



Historical background of Mahesh Dattani's "Final Solutions"

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Abstract

Mahesh Dattani known for his dramatic art and stage craft has secured his place among the great Indian playwrights. He has written many plays but his 'Final Solutions' has brought India's highest literary honor for him and made him the First English playwright by receiving the prestigious Sahitya Akademi Award in 1998. This play includes various flavors of India such as traditions, customs, beliefs, humanism, struggles, politics etc. This research paper's aim is to bring the historical background before Independence and after Independence which shapes the play 'Final Solutions'. The important incidents the Ramjanambhoomi, the Rath Yatra, the two communities come together and the touch of the Lord Krishna's Idol and apart from Dattani's purpose of writing and its performance are connected to one another and compel the readers and audiences to think for searching the solutions in themselves as Dattani has tried to find out the solutions of the problems of communal riots between two different communities Hindus and Muslims seen in India. This paper discusses the historical background of the play 'Final Solutions' along with the important incidents.

Keywords: Prestigious, humanism, communities, compel, communal riots

Introduction

This paper highlights the different faces of India before Independence and after Independence. Partition of India showed the simplicity, ignorance and weakness of Indian people and the crafty skill and shrewdness of the British. Knowing for their crafty skill of exploitation the British followed the rule of "Divide and Rule" and got success in dividing Indians on the name of religion and caste in 1940s. Indians faced this humiliation and damage yet they did not learn a lesson from Gandhi's non-violence concept. Many writers have discussed the situation of partition of India and its communal riots in their writings and tried to find the solutions. Among them Amitav Gosh's prize winning novel 'The Shadow lines' which showed the condition of partition of India and communal riots during the period of 1963 to 1964 in Dhake and remained unsuccessful in getting solution and Khushwant Singh's 'Train to Pakistan' in which two people from different faith sects were able to join in love but were actually unable to express the same emotion.

A three act play entitled 'Final Solutions' includes a number of incidents and issues prevailing in the society of the late 1940s and carries the readers and audiences around the period when India got independence and was also divided into two pieces such as India and Pakistan only on the name of religion. This play unfolds the untold sufferings of the people of that time. With the help of his dramatic art and stage craft, Mahesh Dattani makes the readers and audiences familiar with the pain and sufferings of the people and also wants to find out the solution.

His play 'Final Solutions' reveals the complex situation based on religious grounds specially between Hindus and Muslims, in other words the communal riots which were complex earlier and also complex in the changing time 21st century.

Its close study of articulates the aim of Mahesh Dattani of writing this play is that it is an attempt to provide solution for the complex problem by bringing the followers of the two different groups on to a single platform as issues of communal harmony were not only seen in the past but also appears in the present. The title Final Solutions suggests that there may be multiple "final solutions" rather than a single, all-encompassing remedy capable of resolving every seemingly intractable crisis. In this reference Sohini Pillai has mentioned in her thesis 'Challenging Religious Communalism with Theatre: Mahesh Dattani's Final Solutions' :

"The title of Dattani's play is a reference to the euphemistic term "Die Endlösung" ("Final Solution") that the Nazis used to call their plan to exterminate the Jewish population of Europe.....Yet the title "Final Solutions" is more than a reminder of the worst genocide based on religious identity that the world has seen in the past hundred years. The title makes audience members ask themselves, "Are there solutions to religious communalism?" (Pillai, 2012 ^[4], p. xx) Dattani thought to discuss this important issue and used theatre as a potential medium in order to create awareness among the mass. Many questions raised in the mind of Dattani, "Does the language in which a play is written, influence the effectiveness of the play to address religious communalism in this region? Would film be a better option?" He himself comments during a discussion:

"Theater to me is an impression of what you watch ... I compose plays for the sheer delight of conveying through this dynamic medium." (Nair, 2000 ^[3], p. xx)

The play 'Final Solutions' has been performed since 1993 in many different parts of India and the USA, as well as in different South Asian languages. (Dattani, 2000) ^[3] Its performance has brought a great change in the society and also become food for thought and has led to extensive conversations among intellectuals, activists, theater, critics

and audiences. Undoubtedly Dattani has secured his place among Ibsen and Bernard Shaw.

