

Communal Tension and Togetherness in Mahesh Dattani's

Final Solutions

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Religions are different roads converging upon the same point.

What does it matter that we take different roads, so long as we reach the same goal?

-M. K. Gandhi

Deriving from the classical and European models, Contemporary Indian English drama has become experimental and innovative in terms of thematic and technical qualities. It is not the offspring of any tradition and it has laid the foundation of a distinctive tradition in the history of world drama by reinvestigating history, legend, myth, religion and folklore in the context of contemporary socio-political issues. Among the major dramatists who have given a distinctive shape to this enormous mass of creative material are; Rabindranath Tagore, Vijay Tendulkar, Girish Karnad, Badal Sarkar, Asif Currimbhoy, Mahasweta Devi and Mahesh Dattani. It is note worthy that Mahesh Dattani is the first playwright to win the prestigious Sahitya Akademi Award-1998 in English for his play *Final Solutions* (1992). Dattani's plays embody crucial concerns of Indian society, ranging from many difficult issues to major unrelenting taboos. Dattani picks up issues related to specific scope but explores them in a wider context that can visualize contemporary urban India. In *Final Solutions*, Dattani weaves together the various strands of Ramnik Gandhi's family to meet his point. Ramnik Gandhi, the father, carries with him the burden of the guilt of his father's 'black' deeds, not transferring to his mother, Hardika. Aruna, his wife, and Smita, his daughter, both hit out at each other for no apparent reason. Ramnik's family is pitted against the backdrop of a riot-torn city whereby Bobby, Javed, Zarine and others from the past make an entry into the dramatic scene, interweaving the past with the present besides framing the time and its burning problems particularly the issue of communal tension.

The play opens with a Shaw-like elaborate stage direction putting masks on the Mob/Chorus to make the frequent change of identity look natural. When the Chorus puts on Hindu-Muslim masks, the schism is hinted at. On whispering or shouting along with a character, the Mob's function is to articulate the feelings of that particular character. Alyque

Padamsee, the director of the play, is candid in his observations on the Mob/Chorus device and observes, “The mob in the play is symbolic of our own hatred and panoria. ... can we shake off our prejudices or are they in our psyche like our genes? Will we ever be free or ever-locked in combat ... Arabs against Jews, white against blacks, Hindus against Muslims” (CP 161-162). The innovative idea of putting young Daksha and old Hardika on the same time- plane talks about the past and present at the same instant as Daksha is reading out what she has just written in her diary where Hardika is seated motionless. Daksha’s diary records both happy Independence and sad Partition riots’ experiences. Years rolled by, Daksha has grown up into wizened Hardika but the things have not changed as we see communal tensions are found now and again.

In Act – I a procession comes out resulting communal tension where the Chorus gets splitting into two factions and one faction keeps accusing the other and attacking a Chariot carrying a Hindu god by a Muslim mob. Deftly, the Chorus divides into two groups enacting the roles of the Hindu and Muslims:

Chorus 2, 3: They broke our rath.

They 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 2, 3: It is in their blood to destroy! (CP 168-169).

Ramnik’s mother Hardika experiences a sorrowful past which makes her averse to the other religious sect. While travelling from Hussainabad to India, a mob chases the people of the other community and butchers brutally. In the riots, her father is killed and her friend, Zarine’s father’s dry fruits shop is also destroyed. The underlying tension results in a schism between the two sects continued. Such communal hatred calls for a close scrutiny of relationship between the two communities referred to, for a long time. Revealed as members of the ‘other community’, Bobby and Javed are chased by the Mob/Chorus. They run for life and take shelter in Ramnik Gandhi’s residence. But, the Mob doesn’t cease haunting and thundering Ramnik’s door. When Ramnik comes to rescue the boys, Hardika keeps lamenting because all the injustices 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 those people into my house? Oh! I hate this world! They killed his grandfather! (CP 179-180).

Thus, the homely ambience gets ruffled as Aruna, Ramnik's wife fumbles to give them a glass of water to slake their thirst. When Ramnik asks Aruna to offer them food, she cringes in hatred and forces him to open the door and hand the boys over to the infuriated mob. Smita, who knows the secret of Javed's source of living that he acts as a hired hooligan to earn his living, convinces Aruna and get them stay back.

In Act – II, Ramnik discusses several issues with Bobby and Javed bringing out the truth that Javed has been rendered a scapegoat by the fanatics of his own community. But Hardika cannot digest the fact that her son has offered Javed a job in their shop. She is not ready to forgive the people of the community who brutally killed her father and keeps musing to herself:

That night I couldn't sleep. I listened. I was angry that Ramnik was blinded by his ideals. Why did he offer that boy a job in ourshop? What was he doing? How did he know they were innocent? Couldn't he see there was more violence in that boy's eyes than those stone throwers threats? He wasn't just saving two boys from getting killed. This was something else Ramnik was trying to do (CP 190-191).

