

COMMUNAL HARMONY IN MAHESH DATTANI'S FINAL SOLUTIONS

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ABSTRACT

India is a country of saints and seers who have always preached the lesson of love, harmony, co-operation and respect for each other's sentiments. If we follow the preaching of our elders in letter and spirit, we shall love all religions equally well and there will not arise any occasion for conflict. It is rightly written in the scriptures of all religions that all paths lead to the same God Even if they worship God (or gods) in different ways, yet they should try to realize the underlying spirit in each religion and that is to serve mankind which is basically one. It is very sad that in our country often communal riots take place. Sometimes, the grounds are quite flimsy or trivial. The people need some awakening and joint efforts by enlightened people of all communities, as peace is good for all and strife is harmful to everybody. It is said that the two nation theory that led to the partition of our country, sowed the real seeds of communal disharmony. We must understand that India is constitutionally a secular country where people of all religions, castes and creeds can live enjoying equal rights and opportunities for progress and have the same stake in the welfare of the nation Let us all forget our petty religious differences.

KEY WORDS: Communal Riots, Religious Identity, Secularism.

INTRODUCTION

Communal harmony is a word very familiar to one and all in India. It is always understood as harmony between people following different religions. But this word has wider meaning and application. People belonging to one religion may be Islam or Hinduism but can have difference in terms of caste or religious sub-sects. The plays of Mahesh Dattani emerged as 'fresh arrival' in the domain of Indian English drama in the last decade of the twentieth century. His plays deal with

contemporary issues. Mahesh Dattani won the Sahitya Akademi award for '*Final Solutions*' in 1998. The theme of the play is to highlight human weaknesses, selfishness, avarice and opportunism. Woven into the play are the issues of class and communities and the clashes between traditional and modern life style and value systems. The problem of minorities is not confined to only Hindus and Muslims, it eats the peace of any minority community among the majority. '*Final Solutions*' has taken the issues of the majority communities in different contexts and situations. Dattani is India's leading contemporary English playwright. '*Final Solutions*' bares the ugly face of communalism. It took moral courage, in the immediate aftermath of the Babri masjid nightmare, on the part of Dattani to write the play. '*Final Solutions*' has a powerful contemporary resonance as the central issue of communalism is of the utmost concerns of our society. Presenting different shades of communalist attitudes prevalent among Hindus and Muslims, the play attempts to underline the stereotypes influencing the collective sensibility of one community against another. Moving from partition to the present day communal riots. '*Final Solutions*' examines the attitudes of three generations of a Gujarati business family. The play act as the mirror of current society which we live on.

It talks of the problems of cultural hegemony, how Hindus had to suffer at the hands of Muslim majority like the characters of Hardika/Daksha in Hussainabad. And how Muslims like Javed suffer in the set up of the majority Hindu community. This all resulted in communal riots and culminated in disruption of the normal social life, and thus hampered the progress of the nation. The mob in the play is symbolic of our own hatred and paranoia. Each member of the mob is an individual, yet they meet into one seething whole as the politicians play on their fears. In this play, the chorus continuously sings sometimes under the mask of Hindus and sometimes under that of Muslims revealing their feelings of fear and hatred for one another. When the Chariot leading the procession is broken and the Pujari is killed the Hindus masks sing:

"How dare they!

They broke our Chariot and felled our Gods!

This is our land!

How dare they?" (FS, Act I, 168)

The mob/chorus comprising five men and ten masks on sticks (five Hindu and five Muslim masks) is the omnipresent factor throughout the play. Now Muslim in masks sings:

They hunt us down!

They're afraid of us!

They beat us up!

We are few!

But we are strong! (Act I, 179).

In Act II, the mob/chorus squats haphazardly, and Hindu masks sing:

"Of what use is the curfew? (The chorus 3). When there is unrest in our minds! Have we to let them insult us? To close our eyes while they stab us (FS, Act II, 188)".

The scenes of the play take place inside and outside Ramnik Gandhi's house where Ramnik has given two Muslim boys shelter from the violent mob outside. The mob is in the form of a chorus, changing its guise into Muslims and Hindus through masks and songs. Inside, a Hindu family is sharply divided over giving shelter to the unknown Muslim youths in the midst of communal frenzy and violence. Even after fifty years of Independence, people have not been able to forget their enmity and bias against each other, i.e. Muslims against Hindus and Hindu against Muslims. In the play, two young men, Javed and Babban, are hired to disrupt social harmony while others like Hardika's parents – in-laws have secretly burnt the shop of their Muslim friend, with the selfish end of buying it at reduced price.

