



A Critical Study of Social Criticism in *Final Solutions*

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Abstract

Final Solutions is among the best plays of Mahesh Dattani. The central theme of *Final Solutions* is to highlight communal hatred caused by lack of understanding. It addresses an issue of utmost concern to our society i.e. the issue of communalism. However, the play comprises the issues of class and communities, identity, terrible human suffering, loss of faith, perpetual hatred, aggressiveness and nothingness within the larger socio-political context. The present study aims at the study of the social issues particularly the problem of communal divide and communal riot in the Indian society through the play *Final Solutions*.

Key words: Mahesh Dattani, communalism, class and community, loss of faith, social criticism

Final Solutions is one of the best creations of Mahesh Dattani's literary landscape. Dattani deals with the social issues in almost all of his plays. In *Final Solutions* he has woven in its fabric, the most contemporary social issue. Dattani has excelled in the field of playwriting because his plays are the far-sighted vision of life. They talk about life and realities. They present reality of the society as it exists. That is the reason his plays can be understood well on the ground of social criticism. *Final Solutions* addresses an issue of utmost concern to our society i.e. the issue of communalism. The word, communalism in India can be understood in somewhat different way. It signifies the variance among the different religious groups and communities. It is a multi-religious and multi-cultural society. Thus communalism becomes an important topic here. Such malicious mentality to divide one religion from another on the ground of religion breaks the societal norms. Communalism is a political trade in religion. It is an ideology on which communal politics is based. Consequence is the communal violence in the society, which is the consequence of communal belief. According to Wikipedia:

The term social criticism often refers to a mode of criticism that locates the reasons for malicious conditions in a society considered to be in a flawed social structure. It may also refer to people adhering to a social critic's aims at practical solutions by way of specific measures either for consensual reform or powerful revolution (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_criticism).

Literature can have a significant social impact. Like other art, literature is not created in vacuum. It examines the cultural, economic, and political context in which it is written. It explores relationships between author and society. It can look at

sociological status of author, and the role of audience in shaping literature. Thus the core belief of social criticism is that literature is a reflection of its society. It maintains that the literary work can't be separated from the social context it was created.

The first performance of the play *Final Solutions* took place at Guru Nanak Bhavan, Bangalore, on 10 July, 1993. Then after, it was staged at Tara Theatre, Mumbai on 11 December 1993. Alyque Padamsee directed this performance. Sahitya Akademi honoured him with Sahitya Akademi award for *Final Solutions and other Plays*, in 1998. Sahitya Kala Parishada, the wing of the Govt. of National Capital Territory of Delhi for music, dance, drama & fine arts selected *Final Solutions* (1997), *Tara* (2000) and *30 days in September* (2007) as best productions of the year directed by Arvind Gaur.

The issue of the play is so sensational and simmering with the undercurrents generated by recent events that its translation has had a profound impact on Indian audience and has brought him a greater recognition. It underlines the identity crisis in religious minorities. The tremendous response of the play lies beneath its theme which is "a powerful indictment of the communal passions that threatens to split our country" (Dhar 109).

Dattani, who dwells upon contemporary issues, shows utter interest in search of identity and inner harmony. He is always aware that personal identity and national identity are intimately linked in India. When there is conflict between social identity and religious identity, it leads to an identity crisis. In India where there are various religions, there is always a chance for conflict between two different religions. This is the stark reality of Indian society which can't be ignored. In *Final Solutions*, Dattani deals with such kind of identity crisis. Such crisis is there because of the existence of majority and minority classes in the society. In India, the Hindus are treated as the majority class and the Muslims considered the minority or the 'other' because of political prostitution.

Commenting on identity Erikson says, "identity is the relationship of the self of a man with the others; it is the persistent sameness within oneself (self-sameness) and the persistent sharing of some kind of essential character with others" (6). Our society is very narrow-minded. It works on the principle of uniting with the individual who has the same ideology in various ways. Unfortunately it hates the individual who may vary on the ground of religion, culture, gender, nation or race. Thus the members of the society who do not meet this criterion are secluded and segregated from the stream of the society. They are blamed and made the scapegoat. Thus in India the Muslims are considered the minority class. So they are the victims of the double standard and the mentality of our society. They are left isolated. In some cases they are bereft of equal rights in the society. They are an important part of society but unfortunately because of personal, social, and religious prostitution they face the wrath of one particular community. In such society they become a victim of identity crisis. Sometimes such identity crisis takes the form of violence. Each community sees others with prejudice, hatred and suspicion. What Dattani focuses in this play is

the psychology of this 'other' and the circumstances that make him so. In an interview to Angelie Multani, Mahesh Dattani says:

It is one thing focusing on these areas in the human condition that leave the individual with a sense of displacement or being the 'other'. But it's what the character does under those circumstances that make him or her interesting. Ultimately all good writing is about character revelation and journeys. The provocations that are connected with a person's marginalised identity are what spur the character into action (Multani166-167).

At the same time, Dattani is preoccupied with socio-political realities in India today. His thrusts for such issues lead him to trigger one of the recurrent themes of modern writing in Indian English literature – the theme of communal conflict in *Final Solutions*. No doubt, he has raised the social issue on a wider canvas in this play. It is the extension of his early concern. To quote Asha Kuthari Chaudhuri:

He turned here from the intensely personal focus that marked his earlier works, and looked at history and its ramifications within the localized context, with simple and powerful visual texture that made it one of his most important performed plays (Chaudhuri131).

