

Are There Any Final Solutions?

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Abstract

Literature is one of the most powerful media of expression and emerges for various reasons. It could be to vent out the emotions pent up for a long time because of a particular incident, or a thoughtful evaluation of the gone and going to be, or giving a piece of advice or a piece of one's mind to something or someone, an appreciation of an idea, a thing of beauty and in short it could be anything. Literature of partition period seemed to be preoccupied with the theme of communal riots and passion for nostalgia. Some of the writers captured in their stories the diversity of Indian culture and the sad decline of its glorious values.

KEYWORDS: Conflicts, Animosity, Seclusion, Riots, Communal

Mahesh Dattani occupies a unique place in the history of Indian English drama. He had the honour of winning the first Sahitya Akademi award for English drama in 1998 for his book of plays "Final Solutions and other Plays". This multifaceted personality was able to receive wide acclaim, both national and international, at an early age.

Dattani's prize-winning play "Final Solutions" is a brave attempt at portraying communal conflicts in India. He is successful in handling such a burning social issue. The roots of Hindu Muslim animosity are explored in this play which is set in an atmosphere of communal violence.

The tension develops in Gandhi family when two Muslim young men, Bobby and Javed seek refuge in his house during a riot. The liberal humanist Ramnik gives shelter to the Muslim boys. But his wife, the religious conservative, Aruna and his mother Hardika who is openly anti-Muslim, cannot accept the situation easily. The past reveals itself and it is learnt that Ramnik's father had actually made use of riots to obtain the shop that belonged to Hardika's Muslim friends and she had been wrongly soured against them. Ramnik transfers his resentment at his own father's black deed to his mother. His daughter Smita, who was secretly in love with the Muslim boy, Bobby, hits out at her mother Aruna. Dattani raises the question: Can such historical wrongs ever be righted?

The play mocks at the politicians who use people as their puppets. These puppeteers are the real culprits. A young baffled boy, Javed becomes a victim and a terrorist and is exploited by politicians in the name of 'Jehad'. Javed, who loved playing the hero with the neighbourhood boys in his childhood, was changed after he was humiliated by pious Hindu in his locality. That man was afraid of being contaminated by Javed's touch and his behaviour caused hatred in Javed's mind against the Hindu community.

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! (Pg. No. 195)

Smita, who gathered facts from her friend, Tasneem who happened to be Javed's sister, discloses that Javed was thrown out from his family for being used by the politicians in creating riots.

Dattani shows how fear of seclusion created frenzy leading to riots. And all this is caused by the tendency to treat the persons belonging to a separate community as the 'Other'. We hardly know another religion and society. We do not want to respect the other man's 'otherness'. The ignorance is colossal and it has done enormous harm to us. Sociologically we must learn to see both society and human beings as whole. Dattani elaborated the theme of Hindu – Muslim riot through projecting the incapacity of the recognition of the "Other Man's Otherness".

The fanatics are so biased that they don't bother to verify if the people belonging to the other community have actually done any harm to them. They don't care for any logic; nor do they have rational mindset. Thus Aruna hesitated to offer water to Javed and Bobby and when she found that the two of them quickly gulped down the water, she was afraid of contamination.

"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". (P. No. 185)

We the people of different communities, must stop this hatred and bitterness. Dattani lays bare the fact that hatred breeds hatred and then devastate Indian society. Woven into the play are the issues of class and communities and the clashes between traditional and modern life 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.

Both Hardika and Javed have a bitter taste of the minority community. Hardika's father was murdered because they were members of minority Hindu community in Pakistan during partition and Javed has become a terrorist because he is from the minority community in India. Bobby has changed his name to Bobby from Babban simply because he does not like to expose his identity as a minority member. Ramnik, who seems to be quite liberal, intelligent and understanding stands exposed to his hypocrisy in the end. Dattani tried to show how fundamentalism is born out of fear of marginality.

Through the observation recorded in Daksha's diary Dattani touches the core of social problem that remains the same after so many years of independence. Accusing the political parties for developing tensions that lead to riots, Dattani makes it clear that the political parties in India being merged into corruption, the common persons are exploited and victimized. A nexus among the political parties and the business magnates is another face of the problem that has been laid bare through activities of Ramnik's father and grandfather. As a girl Daksha enjoyed the company of her Muslim friends,

particularly Zarine who had in her collection all popular songs of Noor Jahan. But she was denied the opportunity to go to the Zarine's house. Unable to know the facts, she also developed hatred against the Muslim community. Through revelation of the past, Dattani shows that the germ of hatred is carefully spread among the innocent persons who are misguided and are used as tools for running the machinery of riots. Both the past and present are inter-woven in the plot which operates at the same time, on individual, familial and national level.

In 'Final Solutions' Dattani does not provide any ready-made solution to the problem of Hindu – Muslim riot, that has been eating into the very core of Indian Society since the time of partition. He only presents the complicated problem from every possible aspect. Through his presentation of some real social issues on the stage, Dattani compels us to think over them. Can we shake off our prejudices or are they in our psyche like our genes? Will we ever be free or ever-locked in combat... Jews against Arabs, Whites against Blacks, Hindus against Muslims? Are there any final solutions?

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