

# Mahesh Dattani's 'Final Solutions' and 'On a Muggy Night in Mumbai': A Study from the perspective of Sacral Violence

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## Abstract:

Mahesh Dattani, one of the forerunners of the Indian Drama in English has been sharpening the research appetite of many a scholar. He has dealt with compelling issues, deep-rooted in his social environment. In his dramatic corpus, he has demystified the progeny of evil of the aggression in his works. The dramatic corpus of Dattani is replete with numerous themes of contemporary society and the theme of violence is of noticeable importance. When it comes to violence, he has articulated violence in general and sacral violence in particular, in his plays like "Final Solutions" and "On a Muggy Night in Mumbai".

Sacral Violence means inflicting violence in the name of God. Dattani has very wisely re-defined sacral violence "as a ritual for God's sake". And he has very tactfully re-endorsed how the whole heterosexual world, in the phallographic social structure, is infested with all sorts of violence, perpetrated in the midst of the *mantras* chanted by the powerful patriarch. The paper intends to focus how Dattani has perfect understanding of what is Peace/ Harmony / Love / Fellow-Feeling/ Concord/ Compassion but he has not persuaded himself and that he has also some better ideas related to the true nature of violence but he has not dissuaded himself. The present research paper is an attempt to show that Dattani, while aestheticizing violence, is not merely a nosologist but also a culturalist appreciating the beauty of the lotus of peace with its root (s) in the slough/ bog of violence.

**Key Words:** violence, sacral violence, peace, harmony, Mahesh Dattani.

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## I. Introduction

Mahesh Dattani, one of the most serious contemporary Indian English dramatists has given a new vision, growth and global identity to Indian English drama. He is a dramatist who is unconventional in his approach. He exposes issues which are referred to as invisible issues in Indian society. Rather they are considered as taboo. In his plays, he has dealt with such issues as homosexuality, gender discrimination, child sexual abuse, plight of LGBT, communalism and others. So, the dramatic canon of Dattani is filled with various themes of contemporary society and the theme of violence is very much evident. As far as violence is concerned, Dattani has ideated violence in general and sacral violence in particular, in his dramatic works such as "Final Solutions" and "On a Muggy Night in Mumbai".

## II. Sacral Violence: Putting in Perspective

Sacral violence, as the one dramatized by the French playwright Jean Racine in his dramatic tragedy "Iphigenia" may take the worst form of murder, religious riot/ anarchy in the name of god. Many of the Racine plays expose sacral violence. Even "Phaedra", another play written by Racine, is characterized by the aestheticization of psychological horrors with a religious subtext. So Racine has showed how people kill one another in the name of God, be called in any name. So in the opinion of John J. Conley, sacral violence is a terror buried in the veiled human heart. Carrying forward Conley's interpretation, Ron Rolheiser in 2017 has critiqued "Doing violence in God's Name" (2017). Rolheiser has begun from Blaise Pascal's theorization on / about sacral violence: "Men never do evil so completely and carefully as when they do it from a religious conviction". Really people have been doing violence in the name of God. *Al-Qaeda*, *ISIS* and others perpetrate sacral violence, including capital punishment, abortion and linguistic violence against those who do not toe to a certain religious line of thought, faith, and worship. In the form of violence in language, some and/ or all the *deviants* are *demonized*. That is why; Gospel denounces the violent acts done against Magdalene (in the name of god) for her adulterous behaviour. Even Moses has turned violent to break the Ten Commandments and has stoned people with the splintered pieces to rewrite the commandments. So God has advised Moses, "Don't do

violence in my name!". That is why, Rene Girard has been critical of our "brute tendency toward violence or conflict" (Frazier, 2013)

### III. Sacral Violence in the plays "Final Solutions" and "On a Muggy Night in Mumbai"

At the very outset, it is submitted that Dattani has articulated sacral violence in "Final Solutions" and "On a Muggy Night in Mumbai". Hence in the subsection to follow, "Final Solutions" is critiqued from the perspective of sacral violence.