"Dattani handles issues that influence social orders the world over. Much the same as Ibsen and Shaw, Dattani likewise uncovered the indecencies pervasive in the general public." (Reetu,2019) [5]

The play has far greater significance because of the Hindu Right's Ramjanmabhoomi movement, which occurred during the time it was written and first performed. The screenplay for the play was really finished in 1991, and Dattani was preparing to perform it in December 1992 at the Deccan Herald Theatre festival in his hometown of Bangalore, India (now Bengaluru). However, the Babri Mosque was destroyed in Ayodhya during the month of December.

The Lord Rama was born in Ayodhya and his glory spread to a vast area in the continent. After the invasion of Ayodhya by Baber, a mosque called Babri -masjid was built by Mir Baqi in Ayodhya in the 1940s. During the 1940s, Mir Baqi constructed the Babri Mosque in Ayodhya following Baber's invasion. Hindu parties started claiming that the Babri Mosque was constructed by first demolishing a Hindu temple dedicated to Lord Rama during the intense sectarian arguments that took place between them and Muslim nationalists. It was said that King Vikramaditya constructed this temple on the site of Ramjanmaboomi, the birthplace of Ram, circa 300 CE. Ironically, the British colonists were the ones who first promoted the idea that Lord Rama's temple had formerly been located on the site of the Babri Mosque. Following partition, the Indian government shuttered the Babri Mosque to both Muslims and Hindus. In 1949, the first significant riot between Muslims and Hindus broke out. The Ramjanmabhoomi movement began when radical Hindus erected pictures of Lord Rama, his brother Lakshmana, and his wife, Sita in the mosque. The campaign encouraged Hindus to worship in mosques around 1950. On 6 December 1992, a large gathering of Hindu right-wing activists demolished the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya, an incident that led to widespread communal violence across India (Guha, 2007) [2].

The Rathyatra of "Final Solutions" is based on a specific Rathyatra parade that was demolished in 1985 in Ahmedabad, Gujarat, by some Muslim miscreants. The dramatic theater production "Final Solutions" heavily relies on the theatrical event of the Rathyatra procession. The communal rights that unite the characters in the play begin when the chariot and the images of Hindu deities of Rathyatra are destroyed in a Muslim neighborhood.

For the next four months, Bombay became the focus of widespread religious communalism as violence erupted everywhere. with three distinct waves of aggression. Crime Lord Dawood Ibrahim orchestrated a series of explosions on March 12, 1993, which put an end to the unrest by killing at least 1900 people and wounding over 5800 more. 1200 Indians were killed in the play "Final Solutions," which was scheduled to debut in Bangalore during the first week of December in 1992. The play's theme was communalism between Muslims and Hindus, so the organizers of the Deccan Herald Theatre Festival decided it would be prudent to forbid its premiere because the demolition of the Babri Masjid would spark violent communal riots among India's Muslim and Hindu populations. The drama was then staged on July 10, 1993, at Guru Nanak Bhavan in Bangalore. Dattani believed that it would have been the perfect moment

to present "Final Solutions" because the play is essentially an appeal for religious tolerance. According to Dattani, theater may benefit society.

Alyque Padamsee directed the play, which was later presented at Mumbai's National Centre for the Performing Arts (NCPA). Padamsee took his production all over India. Shahid Anwar translated the play into Hindi, and Arvind Gour directed it for the Asmita Theatre in 1998. Since then, the play has been performed both domestically and internationally, and both Indian and international audiences find it appealing.

It is Rath Yatra which made Javed and Bobby, two young Muslim men, to seek protection in Gandhi's house. The actual 1985 Rath Yatra riot broke out on June 20th. Contemporary news reports describe the Rath Yatra procession in Ahmedabad as a moment of severe communal tension that seven persons were killed and twenty injured when Indian forces opened fire on Muslims hurling rocks during a Hindu festival procession in Ahmedabad today. Up to 30,000 Hindus marched through the streets in defiance of a prohibition on public gathering. Hindus retaliated by burning down Muslim homes and businesses after Muslims threw bricks and stones at them from roofs. In honor of Lord Jugannath [the god Krishna], a parade known as the Parade of the Chariot, or Rath Yatra, took place.

Ramnik welcomes the young Muslims into his home and protects them despite Hardika and Aruna's fervent religious convictions. The interactions between Bobby and Javed and the Gandhis over the night are the primary subject of the play. For two reasons, Hardika dislikes Muslims and is against Bobby and Javed being in her home. The first is that her father was murdered in Hussainabad, her hometown, which became part of Pakistan during the division. The second is the physical and psychological abuse she endured once her husband Hari and in-laws found out that she was friends with her Muslim neighbor Zarine.

