays, his fight for peace and harmony has been embodied without any conceited imposition of self. Hence in "Where did I leave my purdah, a play of idea, hence a problem plays, communal violence is not highlighted but is just suggested. Therefore, it goes well with "Final Solutions". In "Where did I leave my purdah, Dattani has also suggested that in desperate times, it is very natural for the people to be in the grip of fear. While bringing out the horrors of partition, with all its disruption, he has shed light on the communal frenzy of the Muslims, determined to eliminate the Hindus: *Maar dale unharaamionko! ... Kafironkopakdo*(75-76). So gunshots and murder have drowned the pleas for peace. In the end, we all have become "victims". Ruined beyond restoration, terrified beyond alleviation, members of both the communities, involved in the communal violence proceeding, accompanying, and succeeding the ruthlessly sharp and detailed criticism of the undivided India into *Pakistan* and *Hindustan* have been forced to bear the brunt of group violence, entirely avoidable. So Dattani has suggested that no critic should indulge in and support any twisted interpretation of the havoc caused by the psycho-socio-politico-cultural menace termed communal violence.

Conclusion

So the play "Final Solutions" is more about the beauty of harmony- both communal and domestic. Despite his depiction of communal violence between the Hindus and the Muslims in "Final Solutions" and "Where did I leave my purdah", Dattani has never focused only on tracing the stink of violence. On the contrary, he has been a firm supporter of communal harmony and all-inclusive progress of humankind.

He seems to suggest that to solve the century-old Hindu-Muslim communal animosity, the past must be forgotten, a new beginning has to be made by people like Ramnik and the peace-keeping efforts made in the present should be carried forward and strengthened in the future by integrationists like Smita. Through these plays, Dattani has been able to chant the mantra of peaceful coexistence even in the midst of the clouds of communal hostility.

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