Final Solutions elucidates various sorts of communalist attitude prevalent in Indian Society. It is a play where Dattani attempts at portraying communal conflicts in India. It was such a tremendous success that it was translated and performed in Hindi at various venues scattered across India. It proved to be a turning point in the dramatic career of Dattani. The theme of Hindu-Muslim hostility is introduced as the background of the play through the device of chorus/mob. The chorus/mob comprising five men and ten masks on sticks is the omnipresent factor throughout the play, crouching on the horse-shoe-shaped ramp that dominates the space of the stage. The masks lie significantly strewn all over the ramp, to be worn when required. The men in the chorus/mob put on Hindu masks and Muslim masks alternatively, revealing thereby the set-views of the Hindus and the Muslims towards one another. The lack of understanding and unacceptability between the two communities gives rise to acrimony resulting in communal conflict and tension. The tension in the play develops in Ramnik Gandhi's house when two Muslim young men, Babban and Javed seek shelter during a riot. The liberal humanist, Ramnik cannot but think of giving shelter to the Muslim boys. However, his wife, the religious-conservative Aruna and his mother, Hardika, whom the past incidents have made an anti-Muslim cannot accept the situation. The past reveals itself and it is learnt that Ramnik's father had actually made use of riots to obtain the shop that belonged to Hardika's friends and Hardika had been wrongly soured against the Muslims. Ramnik transfers his resentment at his own father's black deed to his mother. His daughter, Smita, who is secretly in love with the Muslim boy, Babban hits out at her mother, Aruna. Alyque

Padamsee is highly critical of the communal disharmony in the society. He questions, in A Note on the Play to *Final Solutions*,

Is life a forward journey or do we travel round in a circle, retuning to our starting point? 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 and blacks, Hindus against Muslims? Are they any final solutions? (Dattani161)

The play opens with Daksha, a young bride attempting to pour out her feelings in a diary written forty years before, thinking back on the riot that exploded in 1947. The mob whispers: "Freedom! At last Freedom!"(Dattani166) Her childhood memories are fouled with communal riots, which are associated with her father's death. Daksha recollects the incident because "Things have not changed much" (167). She is bewildered to think that a period of 40 years is a long period for a nation. However, there is no change even after so much education and development. But unfortunately People have not forgot their prejudice and hatred against the other community. A riot has again broken out but this time at Amargaon.

Daksha has a deep sense of hatred for the Muslim community. The seed of this hatred and anger is sown at the time of India-Pakistan partition. She with her husband Hari, suffers in her married life as her movement is highly restricted because of the imposition of family and society's strict attitude for female dignity. This gives her a way to befriend Zarine. When Daksha learns that Zarine's family is in financial trouble as their cloth mill is burnt, she requests her husband to help him. But the offer is manipulated and her-in-laws put her in dark about it. They say that the aid offered by Hari is rejected by Zarine's father and this enrages Daksha.

Daksha grows old to be called Hardika, and encounters a strange situation when her son Ramnik Gandhi decides to give shelter to two Muslim boys, Javed and Bobby, during communal clashes in contemporary India. They are being chased by the mob. In spite of powerful protest by Aruna and Hardika, Ramnik insists in rescuing those boys. It is here that the tussle begins and reveals the making of Jihadis and a clash between liberalism and radicalism. Thus a complex situation is created as men and women of different faiths and attitudes are thrown together to interact and the characters exhibit changing patterns of thought processes.

To tackle such a sensational issue, Dattani has used chorus /mob in the play as a dynamic technique. He has presented a socio-psychological interpretation through the use of chorus. The chorus has been used as a magnificent technique, uniquely blended with sound and dialogues. The chorus / mob represents the inner voice of both the communities. Illustrating the role of chorus, Alyque Padamsee says:

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 (Dattani161).

The two Muslim boys, Bobby and Javed are trapped in the curfew. They come in the grip of Hindu chorus. Two members of the chorus assault them and snatch their watch. Ramnik Gandhi, a Hindu opens the gate and gives them shelter. When Ramnik comes to know about the real identity of Javed that he is a riot-rouser and is hired by some suspected people of society for their political purpose, Ramnik's liberalism comes to stake. Ramnik who earlier offers him job, now doubts his intention. Both start a reasoned argument on communalism. Dattani through the cross-examination of Javed and Ramnik tries to reflect on the roots of motive behind the passion for communal violence. It is not a natural calamity but man-made chaos that primarily springs out of the loss of human values. Actually religious fanaticism or religious prejudice is the sole reason for communal disharmony. Apart from this, personal prejudices are also the central potent motive behind communal disharmony. People in today's world are self-centred. They don't care for the sentiments of others. To suit their selfish purpose, they make discrimination on the basis of creed, class, caste, colour and sex. When it is the case of marginalized group like minority and refugee, the discrimination is very extensive and painful.

The Indian political system is no less responsible for the communal riot. Politicians exploit every sensitive issue by hiring youths like Javed for their political gains. They heighten their religious faith. Through the mouth of chorus, Dattani has aptly presented a leader's intentions.

Chorus 1:We doubt the leader's intentions. (Pick up his Hindu mask) They want our blood to boil. They have succeeded. (Wears his mask) (Dattani188).

The study of this play under the canon of 'social criticism' gives insightful ideas about creating a peaceful and progressive society. Mahesh Dattani has tried to convey the message that the solution of such communal attitude is forgiveness, generosity and realisation. The generosity of Smita and the realisation of Bobby are the only possible 'Final Solutions' to save the nation from the cloud of disharmony and violence. It is the false assumptions presented by the communal elements of the religion that create bias and hatred for other community. Life is to be meant for peace and brotherhood. The final solution lies in tolerance and respect for other human beings. Dattani without being didactic gives the above message magnificently.

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