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Communal Disharmony: Stereotyping and Prejudices Against the Other Religion in *Final Solutions*

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Abstract

Mahesh Dattani is one of the India's pioneering contemporary playwrights. His plays are exceptional as it deals with critical problems prevailing in the society. Dattani shapes his subject in such a way that not only it appeals the reader but also poses question in front of them.

The playwright comprehends the mind of the readers and deals each and every social problem with appropriate skills and techniques. The issue of communalism, social awareness, social discrimination over religion, humiliation of humanity in the name of social pride, illogical acceptance of prejudices, etc. are brought to the stage through the play *Final Solutions* of Dattani. The paper aims to critique the factors responsible for communal disharmony in *The Final solutions*. It analyzes the textual narrative of the play which has a significant role in highlighting the issue of communalism. It also aims to find out the inappropriate and inhuman behavioral patterns in the society based on conventional stereotyping and established prejudices.

Keywords: communalism, disharmony, humanity, riots, communal issues

Introduction

Communalism, a constant threat for peace and prosperity of the country, is one of the major issues faced by modern India. As a responsible playwright, Mahesh Dattani has successfully drawn the attention of readers towards this burning issue of communal disharmony through his play *Final Solutions*. The play deals with the constant discourse of hatred, aggression and political exploitation of communal riots. It is mainly about mutual distrust of two communities -the Hindu and Muslims from the partition in 1947 to the arrival of second millennium.

About The Play *Final Solutions*

The theme of the *Final Solutions* is summed up in the first sentence of the 'Note on the Play' by Aleyque Padmsee. Padmsee remarks that "The demons of the communal hatred are not out on the street --- they are lurking inside us." (CPI 161) The play examines the attitude of three generations of middle-class Gujarati family. Hardika, the grandmother is obsessed with the murder of her father during partition time and betrayal by a muslim friend, Zarine. Her son, Ramnik Gandhi, is haunted by the knowledge that his fortune is founded on a shop of Zarine's father, which was burnt down by his father and grandfather. Hardika's daughter-in-law Aruna lives with strict notion of the Hindu sanskar and granddaughter Smita is modern beyond all prejudices of Aruna.

Hindu Muslim Hatred

Two Muslim intruders, Bobby and Javed intrudes in a traditional Hindu family during a communal Hindu-Muslim riot. Smita, the young daughter of Ramnik and Aruna Gandhi, reveals that she has been introduced with the two Muslim men. The riot reminds old grandmother Hardika about the Hindu Muslim riots at the time of partition and she gets panicky. Ramnik who is secretly carrying the guilt consciousness for the black deed of his ancestors, gives shelter to the two Muslim young men. The device of chorus has been used very aptly to introduce the theme of Hindu-Muslim hatred as the background of the play. The men in the chorus put on Hindu masks and Muslim masks alternatively. They disclose the set mindset of Hindu and the Muslim towards one another. Padmsee remarks in this regard: The mob in the play is symbolic of our own hatred and paranoia. Each member of the mob is an individual yet they meld into one seething whole as soon as politicians play on their fears and anxieties. (CPI 161)

The play starts with Daksha, a young bride, attempting to express her inner feelings by scribbling a diary.

Dear Dairy, today is the first time I have dared to put my thoughts on your pages... I am sharing my innermost thoughts with you. Nobody else knows what I think or how I feel, except now you... (CP I 165-166)

Daksha's diary portrays the theme of Hindu-Muslim riots as an integral part of the partition. She recorded the incident as "a most terrible thing". Her childhood memories are full with the bad memories of communal riots leading to the death of her father and destruction of gramophone records of her favourite singers like: Noor Jahan, Suriya and Shamshad Begum. She got married at the age of fourteen and suffered a lot in her married life. Daksha's love for Hindi songs introduces her to Zarine, who has a very good collection of Hindi songs. Daksha feels emotionally attached with Zarine and her family. When Daksha learns that Zarine's family is facing financial crisis because their cloth mill is burnt down. She requests her husband to help Zarine's family. But Zarine's father rejects the aid offered by Hari.

Buying their burnt-up little shop. Zarine's father wanted much for it. It was not possible to give him what he demanded and so the resentment what wretched people. All this fuss over such a small matter. I hate people with false pride. As if it is their birth right to ask for more than they deserve. Such wretched people! Horrible people! (*Collected Plays II* 221)

She fails to understand the reason of resentment. History acts like a character in the play, which opens with the main figure of Daksha as a young girl and after marriage as Hardika, because her in-laws changed her name according to their tradition. Past and present are blended through the figures of Hardika and Daksha. After forty years, Daksha grows old but her prejudice against the other community continues with her. Most margins would simply wish to be left alone to themselves, allowed to carry on with their way of life rather than wishing to change the society according to their ways. But they at least want their breathing space under the sun along with the mainstream rather than being pushed mercilessly to the corners and being scoffed at by the centre. (Role of Mahesh Dattani 1559)

The root cause behind Hindu-Muslim communal violence is best revealed through Javed and Bobby. They are trying to hide their identity while they are chased by some Hindu fanatics. It is made clear that failure of understanding between man and man creates communal hatred. It is obvious that ordinary objects take a twisted meaning in times of tension. The way of knotting handkerchief on head becomes a symbol of religious identity for Bobby and Javed.

