Critiquing Communalism: A Literary Exploration of Final Solutions of Mahesh Dattani

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Abstract

India is a country known for its rich cultural and traditional diversities. This diverse society has established and institutionalized various ways of living that have often justified the power and authority held by some individuals over others. Coexisting in such a diverse society requires understanding among people to appreciate the myriad diversities present, particularly in the realm of religion. Conflicts arising from these diversities have found unique resonance and significance in post-independence Indian theater. One such path-breaking play from contemporary Indian theater is *Final Solutions* (1992) by Mahesh Dattani. This critically acclaimed and thought-provoking play brings to the forefront significant and representative features of modern Indian life, which is often marked by fragmentation, and it raises important questions about communal disharmony. The study of modern Indian plays has evolved significantly over time. This paper aims not only to provide a critique but also to delve deeper into the thematic concerns of *Final Solutions*. It seeks to offer a range of evaluations and interpretations based on empirical evidence.

Keywords: Indian Drama, Social conflicts, Communal disharmony, Communalism

Introduction

Dattani's work 'Final Solutions,' which earned him the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1998, resonates powerfully with contemporary concerns, addressing the pervasive issue of communalism in our society. The play delves into the various facets of communal attitudes among Hindus and Muslims, aiming to highlight the stereotypes and clichés that shape the

collective consciousness of one community against another. What sets this work apart from other plays on the subject is its avoidance of sentimental appeals and simplified approaches. Instead, it adopts an objective candor reminiscent of a social scientist, presenting a nuanced mosaic of diverse attitudes toward religious identity, often contributing to inhumane strife in the country. Notably, the play refrains from moralizing the issue; it doesn't externalize the demons of communal hatred to the streets but rather locates them deep within ourselves.

The play meticulously uncovers the origins of Hindu-Muslim animosity within the backdrop of communal violence. It scrutinizes religious beliefs, subjecting them to close examination and dispelling prevalent myths. The subtle commentary embedded in the narrative suggests a broader perspective that inherent in every religion lies an intrinsic potential for oppression. In navigating the tumultuous atmosphere of communal discord, the play challenges preconceived notions and confronts the roots of religious tension. By dissecting the intricate dynamics of Hindu-Muslim relations, it exposes the fragility of coexistence and the often-overlooked complexities within religious identities.

In Dattani's plays, the characters are portrayed as fallible and often vulnerable, confronting with the consequences of being shackled by the dictates of an oppressive society. Ramnik, initially presented as an ostensibly "tolerant" Hindu, appears morally superior to his orthodox wife, Aruna. However, as the play unfolds, the superficial nature of his liberalism is laid bare. Aruna, on the other hand, anticipates unquestioning faith from her daughter Smita, who instead feels stifled by it. The complexities of familial relationships and the clash of individual beliefs against societal expectations become palpable, shedding light on the intricate dynamics of religious identity within a family structure.The characters' struggles are not merely personal; they mirror the broader societal challenges rooted in deep-seated prejudices. Hardik's intense hatred and Javed's militancy find their origins in childhood experiences, underscoring the profound impact of upbringing on shaping religious perspectives. In contrast, Bobby represents the "moderate" face of Islam, deemed acceptable by mainstream society. Yet, beneath his lack of aggression, a sense of shame is discernible as he grapples with the need to apologize for his religious identity. Dattani's exploration of these characters goes beyond individual narratives, serving as a commentary on the intricate interplay of religion, societal expectations, and personal struggles. The characters, with their flaws and vulnerabilities, become conduits for a broader discourse on the

multifaceted nature of faith and identity within the constraints of an oppressive social milieu. Alyque Padamesee opines, "As I see it this is a play about transferred resentments. About looking for a scapegoat to hit out when we feel let down, humiliated. Taking out your anger on your wife, children or servants is an old Indian custom… this is above all a play about family with its simmering undercurrents… (Dattani 161)

