



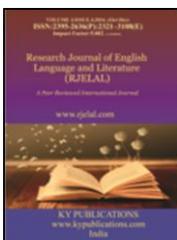
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MAHESH DATTANI'S FINAL SOLUTIONS: A STUDY OF HARSH SOCIAL REALITY

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ABSTRACT

Mahesh Dattani in the contemporary drama is the only dramatist who originally wrote in English and expended the range of Indian drama by exposing the radical issues in the theatre. He introduced the themes like homosexuality, gender issues, radical images of women, awareness about AIDS victims and the growing frustration and nothingness in the middle class life and tradition. His plays deal with contemporary issues. His celebrated plays are *Where There's a Will*, *Tara*, *Brave Fought the Queen*, *Final Solutions*, *Dance Like A Man*, *Ek Alag Mausam*, *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai*. Each and every play of Dattani raises some prominent issues concerning the various maladies contaminating the healthy tissues of the society. Mahesh Dattani is the true observer of society and he writes only what he sees and not what should be. The present research article is an attempt to portray the harsh social reality presented in the play *Final Solutions*. The play is about communal violence, the uncompromising prejudices existing between Hindus and Muslims.

Keywords: Communalism, Secular, Patriotism, Spiritual, Prejudice.

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INTRODUCTION

Religion as an institution has a tremendous hold on man. It gives him a reason to live and a reason to die. It preaches him to live, to give, to forgive, to serve, to suffer for worthy causes and to work for peace and unity. The plays of Mahesh Dattani emerged as 'fresh arrival' in the domain of Indian English drama in the last decade of the twentieth century. Woven into the play are the issues of class and communities and the clash between traditional and modern life style and value system. He presents socio-political realities of our time. India is a Secular country. The existence of such society demands mutual understanding among its religious sects. The finger pointing at each other as the narrow minded fundamentalists on both sides poses the biggest danger to the establishment of healthy relationship between the Hindus and the

Muslims. Mahesh Dattani explores some possibilities for solution to the problem of communal separation in his play *Final Solutions* and ultimately suggests some remedies in this regard. The dramatist feels that liberal outlook with a pacifying approach and respect for one-another's beliefs, mutual trust and sharing of pleasures and pains can help in overcoming the man-made separation where individual will be treated as a human being and not as a Hindu or Muslim. In the plays of Dattani, issues like gender discrimination, idea of alternate sexuality, the suffering of marginalized and the awareness and the awareness of the problems like communal violence have been presented as the central issues. The plays of Mahesh dattani are very fine example of true art.

Mahesh Dattani comes in the category of writers who champion the cause of true art- free

from any theory, universal in taste and flavor, appealing to all sections of society, never bound to any caste, class and creed. (Prasad 262)

Dattani took up the mirror to show the conservative and unprogressive face of the society in the present scenario which is yet to get over with Hindu-Muslim conflicts and politics over religions where the whole world is suffering from climate change, the biggest danger which can destruct the whole human race in general. So, through this play, Dattani suggests that now it is high time to get over these communal politics in the country. The characters delineated in the play fall into two categories; one group comprises of Hindus such as Hardika, Ramnik Gandhi, his wife and daughter Samita while the other comprises of Muslims like Javed, Bobby and their family members; even chorus which plays a very significant role in the development of action in the play represents these two communities. Dattani while delving deep into the psyche of his characters, analyses the process of their attitude formation towards people belonging to different community resulting in their communal preferences and abhorrence and consequently their aspiration for communal hegemony, and explores possibilities of finding a solution to the problem of communal divide and hatred.

The family unit comprises four members of different age groups and different generations. Ramnik Gandhi is a businessman, rational in outlook and is liberally disposed towards Muslims. His wife Aruna is a typical traditional Indian wife whose identity is confined to the pleasure of her husband and management of household. In terms of personality, she is a polar opposite of her husband Ramnik Gandhi. She is highly superstitious and exhibits a very strong sense of pride and faith in her religion. Their only daughter Smita is an educated modern girl, sensible, rational and pragmatic and is more like her father. The eldest member in the family is Ramnik's widowed mother Hardika who spits venom at the very utterance of the word "Muslim" or "Islam". Like her daughter-in-law she too is prejudiced against Muslims and their culture.

In the play *Final Solutions*, the scene of procession of the idols over huge chariot in rath yatra is important to mention here as Dattani

narrates the scenes along with the sarcastic remarks over the issue with the help of the characters.

RAMNIK. The rath yatra started as it does every year from the Vishnu Mandir a few hours before midnight. It passed Shanti Road, Nehru Gardens, and when it reached to Kareem Bagh, the trouble started. Nobody knew how. They say someone threw stone at the idol. Someone else said it was sabotage. (Dattani 193)

After the incident curfew was imposed in that area. In such situation, some people who are in power politicize such matters to serve their purpose and they are probably the same people who create riots at public spaces and give birth to hatred among people. Javed also suggests in the play that they are paid for creating disturbance and riot at different places. In such riots, people from both communities lose their lives!

