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Telescoping the Past and the Present in Dattani's *Final Solutions*: A Critical Discourse on the 'Diary'

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Abstract:

In this paper the pervading importance of 'diary' has been interpreted. Diary has significance in the textual, contextual, and sub textual level. It is material entity but attempt has been made to highlight the fact that it can reveal the undercurrent flow of thoughts. In this play it exposes the psychological and mental turbulence of a woman's sensibility. It contains the emotion, psychic passion of Hardika. Through her undercurrent of thoughts Dattani presents the fragmentary glimpse of wounded or traumatic experience in India. This was the state of Nation. This was the idea of Nation during riot after Babri masque demolition. India was battered by communal tension. Through Diary past and present coalesce together. It is the medium of memory. Through individual memory Dattani peeps into larger society with its mutilated images and problems. It has been presented in postmodern way. It breaks spatial and temporal periphery. It fixes time past and time present.

Keywords: diary, memory, trauma, time, forgetting

Final Solutions is a stage play in three acts .The play opens with a kind of flashback scene. In this scene we see and hear a fifteen year-old bride Daksha reading out what she had written in her diary. This flashback goes back to the late 1940. Here we simultaneously see and hear Daksha as she has passed nearly fifty years. In the present she is the grandmother known by the name Hardika. Also on the stage, perhaps at the back are present the mob. They were carrying sticks with a Hindu and Muslim mask at either end. These masks cover the faces of the members of the mob as they assume the Muslim and Hindu identities or faces alternatively throughout the action of the play. Daksha's reminiscence over the mob wearing Hindu masks introduces the theme of communal tensions as they speak of the overturning of a chariot carrying images of Hindu Gods and of a knifing of a pujari.

Diary is an important device in this drama. Diary is a record with entries arranged by date reporting on what has been done in the past. It actually preserves a person's undercurrent of thoughts which often get deluged in later future and the person can connect his present to his past via this diary. Therefore, it is reservoir of a man's experiences, feelings. It is, therefore, supreme media of one's memoir. It captures moment, and tries to give vent to the historical and societal background as well. In this drama diary illumines the two different stages of a woman's character whose identities are separated only by 40 years. The technique is indeed post-modern. Through the diary two generation of time past and time present is heavily compared.

This use of diary is a very important technique in revealing the psyche of the characters and at once presents the agitating moments of history finely. It also serves as the driving force behind revealing the mixing memory and desires of the characters. Memory is a kind of experience and it is associated with trauma studies. It is a privileged area through which nature of past events can be represented. The past events may be historical or public. In early editions of the *Oxford English Dictionary* the entry for trauma defines it as ‘a wound or external bodily injury in general’. Later the meaning has shifted from physical level to the psychological level. Here I shall discuss about the psychological impact of the communal tensions that has cropped up in course of time.

Memory is a crucial discourse in contemporary literature. It maps out one of the predominant clear cut societal, mental and psychological panorama. Memory actually retains the main topical items throughout various modes and models. In postcolonial literature where literature portrays the mutilated images and problematic models and mindscape, memory is a compelling tool in digging out the innermost psyche of characters and action. “What a wonderful piece of work is Man”, declares Hamlet in Shakespeare’s drama *Hamlet* (Act ii. Scene2). Indeed, man is the only animal who can only think, memorise and use that memory to uncover distracting moods, action, conflict etc. Though memory analysis is a very recent phenomenon, its recurring use and its multiple patterns can be discerned in early Renaissance dramas such as *The Duchess of Malfi*. Actually it captures the specific moments in the current of times and therefore, we see Shakespeare in his *Hamlet* and *Taming of the Shrew* and Marlow in his *Tamburlaine* handling this subtext efficiently in their works.

