

## Mahesh Dattani's "Final Solution": A play based on communalism and its consequences

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### Abstract

Mahesh Dattani the first Indian playwright in English, received the most coveted Sahitya Akademi Award for his collection of plays "Final Solutions and other plays". Dattani's play "Final Solutions" clinched this award because of its contemporary topic. The play and the playwright objectively portrays a very sensitive issue of the Hindu-Muslim divide, the prejudice and the deep rooted suspicion which we otherwise keep concealing beneath the skins of our liberal and secular attitudes. Therefore, this paper is a humble attempt to study the, still so fresh, issue of communal divide and the tensions related to it through the context of "Final Solutions".

**Keywords:** Dattani, communalism, family, Hindu, Muslim, prejudice, hatred, riots

### 1. Introduction

Mahesh Dattani, an actor, director, playwright, dancer and screenplay writer is hailed by Alyque Padamsee as the "most serious contemporary playwright".

"Final Solutions" the fifth play by Mahesh Dattani was written in 1991, the time when communal riots were almost about to start in Bombay due to the destruction of Babri Mosque in Ayodhya. Unfortunately the play's first performance at a theatre festival in Bangalore was cancelled due to the play's subject being too volatile.

The play Final Solutions is basically a thrilling story of gripping communalism. The play is about a Hindu family who gives shelter to two Muslim boys during the communal riots. Dattani uses the family as a microcosm of India and traces the deep-rooted prejudices and conflicts between the Hindu-Muslim communities between the Hindu-Muslim communities. Through this play Dattani tries to prove this point that the biggest reason behind this communal disharmony is the psychosis of Hindus and Muslims which has lead to a chain reaction in the form of so many riots taking place after the division of India.

The beginning of the play depicts two Muslim boys Bobby and Javed trying to seek shelter at Ramnik Gandhi's house from the chasing mob, during the communal riots in the city. As soon as the Muslim boys enter the house of the Hindu family the drama begins. Under the roof of Gandhi's house different cultures, religions and resentments towards each other start confronting. Dattani, using post-partitions riots as a background, focuses on the problem of communal disharmony between the Hindus and Muslims in India. He very neatly analysis the inbuilt and inherent communal prejudices amongst both the communities. When the play begins Daksha, mother of play's central character Ramnik Gandhi, who is at present called Hardika starts reading from her diary. With the help of her diary the reader comes to know about her two identities, one that of a girl of fifteen and another a matured lady who has lived forty years of freedom. Another significant feature of the play is the chorus which assumes Hindu masks and sometimes Muslim ones. The songs of the chorus clearly indicate the communal disharmony and its consequences being

experienced by the characters in the play. In the stage dissections Dattani gives clear hints of the nature of the Mob Chorus:

"There are five Hindu masks and five Muslim maskes. The Mob/ Chorus 'wear' either the Hindu or the Muslim masks. But when referred to individually, they remain chorus 1, chorus 2, etc. The players of the Mob/ Chorus do not belong to any religion and ideally should wear black."

As soon as the riots burst out on the streets it brings horror inside the Gandhi's house. The time Ramnik Gandhi gives shelter to two Muslim boys Javed and Bobby then begins the quest for truth of their beliefs amongst all the characters be it the father, mother, grandmother and the grand-daughter. The Mob/ Chorus starts calling him a 'traitor' for sheltering the boys. The same exchange of accusations could be seen in Act III of the play through the conversation of Javed and Ramnik .Although Javed laterly admits of his being carried away and soon he recovers from his disillusion.

Dattani has very effectively depicted in this play the major causes of difference between Hindu and Muslims i.e the sense of superiority amongst both the communities .Another factor being the scarcity of religious intolerance. Besides this he also discusses the role of police, politicians and public at the time of riots. It is vividly shown that our leaders with the help of few weaklings like Javed doesn't lose an opportunity to take profit. By paying them some money they hire them for creating riots and chaos as it happens in the beginning of the play when the Rath Yatra is attacked and the pujari is also killed. The chorus clearly depicts the sentiments of two groups at that time:

Chorus 1: How dare they?

Chorus 2, 3: They broke our Rath. The broke our chariot and felled our Gods.

Chorus 1, 2, 3: This is our land ! How dare they?

Chorus 1: It is in their blood.

Chorus 5: It could have been an accident.

Chorus 2: The stone that hit our God was no accident !

Chorus 3: The knife that slit the poojari's stomach was no accident.

In the play “Final Solutions”, communal riots broke out due to the attack on the procession. Thus it shows that even any incident like this can create havoc. These kind of riots can also take place even due to bad remarks of one community over the other. Everything during the riots is mercilessly killed be it the respect for life, dignity of humanity, justice and love for truth. During riots people not only lose their bodies but their souls as well.

Many problems of this communalism can be sorted out through talk. But few people instead of trying to diminish it, infuriate it and thus their objectionable remarks lead to communal divide. Therefore, signifying that all this happens due to some so called guardians of the society who otherwise worsen the situation by feeding and encouraging people like Javed. The politicians use religion more as a play in their hands to achieve their desired goals.

In the play we are introduced to Gandhi family including- Ramnek Gandhi (Father), Hardike/Daksha (Grandmother), Aruna (Mother) and Sunita (Daughter). Ramnik and Sunita are somewhat liberal in their attitude whereas Aruna and Hardika are orthodox and fanatically religious. As soon as Javed and Bobby are allowed to enter the house by Ramnik, Aruna and Hardika get enraged as they believe that their house has got polluted due to the entry of Muslims. Hardika had seen her father die during partition riots and that’s why she is deeply prejudiced towards the Muslims. Another reason of her hatred towards Muslims was her overtures of friendship to Zarine, a Muslim girl, whose father’s shop was burnt down during the riots and then bought by Daksha/Hardika’s father-in-law. In reality in lieu of riots Daksha/Hardika’s Husband and father-in law had burnt down that shop so that they can buy it on less price afterwards.

While Javed and Bobby are at Gandhi’s house, Ramnik offer the boys a job at his shop in order to atone for his father and grandfather’s sins. It is just at the end of the play that Ramnik tells his mother the reality behind him offering job to the boys when she confronts him. He tells her the reality at this point of time as he didn’t want his mother to spend last few years of her life with a guilt. After this Daksha/Hardika starts regretting about her deep rooted prejudice against Muslims. She realizes that all this communal divide is due to this prejudice and hatred and this leads to a chain reaction.

Another important event of the play depicting the ill-effects of prejudice is the time when Bobby enters Aruna’s praying place and holds the idol of Krishna in his hand. Aruna to whom her religion and religious place holds great significance shivers at this sight. But Bobby gives a lesson of life to her before leaving by telling her that the God doesn’t fly out or disappeared from his hand as he is a Muslim. It is we, he says, who make all these assumptions. He tells Aruna that all this will not end until people like her end such prejudice in their hearts.

Thus Dattani very appropriately shows through this play that the central issue of communal divide is the utmost concern of our society. He shows that the mutual aversion of the two major religions of India i.e. Hindus and Muslims is just because of their deep-rooted hatred and prejudice under their secular skins. Actually the fears and anxieties of both the communities is an aftermath of the partition. Both the communities remain conscious of the fact that if the one touches the commodities of other they get contaminated. Thus through this drama Dattani has greatly contributed to the

Indian literature. There are some critics who even believe that this play should be translated into every Indian language and should be staged everywhere throughout the country.

### References

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