

## Mahesh Dattani's Final Solutions: A Study of Communal Prejudices in India

### Abstract

Secularism in India means equal treatment to all religions. Secularism in India is always a controversial topic. Because as per the Indian Constitution India is a secular state, which means India does not have an official state religion. However, the law is unequal. For instance, Muslim Indians have Sari-based Muslim Personal Law, Hindus have Hindu Code Bill, while Christians, Sikhs and other Indians live under common law. Hence, within a secular social structure, there are many conflicts and controversies in regards to the majority versus minority, Hindu vs. Muslim or us vs. them. Mahesh Dattani's play *Final Solution* makes one able to view the present Indian scenario with secular, communal and religious views.

The Partition of India is based on the divide and rule policy of the British. From the beginning of colonialism British used this tack trick to rule over India. British divided the Indian population into religious grounds and when they became imperial made rules and law. These rules and laws clearly show the division between 'Hindu and Muslim'. This policy also established Hindu as the majority and naturally Muslims think that they are in minority and they have to secure their rights. These prejudices between the two communities are the root cause of communal strife in pre and post-independent India. So, this chapter research seeks to highlight how Mahesh Dattani chalked out a plot to expose the cause behind the Hindu-Muslim conflict in India and how he exposes the real nature of the Indians (Hindu/Muslim) middle-class people who always attempt to project themselves as Seculars.

In the present scenario of India, we frequently heard words like communalism, secularism, tolerance- intolerance etc. These words are closely associated with communal supremacy. Communal supremacy helps to develop prejudices about other religions. Religion is always defined within social and historical contexts. Religion can be experienced in ideologies, discussions, culture and rituals. Religion operates in society through certain institutions and movements. When it concerns society it automatically enters into various dimensions of society, such as legal, cultural, political and economic dimensions. If religions are a necessity of society then a vital question arises, is it possible to maintain religious harmony within multicultural nations. Certainly, it is difficult to maintain social and religious

harmony in a multicultural nation like India; it is because every religion takes efforts for its existence. To maintain social harmony the modern world has coined a counter revive to religiousness that is secularism. So, many nations adopt secularism as a political principle, though we witness many events of religious tolerance.

Mahesh Dattani's plays have a universal appeal. One can see this universality in the play *Final Solution*. The play *Final Solutions*, deals with communalism, religious fanaticism and the Hindu-Muslim riots. These issues are not only confined to India, but it has universal characteristics. It is a conflict between, white and black, Arabs and Jews, Hindus and Muslims, apart from this it is between the innocent people and shrewd politicians. Mahesh Dattani's plays speak across semantic and cultural barriers. It may be because his plays are rooted in an Indian setting. He makes profound use of Indian rituals, traditions, ideologies and contemporary issues that India is beset with. At the same time, he lifts his plays to a higher level by touching the human soul. Mahesh Dattani has great "contemporary value, they are the plays of today's," writes John McRae in his 'Introduction to Dattani's play' (Dattani, Collected Plays 160).

The theme of the play *Final Solutions* is inter-religious strife, the play also shows liberal views against an orthodox view. The play is based on a very delicate and serious subject of Hindu/Muslim riots which the direct result of Partition. The play is about the deep-rooted hatred simply because of the orthodox understanding of each other. Hindu-Muslim riots are a continuous threatening challenge for Indian society in the post-independent era.

The play *Final Solutions* was written for the Deccan Herald Theatre Festival in Bangalore, in December 1992(A. Sengupta 83). But the play was first performed at Guru Nanak Bhavan, Bangalore, on 10 July 1993(Dattani, Collected Plays 162). The play was dropped from the Deccan Herald Theatre Festival because in December 1992 Babari Masjid was demolished by certain religious activists. There was fear that it could add more communal tension. Mahesh Dattani confesses that initially, he was hesitant to write a play like *Final Solutions*, in an interview he says:

Well, I wrote the play before the destruction of the Babri Masjid, when the Ram Janmabhumi was an issue in parliament. I was commissioned to write the play by Alyque Padmsee. Initially, I was hesitant (Mohanty 174).

The play is presented as if it were seen through the eyes of the principal character Hardika/Daksha. Mahesh Dattani uses unique dramatic devices in the play. He uses a multi-level stage to present the period of the late 1940s and 1990s. On a top-level, there is a room with a roll-top desk and an oil lamp converted to an electric one, suggesting the period of pre-

independence. This level belongs to the young Daksha, who is in fact the grandmother, also sometimes seen as a girl of fifteen. Hardika/Daksha is the same person. Daksha is 15 years old incarnation of old grandmother Hardika of the Gandhi family. The play is divided into three Acts.

