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A Critical Study of Mahesh Dattani's *Final Solutions*

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Abstract

Mahesh Dattani is one of the foremost playwrights of Indian literature in English. Dattani won the prestigious Sahitya Akademi award for his *Final Solutions and Other Plays*, thus becoming the first English language playwright to win the award. His plays have been staged to critical and public acclaim all over the country and abroad. Mahesh Dattani has completely transformed the face of urban theatre in India. *Final Solutions* is a stage play in three acts. Most of us experience anger in some form or other almost every day. Anger is a negative emotion and it can cause violence. It can ruin relationship, The characters in the play motivate us to think that angry outbursts lead to chain reactions.

Keywords

Mahesh Dattani; *Final Solutions*; Anger.

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Final Solutions is a stage play in three acts. The play was first performed at Guru Nanak Bhavan, Bangalore, on 10 July 1993. The play was also translated into Hindi by Shahid Anwar and directed by Arvind Gaur for Asmita Theatre in 1998. The play was performed at Tara Theatre, Mumbai, on 11 December 1993, directed by Alyque Padamsee.

Most of us experience anger in some form or other almost every day. Anger is a negative emotion and it can cause violence. It can ruin relationship, when a person is angry, he tries to take out his anger on anybody closest to him. Alyque Padamsee writes in "A Note on the Play": "Taking out your anger on your wife, children in the play motivate custom."

The characters in the play motivate us to think that angry outbursts lead to chain reactions. The play opens with Daksha reading from her diary. An oil lamp converted to an electric one suggests that the period is the late 1940s. Daksha is the grandmother of the Gandhi, who sometimes is seen as a girl of fifteen on the stage. Daksha thinks that she is "a young girl who does not matter to anyone outside her home" (166). She says: "Last year in August, a terrible happened ... and that was freedom for India." The Mob whispers: "Freedom! At last Freedom!" Daksha closes her diary and now Hardika appears on the stage. She feels the things have not changed that much. A period of forty years is not a long period for a nation. But on the stage, the drumbeat grows louder and the Chorus slowly wear the Hindu masks. The words spoken by Chorus show the beginning of disharmony and painful period ahead. As long as the persons are on the stage they are normal but as soon as they are

behind the makes, their thirst for blood rises. Whether we are angry with someone or someone is angry with us, each outburst takes its toll on both parties. The Chorus with Hindu makes burst with angry words:

CHORUS 1. The procession had passed through these
lanes Every year,
For forty Years!

CHORUS 2, 3. How dare they?

CHORUS 1, 2, 3. For forty years our chariot has moved
through their mo-hallas.

CHORUS 4, 5. What did they?
Why did they today?

CHORUS 1. How dare they?

CHORUS 2, 3. They broke our rath. They broke our
Chariot and felled our God!

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 4. Why Should they?

CHORUS 5. It could have been an accident.

CHORUS 2. The stone that hit our God was no accident!

CHORUS 3. The knife that slit the poojari's stomach was
no accident!

CHORUS 4, 5. Why Should they?

I could have been an accident. (168)

The words spoken by Chorus are the indications of domestic violence, political mischief's and social unrest. The effective use of the Chorus in the play is a dynamic technique used by the playwright. In the stage directions, the playwright gives hints on the Mob/Chorus.

The Mob/Chorus comprises five men and ten masks on sticks. The masks are strewn all over the ramp. The player 'wears' a mask by holding the stick in front of him. At more dynamic moments, he can use it as a weapon in a stylized fashion. There are five Hindu masks and five Muslim masks. The Mob/Chorus becomes the Chorus when they 'wear' either the Hindu or the Muslim masks. But when referred to individually, they remain Chorus 1, Chorus 2, etc. The player of the Mob/Chorus do not belong to any religion and ideally should wear black (165).

"Their chariot fell in our street!" remarks Chorus 1 with Muslim masks. The words "This is our land,' 'fell in our street' show that the borderline is clear. Nobody thinks is the land of Indians. Hardika says that the pride has destroyed her before. He family doesn't want equality. It wants to prove superior to somebody else. Hardika can't stand this 'wretched' pride game.

Ramnik's wife Aruna enters in to the house of Gandhi while Aruna's daughter Smita and her husband are retiring for the night. Ramnik doesn't like Hardika's telling his daughter that "those people are all demons"(173). Aruna is a typical Gujarati housewife doing 'pooja-path' every day. She is overburdened by work. The following dialogue is a comment on overburdened by work. The following dialogue is a comment on the creator of the chaotic situation. When Aruna complains about her uneasiness, Ramnik asks;

RAMNIK. Nobby is asking you to pray all day.

ARUNA. Who do you think is protecting this house?

RAMNIK. Why do you think is creating all this trouble?

(173)

Aruna promises everybody: "Our Krishna will protect us." (174) Arun is God -fearing a woman who thinks that everything will be smooth and peaceful one day. There is Lord Krishna who will protect everyone.