Ramnik's actions arise from the guilt he feels about the actions committed by his father and grandfather. It was his family that had caused Zarine's father's shop to be burnt in riots, but Ramnik proves that he is a secular by crossing the line between tolerance and fanaticism and offering a job to Javed.

In Act – III, the use of theatrical devices is perfect where three stage-spaces are used by Bobby and Javed, [the floor], the Muslim Chorus [ramp] and Daksha [the other side of the stage]. The guilt-feelings of Javed and the reminiscences of Daksha's past throw light on the relationship between the two communities. Javed seems adamant but Bobby tries to bring a change and feels happy that there is a change in Javed:

Bobby: Nobody will believe that you have changed.

Javed: Have I..... changed?

Bobby: Why do you doubt it?

Javed: I cannot think anymore (CP 196-197).

When Javed raises the issue of *mutual trust* between the two communities, Ramnik goes into rage and calls him a hired hoodlum but Bobby tells him the reason of Javed's turning into a zealot:

A minor incident changed all that..... We were playing cricket on our street with the younger boys. The postman delivered our neighbour's mail. He dropped one of the letters. He was in a hurry and asked Javed to hand the letter over to the owner. Javed took the letter..... and opened the gate. Immediately, a voice boomed, 'What do you want?' I can still remember Javed holding out the letter and mumbling something, his usual firmness vanishing in a second, 'Leaving it on the wall' the voice ordered. Javed backed away, really frightened. We all watched as the man came out with a cloth in his hand. He wiped the letter before picking it up, he then wiped the spot on the wall the letter was laying on and he wiped the gate!..... We all heard a prayer bell, ringing continuously. Not loud. But distinct..... (CP 200-201).

Javed, thus, turns into a strong enemy of a particular community. When asked about his reaction on hearing the prayer after the incident, Bobby says that he too feels angry as Javed. Learning the reason of Javed's hooliganism, Ramnik feels ashamed of his community. Ramnik tries to make Aruna understand telling her that there is no magnanimity in not allowing a Muslim boy touch our God or the water with which our God is bathed. Javed realizes the things and feels remorseful for not listening to Bobby's words. The 'hired hoodlum' gets back to his senses and feels repentant for his wrong-deeds and keeps changing into a better young man gradually. After taking refuge at Ramnik's residence, when Bobby and Javed are about to leave, Bobby breaks all norms by lifting the tiny image of Lord Krishna from the altar in Aruna's pooja-room and declares:

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... [To Aruna] You can bathe Him day and night, you can splash holy waters on Him but you cannot remove my touch from His form. 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! (CP 224-225).

Aruna screams against the desecration while Bobby rejoins stating that the tragedy is behaving too much about the *sacred* which we believe. He says that if we understand and believe in one another, nothing can be destroyed and of course it is not a call for a final solution but it is only a suggestion that needs practice and immediate implantation. Aruna comes to a notion that respecting one's religion leads to respecting all religions. Grippled by numerous queries, even after the two Muslim boys leave, Ramnik decides not to go to his shop as it assails him till date to accept the fact that the shop is bought from them at half its value and he confesses:

...We burnt it. Your husband. My father. And his father.

They had burnt it in the name of communal hatred (CP 226).

Ramnik feels a need to expiate by handing over his shop to Javed. He determines to call Javed and pass it on to him as a legacy he is supposed to inherit. His mother, Hardika knows the truth and feels ashamed of her behavior towards the other community. It is understood that the *Final Solutions* is not against the pride in one's own faith or religion but against using that faith to deny others' right to their beliefs. Besides carrying the treatment of communal tension, the play implicitly stresses the idea of mutual recognition. Hardika arrives at this kind of recognition understanding that the Hindu and Muslims become victims to the communal violence. For Dattani, the contemporary nation is one where religious attitudes play a vital role because religion has always been a key factor in the imaging of the nation. In her book on Dattani, Asha Kuthari Chaudhuri writes:

For the Indian, the most important battle for the establishment of a distinctive identity within a territorial location lay in the partitioning of India. National identities were conceived and took shape in accordance with the ideologues that formulated these on the basis of religious (and later, linguistic, ethnic, caste) identities (77).

Even though the play *Final Solutions* carries the theme of communal tension, it tries to suggest final solutions to make a full stop to communal tension and promotes togetherness. However, ironically, ten years after the Babri Masjid demolition, India was subjected to yet another phase of communal violence: the Godhra carnage – 2002.

Works Cited

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