

**MAHESH DATTANI'S *FINAL SOLUTIONS*:
A STUDY IN CASTE, RACE AND GENDER**

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Abstract

Indian English literature has immersed as a potent one to make a representation of the dilemmas of human existence expressed in terms of gender inequalities, caste ridden practices and social discrimination. Mahesh Dattani is leading and daring dramatic artist in the realm of contemporary Indian English Drama. His famous play Final Solutions explores the issues of identity, communal tension, loss and reproduction of culture. The play has been staged in India and abroad and won worldwide acclaim. Dattani takes up a genuine problem which has plagued the country for millennium or so. The primary concern of the writer is to explore the various maladies of society and, wherever necessary, to pinpoint solutions through the medium of literature. Through the realistic presentation of the two major groups of India – Hindus and Muslims, he has tried his best to provide a workable solution to fill up the gap between them. He seems to be very certain in projecting his vision of secularism in which both the communities may live together with happiness. The present paper is an attempt to deal with the issues such as caste, race and gender discrimination addressed in the play. As a social scientist, Dattani gives exposure to deep rooted prejudices among the Hindus against Muslims and vice-versa. The characters in the play Final Solutions struggle for some kind of freedom and happiness under the weight of tradition, caste, race, cultural constructions of gender. Accordingly it registers an urgent need to reconstruct the culture in practice as it is being worked out in literature.

Key words: Caste, race, gender, fundamentalism, communal prejudices, subalterns, lesbianism, discrimination.

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What Bijay Kumar Das says is very true that “Mahesh Dattani needs no introduction.” (ix) A Sahitya Akademi Award winning playwright, Dattani showed his courage of conviction in exploring invisible issues and innovative themes like unusual love relationship, religious fundamentalism, communal prejudices or so; and voicing “concerns for the downtrodden and the subalterns like *hijras*, HIV positives, gays etc.” (Parmar 260) Like George Bernard Shaw, his plays deal with the burning social and political problems such as religious tension, child sexual abuse, lesbianism, sexuality and gender discrimination. Alyque Padamsee, the well-known stage director calls him “a playwright with some conviction.”(Qtd. Das 8)

The present paper aims at highlighting the question concerning caste, race and gender addressed in Dattani's play *Final Solutions*. The play deals with the most complex and intricate issue of communal hatred and racial pride and prejudice towards other community. It focuses on the problem of communal tension between the Hindu and Muslims, especially during the period of the post-partition India. The actual action of the play takes place outside that is on the street, but it brings tension and horror inside the house of Ramnik Gandhi, a Hindu family. Ramnik Gandhi, Daksha (Hardika), Aruna, Smita are the members of Gandhi family. Ramnik Gandhi being head of this Hindu family represents both the pre and post-independence period. The three women

belong to three significant times in the history of India. Daksha (Hardika) belongs to the pre-independence time, Aruna her daughter-in-law, belongs to the independence time, and Smita, Aruna's daughter, is a contemporary, post-independence Indian woman. Dattani gives exposure to deep-rooted prejudices among the members of this family.

The play opens with Daksha (who has become now after forty years Hardika) recollecting from her diary the past when she was married at the age of 14. Her attachment with Hindi film-songs leads her to befriend a Muslim, Zarine. When Zarine's family is in financial trouble as their cloth mill is burnt, she offers help to them. But Zarine's father rejects it and this enrages Daksha. Actually, the reason behind it is disclosed at the end of the play that Ramnik's father and grandfather conspired against Zarine's father and got his mill burnt. Unknown to the truth Daksha's prejudice and hatred against Muslims continues to be with her.