The play is blended into three streams. In the first stream, events cover from the diary of Daksha/Hardika. Daksha narrates the period of the Partition and Hardika narrates the period after forty years of partition. The second stream narrates the present action of the play. The third stream of events is not included in the diary of Daksha/Hardika. These streams of the period also project the attitudes of three generations of Hindu middle-class families about religious prejudice.

Hardika, the grandmother, memorizes the father's murder during the Partition and betrayal by her Muslim friend Zarina. So she hates the Muslims. Her son, Ramnik Gandhi, is haunted by the guilt that his forefathers ruined the life of Zarina's family and grabbed the shop which now belongs to him. As a result of this, he is a little bit liberal towards Muslims. Ramnik's wife Aruna, lives with the strict code of the Hindu religion. On the other hand, Ramnik's daughter, Smita, cannot permit herself a relationship with a Muslim boy. This prejudice of the Gandhi family comes at the forefront when two Muslim boys, Babban and Javed, seek shelter in their house. Babban is a moderate, while Javed is a more aggressive young boy. This complicated plot is briefly described by Mahesh Dattani in the following way: It is about two Muslim boys running away from a mob and seeking shelter in a Hindu household. Now it transpires that they know the girl who lives there. The prejudices of the family are brought to the forefront. There is, of course, a façade of being liberal-minded. (Mohanty, 175)

In the opening scene of the play, Daksha is reading out her diary, which is Hardika in flashback, as a fifteen years old girl- Daksha- a married woman. To present this past or flashback Mahesh Dattani very skillfully uses the stagecraft. On the top level of the stage Hardika is seated, motionless. She narrates 1948, just after India got independence. Daksha describes the time of Indian independence which was the most terrible thing, in her opinion. She also describes the Hindu-Muslim riot at the time of Partition. Her father was happy about independence but nervous about partition. In fact, he represents the Indian as well as Pakistani citizens, both people think that if they are separated from each other they will be happy. The result of Partitions was reversed, communal hatred was at its peak. In her father's opinion, before leaving, the British had set free the dogs. This is not just the opinion of Hindus; it is

also the opinion of Muslims about Hindus. Daksha's diary informs us that she had lost her father in a Hindu-Muslim riot.

In the milieu of communal tension, Daksha is not biased about Muslims. After being married to a businessman, she had a Muslim friend Zarine. Daksha likes the collection of Noor Jehan's record. She used to go to listen to the records at Zarine's house but one day she was ill-treated by Zarine's family. Daksha's in-law family had a cloth shop in Hasinabad, Zarine's father had also run a cloth shop in the same market place which was burnt in a riot. Daksha learnt from her in-law's that though they had purchased the shop they offer a job to Zarine's father in their shop. Daksha thought that this might be the reason for Zarine's rude behaviour. The death of her father in a Hindu-Muslim riot and the ill-treatment of Zarine's family has generated hatred in her mind which never leaves her. Daksha slowly develops a prejudice against the Muslim. This is the cause that she hates all Muslims, irrationally.

When Daksha narrates the scene of the riot of 1947, she comments over the riot: "when I heard them outside—I knew that they were thinking the same of us. And I knew that I was thinking the same, like my father" (169). It shows the general tendency of Hindu-Muslim hatred at the time of the riot. Mahesh Dattani wants to convey a message here that many times communal hatred does not come from the masses it is a personal agony about each other. Daksha starts her hatred towards the Muslim community when she is humiliated by Zarine's family. But she knows half-truth, which is deliberately told to her. The fact is that Zarine's family would like to start their cloth mill like Daksha's family. Her husband and father-in-law look at Zarine's family as a competitor, and at the time of the riot Daksha's family burns Zarine's shop. They do it deliberately for financial gain, not by any communal hatred. After forty years, Daksha/Hardika knows the truth and she realizes the real cause of the grudge that encouraged Zarine and her family to misbehave with her.

The main action of the play is the extension of the first stream. In this course of the play, both the first and second streams run simultaneously. In this stream most of the story is narrated by Hardika, sometimes she goes to the past, otherwise, she is present in the action. To narrate past events, Daksha slips into memories. This is the technical innovation of Mahesh Dattani as a dramatist.

The setting of the play *Final Solutions* is in the scenario of a Hindu-Muslim riot that developed after a chariot carrying the Hindu God had been broken while crossing an area populated by the Muslim community. The age-old enmity is the prime cause behind the communal hatred; both the communities are suspicious of each other. At the same time, the Chorus on the stage became activated and commented on what exactly was happening. Chorus

wear the Hindu masks, the incident of Chariot broken is accepted as a dishonour of Hindu religion. Hindu community seems to be united to take revenge. One should notice here that inculcation is not on the particular person/persons, but the entire Muslim community is inculpated for the incident of Chariot broken. The Muslim community here addresses as 'other' by Hindus.