There are three components of memory labelled as ‘memoria’, ‘recollection’ and ‘remembering’. Studies such as these have impacted criticism in the early modern texts, as in the recent work of Huston Diehl. While this work focus on ‘crises’ of memory, the centrality of memory to early modern culture is easily seen. Ancient texts provided early modern readers with exemplars, and George Puttenham recognized the operations of memory:

“No kind of argument in all the oratorie craft, doth better perswade
and more universally satisfie them example, which is but the
representation of old memories and like successes happened in time
past”.

These ‘old memories’ not only ornament successful arguments, they engender psychological effects by reviving our spirits. In early modern discussions of faculty psychology, memory is necessary to the construction of rational subjects. Memory becomes integral to the moral subjects. It is the art of memory that has dominated the study of individual memory in modern period. The underlying structure of memory art is described by Merry Carruthers, “The fundamental principal is to divide the material to be remembered into pieces short enough to be recalled in single units” Memory is integral to the valorised piece of self-hood.

Forgetting occurs in history, politics and life in general. “The struggle against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting”, comments Milan Kundera in his book *Book of Laughter and Forgetting*. This description is very much fitful in Indian perspective when we see various religious segments and power-centric fundamentalists struggling against each other forgetting the integrity that ties basic values which continue to bind India. Indeed, Indians have experienced the scars that its history allows us to peep into it during partition. Actually the issue of communalist violence and sectarian tension shaped by memories of partition conflicts is a crowded and highly contested area. In novels particularly this motif has found recurrence and Indian novelists were highly successful as it was the core issue of Indian minds from times immemorial. But in dramas the issue is very much neglected but there is no doubt that the issue may be presented most vividly with its lurid aspects. In this respect, Dattani’s *Final Solutions* is a milestone.

In this text identity is very much shaped by the memory and trauma. This identity is of the Indians in particular, yet universal in appeal. It probes into an individual’s position in the wider historical and social context. At the outset Daksha’s pondering over a day in 1948 brilliantly fuses time past and time present. Thereby, it refigures the past in terms of communicating through the present but the experience is deadly enough. Mahesh Dattani’s *Final Solutions* is a play about communal riots in India and subordination of women. It presents three women who belong to three significant times in the history of India- Daksha/Hardika belongs to pre-independence period; Aruna, her daughter-in-law, belongs to independence period; Smita, Aruna’s daughter is a contemporary post-independence Indian woman.

In this Three-act play there are six incorporated diary entries which are loudly read out by Daksha. These diary entries are scattered throughout the whole texture of the play and bring the readers in direct confrontation to the gruelling moment of previous experiences. If we read the diary we can at once have the glimpses of text, context and sub-text underwritten. However, one should not read them in isolation because the disenchanting note of communal tension is very much at work in all of them. Daksha first invokes his diary by recalling: “Dear diary. Today is the first time I have dared to put my thoughts on your pages” (*Final Solutions* 8). A few lines after he goes on “I am sharing my innermost thoughts with you. Nobody else knows what I think or how I feel, except now you” (*Final Solutions*.p. 8). Therefore, it is evident that Daksha is building a relation with the diary and diary is essential in connection with her. The diary preserves both happy and sad news. It contains the narrator’s dire situation. Daksha: “All my dreams have been shattered...I can never be a singer, like Noor Jehan. Hari’s family is against my singing film songs”. It also reminds the readers of a festive moment of history. “But there is so much happening in the world that maybe it isn’t fair to trouble you with my sadness”. Actually she wants to state about India’s grasp of freedom. But it was freedom which was not unscathed; it charred Indian people’s mind. Therefore, the diary unambiguously reveals the mixed feelings of relishing India’s long-cherished freedom and at once projects the riots between two religious sections.

Daksha (reading from her diary). “He said he was happy we were rid of

the Britishers...The windows broke one by one...The stones came smashing into our rooms”.(Final Solutions p.9)

In the play, Daksha has taken to writing a diary to share her secrets, one of which is her inability to sing the songs of Noor Jahan. The family heard her singing and spoke to her husband Hari about it. Then Hari reprimands her. In her valuable diary, Daksha reminds how her father participated in the country’s struggle for independence from British. Through her diary, we can see her childhood memories tainted with communal clashes associated with her father’s death and destruction of her favourite gramophone. From this diary Daksha tells her continual suffering married life with her husband, Hari who strictly restricted society’s norms of female decorum to her wife, Daksha. .

