

INTROSPECTION AND RETROSPECTION OF COMMUNAL RIOTS IN MAHESH DATTANI'S PLAY '*FINAL SOLUTIONS*'

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ABSTRACT

Sahitya Akademi Award winning Playwright Mahesh Dattani has been dealt the foremost theme of communal disharmony in his play 'Final Solutions', which shows his objective and unbiased attitude towards communal differences. It has become controversial in its production time because it deals with the sensitive issue of communal tensions after Babri Mosque Demolition event which haunts and damages the secular fabric of the country. The play 'Final Solutions' foregrounds the Hindu-Muslim divide, the prejudices and the deep rooted mistrust that lies just beneath the skins of our liberal, secular attitudes.

Key Words: *Communal Riots, Secularism*

Introduction:

Unlike poetry and fiction, Indian drama in English has not registered very notable gains right from its inception; however the prospect of Indian English drama is certainly not bleak provided, we have playwrights solidly grounded in the Indian tradition and yet willing to experiment and also a living theatre to subject their art to the kind of test which alone can prove the authenticity of their dramatic genius like new band of playwrights emerge after 1990s who have displayed their thematic creativity as well as technical virtuosity. This new group of Playwrights is Manjula Padmanabhan, Mahesh Dattani, Cyrus Mistry, Dina Mehata, Zubin Driver and so on. New themes have been the main concerns of these playwrights; particularly the contemporary burning issues of the society are the major topics of these plays. Here my sole emphasis is on Mahesh Dattani as social Playwright through analytical study of his play 'Final Solutions'.

The plays of Mahesh Dattani emerged as '*fresh arrival*' in the domain of Indian English drama in the last decade of twentieth century. His plays have been staged to critical acclaim all over the country and abroad. Alyque Padamsee says regarding him, "*At last we have playwright who gives sixty million English speaking Indians an identity.*" (Dattani; 20) A theatre personality, Mahesh Dattani is actively involved in the stage production and performing on the stage by drawing inspiration from Marathi Playwright Vijay Tendulkar.

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But unlike Girish Karnad, who laid emphasis on history, myths and scriptures, Dattani concentrates on the contemporary society and reality in the fast changing world. His plays are topical dramas and questions to feminine identity, religion, communal tension and sexuality. The most fascinating thing about him is the way in which he presents characters and society that shows his dynamic nature.

Final Solutions:

In 1998, Mahesh Dattani won the Sahitya Akademi award for his 'Final Solutions and other plays' published by East-West Books Chennai, thus becoming the first Indian English language playwright to win this award. 'Final Solutions' is a stage play in three acts, Dattani's fifth play, was written early in 1991, a year before the communal riots in Bombay, sparked by the destruction of the Babri Mosque in Ayodhya. The play was first performed at Guru Nanak Bhavan, Bangalore, on 10th July 1993. The play was also translated into Hindi by Shahid Anwar and directed by Arvind Gaur for Asmita theatre in 1998. The play was performed at Tara theatre, Mumbai on 11th Dec. 1993 directed by Alyque Padamsee. This play gave him worldwide recognition.

Theme of Communal Disharmony:

India is a multi religious and multi ethnical country since ancient times. People live happily together by sharing and respecting each other religious practices and principles. But a single flame, rather misunderstanding causes communal tension among them which nevertheless equally responsible from both the sides. Demolition of 430 years old Babri Mosque on 6th Dec. 1992, Bomb blasts in Mumbai, Godhra Massacre in Gujrat are few examples of recent results of communal disharmony. Playwright Mahesh Dattani handled the theme of Communal disharmony very meticulously in his play 'Final Solutions' because the issue of Communal disharmony has an enormous significance in the background of our history and cultural variety. Our forefathers witnessed a lot of bloodshed, violence and all evil effects caused by communal tension between two major communities during the period of post partition riots in India. The play 'Final Solutions' presents the realistic picture of riots that shatters everything of the society. Alyque Padamsee in the note on the play 'Final Solutions' highlighted the theme of communal hatred in the very first statement in a nutshell manner-

"The demons of communal hatred are not out on the street----they are lurking inside Ourselves. The mob in the play is symbolic of our own hatred and paranoia....Can we shake off our prejudices or they in our psyche like genes? Will we ever be free or ever-locked in combat...Arabs against Jews, Whites against blacks, Hindus against Muslims?" - (Dattani, CP 161)

Dattani's Search for Roots of Communal Disharmony:

Mahesh Dattani searches for the root causes behind Hindu-Muslim riot is best revealed through two Muslim boys Javed and Bobby who are introduced as two Muslim intruders in a Hindu family while they are chased by some Hindu fanatics during riot. It is made clear that failure of understanding between man and man creates communal tension. Infuriated by the notion that a chariot carrying the Hindu God was destroyed by some Muslim men, the Hindu fanatics started searching for Muslim men because they equated the breakers of chariot with the Muslim community. When the prayer cap of Javed and the knotted handkerchief of Bobby were found in their pockets, the mob became furious.

