



PLIGHT OF MINORITIES: A STUDY OF MAHESH DATTANI'S *FINAL SOLUTIONS*

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ABSTRACT

Mahesh Dattani is a well known Indian playwright. His main focus in his plays is the marginalization and subjugation of the Other. Mahesh Dattani's play Final Solutions deals with the theme of minority discrimination in society. The play presents different shades of the communalist attitude prevalent among Hindus and Muslims in its attempt to underline stereotypes and clichés influencing the collective sensibility of one community against another. The present paper aim at analyze and discuss and how Dattani has represented the issue of marginalization of minority in the play. They play has multiple layers of societal, familial and historical contours of such a location. The play moves from the partition to the present day communal riots. It probes the religious bigotry to the present day communal riots. It probes the religious bigotry by examining the attitudes of three generations of and middle class Gujrati business family. The gruesome rioting and communal/religious disharmony that took seed in 1947 continued to throw up countless incidents of communal violence in India between Hindus and Muslims, and was underscores emphatically by the brutal bloodshed in Gujrat in 2002. These were some of the issues that Dattani had actually dramatized in the form of Final Solutions.

Keywords: Gender, Discrimination, Patriarchal, Guilt, Marginalization

INTRODUCTION

Final Solutions, which won Dattani the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1998 has a powerful contemporary resonance as it addresses an issue of utmost concern to our society , that is the

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issue of communalism. The play presents different shades of the communalist attitude prevalent among Hindus and Muslims in its attempt to underline stereotypes and clichés influencing the collective sensibility of one community against another. What distinguishes this work from other plays written on the subject is that it is neither sentimental in its appeal nor simplified in its approach. It advances the objective candor for a social scientist while presenting a mosaic of diverse attitudes towards religious identity that often plunges the country into inhuman strife. Yet the issue is not moralized, as the demons of communal hatred are located not out on the street but deep within us.

The roots of Hindu-Muslim animosity are exposed in this play which is set in an atmosphere of communal violence. Religious beliefs are put under the microscope and popular myths are exploded. The understated comment is that every religion is inherently oppressive.

The characters that inhabit Dattani's world are fallible and often vulnerable. They suffer as a consequence of being bound by the dictates of an oppressive society. Ramnik is an average "tolerant" Hindu who at first glance seems morally superior to his orthodox wife Aruna. But as the play progresses, the superficial nature of his liberalism is exposed. Aruna expects her own unquestioning faith to be accepted by her daughter Smita who instead feels stifled by it. Hardik's deep-seated hatred as well as Javed's militancy has its origin in childhood experience. Unlike the provocative Javed, Bobby's is the "moderate" face of Islam that is acceptable to mainstream society. But lurking within his lack of aggression is shame; he tends to be apologetic for his religious identity.

Final Solutions stirs a hornet's nest of the issue of communal riots and disharmony, and familial controversies. It is about man being pushed into concerns and effects this has on people and society in general. In his conversation with Mahesh Dattani, Girish Kanrad says; "theatre can't change society but you can make society aware of issues and the complexities of issues and I think *Final Solutions* was superb" (Dattani *Two Faces Of Indian Drama* 4)

The play has multiple layers of societal, familial and historical contours of such a location. The horseshoe shaped ramp with the ever-present mob, and the two levels within the closed doors of the family where the action is played out mark the distinctive zones. The play moves from the partition to the present-day communal riots. It probes the religious bigotry to the present-day communal riots. It probes the religious bigotry by examining the attitudes of three generations of a middle-class Gujarati business family. Hardika, the grandmother is obsessed with her father's murder during the partition turmoil and the betrayals by a Muslim friend Zarin. Her son Ramnik Gandhi is haunted by the knowledge that his fortune was found on a shop of Zarin's father, which was burnt down by his kinsmen. Alyque Padamsee comments on *Final Solutions*



As I see it this is a play about transferred resentments. About looking for a scapegoat to hit out when we feel let down, humiliated. Taking out your anger on your wife, children or servants is an old Indian customs... this is above all a play about family with its simmering undercurrents... (Dattani 161)

While never making the overt comment, Dattani handles the difficult contours of the play with a subtle dramatic mechanism of using the family to mirror the community, as also using the community to reveal the hidden ugliness within the family unit. While Dattani never really offers easy resolutions, to the problems he has treated, it is interesting to see how he negotiates the terrain and the search for a solution to the core issues of the p[lay individual , familial, communal, national problems. His plays finally appeals to the younger generation who carries much less of the historical burden than the scarred psyches of their predecessors. And even of individual scars do exist, as in Javed's case, they would be quick to heal.