These guys get hospitality from her son Ramnik, a secular Hindu. Ramnik's charity is later revealed to the audience to be partly motivated by his regret with running the business his father had acquired by scamming Zarine's family during the partition. The fact that Muslims sit in her home and drink water from her cups offends Ramnik's wife, Aruna, who is deeply devout. She thinks their touch is dirty. Smita, the daughter of Ramnik and Aruna, is similarly quite uncomfortable around Bobby and Javed, but for a different reason.

This night also reveals the secret of the romance between Smita and Bobby before the play's events, but later they discontinued it. Bobby and Javed are opposite to each other. Bobby, whose real name is Babban, is a secular Muslim who hesitates to reveal his religious identity. Javed, on the other hand, has a strong sense of identity and become a member of the group of rioters who disrupted the Rath Yatra. Bobby suggests Javed to give up his profession but he always ignores him. Hardika does not like their presence in the home and points out:

With response to the Muslim characters' presence in her home, Aruna shows ingrained prejudice and dread, saying: "How could he allow these individuals to enter my home? His granddad was murdered. They will despise us for keeping them safe. They feel inferior to us when we ask for assistance. I am aware! They are opposed to equality. They aspire to be better than others (Dattani, 2000 [3], p. xx).

"Why did you let them in?" she asks, further challenging Ramnik's choice. Why? Javed responds, "We do love our own blood," challenging Aruna's viewpoint. As opposed to you, who treat your own like an untouchable [expletive]. But Aruna remains calm and answers, "Who gave you the right to condemn us? We are the ones who have shielded you (Dattani, 2000) [3].

Throughout the entire evening, these six individuals engage with one another on the basis of their religious beliefs, but the pivotal moment takes place in the puja room of Gandhi's house and involves a dramatic event. The following day, when Bobby and Javed are ready to leave Gandhi's house, Bobby unexpectedly walks into the puja room with the idol of Lord Krishna in his palm to demonstrate that a Muslim who touches a Hindu deity is not harmed or contaminated. Instead of being disgusted or crushed to ashes by his touch, God welcomes its warmth. He declares and addresses Aruna, "See! See! I am touching God!...Your God!" (Dattani, 2000 [3], p. xx) Here Bobby claims that he challenges the idea that human interaction can render God "impure" by touching the idol. He holds that God is not a material being that can be contaminated or damaged. Rather, divinity is something greater that is unaffected by societal notions of impurity and purity. He also emphasizes that he respects the notion that God belongs to everyone, despite the fact that he does not personally believe in God. According to him, God does not discriminate or reject anyone on the basis of their religion. Bobby goes on to say that no amount of religious rites, such as cleansing, washing, or using sacred materials, can take away the significance of what he did. Touching the idol, in his opinion, symbolizes something more profound: respect for diverse views, acceptance, and human connection. Lastly, he contends that rigid rituals and religious segregation are not necessary for genuine spirituality. Rather, it is about accepting, comprehending, and tolerating individual diversity.

In this way this scene and the action of Bobby make the audience thoughtful. In the play the character of Ramnik appears differ from his mother and wife Aruna. He is kind, loving, affectionate and fellow –being towards others or the people of other communities. It comes to us when he provides the helping hand to the two these Muslim boys and saves their lives from the violent mob by giving them shelter in his house and goes against his wife and mother.

The entrance of these two Muslims boys in Gandhi's family raised many question not only in the minds of the family members but also in the minds of the audience why Ramnik helped them. Apart from it he offered the job also. At this Ramnik frankly speaks:

"It's the same burnt-up shop we bought from them at half its value' and further says 'and we burnt it. Your husband, my father and his father. They had burnt it in the name of communal hatred.'" (Dattani, 2000 [3], p. xx)

Through this play Mahesh Dattani wants to state that if the person accepts his mistakes by self-expressing, he can clear his heart from the heartedness established in his heart due to the guilt done by his father or other persons. The action of Ramnik is worth praising that he realizes the mistakes and understands the situation which provides him a golden opportunity to improve and establish amity and good-will between the two communities. He puts his ego aside and welcomes Javed and Bobby by noble heart.

The above discussion reveals promising points in order to establish harmony and goodwill between the two

communities due to having nobility of heart, self-expressiveness, frankness and tolerance towards others' disparity, respect and reverence for each other's cultural values. It requires a society free of ego and prejudice by both communities to look beyond narrow communal boundaries.

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