

Aestheticization of Communal Violence in Mahesh Dattani's Plays "*Final Solutions*" and "*Where Did I Leave My Purdah?*"

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Abstract

When we discuss Indian Drama written in English, the great luminary who stands at its center stage is Mahesh Dattani. As one of the doyens of the Indian Drama in English, he has been whetting the research appetite of many a scholar like me. He belongs to the tradition of those Indian playwrights who expressed their views on human life relating to numerous social, political, and cultural evils and disorders. In this regard, this paper attempts to look at the Dattanian aestheticization of communal violence critically demystified in his plays "Final Solutions" and "Where did I leave my purdah." Despite his focus on collective violence and its fluidities, Dattani has never been a dysthymic. On the contrary; he has been a staunch crusader of communal harmony, communal amity, and holistic growth of humanity. That is why it is more logical to call him an integrationist with an unclouded harmonious vision. Essentially, this paper aims to show how in his plays like "Final Solutions" and "Where did I leave my purdah?", Dattani has chanted the "mantra" of peaceful coexistence, even in the drone made by the vultures of communal violence.

Keywords: Mahesh Dattani, violence, communal violence, harmony, coexistence

Introduction:

Unfortunately, violence happens to be the most familiar word in our everyday life. But it becomes complicated to define it, as it is not limited to a particular area, person, caste, creed, color, class, gender, and specific causes. Violence is a broad term that generally refers to deliberate conduct or behavior which causes or intends to cause injury to people. Violence is not containable. It overflows its supposed constraints. We have noticed how, in our societies, there are many forms of violence. The different kinds of violence that can be marked under the umbrella term "violence" are societal violence, political violence, somatic violence/ physical violence, sexual violence, psychological violence, and sacral/ spiritual violence. Under the category of political violence, one can put such kinds of violence as communal violence, civil violence, riot, anarchy, and war/genocide.

Communal Violence:

Communal violence is essentially impersonal, collective, and ethnic/ tribal. So it

includes inter-community conflicts, riots, and demonstrations involving communities of diverse religious groups, sects, tribes, and ethnic groups. That is why violent civil unrest, minoritarian unrest, racial strife, inter-communal fracas, ethno religious violence, and mob frenzy come within the range and domain of communal violence. In the opinion of scholars like Colm Campbell, Kimuli Kahara, D. L. Horowitz, G. Kynoch, and L. Mancini, communal violence is principally caused because of degradation of the rule of law, the radicalization of anger among one or more communities, violent mobilization, and discriminatory application of jurisprudence, ethnic segregation and widespread mistrust among communities. So communal violence/ ethnic violence/ non-state conflicts/ mass violence/ social-inter-communal violence/ethno religious violence/ massacre/ sectarian violence is the outcome of people's aggressive denunciation of and reaction to horizontal inequality. Hence, communal violence is a type of organized violence/ crime and, therefore, group violence. Concerning the brief meta-critical analysis of communal violence just actualized, it is proposed to study how Dattani has trans-scripted communal violence in "Final Solutions" and "Where did I leave my purdah?"

Communal Violence in "Final Solutions": A Demystificatory Study

Dattani scholars like Beena Agarawal, Asha Kothari Chaudhury, Tutun Mukherjee, E. Ali, Gautam Sen, Ibrahim Khalilulla, Bipin Parmar, and R. K. Dhawan have studied *Final Solutions* from the perspective of communal violence. Carrying forward the discursive analysis, Alyque Padamsee has studied *Final Solutions* from the standpoint of "transferred resentment" (161). Yet "Final Solutions" is immensely amenable to an analysis from the viewpoint of communal disharmony, religious fanaticism, sectarian intolerance, communal distrust, and group violence. In this play, one can notice how acts of violence on communal lines can disturb the audience. The violent show is narrated by Javed as follows:

...I saw the poojari ringing a bell! There was chaos all around. I saw the poojari's frightened face...And I watched men fighting, distorted faces not making a sound. And I watched someone pick up the knife and pierce the poojari...The poojari fell to the ground... (*Collected Plays*208)

Here we notice how the *poojari* is pierced with the knife. This can be called the "theatre of cruelty," as it is a disturbing act of violence on display.