In his note on the play, *Final Solutions*, Alyque Padamesee attacks the very concept of communalism: "who is responsible for us becoming a third rate nation? Get rid of the minorities and Ram Rajya will return!" 161. Again he poses a vital question regarding the communal disharmony that is prevalent in our country: "will we ever be free or ever-locked in combat...Arabs against Jews, whites against blacks, Hindus against Muslims?"(161)

In the play, there are five Hindu masks and five Muslim masks, the mob/ chorus becomes the chorus when they wear either the Hindu or the Muslim masks. A riot breaks out when the chariot of the Hindus is damaged by some hoodlums. Immediately, the Hindus accuse the Muslims of this violent act:

For forty years our chariot has moved through their Mohall's. How dare they? They broke our wrath. They broke our chariot and felled our gods! This is our land! How dare they? It is in their blood! It is in their blood to destroy!" (168)

Smita, daughter of Ramnik, explains how the youth are being exploited as riot-rousers: "those...parties! They hire him! That's how he makes a living. They bring him and many more to the city to create riots. To...throw the first stone!" (195). Javed tries to justify his act of throwing stones at the Vinayaka Procession: "but you do something more violent. You provoke! You make me throw stones! Every time I look at you, my bile rises!" (195).all the citizens of India are guaranteed the "freedom of conscience and free profession, practice and propagation of religion-subject of public order, morality and health" (194). Still, Muslims have been subjected to a higher than usual level of abuse since partition. Ramnik retorts angrily: "how dare you blame your violence on other people? It is in you! You have violence



in your mind.. our life is based on violence. Your faith is based...”(198). When Ramnik threatens Javed that he would throw him out to the mob, Bobby says that they have disappeared. Javed sarcastically says:

Maybe they aren't being paid overtime. And they attacked us! They aren't very systematic. Next time they should have around of introductions so we don't end up killing each other. At least, not unintentionally. Ha! You want to throw me to the mob? I am a part of it. You have been protecting me from people like me. I am no different from them! No different, do you hear? I do what they are doing-only on a different street! (204)

Javed wants to assert his religious and family identity through violence:

Anyone sitting at home, sipping tea and reading the newspapers will say that if=t is obvious that a minority would never start a riot, we are too afraid, that is had to be politically motivated. Try telling it to a thousand devotees swayed by their own religious fervor, united by their fantasies of persecution, constantly reassuring themselves that this is their land by taking out processions. [. . .] This is jihad- the holy war! It is written! Yes! I would say. I am ready. I am prepared (205)

Javed attacks the caste system in Hinduism and how it segregates a particular section of people as “untouchables.” He sarcastically comments on this peculiar institution “untouchability”; “we do love our own blood. Unlike you who treat your own like shit which can't be touched” (190).

The dalits were not allowed entry in to the temples; they were absolutely barred from entering the sanctum sanctorum. Ambedker was furious when the Brahmins priests threw the holy ash from a distance into the hands of non-Brahmins in the temples. Only Brahmins could take a bath in the temple pond, and take the water to do the pooja in the sanctum sanctorum. Dalits were not allowed to walk in the lane where the temples were located. The Muslim chorus reveals it sharply:

What must we do? To become more acceptable? Must we lose our identity? Is that what they want? Must we tolerate more? Does our future lie in their hands? Is there anyone more unsure more insecure than us? Oh what a curse it is to be less in number” (208)



The hindu chorus is accusing the secularist as pseudo-secularist: “our bellowing pales in comparison to the whisper of a pseudo-secularist who is in league with the people who brought shame to our land! Half-hearted, half-baked, with no knowledge of his land’s greatness. He is still a threat” (212)

At the end of the play, Bobby deliberately removes his footwear and advances towards the pooja room slowly. Despite Aruna’s disapproval, Bobby suddenly picks up the image of Krishna, extends his hands and shows the image to everyone:

*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.*

For the Indian the most important battles for the establishment of a distinctive identity within a territorial location lay in the partitioning India. National identities were conceived and took shape in accordance with the ideologies that formulated these on the basis of religious (and later, linguistic, ethnic, caste) identities. The gruesome rioting and communal/religious disharmony that took seed in 1947 continued to throw up countless incidents of communal violence in India between Hindus and Muslims, and 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*.

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 has explored the issues of identity, memory, suffering and loss within the larger political context through the various productions of the play.

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