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## THEME OF COMMUNAL HATRED IN MAHESH DATTANI'S 'FINAL SOLUTIONS'



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### Short Profile

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### ABSTRACT:

Mahesh Dattani is the first Indian playwright writing in English to be awarded the Sahitya Akademi Award. Dattani's writing has great significance in the present scenario. His play 'Final Solutions' is one among his most talked about plays. The play deals with the theme of communal hatred and communal violence. This sensitive issue is handled objectively, delicately and impartially by Dattani in this play. The characters in the play display the different levels of communal attitudes, and to each of them, they have the sound reasoning for their attitudes. The playwright does not provide any firm solution to such communal hatred. There are several possibilities and therefore he has entitled the play in plural 'Final Solutions'. Making a family unit to represent the societal ugliness, he holds the mirror to the readers and society to reflect at their self and search

for themselves several possible solutions. His appeal is especially to the younger generations, who carry the ghosts of history over their heads, to free themselves from the scarred psyche for communal harmony. This paper is an attempt to explore communal hatred as a theme of Mahesh Dattani's 'Final Solutions.'

### KEYWORDS

*Mahesh Dattani, Final Solutions, Communal hatred.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

'Mahesh Dattani is the first Indian playwright writing in English to be awarded the Sahitya Akademi Award. His plays bring Indian drama into the present day in their themes- sexuality, religious tensions and gender issues- while still focussing on human relationships and personal and moral choices which are the classic concerns of world drama'. (Alyque Padamsee, CP, Backpage)

Alyque Padamsee has paid a very apt tribute to Mahesh Dattani for his contribution to Indian English Drama. He writes: 'At last we have a playwright who gives sixty million English- speaking Indians an identity. Thank You, Mahesh Dattani!' (Alyque Padamsee, CP, Backpage). Such glorious appreciation and tributes to Dattani underlines the significance of his writing in the present scenario.

Dattani's 'Final Solutions' is one among his most talked about plays. The play deals with the theme of communal hatred and communal violence. This is the unresolved national issue of India since partition. The Hindu-Muslim riots and their hatred to each other often become the major cause of nation's internal instability and one of a major hurdle in the cause of national integrity. This sensitive issue is handled objectively, delicately and impartially by Dattani in this play. Each character in the play, fostering the hatred to other community, has a sound cause and reasoning on their part to hate another community which Dattani, towards the end of the play, skilfully work out to prove as a shallow, prejudiced and hollow approach responsible to disturb the communal harmony.

The play opens with a young girl Daksha reading her diary, who has now turned old and is now grandmother in the house. Dattani presents young Daksha and old Hardika (Daksha is now old and her name is changed after marriage) simultaneously on the stage. Daksha's reading from diary is Hardika's recalling of the past. From her reading it becomes evident that Hardika hates Muslims because as a child and then young girl she had been ill treated by Muslims. 'her father was killed in communal riot, and overtures of friendship to Zarine, a young Muslim girl, were rejected after other communal riot that razed Zarine's father's shop, and which incidentally, was bought by Daksha's father- in- law. (Multani, 2007) Hardika recalls the history of past forty years and realizes that 'After forty years... Yes, things have not changed that much'. (CP, 167) After forty years it is again the background of Hindu- Muslim riot and the locale of the play Ramnik Gandhi's house. Ramnik is Hardika's son who is married to Aruna. Smita, the daughter of Ramnik and Aruna, is a college girl.

On the background of riot, when curfew tolls, two young Muslim boys Bobby and Javed, chased by the frantic mob, enters into the house of Ramnik Gandhi. The exchange of dialogues among the members of Chorus (Hindu) is expressive of communal hatred.

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! ...

CHORUS 2. (pounding with his stick). Drive... them... out.

CHORUS 3. Kill the sons of swine. (CP, 168-169)

The dialogues of Muslim chorus are similarly expressive of communal tensions.

CHORUS 1, 2. They hunt us down!  
They are afraid of us! ...  
We are few!

But we are strong!

The communal differences of Hindus and Muslims in India have become the part of communal psyche of respective communities. The intensity of these differences can be realized in the words of the chorus. 'A drop of oil cannot merge with an ocean of milk. One reality cannot accept another reality.' (CP, 196)

The characters in the play display the different levels of communal attitudes, and to each of them, they have the sound reasoning for their attitudes. Hardika and Javed stands for the hatred to other community, whereas, Smita and Bobby support for the change in attitudes. Ramnik Gandhi is Pseudo-liberal who is tolerant because he carries guilt consciousness. Aruna, in her ignorance, is a carrier of communal cords.