In this play, Hardika and Ramnik represent two different schools of responses to the communal divide or drift between the Hindus and the Muslims in India. Hardika is critical of the mob frenzy of the Muslims, whereas Ramnik, a large-hearted and broad-minded humanist, is sympathetic toward the Muslims. If Hardika distrusts the Muslims, Ramnik tolerates them, forgives them, and goes for amity. He goes for revived re-bonding. He wants to clarify his father's, his grandfather's, and his acts of omission and commission so that the communal violence that disrupts the Hindu- Muslim amity can be bottled. Instead of pushing the unfortunate Muslim youths left in the lurch in the disturbing hours of communal violence, he gives shelter to them. Though Hardika disapproves of his kindness, Ramnik flows against communal hatred. He declares, "I have to protect them! I need to protect them"(*Collected Plays*182), and he has not thrown Bobby and Javed out to

be butchered by the frenzied Hindu fundamentalists. Hence Ramnik is quite different in his attitude and aptitude from Hardika. Luckily Ramnik has a liberalist as his ally in his daughter Aruna. So Dattani seems to suggest that to solve the century-old Hindu-Muslim communal hate/ violence, the past must be forgotten, a new beginning has to be made (by people like Ramnik), and the peace-keeping efforts made in the present should be carried forward, and strengthened in the future (by integrationists like Smita)

Hardika has failed to forget how the Muslims had stabbed the Hindus in the back, raped the Hindu ladies, and butchered the Hindu fugitives. She has remembered selectively and has forgotten the obnoxious activities of the Hindus against the Muslims, but Ramnik doesn't suffer from chosen/ preferred amnesia. He remembers how Hindus had burnt down a Muslim property to force the Muslim owners to resort to a distress sale so that they could procure the desired property belonging to their Muslim victims. They had duped and cheated the Muslims. So he has made up his mind to help Bobby and Javed so that he would be able to atone for his/ their past sins. Hence Ramnik has tried to voice his disapproval of religious fanaticism.

Initially, both Aruna and Javed have been equally prejudiced. Still, right from the moment of the entry of Bobby and Javed to Ramnik Gandhi's safety nest, Smita has been an integrationist. So Beena Agrawal inferred from the exposition Act that Smita has been behaving "like the instrument of solution in the play" (48). That is why she is neither a radical nor a quitter; she is a votary of peace and communal harmony. However, Javed has been a disrupting element. He has aroused the fury and frenzy of the Muslims against the Hindus. He played a vital role in the communal war between the Hindus and Muslims during the *Rath Yatra*. He has vitiated the atmosphere. As a professional rioter, he has pelted stones at the Hindu processions and masterminded the violence against the IDOL and the *Rath*. So Javed is pulverized/ stunned when Ramnik shows compassion to/ for him. So he melts, his hatred evaporates, and his attitude changes, keeping pace with the cathartic modifications in the philosophy of Ramnik. He understands how because of his anger and frustration, he has swerved off the path of peaceful existence and communal amity to the communal violence-crazed zones of mutual bitterness and hatred.

As he tries to regain his calmness and composure, Aruna has also attempted to maintain her poise. So Javed, Bobby, Aruna, and Smita go beyond the lines of communal divide. They all create their freedom by nurturing their respective progressive ideas and fortifying their budding love for humanity. Bobby leads from the front and dandles the Hindu idol without a trace of disinclination, distrust, skepticism, and mockery. He respects "the other," his "other," and Muslims' "other," and so he is accepted, not othered. So *Final Solutions* is not simply about the ravages of communal violence. Still, it is also about society's desired and desirable emancipation from the trap of communal animosity or disharmony. That is why Aruna and Javed must shed their prejudices. So Smita has said categorically to Aruna:

I listened to you, and I obeyed you. I tolerated your prejudices only because you are my mother. I should have told you earlier, but I'm telling you now, I can't bear it!
Please don't burden me anymore; I can't take it. (*Collected Plays*213)

So Asha Kothari Chaudhury has inferred that with the intrusion of Bobby and Javed, Smita reveals her true sensibility and frees herself of her mother's oppressive prejudices while

trying to be fair to her (40).

Hardika is an old timer, cut in the mold of communal hatred. For her, the Muslims are marauders, "dogs," and "let loose" (*Collected Plays*174). She has not forgotten how the Muslims had attacked them in her father's absence. She fails to find any glint of humanity in the eyes of Javed and Bobby. She sees despicable pride in their eyes. She fears that they would rout them. So she tells Aruna to be careful as the dogs (Muslims) have been let loose.

