

The Problem of Intercommunal Harmony in Mahesh Dattani's play 'Final Solutions'

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Abstract

Mahesh Dattani is a unparalleled contemporary "world-status playwright" who requires no introduction. He is one of India's most talented playwrights, competent at incorporating current themes into his works to the utmost extent possible. In his plays, he seeks communal harmony. Communal enmity and religious hostility still afflict contemporary India. For various selfish and politico-cultural reasons, the delicate fabric of communal harmony is frequently disrupted. In India, theatre has always been one of the most effective means of sensitization, awareness, and social communication. Communal violence and conflicts resulting from caste rivalries, religious revulsions, and gender prejudices have taken on a new meaning and expression in post-independence Indian theatre. This paper is a modest attempt to study the communal difference and tension in Mahesh Dattani's *Final Solutions*. The play focuses on the subject of communal disharmony between Hindus and Muslims in India, particularly during the post-partition riots.

Keywords: Communalism, harmony, theatre, playwright, religious hostility.

Introduction

Mahesh Dattani, the most unconventional and modern playwright of Indian English drama, has used the stage to provide the audience with invisible issues because theatre serves as a reflection of real life. Dattani, according to Erin Mee "is a young playwright who can create a new generation in the Indian English Drama which deals with the invisible social issues". For his play *Final Solutions*, Dattani got the Sahitya Akadami Award. Putting Drama on a very high pedestal, Dattani claims, "Well, I think this is a wrong perception prevailing among the academics, especially the view that writing for the stage is inferior to writing a novel or writing poetry. I think it is important to keep in mind that the playwright is actually an artisan." (Subramanyam 134)

In India, everyone is familiar with the concept of communal harmony. It is always interpreted as religious tolerance. But this term has broader connotations and uses. People who identify as members of one religion, such as Islam or Hinduism, may differ in terms of caste or

religious sub-sects. In the final decade of the twentieth century, Dattani's plays became a "new arrival" in the field of Indian English drama. His plays tackle contemporary issues. The selfishness, avarice, and opportunism of people are highlighted in the theme of the drama "*Final Solutions*." Class, community, and conflicts between old and modern value systems are all concerns that are woven into the play. The issue of minorities affects all minority communities living alongside the majority; it is not just a problem for Hindus and Muslims. In many contexts and circumstances, "*Final Solutions*" has addressed the problems of the majority communities. India's top playwright of modern English plays is Dattani. Writing the drama in the immediate aftermath of the Babri masjid nightmare required moral bravery on the part of Dattani. Due to the fact that our society is extremely concerned with communalism, "*Final Solutions*" has a strong contemporary resonance. The play seeks to highlight the stereotypes influencing the collective perception of one community against another by presenting various shades of communalist views common among Hindus and Muslims. Comparing the communal rioting of today to the partition, the documentary "*Final Solutions*" looks at the perspectives of three generations of a Gujarati business family. The drama serves as a mirror of the society in which we currently live. Asha Kuthari Chaudhuri claims:

The gruesome rioting and communal/religious disharmony that took seed in 1947 has continued to throw up countless such incidents in independent to secular India. Such incidents and communal violence in India between Hindus and Muslims was underscored emphatically by the brutal bloodshed in Gujarat in 2002. These were some of the issues that Dattani had actually dramatized in the form of *Final Solutions* earlier, dealing with the recurring rhetoric of hatred, aggression, the monetary and political exploitation of communal riots, in chauvinism and parochial mindset of the fundamentalists, in the context of the India of the 1940s interspersed with the contemporary India. In confronting and negotiating responses to the post-Babri Masjid demolition and the post Godhra Hindu Muslim communal violence in Gujarat, through varied discursive frames of history and theatre, Dattani subsequently explored issues of identity, memory, suffering and loss...within the larger political context through the various productions of this play (*Final Solutions*). (Chaudhuri 78)

The play discusses issues of cultural hegemony, how Hindus must endure suffering at the hands of a Muslim majority, as depicted by the characters of Hardika and Daksha in Hussain's hands, and how Muslims, like Javed, must endure suffering in the context of the dominant Hindu community. All of this slowed down the advancement of the country by causing community riots, which culminated in the disturbance of normal social life.