Though the play *Final Solutions* is outwardly focused on Hindu-Muslim communal hatred, the undercurrent theme is even more powerful for it unwinds the ideological differences and hostility amongst the members of Ramnik Gandhi's family with the entry of two young Muslim boys namely Javed and Bobby into the house. Javed and Bobby are chased by an angry fanatic Hindu mob which is on the leash during a curfew period. The unannounced arrival of these two outsiders into Ramnik Gandhi's house triggers panic in the family.

When Ramnik comes to their rescue, his wife, Aruna, gets flung to fury as all his prejudices regarding religion get a major blow and Hardika keeps lamenting,

"How could he let these people into my house?.....They killed his grandfather.....They will hate us for protecting them. Asking for help makes them feel they are lower than us. I know!They don't want equality. They want to be superior."

The reason that kicks off the riot drives Ramnik to think everything a new. He sorts a sundry issues with Bobby and Javed. The conversation brings out the truth to the open—Javed has been rendered a scapegoat by the fanatics of his own community who have simply used him! But Hardika cannot

come to terms with the fact that her son, Ramnik, has offered Javed a job in their shop. She cannot forgive the people of that community, who brutally killed her father. Hardika keeps musing to herself, as seen in Act II:

“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 wasn’t just saving two boys from getting killed. This was something else Ramnik was trying to do.”

Aruna even fumbles to give them a glass of water to slake their thirst. Aruna cringes in hatred when Ramnik asks to offer them food as they might have been hungry and exhausted. After taking refuge at Ramnik’s residence, when Bobby and Javed are about to leave finally, Bobby breaks all norms by lifting the tiny image of Lord Krishna from the altar in Aruna’s pooja-room and declaring in front of all,

See! See! I am touching God!...Your God! My flesh is holding Him! Look, Javed! And He does not mind!...He does not burn me to ashes! He does not cry out from the heavens saying He has been contaminated!...Look how He rests in my hands! He knows I cannot 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....He feels me. And he welcomes it! I hold Him who is sacred to them, but I do not commit sacrilege. [To Aruna] You can bathe Him day and night, you can splash holy waters on Him but you cannot remove my touch from His form. You cannot remove my smell with sandal paste and attars and fragrant flowers because it belongs to a human being who believes, and tolerates, and respects what other human beings believe. That is the strongest fragrance in the world!(Hossain 159)

Now the question that stares at us is can there be a solution to this larger than life problem of communal divide and hostility which we are facing till today? The playwright tries to answer this

question through the delineation of certain judicious, even-headed characters with their rational and constructive approach in the play, where experience (Ramnik) and youth (Samita, Babban, Javed) provide a hope in this regard. Ramnik Gandhi seems to be the only sensible human being among the seniors, always adopting a conciliatory approach towards one and all. He is not the hardened communal like his mother and wife Aruna. His heart is full of compassion, affection and fellow-feeling towards the oppressed ones, that is why he extends the helping hand to the two Muslim boys and saves their lives from the violent mob by giving them shelter in his house, even against the strong protests from his wife and mother.

Even after the two Muslim boys leave, numerous queries keep floating in the air demanding answers. Ramnik decides not to go to his shop as it assails him till date to accept the fact that, “It’s the same burnt-up shop we bought from them at half its value.’ He confesses candidly, ‘And we burnt it. Your husband, My father and his father. They had burnt it in the name of communal hatred.” He doubts whether he will be able to step into the shop once again. He felt a need to expiate now by handing it over to Javed. He seems determined to call Javed and pass it on to him as a legacy he [as a representative of the sect] is supposed to inherit.

His mother, old Hardika, gets a shock of her life to learn the truth [or, shame?] She was unaware of so long. But, her son consoles her, ‘You have to live with this shame only for a few years now.’ Doesn’t it sound as a hollow solace especially when he is assailed by the misgivings whether the boy would ‘come even if called to take charge of their shop.’ Or, ‘it might be too late now.’ However, a humane solution is proffered to iron off all points of misunderstanding or confusion the two sects might have between them!

Conclusion

This play is a response to Mahesh Dattani’s reaction to the sporadic communal riots, breaking forth here and there, at different times. The play further highlights that being in majority or minority also determines our thought processes and subsequently our response towards the people of other community. While the majority group fails to

acknowledge the equal status of the minority, the latter raises the finger at the dominant majority group for becoming their destiny makers. The promising points which the study of the play offers for establishing amity and good-will between the two communities are the nobility at heart, space for self-expression, open-mindedness and tolerance for other's dissenting note, respect and regard for one another's cultural values, a society sans ego and sans prejudice and initiation on the part of both the communities to look beyond the narrow communal lines.

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