In the second diary Daksha portrays the little family frame with its own monotone. The diary binds a family life in every detail. It depicts a Hindu family’s devout sensibility towards the deity. It at once shows an orthodox Hindu family’s superstitious mindset. The very irony is that the orthodox character believes that touch with another sectarian would ultimately ruin one’s soul. So “My mother was sensible that way. If anyone contaminated her by touching her, she would just sprinkle some Gangajal and be done with it” (Final Solutions p.16). Great irony lies in the fact that India has possessed freedom, but is dispossessed of integrity of heart and mind. Its society is hollow at the core. A great many number of people in Hindu community are repulsive of Muslim custom- “The other side –where they sell-unmentionable things”. But in spite of all, the hope that exudes throughout the second diary entries is that there is one thing that unites a bit many section of society including people at the level of the marginal. It is music of Nurjahan. It is a song sung by Muslim voice. However, it exposes the musical taste of Daksha. So through Daksha’s second diary we can have a glimpse of the panoramic picture of typical Indian society.

As already suggested, a significant aspect of *Final Solutions* is Dattani’s simultaneous manipulation of past and present time. It is accomplished through Daksha’s narrative diary at different stages and in relation to different events. In Act one of the *Final Solutions*, we see the young Daksha writing in her diary. She has been given a new name, Hardika, after marriage to match with her husband’s name, Hari. But she cannot use this name in her diary. She obviously does not like either the new name or her in-laws as she looks ‘distastefully’ in their direction. Daksha likes a Muslim girl, Zarine. She used to go to Zarine’s house. Here, Daksha-Zarine friendship is replicated in Smita-Tasneem. Although Dattani sets the two generations apart through his manipulation of time past and time present, blending of the two becomes imminent. Actually in this diary, Daksha is Hardika’s memory and at the same time warning to be on guard. But history repeats itself. Daksha’s life taught Hardika to suspect. Hardika is over-cautious and apprehensive as she foregrounds the entry of Javed and Bobby even before they have appeared on stage. The two boys remind her of some permanent scars in her mind created forty years back:

“It was those two boys running away who frightened away me. Those two who were begging for their lives. Tomorrow they will hate us for it. They will hate us for it...All those

memories came back when I saw the pride in their eyes! I know their wretched pride! It had destroyed me before and I was afraid it would destroy my family”. (*Final Solutions* p.14)

Through the incorporated lines in the third part of diary Daksha harks back the past when, after the partition, her husband told her that all the Muslims had left for Pakistan, their new homeland. Daksha metaphorically reveals the irrational tendency of her section of people. “The world may change but Gaju and Gaugh remain where they are, like a huge banyan tree everybody remembers being there for hundreds of years.” (*Final Solutions* p.38). Her diary also shows her close affinity with the Zarine’s family because she would have an easy access to their home and would be able to listen to her favourite gramophone records there. From her third diary, we can see that Daksha used to visit Zarine’s house. When she entered the house, she found Zarine engaged in embroidery work. Daksha handed over a saree to Zarine’s mother for embroidery. The two friends laughed and listened to songs by Noor Jehan. Thus, they spent their life joyfully with their mundane activity of life. Violence has stopped but enmity between religions is still dormant in the core of the heart of the people. Scholasticism goes quite in vain. People become indolent; they grunt, groan and indulge in all types of absurd activities. Their activity actually gets published in their collection of donation for building temples and celebrating festivals. Money actually makes them only to mar them in later period. Politicised mindset compels them to spread the violence. In this part of diary human psychology is revealed at its best. It also reveals that proper mentality cannot be formed in abnormal ambience.