The three-act play *Final Solutions* tells an exciting tale of compelling communalism. Family serves as the action's battlefield in this play, as it does in all of Dattani's other plays, which also use segmented stages. In Dattani's plays, terror is brought home by street-level

incidents. *Final Solutions*, in Alyque Padamsee's opinion, is a play about transmitted resentment. He says: "As I see it, this is a play about transferred resentments. About looking for a scapegoat to hit out at when we feel let down, humiliated. Talking out your own anger on your wife, children or servants is an old Indian custom." (Mee, 319)

The action takes place in the late 1940s, just after India gained its independence and was divided into Pakistan and India on the basis of religion. Hardika was a little girl at the time known as Daksha. Even before turning fifteen, Daksha marries Hari. Reading her diary, Daksha. (Reads from her diary) "Dear Diary today is the first time I have dared to put my thoughts on your pages. (Thinks for a while) Today? How will people know when "today" was a hundred years from now? (Picks up pen and scribbles.) 31 March, 1948" (165-166)

Her father had battled for freedom. Because of specific characteristics, she refers to her mother-in-law as Gaju and her father-in-law as Wagh. Daksha's character is introduced in a very significant and creative way. Through her diaries in particular, Dattani constructs her persona for reviving the past. In order to link the past and the present, Dattani very diplomatically gives her a separate space and identity. She offers her comments after comparing the past and present. As the situation intensifies, it eventually reaches Gandhi's home. While the real activity occurs outside the home, it creates tension and fear inside. One can say that social unrest takes the guise of domestic disturbance. Javed and Bobby, who were being pursued by a fanatical Hindu mob, sought safety at the home of Ramnik Gandhi, a liberal. This occurrence introduces the play's suspenseful plot. Inside Ramnik Gandhi's home in Amargaon, Dattani depicts the entire drama of the intercommunal strife. He actively propounds democratic and liberal values. The town was experiencing communal unrest. Due to the attack on the rath yatra, rioting among the communities break out. With weapons and flaming fire, the rioters are on the streets. The entire calm of the town is consumed by the communal flame. There is disorder and confusion. What specifically occurred is unknown. Everyone is terrified and agitated. Rumors of Pujari's murder, a bombing of the Muslim girls' hostel, and other crimes are spreading quickly. The community is being overtaken by the rage and stress of the long night.

The play advances with the entry of two young Muslims named Javed and Bobby into the Ramnik family's home space, which serves as the setting. The conversation demonstrates how prevalent communalism is in Indian socio-political discourse and how it keeps coming up. The drama is filled with topics related to generational differences, politics, communities, and identities in the lives of Ramnik, Aruna, Smita, Daksha, Javed, and Bobby, in addition to the lack of trust and tolerance.

The presentation of a mosaic of diverse perspectives about religious identity that frequently drags the nation into inhumane conflict promotes the objective truthfulness of a social scientist. The problem is not moralised, though, because the demons of racial hatred reside not on the street but rather inside each of us. "The demons of communal hatred are not out on the street.they are lurking inside ourselves." (353)

The partition is followed by contemporary communal rioting in the play. Hardika, the grandmother, is fascinated with her father's murder during the turbulence of the partition and the betrayal by a Muslim friend, Zarine. The documentary explores religious intolerance by studying the attitudes of three generations of a middle-class Gujrati business family. Ramnik Gandhi, her son, is troubled by the idea that the shop Zarine's father owned, which was destroyed by his relatives, was the foundation for his success. Hardika's daughter-in-law Aruna adheres to the rigorous Hindu sanskar ethic, and Hardika's granddaughter Smita is forbidden from having a romantic involvement with a Muslim boy. Two Muslim boys, Babban and Javed, seek refuge in their home after being chased by a shrieking Hindu mob, exposing the family's pulls and counter pulls in the process.

Javed is a young man who is aggressive, while Babban is a moderate. After a nightlong barrage of criticism and retorts between the characters, forgiving and forgetting become the only options for dealing with the crisis. The play serves as a timely reminder of the conflicts happening not just in India but also in other regions of the world.

Final Solutions strikes us deeply and exposes the harsh reality of our lives, making it challenging for the Indian director to manage. The prior contradictions reappear when the past starts to influence the outlook of the present. The play doesn't offer any specific solutions to the communalism issue, but it does raise issues of secularism and pseudo-secularism. It compels us to examine our own attitudes in light of societal attitudes still prevalent today. The conflicts between the characters are reflected in the chorus. Thus, the chorus serves as the characters' psycho-physical representation and also gives the spectator a visual depiction of the tensions between the characters. Because communalism has no face and is an attitude rather than a concept, it cannot be used in a stereotypical manner to describe the chorus.

Chorus 1: "The procession has passed through these lanes every year, For forty years! Chorus 2, 3: How dare they?"

Chorus 1, 2, 3: For forty years our chariot has moved through their mohallas.