Analysis of *Final Solutions*

Final Solutions is deeply rooted in a historical context, grappling with the enduring issue of religious communalism a concern that has plagued the nation for well over a century. Despite India's rich theatrical heritage, the country is unfortunately marked by a history of religious inflexibility, notably manifested in religious conflicts that have, for generations, disrupted the nation's peace. The term 'religious communalism' encapsulates the aftermath of ideological differences among individuals from different faiths, often exacerbated by political manipulation of social issues. The consequences of such conflicts manifest as hatred, animosity, and anger. These divisive elements, deeply entrenched in history, have given rise to a complex web of religious tensions, a theme that *Final Solutions* courageously delves into.India's political landscape has, at times, amplified these tensions, with the emergence of phenomena like vote-bank politics. The play offers a reflective lens on the consequences of emphasizing communal identities, highlighting the potential pitfalls of such approaches. It draws attention to how political institutions, driven by communal considerations, can contribute to an environment where the complexities of religious coexistence become increasingly elusive. The heart of the issue lies in the dangerous practice of stereotyping, punishing entire communities for the deliberate mistakes and anti-social activities committed by a few. *Final Solutions* serves as a poignant commentary on this broader societal challenge, inviting audiences to contemplate the implications of collective blame and the urgent need for nuanced understanding amid the complexities of religious diversity.Communalism, much like casteism, perpetuates stereotyping and prejudice, giving rise to animosity, anger, and hatred rooted in cultural and religious differences. Historical events such as the partition in 1947, the Babri Masjid demolition in 1992, and the Godhra incident in 2002 have cast long shadows, creating a profound rift between Hindus and Muslims. The pervasive consciousness of being in the majority or minority shapes thought processes, fostering a sense of 'us' and 'they' based on religious affiliations. These historical incidents have etched deep

scars in the collective psyche, contributing to the perpetuation of divisive themes. The interplay of majority-minority dynamics further intensifies the complexities of religious relations, and this nuanced understanding is crucial for interpreting the dynamics explored in the play *Final Solutions*.

Throughout the play, the characters grapple with the weight of historical and societal baggage, mirroring the broader implications of communal tensions. The play serves as a reflective mirror, inviting audiences to carefully contemplate the subtle nuances of religious consciousness and the impact of historical events on contemporary perspectives. By examining the characters' actions and interactions, *Final Solutions* becomes a lens through which we can gain insight into the intricate dynamics of communalism, urging society to confront its biases and work towards fostering a more inclusive and understanding coexistence.The presence of violence, manifesting in various forms such as mental, domestic, psychological, and physical, remains an undeniable facet of Indian society. In his play, Dattani employs the flashback technique to delve into an incident that unfolded four decades ago, shedding light on the persistent theme of violence. The play unfolds as Daksha witnesses the plight of two Muslim boys, Javed and Bobby, seeking refuge from a Hindu mob intent on harming them. The ensuing assault, where the mob steals their possessions, underscores the opportunistic nature of violence motivated not by religious fervor, but by individual gain. Dattani skillfully exposes the dark side of using religion as a guide for selfish motives, a recurring theme in the play.The town is under curfew due to rumors of the Muslim community allegedly damaging a religious idol by throwing stones. In this charged atmosphere, Ramnik, Daksha's son, defies the communal storyline by offering shelter to Javed and Bobby. Despite his liberal attitude, Ramnik's actions also reflect the subtle influence of religious faith. The pivotal moment reveals his commitment to nurturing human love and faith beyond the confines of communal disharmony. Ramnik's defiance against the demands of the angry Hindu mob outside his home showcases the power struggle between individual convictions and the collective force of communal ideologies. As stones are hurled at his house, the scene becomes a poignant metaphor for the resistance against intolerance and the resilience required to uphold principles of compassion in the face of communal discord. The play intricately weaves together these

elements, compelling audiences to confront the complexities of violence, communalism, and the enduring struggle for humanity amid the tumult of societal divisions.

The societal bias is vividly depicted as Ramnik, motivated by a desire to offer refuge to Javed and Bobby, encounters resistance from his wife, Aruna. The familial tension unfolds through a discussion in which their daughter, Smita, inadvertently reveals her awareness of the two boys. In this Hindu household, diverse perspectives and conflicting opinions emerge, sparking arguments regarding the decision to provide shelter to Muslim boys. The family dynamic becomes a microcosm of the broader societal prejudices, reflecting the complex interplay of individual beliefs within the context of communal tensions. Ramnik's inclination towards compassion and hospitality clashes with Aruna's opposing stance, creating a domestic scene that mirrors the wider societal discord. Smita's entrance into the conversation adds another layer, revealing the generational nuances and varied viewpoints within the family unit.The multifaceted nature of the family's discussion serves as a lens through which the audience can discern the intricate challenges and differing convictions prevalent in the broader social landscape. Dattani skillfully utilizes this familial microcosm to explore the complexities of communalism, shedding light on the internal conflicts that arise when individual values clash against societal norms and prejudices.Act two commences with a series of questions directed at Smita by her parents, probing into her connection with Javed and Bobby. The interrogation delves into the dynamics of her relationship with the two boys, unraveling a complex theme. Smita's revelation of her acquaintance with the Muslim boys is intertwined with the mention of her Muslim friend, Tasmeen, who resides in a hostel. She provides a harrowing account to Smita, detailing the communal violence that has erupted. The Hindu mob's aggression extends beyond the confines of personal relationships, as evidenced by their assault on Tasmeen's hostel, including the shattering of windows. This thematic thread underscores the pervasive reach of communal tensions, transcending individual connections to affect broader communities.Dattani skillfully weaves a tapestry of interconnected relationships, illustrating how communal violence is fueled by an ideological war. In this ideological conflict, each group perceives itself as superior, fostering an environment where superiority and inferiority are arbitrarily assigned based on religious identity. Through Smita's experiences and interactions, the play paints a vivid picture of the deep-seated divisions within society and the far-reaching consequences of