The fourth part of diary is typical representation of neighbourhood picture. It only reveals the scathing effects of riots on a Muslim family and a heartless indifference on the part of Hindu family. Still it bears the sweet association on the part of two friends from two different communities. Bondage of hearts can erase difference of race, culture, religion. Music brings them on the same pedestal. Diary forthrightly explicates,

“We both listened and sang along with Noor Jehan. Three voices singing together in perfect unison. Every now and then our eyes would meet and we would smile as we continued singing, as if, if we stopped, Noor Jehan would stop singing for us”

(*Final Solutions* p. 43).

Niladri R. Chatterjee has explained in his essay- “Daksha, Music and Transgressive identity Formation in *Final Solutions*” : “...well aware of the sensure that her liking for Noor Jehan is earning her, Daksha continues to cherish the Muslim singer as the embodiment of an aspired culture”. Daksha’s musical selection makes a protest that she had no other means of voicing. Her musical choice of Muslim singer, Noor Jehan, creates a template on which Daksha constructs her own gendered identity as well as an identity which defies the family-made cultural norms in which she is confined herself. Niladri R. Chatterjee further says in the same essay-“Daksha’s reception of Noor Jehan is not a subversion of that which is being received. Her strictly uncritical reception of the Muslim singer actress is meant to be a criticism and an

indictment of the cultural strictures she is proscribed by". Identity is formed amidst the debris of fragmented entities of the persona due to straining atmosphere.

The next diary entry shows the inherited anger that one can bear in sub-conscious level. It fervently marks the fact that anger is pre-historic and it can be exploded at the trigger of a moment. In dire situation manly quality is shorn off from a person's character and he forgets the need of religious bondage because society compels him to act otherwise. Though Hari is a typical good character, he was raged at the mention of human attitude to the Muslim. The problem is not solved, people only is covered by beastly wallow. Daksha's diary indirectly sheds light on this spot.

Daksha (reading). "We were silent for a long time and I forgot about Zarine's problems.

I was confused. And yet, I wanted to please Hari...Hari smiled while he continued chewing on his supari. He beckoned me to lie beside him on the bed. And I did."

(*Final Solutions* p. 55)

The last diary entry captures the distrustful attitude of each of the characters. This distrust makes one isolated from the entire community. Actually there is no perfect united community in that position. So Daksha decides to go outside to Zarine's house alone in order to find consolation. But consolation is yet to be attained. Familiar persons seem to be apart from each other. From her last diary we can see a hatred feeling of Daksha when she went to Zarine's house. Daksha actually dislikes their food. When the member of Zarine's house started eating their meals, the smell of their food repelled Daksha. She sat with them without her hands touching the table and watched them "eat those things!". For this reason Daksha's husband hit her repeatedly and she was confined to the house by Hari and his parents for the offence she had not committed. Difference of taste for food is symbolic here. It perfectly suggests the mindset which cannot be bridged easily. The innocent youth catches the elder persons' indifferent attitude. The possibility of reconciliation of the different segments is blurred, seemingly, on the ground of economical matter.

The ill-treatment still hurts her. This anguish and bitterness and pain of the last encounter with Zarine make an abiding impression on Daksha or Hardika. Henceforth, for most part of her life, Hardika stays trapped and cocooned in her community. From her hatred feeling, she considers them 'horrible people' with false pride and arrogance, and hates them. The end of the diary is indeed pessimistic and caustic; Daksha's idea is noteworthy-

Daksha. "What wretched people. All this fuss over such a small matter. I hate people with false pride. As if it is their birthright to ask for more than they deserve. Such wretched people! Horrible people!" (*Final Solutions* .p. 60)

Reflecting on the whole gamut of memories, examining the various course of events through the diary, Daksha concludes, “things have not changed so much”(Collected Plays p.167). Forty years have elapsed since Independence. Daksha is now transformed into Hardika, who opens her diary and starts writing again. Now she calls it “a young girl’s childish scribble” to her matured handwriting-“An old woman’s scrawl”-implying the passage of time, but regrets that things today are the same as they were forty years ago. And Hardika remembers, we realize those forty years on, indeed, things have not changed so much, as the play has opened in the midst of another riot, and a curfew is declared in the small town of Amargon where Gandhis live. Through the device of diary two distinct phases of the same character, separated by forty years, are merged, subtly suggesting that the narratives of hatred too have not changed much. This is of immense significance both from theatrical and visual points of view. In the same play the age difference between Daksha and Hardika would appear stark. So the ideology of “things have not changed so much” would be shockingly pertinent. It is this effect that Dattani wants to create in his readers and the effect continues throughout the play.

