

Communal Violence in Mahesh Dattani's *Final Solutions*

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Abstract

Mahesh Dattani, actor, director, playwright, dancer and an screenplay writer was born in Bangalore on August 7, 1958. In 1998, Dattani won the prestigious Sahitya Academi Award for his book of plays. He writes plays and film-scripts in English. His themes reflect and comment on the ordinary and everyday conflicts of so many urban people who may be living in transitional periods of history, caught between the firm undertow of Tradition and social values and the pull of modernity and globalisation. Dattani, an adept playwright and theatre practitioner, finds the issue and creates characters, simultaneously uses the stage, space and time that suit the subject he treats. The characters on the stage are contemporary urban Indians. The issues they deal with are socio-cultural conflicts and the technique he uses is expressionism.

Final Solutions, a play about Hindu-Muslim conflict was slated for the Deccan Herald Theatre festival in Bangalore in December 1992. A week before it was scheduled to be staged, the Babri Masjid was demolished. The festival organisers fearing calamitous repercussions rejected the play. It was finally staged the following year in Bombay and Bangalore. The play explores the themes of secularism and communal understanding, showing how personal and family history often shape the contours of communal conflict.

The play is about communal riots in India and Subordination of women that restricts their lines. It presents three women who belong to three significant times in the history of India-Daksha/Hardika belongs to pre-independence period; Aruna, her daughter-in-law, belongs to independence period, and Smita, Aruna's inquisitive daughter, is a contemporary, post-independence Indian woman.

The play begins with Daksha, a young bride attempting to pour her inner feelings through her writings in a diary. Her childhood memories tainted with communal clashes associated with her father's death; and destruction of her favourite gramophone records are all laid bare to the audience / readers. Daksha continues to suffer in her married life with her husband Hari, as her movements were highly restricted because of the imposition of family and society's strict norms of female decorum. Her love, for Hindi film songs leads her to befriend Zarine. When Daksha comes to know Zarine's family is in financial trouble as their cloth mill is burnt, she politely requests her husbands to help Zarine's family. This indicates her mode of mind. Daksha becomes angry and shocked when the aid offered by Hari is rejected by Zarine's father.

Dattani places history as a dominant character in his play. The first scene of the play shows us the writing of history. Past and present are combined on stage through the figures of Daksha and Hardika. Daksha is writing a diary. Diary has a special importance in all sense. Daksha's father-in-law did not give permission for writing.

History is present throughout the action of the play, through statements made by Daksha/Hardika, through situations of violence which have been enacted before and are all familiar. History is also evoked by almost every character on stage as a part of explanation regarding violence.

As the play opens, we see Daksha as the fifteen year old bride of Hari who is still in college, reading from her diary she started on March 31, 1948. She is a young, vivacious woman whose passion is listening to and singing Noor Jehan's songs. She shudders to remember the August of 1947 When a most terrible thing happened to our country. We gained independence. Independence was 'terrible' for her as she lost her father in the communal riots at Hussainbad where she lived with her family before marriage. She still remembers how her father was happy and joyous when the country was granted freedom by the British but lamented that "that had let loose the dogs." Her mother always prays Lord Krishna, but Lord Krishna could not save her fathers life. Her faith on God is shattered into pieces. Her idea about God has changed.

I looked at the idol and suddenly I had the most horrible thought. I feel afraid to repeat it here, but I must. I felt that the idol I had grown up seeing my mother worship was just a pointed doll. A doll no different from the ones I used to play with and think that it was a real person.

Her second shocking experience is that when she sought to befriend a Muslim girl Zarine. Zarine is very close to Daksha because their likings and disliking were same. But the problem in their friendship starts when personal gain makes its root. Zarine's father wants to open a textile mill. Hari has some wrong ideas about Zarine's father. The communal root gives Hari an opportunity to burn his shop. Zarine's father knows the reasons but Daksha was ignorant about it. She politely requests Hari to give job to Zarine's father because nothing remains with him. Hari becomes angry as Daksha and he insults her when she visits Zarine's family, and she is behaved badly. Sometimes Daksha's husband hit her and confined her to the house. This hardened Daksha's attitude to the Muslim community.

Forty years later, Daksha is now transformed into Hardika, who opens her diary and starts writing again. She regrets that things today are the same as they were forty years ago. There is no change in the mentality and attitude of the people. Communal violence is still a feature of our lives.