The play puts the myths and notions of our faith and rituals under scrutiny. Every caste has religious faith and creed. It brings out the statements that mutual faith and respect can remove communal disharmony and discord. The members of both caste communities should shake off the pride and ego. Trusting and understanding thoughts and feelings is the possible way to fight back communal hatred and flame. Prejudice and bias against the other community is harmful. Dattani dismisses the idea of sending the Muslims to Pakistan. According to him, it is not the solution nor is it possible. All human beings are alike. Deepali Agrawal rightly says:

Mahesh Dattani puts the eternal question with his play, *Final Solutions* that every now and then rankles our consciousness - are we human beings real humane? It propels us to perennial problems as to what's that

we should priorities - our Religion, our perennial ideals or our compassion for other human beings. Besides studying these issues from a social point of view, Dattani also analyses as to how these issues alter the equations within a family. (62)

Dattani addresses the problem of racism, and how it debilitates impact on cultural self-consciousness and identity of the characters. The play deals with the psychological conflict between two cultural world views deliberating resolution externally. The conflict between the two ethnic groups – Hindu and Muslims illuminates behind the action of the play. “The Hindus always think that they are superior to the Muslims and the Muslims think the same.” (Singh 60) Alyque Padamsee puts it in introduction to the play, “the demons of communal hatred are not out on the street ...they are lurking inside ourselves.” (CP 161)

The sentiments of the people from two groups of different religions can be traced in the chorus of the play:

... the Mob/Chorus slowly wear the Hindu masks.

CHORUS 1. The procession has passed through these lanes every
year, for forty years!

CHORUS 2, 3. How dare they?

CHORUS 1, 2, 3. For forty years our chariot has moved through their
mohallas.

CHORUS 4, 5. Why did they? Why did they today?

CHORUS 1. How dare they?

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! (FS 6)

These dialogues reveal the sentiments of Hindus against Muslims. And in the following dialogues one can find the sentiments of the Muslims about Hindus.

...*They now have on Muslim masks.*

CHORUS 1. Their chariot fell in our street!

CHORUS 2. Their God now prostrates before us!

CHORUS 3. So they blame it on us?

CHORUS 1. Was the chariot built by us?

CHORUS 2, 3. Blame the builder of those fancy thrones.

CHORUS 4. A manufacturing defect!

CHORUS 5. Doest their God have a warranty?

CHORUS ALL. We are neither idol-maker nor-breakers!

CHORUS 5. But they blamed it on us!

CHORUS ALL. Why did they? Why did they? Why? (FS 10)

The action moves on when two Muslim boys Bobby and Javed enter into Ramnik's house during communal riots occasioned by the attack on the Rath Yatra procession. The mob of Hindus follow them to Ramnik's house and demand that Bobby and Javed be handed over to them but Ramnik refuses. Aruna and Hardika treat these two boys indifferently. Aruna places two glasses of water before them. After they have drunk water, she holds the glasses with her thumbs and index fingers, on the sides which have not been touched by their lips. She takes them away and keeps them separate from the other glasses. Moreover, Ramnik is surprised to know that Javed is seeing his sister when he doesn't live with his parents. As Javed replies to Ramnik, "We do love our own blood. Unlike you who treat your own like shit which can't be touched." (FS 32)

Javed criticizes caste discrimination existing in the Hindu community saying that the caste Hindus don't touch the lower caste people.

The play depicts the picture of transferred resentments and communal riots and involves the audiences to rethink over the burning issues. It reveals how religious fanaticism and caste/race prejudices work as cohesive forces. There's a great irony in it that the people of different castes and communities of the world boast to call their religion greater than those of others on one hand, and they are committed for unscientific and inhuman practices on the other. They hurl insult and express unsuitable comments on others' religion. And this creates hatred and violence and gives birth to communal riots. The political forces and hypocrite agencies are not interested in finding out solution to this problem. Alyque Padamsee rightly comments: "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, whites against blacks, Hindus against Muslims? Are they any final solutions?" (CP 161)

The play shows that the cause of two castes hatred is not only due to disbelief: but also it is related to economy. Zarine's father collects his community people only when his shop was burnt. In the beginning he wants the real price of his shop. When he fails in the act he realizes in the fanatic way. All the male members of Daksha's family know this. As Daksha writes: "Kanta told me he (Zarine's father) is actually telling people that his shop was burnt down purposely." (FS 47) Most of the people think that it was burnt by the mob but the conspirers knew the fact which Hardika faces reality at the last when Ramnik tells: "And we burnt it . . . They had burnt in the name of communal hatred." (FS 75) It shows the mentality that the eyes are somewhere different but the mob in ignorance, do the work differently.