Hardika hates the Muslims due to her past experiences. Firstly, her father was killed in one of the riots. Secondly, as young Daksha she had a friend from a Muslim family, Zarine. Daksha learnt from her servant Kanta that Zarine's father's dry fruit shop was burnt and her father went to Daksha's (Hardika's) father-in-law to ask for a job. Later she learnt from her husband Hari that Zarine's father didn't come for job, nor her father-in-law had offered him one. Everything seemed suspicious. But she craved for Zarine's friendship and both the families had developed a mute hostility towards each other. Zarine had stopped meeting Hardika and still Hardika tried to be friend to her. With the reason of embroidery she went to Zarine but was not received well. Still she enjoyed the company of Zarine that day. Again, she went to her to get her embroidered saree back, but she was strangely humiliated by Zarine's family. Innocent Hardika could not understand their attitude towards her. To her strangeness Zarine also had joined the strange behaviour of her family. Only reason, she learnt from Kanta, was that her father-in-law had offered Zarine's father to purchase his burnt up shop; just to help the family in financial crisis, but Zarine's father wanted more price than her father-in-law could pay. And finally, her impression of the people was "What wretched people. All such fuss over such a small matter. I hate people with false pride. As if it was their birthright to ask for more than they deserve. Such wretched people! Horrible people!" (CP, 221)

Javed is a hired hoodlum. He is paid to throw the first stone to begin the riot. He does it because he hates the Hindus. This hatred has not been inherited by Javed, but like Hardika, he is equally the prey to humiliation by other community. A minor incident changed that. In the words of Bobby:

"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. 'Leave 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 lying on and he wiped the gate! We stared at him as he went back inside... We all heard a prayer bell, ringing continuously. Not loud. But distinct. The neighbour had been praying for quite a while, but none of us had noticed the bell before. We'd heard the bell so often everyday of our lives that it didn't mean anything. It was a part of the sounds of the wind and the birds and the tongas. It didn't mean anything. You don't single out such things and hear them, isolated from the rest of the din. But at that moment ... we all heard only the bell... The next day the neighbour came out screaming on the streets. Yelling at our windows. We peeped out. He was furious, tears running down his face. We couldn't understand a word he was saying. I found out later. Someone had dropped pieces of meat and bones into his backyard... I didn't speak to Javed for many days after that. I was frightened of him. For months, whenever he played cricket and heard the bell, we

remembered that incident and avoided looking at Javed. And for Javed he was- in his own eyes- no longer the neighbourhood hero. (CP, 200-201)

As Alyque Padamsee puts it, "This is a play about transferred resentments." (CP, 161) Some people consciously work for amendment of the situation. Ramnik Gandhi represents such people. He is guilt conscious, knowing that the shop of Zarine's father was deliberately burnt by his father. He tries to compensate by accommodating two Muslim boys Bobby and Javed, during the riot into his home. But still he is unable to shake off his all prejudices. That is why after learning the truth that Javed is a riot-rouser, just to relieve himself from his own sense of guilt he offers Javed a job in his own shop and asks Bobby to bring him to his shop next day, in following words:

"What he has done is unforgivable. I don't think he will change. But still... I am willing to try. If you wish, you can bring him to my shop tomorrow."

Aruna, the wife of Ramnik Gandhi, is a carrier of prejudiced traditions and customs, which make other religion, feel humiliated to foster hatred towards them. She takes hollow pride into her religion and God. For her the touch of the Muslims is loss of sanctity of her own religion. The description of her behaviour by the playwright, after her serving the water to two boys, is realistic portrayal of a dogmatic Hindu.

'Aruna 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.'(CP, 185)

Smita and Bobby are the supporters of change. They are the realists who speak for the cause of the dramatist.

SMITA. How can you expect me to be proud of something which stifles everything else around it? ...

ARUNA. You said it stifles you?

SMITA. What?

ARUNA. Does being a Hindu stifle you?

SMITA. No, living with one does. (CP.211)

Smita and Bobby are against fanaticism. The playwright does not provide any firm solution to such communal hatred. There are several possibilities and therefore he has entitled the play in plural 'Final Solutions'. He works out the change through Bobby. Bobby goes into Aruna's pooja room. She tries him to stop. Bobby picks up the image of Krishna and speaks:

"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. He smiles! He smiles at our trivial pride and our trivial shame." (CP, 224)

And the solution provided by the dramatist is in the answer of Bobby to the question of Aruna, towards the end of the play, when she is broken by the touch of a Muslim boy to the image of her God.

ARUNA. Oh! Is there nothing left that is sacred in his world?

BOBBY. The tragedy is that there is too much that is sacred. But if we understand and believe in one another, nothing can be destroyed. (Puts on his footwear and looks at Hardika) And if you are willing to forget, I am willing to tolerate. (CP, 225)

While handling the sensible issue of communal hatred in 'Final Solutions', Dattani never over-comment the situations. Making a family unit to represent the societal ugliness, he holds the mirror to the readers and society to reflect at their self and search for themselves several possible solutions. His

appeal is especially to the younger generations, who carry the ghosts of history over their heads, to free themselves from the scarred psyche for communal harmony.

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