Thus we can see the pervasive importance of diary in this text. Its use is very intellectual and it at once breaks the spatial and temporal barrier within the short arena of dramatic performance. The conflation of Daksha and Hardika is thus a conflation of the past and the present, of related historical inputs and the specific contemporary scenario. For this reason, the blending of the diary of time past and time present widens the temporal and spatial base of the play. All these add to the multilayered features and at once enhance the effect of the dramatic performance. It echoes many of the thematic issues and highlights them which are impossible to draw from outside. It brings us to another important element in Dattani’s plays. Dattani likes to probe into the secrets in his plays, may those secrets be sociological or psychological. These secrets actually build up the core area of the drama, thereby making the structure well-made enough. Diary expostulates the surface of tempestuous past. The action then goes on to the climactic position. At the end of the play, the action is pathetic indeed. Here Daksha saw the dark facet of Zarine and her family. However, Daksha’s family’s behaviour was responsible for the outrage and emotional pang of Zarine’s family. Actually this attitudinal difference leads to the ultimate disharmony of the characters and cycles of hatred and violence.

The last utterance of Daksha in the diary ‘wretched people.Horrible people’ is very pathetic. Daksha considers Zarine’s family to be benumbed with false pride and arrogance, and hates them. She was the only person who was free of prejudice but her ideals broke off. The ending is different that many of us cannot like to respond. Indeed there is the major difference between *Final Solutions* and most of the other plays of Dattani. The difference is, of course, that Dattani’s *Dance Like a Man* and *Tara* end in an optimistic tone. But *Final Solutions* does not offer any such assurances.

In *Final Solutions*, Dattani’s use of diary draws attention to his brilliant conflation of Daksha and Hardika, as well as past and present of the Indian Nation. At the end of the play, Hardika’s actual hatred of Muslims and Daksha’s complete confinement in the room are two important growing issues in the plot that are linked very wisely. Dattani’s intention of

presenting the burning issue in the present world is reflected through the journey of Daksha's diary in the play. According to Angelie Multani, Daksha's diary establishes the history of division-the source of 'us and them', the link between personal experience and political belief or social hatred.

Dattani has perfectly delineated the hierarchies and networks. Actually, Dattani's plays always use the family as a central trope. He draws attention to the relationships within the families, and extended families, including friends, neighbours etc. He also highlights the generational gap between the old people and the youth. Through the device of diary Dattani is also able to define clashes and conflicts between tradition and modernity in India's context. John Mc is full of praise of Dattani's talents and even relates this to the best dramatic tradition in the world. He says,

“The starting point for many of the greatest plays is the family-from
The Orestia to Hamlet, from Racine to Ibsen and Chekov, from
the royal concerns of Shakuntala to the tribal spectacles of Wole Soyinka
, human relationships and the family unit have always been at the heart of
dramatic representation. Yes, Dattani has the Ibsenite talent for revealing
the secrets of a family, but he goes beyond this, making his characters
turn towards the future in exorcising the past”.(“A Note on the Play”. P.40-50)

In Final Solutions, the present and the past co-exist. While the past has designed the structure of the present, the present assists the characters to reinterpret the past. This is possibly done only through the technical use of Dattani's diary in the play. When the play opens, Hardrika is both young and old. Her youth talks of the past while her aged self lives in the present-bitter and withdrawn. Thus Dattani's device of diary of using two actors consecutively represents one character.

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