Mahesh Dattani very intellectually observes both the mobs. He comments on Hindus, the same way he directly exposes the Muslims. He has a deep study of the Hindu-Muslim problem. Here, Mahesh Dattani boldly and directly presents the issue of communal strife. At the same time, his treatment of the problem is artistic. Mahesh Dattani uses a mask as his stagecraft. He wants to convey the message that people put on the masks as per the situation needed. Through the dialogues in the play, the audience comes to know the Muslim mob does not want to accept the blame. Though, they know that the chariot was broken by them but they blame manufacturing defect. At the same time, they try to do mockery over the Hindu God. Chorus 3 reveals their history, "They say we razed their temples yesterday" (171). In the Indian history, many references prove Muslim ruler had destroyed Hindu temples. Dr. Pranav Josphipura, boldly express his views on the above topic, he writes:

And they continue to do the same whenever they have an opportunity to do so. Dattani truthfully presents the psyche of the Muslim minority. They are not prepared to see their collective oddities. On the contrary, they blame others for their retaliation to their violence. (104)

The above observation is harsh but somehow it is true. Among the Muslim chorus, Chorus 5 is noteworthy, he says: "Let them send us back" (104). In the end, there is a faint suggestion that Chorus 5 has accepted India as his land while the other four are biased with Pakistan. The basic cause of communal hatred is disrespect of each other's religion or ignorance about the other community. Santwana Haldar quoted a Muslim intellectual Hassainur Rahman in this respect,

We (Muslims) hardly know another religion and society. We do not want to respect the other man's otherness. Ignorance is colossal and it has done enormous harm to us. Sociologically we must learn to see both society and human beings as wholes. (113)

The above statement is exceptional in Muslim ideology. Most Muslims are fanatic about their religion. They do it all in the name of Islam.

Once again light spots over the two Muslim boys Javed and Bobby who appear on the other side of the ramp. They look as they were lost in the new city. Suddenly, boys are grabbed by a Hindu mob. Hindu mob inquired about their name, religion and when they found out that

boys are from Jeevanagar, Mob/Chorus ask about the business in the town. When the Hindu mob knows that boys are outstation Muslims, they started betting on them. Some of the members search their pockets and wallets and find a bus ticket, a prayer cap and a knotted handkerchief. Now, the mob conform to the identity of two boys, as Muslim. Mob/Chorus pick up the Hindu masks and say: "You pray to a god you do not know! You pray to a nothing. You do not know his form. And you seek to destroy our gods! Drive them out! Kill the sons of swine! Kill the sons of swine!"(178).

Javed and Bobby ran away from the mob and the Chorus gave chase to them. Boys reach the door (imaginary). Ramnik and Aruna come close to the door but heisted to open it. Finally, Ramnik opens the door and two young men enter and quickly shut the door. Chorus also reaches Gandhi's house and pounds with their sticks on the door. Aruna and Hardika also do not want these boys to stay inside their house. Ramnik Gandhi looks in dilemma now. Ramnik showed his courage and presence of mind. Ramnik decided to talk with Mob and an interesting debate took place. Through the debate, it became clear that the Hindu mob looks aggressive and wants to take revenge on Muslim. Dr. Pranav Joshipura observes:

The Mob wants to take revenge for the wrongs Muslims have done for almost five hundred years. They want to kill these Muslim boys to communicate to the Muslim community thereby that the Hindus, too, can retaliate and kill people in the name of religion. This is mob psychology. It can never establish true peace. True peace can come only when two communities understand and love each other as human beings. (104)

Ramnik being a liberal person does not care about the threats of Mob/Chorus. He decided to protect Javed and Bobby at any cost. The shout of Mob became unheard. Javed and Bobby feel relaxed in the house of Gandhi but they are scared enough. Ramnik asks them primary questions. He also asks Aruna to offer them a glass of water. Here, the action of Aruna is brilliantly described by the dramatist, he writes in stage direction: "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" (185).

Aruna's movements show untouchability and an orthodox attitude in the Hindu community. Javed's attitude is aggressive as compared to Bobby. In meanwhile Hardika comes to know that those boys are Muslim she became assertive and asks her son Ramnik why they were allowed to shelter in her house. Smita comes out from Hardika's room and at the moment she comes out Bobby greets her as if he were waiting for her appearance. Smita also greets Javed and Bobby. Their action shows that Smita and the boys know each other. Ramnik was surprised by the reaction of Smita. At the same moment, Mob/Chorus shouted from the outside that these



Muslim boys might rape his daughter. Now, Ramnik has a dilemma. He can't understand what to do, whom to listen to? The first Act ends on this verge of curiosity and suspense.