communal ideologies. The renowned historian Bipin Chandra remarks, "Communal violence is a conjunctural consequence of communal ideology…Hindu, Muslim, Sikh or Christian communalism are not very different from each other; they belong to a single species; they are varieties of the same communal ideology" (Chandra, 399).

It is evident that communal violence stems from communal ideology. In a crucial revelation, Smita discloses to her father that Javed and Bobby are relatives of her friend Tasmeen: one being Tasmeen's brother and the other her fiancé. This revelation sparks anger from her parents, and while Bobby maintains a polite demeanor, Javed engages in arguments with Ramnik, Smita's father. Ramnik, in response, recounts a personal tragedy, explaining how Muslims killed his father with inhumane cruelty.

Another instance highlighting communal disharmony unfolds in Act two, as Mahesh Dattani vividly portrays a cycle of suffering where Hindus inflict pain on Muslims, and Muslims, in turn, cause suffering to Hindus. However, the playwright underscores that beneath these communal differences lie individual interests and selfish motives, revealing the multifaceted nature of the conflicts. Dattani's play adeptly unveils the intricacies of communal tensions, illustrating that behind the veneer of ideological clashes are personal histories, grievances, and self-serving motivations. This nuanced exploration challenges the simplistic narratives surrounding communal violence and prompts reflection on the complex interplay of individual actions in fueling broader societal discord.

Mahesh Dattani skillfully imparts a didactic, liberal, and humanistic perspective within his play. Throughout the drama, a palpable undercurrent of hatred is depicted within individuals. Dattani squarely places the blame on the police and politicians, presenting them as the true culprits. The play sheds light on a troubling reality where the police often fail to apprehend the actual perpetrators, instead wrongfully arresting innocent individuals. Javed and Ramnik's interactions underscore the hypocrisy and manipulation inherent in the police system, prompting Dattani to advocate for necessary reforms within the rules and regulations governing law enforcement.

The play unfolds with small yet impactful incidents of hatred, such as the deliberate act of dropping meat and bones in the backyard, wiping the gate, letter, and any spot touched by Javed. These acts reflect individual ideologies that contribute to societal division based on religion. The mistreatment directed at Javed fuels profound anger and hatred within Bobby,

highlighting the toxic consequences of communal prejudices. Amid this turmoil, Dattani emphasizes the urgency of self-understanding and introspection. Characters like Aruna and Hardika express their agonies, stemming from their own perspectives. Smita, however, emerges as a beacon of humanitarianism, devoid of prejudice or bias. Her stance becomes a powerful symbol of the need for empathy and understanding to bridge the deep-seated divides perpetuated by communal hatred. In essence, Dattani skillfully imparts a compelling call for societal reflection and reform, urging individuals to confront their biases and work towards fostering a more inclusive and compassionate coexistence within the dramatic context.

Conclusion

In *Final Solutions*, Dattani articulates his profound humanistic concerns by delving into the pervasive theme of communalism. The play becomes a canvas where Dattani applies a keen awareness of religious consciousness and the ingrained prejudices toward different faiths. He exposes communalist attitudes and stereotypes embedded in society, which contribute to the development of a collective hostility between communities. Through a methodical reflection on contemporary socio-political issues, Dattani endeavors to convey that genuine solutions to the complex problem of communalism may not be as elusive as they seem when discursive boundaries are transcended. In essence, Dattani's exploration of communalism in *Final Solutions* serves as a compelling call for understanding and empathy. By dismantling stereotypes and shedding light on the intricacies of religious prejudices, the play encourages a deeper examination of the complexities that underlie communal discord. Through this lens, Dattani suggests that the path to resolution lies in a collective effort to break down the barriers that perpetuate hatred and foster a more nuanced, inclusive understanding of diverse religious identities.

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