Chorus All:

You pray to a God you do not know! You pray to a nothing.

You do not know his form. And you seek to destroy Gods!

Drive them out! Kill the sons of swine! Kill the sons of swine!

- (Dattani, CP ; 169)

The chorus gives a chase and some of their blows strike the two men. But somehow both boys escape from clutches of the mob and ran away.

The Muslims, on the other hand, react to the behavior of the Hindus. A total lack of understanding between the two communities creates tension.

Two of the Chorus now has Muslim masks.....

Chorus 1 & 2: They hunt us down!

They're afraid of us!

We are few!

But we are strong!

They beat us up!

They're afraid of us!

They hunt us down!

They want to throw us out! (Dattani, CP; 179)

What are the final Solutions in the play "Final Solutions"?

Angelie Multani, a renowned teacher and research scholar in Indian English drama poses the question on the final solution to the problem of communal disharmony in her essay on 'Final Solutions'-

"What then is the final solution? Is one even possible? Would it be better for us to stop trying to find the final answer, and just try to make our own peace with ourselves and those around us? Is it possible to atone

for the past?....” (Multani; 20)

It is in this context that we need to take a closer look at the title of Dattani’s play. The very word ‘Final’ subverts the possibilities of a ‘solution’ since Dattani deliberately sticks to the plural- ‘Solutions’, thereby questioning the justification of ‘Final’. Angelie Multani points out that in this deliberate subversion lies the repetitive nature of communal violence, guilt and hatred-

“The title of Dattani’s play on communal violence and tensions in contemporary urban India itself calls to attention the apparent insolubility of this situation... It is indeed, this very search for a final solution, which in many ways perpetuates the cycle of violence and hatred.” (Multani, 25)

However **No concrete solutions** are provided in the play ‘Final Solutions’ by the playwright Mahesh Dattani to the problem of communal disharmony. But still playwright explores some possibilities for the solution to the problem of communal disharmony and indirectly suggests few remedies in this regard. Mahesh Dattani feels that liberal outlook with a conciliatory approach, respect for one another’s belief, mutual trust and sharing of pleasures and pains as a human being and not as a Hindu or Muslim are few solutions to the problem of communal disharmony. Bobby suggests to Hardika-

“And if you are willing to forget, I am willing to tolerate”. (Dattani, CP; 223)

This shows the mutual understanding which can reduce tensions and hatred between the two communities. Ramnik offers Javed a job in his shop even after he knows that Javed was one of the hired men who were sponsored to throw the first stone in the procession. Smita developed friendship with Muslim girl and her relationship with Bobby was a love relationship. Even Hardika, after she learns about the black deed of her husband and father in-law, becomes softer for Muslim community and she wants to know from her son if the two Muslim boys will come back. The characters of both communities, Hardika, Aruna and Smita on the one hand while Babban and Javed on the other hand were revealed to have inherited or received communal identity and fractured value system in the milieu of which they are a product and are repeatedly reminded of who are they and where they belong to. The communal malaise did not allow them to come out from the world of hatred. A bridge of healthy understanding is required to dismantle this communal malaise.

These are few indirect remedies suggested by the playwright to the problem of communal disharmony. After all the best solution as suggested in the end of the play by Ramnik Gandhi:

“We should forgive the offenders and forget the past.

This can be the final solution” (Dattani, CP; 226)

The playwright at the end of the play wishes to stop this game of hatred and communal tension through the character of Ramnik. Even Ramnik accepts that his father has done the black deed so we should forgive offenders and forget the past. This is the final solution suggested by playwright Mahesh Dattani through the character of Ramnik. Dattani muses over the issue psychologically and philosophically. He attempts to find out the seed cause of the communal hatred that has devastated the land. Like a scientist, he believes in theory of cause and effect. He makes analytical inquiry into the problem for searching out the truth. He is the seeker of social and psychological truth.

Summing Up:

Thus Mahesh Dattani raises the problem of Communal Disharmony in this play “Final Solutions’ which is grounded in the loss of human values and ethical standard. Dattani upholds that prejudice and blind faith nurtures the issue of communal hatred. On the whole, Mahesh Dattani becomes a major stalwart in the domain of Indian English drama after 1990. So that Critics rightly regard him as- ‘a playwright of world stature in the contemporary Indian English Drama’.

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