

## Partitioned Identity in Mahesh Dattani's Final Solutions

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### Abstract

*Mahesh Dattani's Final Solutions is a play on religious communalism between the two religious communities, the Hindus and the Muslims and its effect at the level of society and also at the individual level. The play gives an insight into the history of the partition of India into India and Pakistan, a glimpse of the social conditions then, the trauma of the people living during that phase of country. Literature has the potential to enrich everyone's lives in many ways. Study of literature can take us beyond the limited experience of our lives to show us the lives of others, giving us experiences we may not face in our own lives and the play Final Solutions is one such literary piece which deepens our understanding of our history, society and our individual lives.*

**Keywords:** partition, religious communalism, Hindus, Muslims

Mahesh Dattani is an internationally acclaimed playwright, theatre director and actor, screen writer, film maker and has his own theatre group, 'Playpen'. He has been honoured with the prestigious Sahitya Akademi Award in 1998 for Final Solutions and Other Plays. His plays are set in contemporary society and discuss issues of alternate sexuality, gender inequality, social exclusion, religious communalism between the Hindus and the Muslims, the impact of incest and child sexual abuse on the minds of young children, the impact of dreaded disease HIV/AIDS on the lives of the people.

Mahesh Dattani's Final Solutions is a play on religious communalism between the two religious communities, the Hindus and the Muslims and its effect at the level of society and also at the individual level. The script of the play was ready in 1991, and Dattani was preparing to launch it in December 1992 at the Deccan Herald Theatre festival in his hometown of Bangalore (now Bengaluru), India. But in December riots broke in several parts of the country after the demolition of Babri Masjid in Ayodhya. The organizers of the festival thought it prudent to ban the premiere of the play as its theme was based on communalism between the two religious communities namely the Hindu and the Muslim. The play was then performed on 10 July 1993 at Guru Nanak Bhavan,

Bangalore. The play was subsequently performed at The National Centre for the Performing Arts (NCPA) in Mumbai, Alyque Padamsee directed the play. Padamsee travelled across India with his production. The play was translated into Hindi by Shahid Anwar and directed by Arvind Gour for Asmita Theatre in 1998. Since then the play has had several shows in India as well as abroad; and is popular with the Indian as well as foreign audiences.

The play centers around a middle-class Hindu family of the Gandhis in Gujarat comprising of secular Ramnik Gandhi, his staunchly religious wife Aruna, his mother Hardika, who has witnessed the period of partition of India and Pakistan, and his college studying daughter Smita. Two young Muslim men seek refuge in their home from Hindu mob during a communal riot. Amongst the two Muslim men, one is a liberal-minded Babban, who prefers to be called Bobby and the other is Javed, a misguided man who is hired to initiate communal riots. The interaction between these six characters through the night leads to the action of the play, with a dramatic climax when Bobby enters the puja room of Gandhi house and holds the idol of Lord Krishna in his hand to prove the touch of a Muslim to a Hindu God does not affect the God or contaminate Him. God does not shrink from the touch or burns him to ashes; rather God welcomes the warmth of his touch.

With the conversation between the six characters through the night the attitude of the characters towards the people of other community and their religion is revealed and also the theme of the play of religious communalism and it as an issue prevalent in the society. Through the character of Hardika, Dattani puts-in the picture of unchanged existence of rift between the Hindu and Muslim community since partition with her experience in the aftermath of partition surfacing in her memory at various instances in the play. Hardika was of fifteen years of age in 1948 and that was the time when she came to Gandhi family as a young bride.

In the play Gandhis are the middle-class Hindu living in present day Amargaon, Gujarat. The family is shown to

have four members, Hardika (who was earlier known as Daksha), her son Ramnik, his wife Aruna and their daughter Smita. Javed and Bobby, the two young Muslim men seek refuge in their home from Hindu mob during a communal riot. The cause of this riot is discussed in the subsequent paragraph. The tension that arises between these six characters in the play during a single night forms the crux of the play.

A Rath yatra procession was passing through the lanes of the Muslim inhabitants of the city. During the procession damage was caused to the idols of God in the yatra and to the rath (chariot) and the poojari (priest) was stabbed to death with a knife. As a result, curfew has been imposed on the city. The Gandhi family is safe in their house. Smita is seen worried for her Muslim friend, Tasneem, who stays in Muslim girls' hostel. It's the night time when two Muslim boys, Javed and Bobby, knock their door for protection from the violent Hindu mob outside. Ramnik Gandhi gives shelter to the two young Muslim men in his house. Both, Hardika and staunchly religious Aruna object to this. For Hardika, presence of the two Muslim men in Gandhi house reminds her of her memories of partition of India and Pakistan and the events that happened in her life at the time. Hardika (then Daksha) lived in their ancestral home in Hussainabad along with her parents during the period of partition. She along with her mother was waiting for her father to return back home. There were loud noises outside which grew louder and louder. Suddenly stones hurled towards their house and the windows broke, one by one. They both got scared and hid themselves in their puja room, mother was holding the idol of Lord Krishna and praying for the safety of Daksha's father, to return home safely and take them from that hell. Petrified Daksha is shown to have lost faith in God then. A stone hit the gramophone table destroying the entire collection of records of Shamshad Begum, Noor Jehan and Suraiya. For Daksha her collections of love songs are broken. She expresses about this in the play thus, "The songs of love that I had learnt to sing with. Those beautiful voices. Cracked . . ." (CP, FS, 167). The word 'cracked' symbolizes the division of India into India and Pakistan. Daksha closes her diary and Hardika picks up the diary and speaks directly to the audience;

HARDIKA. After forty years . . . I opened my diary again. And I wrote. A dozen pages before. A dozen pages now. A young girl's childish scribble. An old woman's shaky scrawl. Yes, things have not changed that much (CP, FS, 167).

Thus, with the character of Daksha/Hardika Dattani weaves the past and the present together to highlight on

the unchanged condition of communal tension in the country. And which is a reality. There was tension at the time of partition, when Dattani was commissioned to write the play and when the researcher is studying the play and the evidence of which have been earlier noted in this chapter. Angelie Multani writes;

Daksha's diary establishes the history of division - the sense of 'us' and 'them', the link between personal experience and political belief/social hatred. A communal riot is invoked in the very first scene of the play, a riot in which Daksha's father was killed, a riot which firmly creates for Daksha, the 'them.' (111)

Daksha's father was killed in the communal violence. Daksha lost her father in the riot and also she lost her collection of gramophone records. Most noteworthy is her loss of faith in her family God, Krishna. The play through the character of Daksha/Hardika gives an insight into the violence during the partition, which resulted in loss of life and material and making the people live in terror. The terror of their experience haunts the survivors of the partition throughout their life, and Daksha/Hardika is an example of that in the play. Therefore, Hardika objects to Ramnik Gandhi's giving shelter to the two young Muslim men in their house.

Thus, the play gives an insight into the history of the partition of India into India and Pakistan, a glimpse of the social conditions then, the trauma of the people living during that phase of country. Literature has the potential to enrich everyone's lives in many ways. Study of literature can take us beyond the limited experience of our lives to show us the lives of others, giving us experiences we may not face in our own lives and the play *Final Solutions* is one such literary piece which deepens our understanding of our history, society and our individual lives.

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