Javed and Bobby are outsiders. They have intruded. They are grabbed by the Hindu mob, pushed, pulled, beaten, and hounded. They are chased. Javed is wounded. Javed and Bobby cringe for pity and plead to be spared. Psychosis has mentally unbalanced the Hindus, so their actions and reactions are neurotic. They have been sheltered in Ramnik's house. Now the Gandhis face the Hindu mob. They demand, "Throw them out! Give them to us!" (*Collected Plays*180). They pound the door of the Gandhi House. But Ramnik doesn't open the door. Javed pleads and prays to Gandhi not to open the door. The Hindu mob threatens to break in, becomes furious, and calls Ramnik a traitor. Ramnik remains unfazed. He tells the group, "There is nothing you can take from here without killing me first!" (182). The mob hangs about outside.

Ramnik is humble and sensitive. He is civilized, humane, rational, and compassionate. He believes that all community members with a numerical majority must behave responsibly, strive for peace, promote peace, and strengthen the peace-keeping forces because peace is "hidden inside the armpits of the majority" (*Collected Plays*191). The play under study has not only specified how the majority should behave while dealing with tricky issues but also has defined the role of the minority in any peace-keeping effort. Minorities should not distrust, nor should they be blinded by prejudice. They should separate truth from communal falsehoods. They should honor the sentiments of the "other." Bobby does conduct himself with dignity, objectivity, and neutrality. Before entering the Puja enclave in the house of Ramnik Gandhi, he removes his footwear and picks up the idol of Lord Krishna, and he lifts the icon with reverence, adoration, and exults:

Look how He rests in my hands! He knows I can't harm Him. He knows His strength! I don't believe in Him, but He believes in me. He smiles! He smiles at our trivial pride and our trivial shame. (*Collected Plays*224)

So what is essential is that both the groups, of the majority and the minority, must get rid of their respective prejudices to reach some "final solution."

Dattani, for whom hurt and humiliation, assault and aggression, violence and viciousness have been stable subjects of drama, is not a dysthymic. Instead, he has been a staunch crusader supporting peace, certainty, and joy in society, variously vitiated but not weakened beyond repair and redemption. In other words, "Final Solutions" has put the central spotlight on his harmonious vision, but not on his diagnostic temperament to trace the stink of violence threatening the dignified and graceful acuity of human society.

Communal Violence in "Where did I leave my purdah?"

In "Final Solutions", Dattani has given top-most priority to the dramatization of communal violence, but in "Where did I leave my purdah", communal violence has been

telescoped, that too among other things. Suppose the former is a microscopic study of the Indian socio-politico-cultural miasma called communal violence. In that case, the latter is just a symptomatic study of communal violence, with implicit references to the during-partition and post-partition naked dance of communal violence in India. Yet Dattani has made as robust “a plea for tolerance” (*Me and My Plays* 31) as the one he has made in “Final Solutions”. In this play, Dattani has taken elaborate care to show how communal violence has destroyed the cultural harmony of the country but in “Where did I leave my purdah? He has just glossed over the issue. Yet in both the plays, his fight for peace and harmony has been embodied without any conceited imposition of self. Hence in “Where did I leave my purdah, a play of idea; hence a problem plays, communal violence is not highlighted but is just suggested. Therefore, it goes well with “Final Solutions”. In “Where did I leave my purdah, Dattani also suggested that in desperate times, it is very natural for people to be in the grip of fear. While bringing out the horrors of partition, with all its disruption, he has shed light on the communal frenzy of the Muslims, determined to eliminate the Hindus: *Maar dale unharaamko! ... Kafironkopardo*(75-76). So gunshots and murder have drowned the pleas for peace. In the end, we all have become "victims". Ruined beyond restoration, terrified beyond alleviation, members of both communities involved in the communal violence proceeding, accompanying, and succeeding the ruthlessly sharp and detailed criticism of undivided India into *Pakistan* and *Hindustan* have been forced to bear the brunt of group violence, entirely avoidable. So Dattani has suggested that no critic should indulge in and support any twisted interpretation of the havoc caused by the psycho-socio-politico-cultural menace termed communal violence.

Conclusion

So the play “Final Solutions” is more about the beauty of communal and domestic harmony. Despite his depiction of communal violence between the Hindus and the Muslims in “Final Solutions” and “Where did I leave my purdah”, Dattani has never focused only on tracing the stink of violence. On the contrary, he has been a firm supporter of communal harmony and the all-inclusive progress of humankind. He suggests that to solve the century-old Hindu-Muslim collective hate, the past must be forgotten, a new beginning has to be made by people like Ramnik, and the peace-keeping efforts made in the present should be carried forward and strengthened in the future by integrationists like Smita. Through these plays, Dattani has been able to chant the mantra of peaceful coexistence even in the midst of the clouds of communal hostility.

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