Act II opens with all the characters, all were in the same position as the end of Act I and Mob/Chorus is sitting on the heels. Once again Mahesh Dattani dramatically brings the Chorus into action. Chorus is in a Hindu mask. Here, Mahesh Dattani hypothesizes the thoughts and questions in the minds of millions of Hindus. Chorus gets up agitatedly and speaks out. Mahesh Dattani satirically comments over the communal hatred "Of what use is this curfew. When there is unrest in our minds!" (188).

Act II works as an exposure of all the characters in the play. It is the dramatic art of Mahesh Dattani which reveals the psychological insight of character as per their religious incitement. Hardika who was Daksha is completely changed in course of the time and she is already suffering from lifelong inveterate prejudice. She believes that Muslims will never change, they are fanatics. Ramnik's character is beautifully blended by Mahesh Dattani. Ramnik knows the fact that his father and grandfather got that shop burnt during the riot. This fact creates a sense of guilt in his mind. This is the only reason that he takes the liberal pose. But the dramatic irony is that none of his family members knew the fact. Hardika, Aruna and Smita were confused with the behaviour of Ramnik. When Ramnik knows the fact about Javed, he goes into a dilemma. His mask of liberalism gets weaker. Aruna, Ramnik's wife, represents the characteristics of common men and women who sometimes try to ignore humanity in the name of religion. But her religious attitude is good as compared to Ramnik. She openly accepts her religious hatred. She is proud of her rituals, religion and her behaviour. She does not find any logic to help different religions, especially Muslims. We can see, there is an ingrained prejudice against the Muslim religion in society. The character of Javed is an example of how irrational fear of impure and minority creates mutual hatred leading to communal riots. But at the same time, the characters of Bobby and Smita represent the humanistic approach that tries to maintain social harmony.

Act III opens with the prayer of the Muslim Mob/Chorus, the action and the dialogues of the mob show the feeling of insecurity.

CHORUS 1: Should we be swallowed up? Till they cannot recognize us? Should we meld into anonymity so they cannot hound us? Lose ourselves in a shapeless mass? Should we? Can we?

CHORUS 1: A drop of oil cannot merge with an ocean of mil. One reality cannot accept another reality. (196)

This dialogue shows that Muslims are afraid of the Hindu majority. Muslims believe that their existence is in danger. Muslims think that they cannot convert to any religion or

accept any customs as a drop of oil cannot merge with an ocean. This is the reality of Indian society, whatever may humanistic philosophy say but Hindu and Muslim cannot merge in one. Only with mutual understanding can they live peacefully. This might be the final solution, to understand each other.

Cross-fade to the living room of Ramnik Gandhi's home. Booby is lying down, Javed is walking about. Ramnik is trying to control his feelings. Ramnik thinks that just for the money Javed works as a hoodlum. That's why once again Ramnik offers a job to Javed. However, Javed does not take the offer of Ramnik. Mutual hatred is seen in both individuals. Both Hindu and Muslim are fastening with their prejudices. Politicians take advantage of hatred and sometimes provoke the ill elements in society. Mahesh Dattani, very simply put the reason for communal hatred he says that the violence is in our mind.

Bobby tries to control the situation. Now Bobby said to Ramnik that Javed did not become a hoodlum for money he volunteered for it. Bobby says that Javed was his heroin childhood. He was the most popular student in his school. But one incident changed his entire life. Bobby unfolds the life of Javed in the following words:

JAVED: 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! (195)

This incident deeply affected Javed. He decides to take revenge on the neighbours. Javed had dropped pieces of meat and bones into his backyard. From this incident, Javed developed a hatred for other communities.

Ramnik still wants to hand over Javed to the police but Bobby requests him not to do so. Bobby, as a good friend of Javed, assured Ramnik that Javed has changed himself. Javed also narrates how he was hired for the riot but he did not do any harm to anyone. Ramnik understands the situation and asks both of them to stay for a night. Smita also apologies for what she had said to Javed. Aruna wants to fill water for her pooja. Javed wants to help Aruna but she clearly says no to him because she wants a pure person to fill water for worship. Smita tries to control the situation but Aruna is not in a mood to listen to anyone. She is proud of her



religion. Javed comes forward and says to Aruna that they both are the same; they blindly follow the religion. In this way, the play ends and the audience gets a chance to introspect the psyche of their communism.

Indian thinkers criticise the divide and rule policy of Britisher for the communal disharmony in India. But, we cannot fully blame British colonialism for Hindu-Muslim hatred. This problem of communal hatred has plagued the country for a millennium. The issue of communal disharmony can be solved when we put aside the prejudices between communities and try to create a new society.

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#### About Author –

1. Dr. Niraj P. Kendhe  
Assistant Professor,  
Arts, Commerce and Science College, Arvi, Dist- Wardha
2. Dr. Vivek V. Joshi  
Associate Professor,  
PGTD(English), Gondwana University, Gadchiroli