Chorus 4, 5: Why did they? Why did they today.

Chorus 1: How dare they?

Chorus 2, 3: They broke our rath. They broke our chariot and felled our Gods!

Chorus 1, 2, 3: This is our land! How dare they?" (168)

Additionally, the play addresses the issue of how minorities can be accepted. The way Aruna and Hardika treat these two young boys is clearly racial discrimination. Aruna sets two glasses of water in front of the guests. She grasps the sides of the glasses that have not yet been touched by their lips with her thumbs and index fingers after they have finished their glasses of water. They are removed and kept apart from the other glasses by the woman. The play's setting places the fears and anxieties of the two communities primarily in the context of the partition, but in traditional Hindu homes, there has always been a subliminal animosity and disapproval of everything connected to Muslims, to the point where everything touched by them is seen as tainted. Muslims share the same hostility toward Hindus as do Hindus, who are also aware of the antipodal position they occupy in a Hindu community. The two communities

in India have a mutual hatred for one another, but this is not overplayed; rather, it is portrayed with a rare fidelity that conveys complete conviction.

In *Final Solutions*, Dattani demonstrates how riots are started and how some powerful groups end up benefiting from them. He also talks about how the people, police, and politicians all contributed to the communal riot. At the time of a riot, the common people who had previously lived side by side for years all of a sudden stopped knowing one another and started fighting on grounds of religion. They never understand that they are losers, and politicians seize the chance to rise to power. This unique community makes use of the chance to gain profit. It also demonstrates how politicians and police never treat society fairly. Politicians, whose main goal is to get votes by any means necessary, are frequently observed engaging in a variety of unethical acts. The major source of division between the two dominant communities in our nation, according to Dattani, is their sense of superiority. Both Muslims and Hindus consistently hold the belief that they are superior to Muslims. Their relationship is severely strained as a result. The main reason for creating a breach in society is the lack of religious tolerance.

Aruna and Smita's conflict serves as a powerful illustration of the tension between tradition and modernity. Smita should adopt Aruna's philosophy, says Aruna. Aruna is horrified by the thought that her daughter doesn't respect her faith, sanskar, etc.

Aruna: "You said it stifles you?"

Smita: What?

Aruna: Does being a Hindu stifle you?

Smita: No, living with one does.

Aruna: I never felt like that. I have always taken pride in my religion." (211)

Conclusion

The play contrasts the joy of freedom with the horrors of communal riots. People got greedy for the blood of their own countrymen while under the influence of religion. Murder, stabbings, fires, looting, rapping, etc. were frequent occurrences during this time. Many people were killed, and many more were injured. Numerous individuals moved from Pakistan to India, and vice versa. The situation has not improved in terms of religious prejudice and intercommunal conflict even after decades of freedom.

Dattani's assertion that the family unit is a microcosm of society is emphasised through the play's location or structural design. A straightforward set up of wooden furniture pieces depicts the Gandhi family's living area. The kitchen and a pooja room are the only detailed setups. This is important because we all establish distinctions between "we" and "them" based mostly on household eating customs and social taboos. Inclusion of what is socially prescribed and exclusion of what is socially proscribed are both parts of the process of "othering," which starts at the most intimate and domestic level. Food practices and religious beliefs are closely related, and the apparent "otherness" of many societies is reflected in the distinctions in what and how they — and we — eat. We also draw clear lines between foods and objects used in conjunction with food, which may be used to stress division in a very specific way.

Due to the fact that our society is extremely concerned with communalism, *Final Solutions* has a strong contemporary resonance. The play aims to highlight how stereotypes affect how one community feels about another by presenting many nuances of communalist sentiments that are common among Hindus and Muslims. *Final Solutions* explore the perspectives of three generations of a Gujrati business family as it moves from the partition to the current communal violence. The play's events develop quickly, bringing together the communal riots of today with the post-independence partition riots in a single thread.

One community despises another. The majority community is one, and the minority community is another. As a result, the two communities are at odds with one another and coexist in a hostile environment. Hindus and Muslims are not merely two stereotyped groups, in Dattani's opinion. When a pooja is interrupted, a procession is stoned, or a mosque is demolished, they fight.

The play employs simple sets and properties. The purpose of doing this is to highlight the play's subtext and internal problems. The plot of the play is formed by current socio-political situations. Consequently, the play serves as a timely reminder of the conflicts happening not just in India but also in other regions of the world. Mahesh Dattani is a relevant and unique dramatist because of the way he confronts sensitive subjects like intercommunal strife in an Indian context.

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