Javed also faces the same thing. When the Mob catches him, they do not go for their prime job to punish the wrongdoer. They snatch the money and watch of Javed. It shows that people think of personal benefit more than the religious issues. As Dattani writes:

“Two of the Mob / Chorus suddenly grab them from behind and snatch the watch of one of the young men.

The Mob / Chorus searches their pockets. Some money is found, which Chorus 1 pockets. ” (FS 17-18)

A person from the same mob treats a person from other caste – community as untouchable. When Javed in his early days takes a letter and the letter becomes contaminated. The conservative person washes the letter and wall. Bobby tells “. . . the men 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 lying on and he wiped the gate” (45) But during riot a person from same community snatches the money and material but at that time he does not think that it is a contaminated thing. Through this act Dattani shows that Mob behaves rudely, but they never forget the personal benefit. Ramnik’s father does the same thing and acquires the land of Zarine’s father taking the support of communal riot and mob. The play brings out one more reality to surface that the police and politicians never treat the society on equal terms. The politicians whose primary purpose is to gain the vote by hook or crook are often seen indulging in so many malpractices. As chorus I–in the play rightly says: “We doubt the leader’s intention.... They want our blood to boil. They have succeeded.” (FS 30) Smita is quite right. She criticizes politicians: “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!” (FS 39)

Dattani takes up the issue of gender discrimination also. Daksha (Hardika) is treated even as an object by her husband, Hari. When she asks Hari why Zarine's father came to their mill, Hari becomes angry and he even demoralizes her. As she says: "...Hari become angry with me. I had never expected him to. He shouted so loudly, he sounded just like Wagh. And he called me names. Names that are too shameful to mention to you. My cheeks went red." (FS 63) this reveals inner conflict that runs in our home daily. If a man or a woman is not given his/her proper right, the progress of the society cannot be imagined. Although we live in the world together but that is, what Dattani calls it 'forced harmony'. Hari chides his wife for a question but she never behaves in that manner as she says, "I wanted to please Hari". (FS 63)

The problem of gender discrimination does not lie merely with Daksha, but also with Smita who is a modern educated girl. She is oppressed even by her mother. When Aruna finds that Smita, her daughter, knows Bobby and Javed very well, she becomes agitated and decides to prohibit her from studies. She asks Smita to stay at home only. This is indicative of the spoiling of female psyche under the pressure of patriarchy. They think it against the custom or culture to have friends of another community. Knowingly and unknowingly if a girl does so, she is imposed upon various restrictions. Many times she is banned from education, the basic need of human towards self-reliance. Smita reacts to this in these words: "Mummy, thank you for making me feel like a rat in a hole". (FS 56) This indicates that Dattani has also registered a great change occurred in the attitude of women in the course of time. Daksha, who is also young woman forty years ago, tolerates the humiliation of her husband and does not react sharply but Smita does not accept all things at ease.

To conclude, Indian English literature gives an expression to Indian

multiculturalism and the problems like casteism, religious fanaticism and gender discrimination. It is sprouting and blooming in its best possible ways. A few playwrights like Mahesh Dattani deal with the burning social and political problems. As a social scientist, he gives exposure to deep rooted prejudices among the Hindus against Muslims and vice-versa. It also exposes the problem of gender discrimination in Indian society. Daksha and Smita are unjustified by male dominated society outside and inside the house as well. The characters in Dattani's *Final Solutions* struggle for some kind of freedom and happiness under the weight of tradition, caste, race, cultural constructions of gender. Accordingly it registers an urgent need to reconstruct the culture in practice as it is being worked out in literature.

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