'Final Solutions' is based on the apparently friendly relations between Muslims and Hindus and the simmering currents of hatred beneath. The family unit comprises members of different age groups, symbolic of past and present, stretching the plot to over a period of half a century. Young people like Smita, Bobby and Javed, present the future and Ramnik and Aruna, the present while Hardika, the grandmother of Smita, is sometimes presented in Daksha (Past) a fifteen year old newly married young girl, writing her diary and then as her grandmother in her late sixties (present) teaching her children and revealing the family's past. Major events are presented through her eyes. The play, *'Final Solutions'*, is also the story of a young baffled boy Javed, who becomes

a victim and a terrorist and is exploited by politicians in the name of 'Jahad'. He is trained for the terrorist activities and sabotaging. He is sent to a Hindu 'Mohalla' where a 'Rath Yatra' is taking place. Javed is so overwhelmed with the fervor of 'Jehad' that he throws the first stone on the 'Rath' causing chaos, ending up in the killing of the 'Pujari' and crashing down of the 'Rath'. Bobby a close friend of Javed, saves him from the violent mob and gets him shelter in Ramnik Gandhi's house, where causes of Hindus and Muslims hatred are being discussed and strange secrets of terror, greed, avarice and communal hatred are being revealed. The details of stage given in the play help the audience to experience the shifts in time, Dattani keeps shuffling the frames:- "Within the confines of the ramp is a structure suggesting the house of GANDHI'S with just wooden blocks for furniture. However upstage perhaps as an elevation is a detailed kitchen and a Pooja room. On another level is a room with the roll top desk and an oil lamp converted to an electric one, suggesting that the period is late 1940's. This belongs to the young Daksha, who is in fact the grandmother, also sometimes seen as a girl of fifteen.... Hardika should be positioned and lit in such way that entire action of the play is seen through her eyes" (FS Act I, 165).

When the curtain rises, we find Daksha, the newlywed bride, going through her diary dated March 31, 1948. Considering her diary as her sole friend in the new environment of her in-laws, she is sharing her secrets, experiences and views with her diary. The diary begins with the shattered dreams of a young girl who wanted to be a singer like Noor Jahan, but who has been married and confined to four walls of her in-laws house. This suggests how most of us have to live a life of unfulfilled desires. This is a very lengthy monologue of Daksha but is written in the style of a spoken dialogue. She is narrating the horrible incidents of the Partition, which are still haunting her mind ever after one year.

"We... gained independence... My father had fought for that hour. He said he was happy we were rid of the Britishers... He said that before leaving, they had let loose the dogs. I hated to think that he was talking about my friends' fathers... But that night in Hussainabad in our ancestor's house... When I heard then outside--- I knew that they were thinking the same of us. And I knew that I was thinking the same, like my father" (FS, 166-67).The young girl immediately changes into the old Hardika:

"I opened my diary again. And I wrote. A dozen pages before. A dozen pages now. A young girl's childish scribble. And an old woman's shaky scrawl. Yes, things have not changed much" (FS, 167).

After fifty year of marriage, Hardika is advising Aruna her daughter-in-law: "Be careful I said. The dogs have been let loose". (FS, 168). There seems to be no change even after so much education and development. It is sad that over after fifty years of Independence, the same things are happening, the whole story is presented in a series of scenes and memories, dialogues, images and sudden shifts in time. Hardika's wounds caused by the killing of her father in communal frenzy during Partition become fresh again. She is terrorized when she finds two Muslims boys in her house. She does not like her son Ramnik giving them shelter from the mob outside. When she is alone with the boys, she asks them to leave India and go to Pakistan for good, as she still doubts the commitment of Muslims to the nation.

Hardika : Have you ever thought of going to Pakistan?

Bobby : No

Hardika : Why not?

Javed : I prefer Dubai

Hardika : There you can live the way you want without blaming other people for your failure like we did many year ago. (FS, 221).