The Hindu fanatics started searching for Muslim men by the notion that a chariot carrying the Hindu god was destroyed by some Muslim men. When the prayer cap of Javed and the knotted handkerchief of Bobby were found in their pockets, the mob became furious:

You pray to a god you do not know! You pray to nothing. You do not know his form. And you seek to destroy our gods! Drive them out! Kill the sons of swine! Kill the sons of swine! (CP-I 169)

On the other hand, the Muslims too react aggressively. A total lack of understanding between the two communities creates tension. Muslim chorus 1&2: They hunt us down! They're afraid of us! They beat us up! We are few! But we are strong! They're afraid of us! They hunt us down! They want to throw us out! (CP-I 179)

Mob wants to kill both the boys. To escape from the wrath of mob, Javed and Bobby try to seek shelter at many doors but nobody helps them. Finally Ramnik opens the door for them but the mob follows them and demands the boys back.

Chorus All: We want those traitors! Ramnik: I have to protect them. (182-183.)

Ramnik's daughter supports her father's decision while mother and grandmother are against it. Hardika expresses her disliking:

I didn't like the one called Javed the minute I saw him. I know he was no good. And the other are, I was frightened of him. (183)

She does not agree with her husband and we can see clashes of thoughts between them:

Aruna: why do you bring so much trouble on our heads? Ramnik: What do you want me to do? Throw them out so they'll be butchered? (184)

Whereas Aruna is in confusion of right and wrong. She is sympathetic towards them but she hates them as outcaste or impure section of society, better to be treated at an arm's length. Intimate mixing of food and relation is not acceptable. She denies Javed's offer to help her by filling a bucket of water meant for bathing the gods. She clears her stands:

(To Javed) Please try to understand. We have nothing against you. It is only that, we have our ways and customs and... and... we are all equal. There is no doubt. We respect your religion and we wish you well why, we have friends who are... Smita has so many friends who are not... All religion is one only the ways to God are many...

Aruna: We bathe our god with it. It has to be pure, it must not be contaminated. (209)

Aruna offers some water to both the boys but she puts the glasses separately from the other glasses like they are touched by any outcaste or demon.

Aruna unable to effectively stand up to her husband, asserts her questioning belief in right/wrong. If the men were being chased to be killed, they must have done something wrong. (Angelie Multani, 45)

Smita is not happy with her mother's attitude, she tries to make her understand, but Aruna has been groomed by other notions:

Aruna: ...I shudder to think what will become of your children. What kind of Sanskar will you give them when you don't have any yourself?... Does it mean anything to you? For so many generations we have preserved our Sanskar because we believe it is the truth! It is the way shown to us by our Saints. We must know no other path. And I will not have it all perish to accommodate someone else's faith. I have enough faith and pride to see that it doesn't happen. I shall uphold what I believe in the truth. (CPI 209-210)

The play presented with the mixture of present and past throws light into the belief of the people who consider themselves liberal and modern.

Final Solutions has a powerful contemporary resonance as it addresses an issue of utmost concern to our society i.e. the issue of communalism. The play presents different shades of communal attitude prevalent among Hindu and Muslim in its attempt to underline the stereotypes and clichés influencing the collective sensibility of one community against another. What distinguishes their 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 object. Candour or a social scientist while presenting a mosaic of diverse attitudes towards religious identity that often plunges the country in human strife. Yet the issue is not moralised, as the demons of communal hatred are located not out on the street but deep within us. (Arvind Gaur 49)

Dattani presents two different attitudes to religion. Aruna stands for conservative attitude whereas Smita voices liberal attitude to religion. It is difficult to say anyone right or wrong. Individuals have their own beliefs. Smita is against her mother's conservative attitude.

The play *Final solutions* attempts to solve the problem of communalism. It is very difficult to give any viable solution to it. People have to respect other religion, to understand other communities, their feelings and customs. Political parties have to keep away from communal issues. The young Smita represents the dynamism of solution in the play. She is neither rebellious nor apprehensive. She promotes the idea that the search of peace lies not in demonstration on Rath Yatra but in the realisation of one's own feelings. Ramnik reveals Javed the real incident that was responsible for communal violence. The incident of stone, splitting on the Rath results in the loss of axle of the chariot and breaking of idols. (Beena 51)

Humanity is above all the trivial notions. The names of God are different but He is one. In third act of the play Bobby holds the ideal of the Lord Krishna in his hands from Gandhi's pooja room. He expresses his feelings to Javed:

See, Javed! He doesn't humiliate you. He doesn't cringe from my touch. He welcomes the warmth of my hand. 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 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! (224-225)

Dattani shows the belief and prejudices of people which have moved with passage of time. As generations grow up, prejudices become as strong as ever before.

Dattani has also tried to show how communal violence breaks our society. Kenneth Pickering rightly observes: The problem play is that 'which explores a particular social problem, raising many questions about it and provoking the audience into finding answer. Such plays, sometimes known as, 'thesis play' because they mount and work out an argument may be tragic or comic in essence but these ideas constitute some issues of deep concern to the dramatist with which he wishes to engage the minds and consciences of the audience (quoted in Das 78). Here, Dattani discloses the essential loneliness of man who is trapped by the feelings of communal hatred. He shows that biased approach shows lack of human understanding.

Conclusion

Mahesh Dattani has always tried to represent contemporary social conflicts and reality through his plays. *Final solutions* by Mahesh Dattani is the best example to a persistent issue of communal disharmony. Through this play Dattani has shown that fear of seclusion and isolation creates insanity which leads to violence. And the reason behind this tendency is to treat the person belonging to different community as the 'other'.

Mahesh Dattani attempts to sensitize people through *Final solutions*, he told them that communal hatred can be addressed as it is a result of transitory rage which culminates into violence. The main aim of this play is to try to nurture unity and co-operation between two different communities.

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