Daksha remembers her best friend Zarine. She admires her beauty: “I have never met anyone as pretty as her! What a complexion! It’s true that Khoja women are the prettiest in the whole world” (175). Daksha feels her beauty but hates the place where she lives as it is “a place where they sell unmentionable things” (175).

Ramnik saves the two boys, Bobby and Javed, when the Chorus shout: “Kill the sons of swine!” It is the demon of hate that has been let loose. Nobody helps the boys. Finally, Ramnik opens the door for the boys. The bitter hatred intensifies. The irrational behaviour of the two communities lingers for some time showing one’s prowess over the other. Chorus 1, 2 shout: “We are few! But we are strong!” (179).

Chorus calls Ramnik ‘a traitor’ for protecting the boys. Deep hatred makes the Chorus devoid of any human feelings. Hardika betrays her feelings by saying that she hates Javed. Aruna wants that they boys must go away from the house. She gives them water but puts the empty glasses separate from other glasses. Act I end with the violent words of the Chorus: “Throw them out” (187)! The Chorus goes to the extent of saying: “You mad man! They’ll stab you in the back! They’ll rape your daughter”(186).

At the beginning of Act II, the characters are all in the same position as at the end of Act I. The Mob/Chorus is restless. The conflict deepens as the chariot lies broken in their streets. Chorus I doubt their leader’s intentions. He says, “They want our blood to boil” (188). But what should boiling blood lead to, nobody knows. Chorus I laments that the leaders have succeeded in their mission. After lot of bloodshed and bitter enmity, the Chorus understands their flaw.

Smita recognize the two boys as Javed, Tasneem’s brother, and Babban or Bobby, Tasneem’s fiancé, Tasneem is Smita’s classmate. Smita feeling of hatred for the political parties can be traced here:

SMITA. (to Ramnik) they hire him! They hire such

people!

RAMNIK. They who?

SMITA. Those – parties! They hire him! That’s how he makes a living. They bring him and many more to the city to create riots. To... throw the first stone! (195)

Javed turns furious at these words and calls Smita a “Traitor” (195).

Act III opens with a spotlight on the two men sitting on the floor, looking troubled. The Muslim Chorus is on the highest level of the ramp. They sit with their legs folded under them in prayer position. The wordy duel between Ramnik and Javed goes on, accusing each other. The flames of hatred are still in their minds. Ramnik says to Javed that his life is based on violence. Ramnik thinks that Javed is a riot-rouser and criminal. Ramnik emits a few curses on Javed.

Ramnik thinks that Javed has done an unforgivable act. Ramnik, a liberal-minded person, offers a job to Javed only to give him a chance.

Daksha’s complaint about her in-laws that they don’t allow her to play gramophone makes Zarine sympathetic about Daksha. Zarine’s father is busy narrating the stories about the clash between two communities and how his shop is burnt purposely. Javed sarcastically remarks: “You scream with pain and horror, but there is no one listening to you. Everyone is alone in their own cycles of joy and terror” (205). Javed admits that he himself doesn’t know, what he is doing there. He is totally disillusioned. Smita frankly tells her mother, Aruna, not burden her anymore with religious prejudices.

In the last lines of the Third Act, Bobby picks up the image of Krishna and tells everybody: “He does not burn me to ashes! He does not cry out from the heavens saying. He has been contaminated” (224)! Aruna feels uneasy by seeing this act but Bobby clarifies: “if you are willing to forget, I am willing to tolerate” (225).

Ramnik transfers his anger at his own father's black deed (burning the shop) to his mother. In the name of communal hatred, this shameful act is done by Ramnik's father. This is the reason why he does not want to go to his shop. In the play Smita looks very innocent. She doesn't like hypocrisy or over-reaction to religious duties. So she openly opposes her mother: "I can see so clearly how wrong you are" (211). Aruna is proud of her religion. Arun listens to the stories of Gods while Smita thinks it is all rubbish. Aruna's own daughter does not show any respect for all the religious rituals her mother observes. Smita boldly says to her mother: "You have to admit you are wrong" (210).

We have to oust anger from our lives if we want to live peacefully. Are there any final solutions to the problem of communal riots, disputes and acts of hatred? Can we come out of this vicious circle? Mahesh Dattani gives no answer. Alyque Padamsee asks: "Is life a forward journey or do we travel round in a circle, returning to our starting point" (161)?

The play is a fine example of transferred resentments, Smita, who is unable to express her love for Babban, criticizes her mother bitterly. Smita hates praying and fasting. Her mother accuses her of running away from religion. The characters in the play express their anger at every stage. The members of the raging communities do not know that negative emotions like anger tend to release harmful toxins in the body. The mob seems to be symbolic of our own hatred. We, the people of different communities, must stop this hatred and bitterness. The play mocks at the politicians who use people as their puppets. These puppeteers are the real culprits. The playwright, at the end of the play, wishes to stop this game of hatred and communal tension through the character of Ramnik. Ramnik accepts that his father has done the black deed. We should forgive the offenders and forget the past. This can be the final solution.

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