The Mob/Chorus don the Hindu masks and become Hindu fanatics. They are agitated because the gods chariot which has passed through the same locality for forty years has been attacked by the Muslims. The chariot has been broken and the god's idol smashed. Even the poojari who accompanied the idol on the chariot has been killed. This act shows crucked mentality of the Muslims. The Hindu fanatics shout that the Muslims must be driven out of the country and be killed. The news spread immediately to inform as well as warn the people against venturing out of their homes. Muslim mob celebrating their triumph over disrupting the chariot's journey through their locality.

Chorus 1 : Their chariot fell in our street.

Chorus 2 : Their God now prostrates before us

Chorus 3 : Doesn't their God have a warranty?

They claim that they are "neither idol makers not breakers". They are blamed for their dirty mind and dirty act. Simultaneously, the Hindu mobsters blame the Muslims for razing their temples and breaking their chariot. They plan to attack on Muslim locality. They expressed their reaction why the latter (Muslims) have chosen to stay back in India even after having been granted a homeland of their own in Pakistan.

Chorus 2 : This is not their land. They have got what they wanted. So why stay?

Chorus 3 : They stay to spy on us

Chorus 4 : Their hearts belong there. But they live on our land.

Bobby (Babban) and Javed are two Muslim young men who seek refuge in the Gandhi's house one night when communal riots are raging in the locality. The crowd is baying for their blood but Ramnik Gandhi boldly offers them shelter in the house despite the crowd threats and warnings and stiff opposition from his mother Hardika and his wife Aruna. Outside atmosphere was very dangerous. Javed came to Amargaon in a van, and the mob should understand the purpose of it. They find a

knotted handkerchief on Bobby to tie on his head to say his prayers, and they find a prayer cap on Javed. In times of tension, even ordinary objects take on meaning, become symbols of a religious identity and markers of ‘otherness’. Ramnik Gandhi’s family members are not ready to give shelter to both. As Ramnik lets the ‘outsiders’ in his mother is thrown back into the past, and all the injustices ever done to her are re-invoked:

Why did he do it? Oh God, why do I have to suffer? Didn’t he have any feelings for me? I just wanted them to be my friends! How could he let these people into my house? Oh I hate this world! They killed his grandfather! (Act one)

Aruna has problems with these youths. Aruna, unable to effectively stand up to her husband, asserts her unquestioning belief in right/wrong- if the men were being chased to be killed, they must have done something wrong. Bobby and Javed requests Ramnik not to throw them out as the mob would kill them. Aruna pleads Ramnik to land over these traitors to the mob but Ramnik opposes his wife. Bobby and Javed are scared as they have been beaten by the mob and they are badly hurt. Again and again Aruna warns her husband and argues lot. She doesn’t have trust on them. Ramnik clearly act out of a personal motivation his sense of guilt is the driving force behind his conscious and structured liberalism, which becomes apparent when he blurts out to Aruna, “I have to protect them! I need to protect them!” (Act one). He tries to extend as much comfort as possible to them. Both Bobby and Javed are outsiders. The daughter, Smita is immediately sent inside to her room by her father, the tolerant insider who alone had the power to save the two men from the intolerant outside. When Smita comes out of her room and recognizes Bobby and Javed that time all family members shocked and surprised.

Aruna : You - you know them?

Smita : I know who they are.

Ramnik : Why didn’t you tell us?

Smita : I was too confused.

Hardika: Where did you meet them? In College?

Smita : (unsure) Well-yes

Ramnik : What does that mean?

Aruna : Stop her studies: From now on she can stay at home! (Act Two)

Ramnik calms down when Smita tells him that she knows the too because Javed is her friend Tasneem’s brother, and that Bobby is Tasneem’s fiancé. Smita again tries to explain.’

Look, all I know is what I have seen. Bobby comes to college quite often--- to meet Tasneem. She--- they used to go out quite often--- There’s no harm in that, they’re getting married any way--- and Javed -- I have seen him once. When I dropped Tasneem at her hostel--- She told me later who he was --- that is all. (Act Two)

Where is there no harm? In Bobby going out with Tasneem because they are engaged? Or because he is involved with somebody from his own community and therefore safe? This question remains unanswered.

Even Ramnik does not approve the love marriage and even meeting with the person of other community. Aruna Smita’s sensitive mother wants her husband to stop Smita’s studies and stop her from attending college because she says she met them in college.