Her problems have no meaning for Bobby and Javed and their problems have no meaning for her. Hardika and Javed are easily excited and are kept in dark about the reality of the things. The death of Hardika's father at the hands of Muslims is of no concern for Bobby and Javed, and Javed's sister's safety has no meaning for Hardika. Their experiences are their own. Each of them is trapped in his/her own experiences. Hardika and Javed both have the bitter tastes of the minority community. Hardika's father was murdered because they were member of the minority Hindu community in Pakistan during Partition and Javed has become a terrorist because he is from the minority Muslim community in India. Javed explains to Ramnik his reasons for involving himself in terrorism and acts of sabotage on the Hindu procession (Rath Yatra).

"Anyone sitting at home, sipping tea and reading the newspapers will say that it is obvious that a minority would never start a riot, we are too afraid that it had to be politically motivated. (FS 205).

The selfish and petty politicians still play with the emotions of the young people like Javed and Babban, instigate them to create violence and use them for their own ends. Dattani has conveyed the same message in '*Final Solutions*'. The play has a powerful contemporary resonance as it addresses an issue of utmost concern to our society, i.e. the issue of communalism. The play presents different shades of the communalist attitude prevalent among Hindus and Muslims in its attempt to underline the stereotypes and clichés influencing the collective sensibility of one community against another. What distinguishes this work from other plays written on the subject is that it is neither sentimental in its appeal nor simplified in its approach. It advances the objective candor of a social scientist while presenting a mosaic of diverse attitudes towards religious identity that often plunges the country into inhuman strife. Yet the issue is not moralized, as the demons of communal hatred are located not out in the street but deep within us. The play moves from the partition to the present day communal riots. It probes into the religious bigotry by examining the attitudes of three generations of a middle-class Gujrati business family. Hardika, the grandmother, is obsessed with her father's murder during the partition turmoil and the betrayal by a Muslim friend, Zarine. Her son, Ramnik Gandhi, is haunted by the knowledge his fortunes were founded on a shop of Zarine's father, which was burnt down by his kinsmen. Hardika's daughter-in-law, Aruna, lives by the strict code of the Hindu Samskar and the granddaughter, Smita, cannot allow herself a relationship with a Muslim boy. The pulls and counter-pulls of the family are exposed when two Muslim boys, Babban and Javed, seek shelter in their house on being chased by a baying Hindu mob. Babban is a moderate while Javed is an aggressive youth. After a nightlong exchange of judgments and retorts between the characters, tolerance and forgetfulness emerge as the only possible solution of the crisis.

CONCLUSION

One community hates another. One community is in the majority, the other is in the minority. Consequently, the two communities are at loggerheads, living in an atmosphere of conflict and acrimony. Mahesh Dattani's rare look at the socio-political problem defines all '*Final Solutions*'. In Dattani's view, Hindus and Muslims are not just two cardboard communities. They clash when a procession is stoned, a pooja is disrupted, a mosque is dismantled. These for him, are just the jagged tips of an ominous iceberg. One that threatens to freeze the entire landscape into

polarized communities that live by intolerance and hate in place of harmony. More important is the iceberg an amorphous mass that glorifies the credo of unity in diversity without actually understanding the meaning of diversity. The play looks straight in to the heart of fundamentalist and the liberal and tears down the prototypes. 'Final Solutions' touches us. The past begins to determine the outlook of the present and thus the earlier contradictions re-emerge. No concrete solutions are provided in the play to the problem of communalism but it raises questions on secularism and pseudo secularism. It forces us to look at ourselves in relation to the attitudes that are persisting in the society. Since it is an experiment in time and space and relates to memory, it is a play, which involves a lot of introspection on the part of the characters in the play and thus induces similar introspection in the viewers. I have attempted to experiment with the chorus. It has been used in a style, which I would like to call 'realistic stylization'. The chorus represents the conflicts of the characters. Thus the chorus in a sense is the psycho-physical representation of the characters and also provides the audience with the visual images of the characters' conflicts. There is no stereotyped use of the characterization of the chorus because communalism has no face, it is an attitude and thus it becomes an image of the characters. The sets and properties used in the play are simple. This has been done to accentuate the internal conflicts and the subtext of the play. Contemporary socio-political issues form the process of the play. Thus, the play becomes a timely reminder of the conflicts raging not only in India but in other parts of the world.

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