#### a. Sacral Violence in "Final Solutions"

"Final Solutions", is immensely amenable to an analysis from the perspective of communal violence. Perhaps, that is why, there is sacral violence in it too. Since the communal strife has been between two inter-warring communities, violence has been made by one community against the idealized god of another community. The Muslims have not only disturbed the *rath* procession organised by the Hindus, they have broken the chariot, broken the idol and killed the priest-in-charge of the god on the chariot with a knife. That is why the communal violence in "Final Solutions" has morphed into one kind of sacral violence, i.e. iconoclastic / sacrilegious violence.

In "Final Solutions", there is also another kind of sacral violence. The Hindus have been too orthodox to allow the Muslims to touch their gods and partake in any Hindu ritual. Though the Muslims claim that they "are neither idol makers nor idol breakers", the Hindus haven't believed in them. Hindus (like Smitha) think that the Muslims hire people like Javed to "create riots", "to throw the first stone" (CP, 195). That is why Ramnik has called Javed "riot-rouser" and a "scum" (CP, 198). So liberalists like Aruna think that both communal violence and sacral violence between the Hindus and Muslims would be eliminated if the parties involved would believe that "All religion is one. Only the ways to God are many" (CP, 209) and that there is no meaning in fighting in the name of God. So if the water fetched by the Muslims, touched by the Muslims, is used to bathe the Hindu god(s) and goddess (es), no contamination takes place. That is why, people must rise above prejudice and bigotry and that religion which oppresses "outsiders" and causes communal conflagration, along with sacral violence. To do that, they must "see reason" (CP, 214). People should remember that God believes in His children and smiles at "trivial pride" and at "trivial shame" (CP, 224) and therefore, none should commit any act of sacral violence in the name of "God". They must understand and believe in one another to defeat both communal violence and sacral violence.

In the light of the facts, it is inferred that Dattani has denounced both communal violence and sacral violence in "Final Solutions". In his studied and unprejudiced opinion, there is no meaning in fighting in the name of God because no god has ever supported and promoted violence for the sake of perpetuating the infernal fire of violence, rather God has been always identified in terms of Peace/ Amity / Love / Compassion / Grace / Charity- all life-giving, life-sustaining positive forces, salvific forces. So Dattani's canon does not belong to any katabatic literature; hence is least dysthymic, despite copious aestheticization of all sorts of violence in his works. It is also informed that Dattani has perfect understanding of what is Peace/ Harmony / Love / Fellow-Feeling/ Concord/ Compassion but he has not persuaded himself and that he has also some better ideas related to the true nature of violence but he has not dissuaded himself. It is, therefore, prudent to conclude that Dattani, while aestheticizing violence, is not merely a nosologist but also a culturalist appreciating the beauty of the lotus of peace with its root (s) in the slough/ bog of violence.

#### b. Sacral Violence in "On a Muggy Night in Mumbai"

In the play, "On a Muggy Night in Mumbai", Mahesh Dattani has defined sacral violence as "a ritual for God's sake" (CP, 72). As testified by Sharad, "the whole heterosexual world is run by rituals" (CP, 72). In other words, in the opinion of Dattani, the whole heterosexual world is infested with lots of violence, pernicious but sacramentalized. That is why, the powerless, the helpless entities in the phallocratic world, be they children, women, LGBTs, coloured and poor are subjected to all sorts of violent attacks. While "chanting mantras" (CP, 72), the powerful hegemonists have been perpetrating heinous crimes against the subaltern.

### IV. Conclusion

On the basis of discussion made above, it is reiterated that Dattani has very wisely re-defined sacral violence "as a ritual for God's sake". And he has very tactfully re-endorsed how the whole heterosexual world, in the phallocratic social structure, is infested with all sorts of violence, perpetrated in the midst of the *mantras* chanted by the powerful patriarch. Furthermore, it is inferred that Dattani has perfect understanding of what is Peace/ Harmony / Love / Fellow-Feeling/ Concord/ Compassion but he has not persuaded himself and that he has also some better ideas related to the true nature of violence but he has not dissuaded himself. It is, therefore, prudent to conclude that Dattani, while aestheticizing violence, is not merely a nosologist but also a culturalist appreciating the beauty of the lotus of peace with its root (s) in the slough/ bog of violence.

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