Ramnik saves Javed and Bobby even he forces his wife to be ‘civilized’ and bring them a glass of water. When Aruna gets them water, they both quickly gulp it down and thank her. They wouldn’t actually drink it. After they do, the ‘contaminated’ glasses are picked up gingerly and kept separately from the other glasses in the kitchen. Even Aruna is prepared to throw away the milk because a lizard

had fallen on the lid of the vessel containing it but she has no qualms in offering the same 'contaminated' milk to Bobby and Javed later.

When Bobby tells Ramnik that Javed is looking for a job, he has a need of job so they have come to Amargaon. Ramnik lovingly offers Javed a job in his saree shop in the market telling him.

You'll like the job. You can handle those Bohra and Memen women who usually pass by our show room. You can stand outside and call them in. What do you say?-- Please I would be --- happy if you say yes. I will be --- it will be my pleasure to give you that job. That shop, it used to be --- (pause). Take the Job please.

Ramnik's actions and deed arise directly from the guilt he feels about the actions committed by his father and grandfather. He very frankly admits that it is the shop once belonged to Zarinee's father. It is the same burnt-up shop we bought from them, at half its value. He and his father Hari had burnt it in the name of communal hatred; the fact being that they had really wanted that shop. Zarine's people came to know of it. They were also planning to set up a cloth mill of their own. This is Ramnik's guilt that he has hidden.

When it is discovered that Javed is one of those who were brought to Amargaon to participate in the violence and create riots. He and others on the bus were prepared to contribute to the cause of their religion and were proud of it. Ramnik crosses that line between understanding and allocating blame:

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. Every time I look at you, my bile rises!

Ramnik : (angry): Now you are provoking me! How dare you blame your violence on other people? It is in you! You have violence in your mind. Your life is based on violence. Your faith is based--- (He stops, but it is too late) (Act Three)

Above dialogue /discussion clearly shows both Javed and Ramnik blame each other. The problem of violence as something that could be solved by human understanding and compassion.

Javed, the "riot-rouser", is a vulnerable, misled and misguided young man who realizes that he has been used all along by vested interests to engineer communal riots. His boyhood experience with a fanatic Hindu neighbour has resulted in his defiant and aggressive attitude. But he is now disillusioned and frustrated, partly due to Bobby's influence and partly through his own realization.

Although there are no, "final solutions" to the communal tangle in this country, youngsters like Smita and Bobby hold out hope in the play. It is through the efforts of youngsters like these that the two communities can live in harmony in the future despite the odds stacked against them.

Aruna does not give permission to Bobby to enter into the pooja room. When Bobby pick up Lord Krishna's idol, Aruna shouts and screams loudly on Bobby. Bobby defies her:

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.

Dattani gives an ideal view that God does not make any discrimination between the Hindu and the Muslim. It is man who thinks differently. All are equal before God. God is one but one may call him-Ram, Rahim, Christ etc. our ego, and wrong ideology creates problem. Further Bobby turns to Aruna and tells her:

You can bathe Him day and night, you can splash holy waters on him but you can not remove my touch from his form. You cannot remove any smell with fragrant flowers because it belongs to a human being who believes, and tolerates, and respects what other human beings believe. That is strongest fragrance in the world.

Dattani through Bobby suggests that we have to change our attitude and mentality of thinking and see all things politely, lovingly. God never makes any difference between Hindu and Muslim our positive, happy feelings are very important Bobby breaks through physically created boundaries but there is need to break mental barriers. Dattani further suggests that tolerance is the keyword if we have to communal harmony in the country despite all our differences. As Bobby rightly tells Hardika and Aruna before he leaves with Javed:

The tragedy is that there is too much that is sacred. But if we understand and believe in one another, nothing can be destroyed --- And if you are willing to forget, I am willing to tolerate.

This can be the only possible “final solution” to the communal disharmony that raises its ugly head with alarming regularity in this country.

Now our country and even other countries are facing CORONA epidemic (COVID-19) Government is taking too much precaution of the society. They have already closed all religious places, still some Muslim Community people they are praying together, this act directly or indirectly disturbs society and creates problem. Immediately people begins to think wrongly about this community. Actually some arrogant people does this and all good people suffers. There are so many good Muslim scholars and leaders guiding properly to the society and thinking positively about the Nation. All Hindu should accept the fact that Muslims are part of this country, they are one organ of the body we can't separate them; and all Muslims should behave like how the organs of the body adjust with each other and tolerance then in the future we will hope the communal riots will be stopped.

Reference:-

Dattani Mahesh, *Final Solutions and Other Plays*, Affiliated East-West Press Ltd, New Delhi, 1994.