
Stress Management Skills as a Soft Skill in Mahesh Dattani's Play 'Final Solutions'

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Abstract:

Stress is not the unique or entirely modern phenomenon; however, the ways it has impacted the present life is significant. All the major civilizations, even Stone Age people which were pioneer have faced stress at different level. Their stressful situation and its management can be seen via staying in caves to cope up from harsh weather and sudden animal attacks. Further Indus Valley civilization people choose to build brick houses for greater protection, ownership and disciplined life to cope up from stressful situations. Even at present after two World Wars and shaking Great Depression of 1930, stress became global phenomenon for all at all the levels. Thus, to all generations chopping mechanism is crucial, essential and changes with time.

Thus, this paper analyses stress management as a significant soft skills through literary lens, focusing on Mahesh Dattani's play *Final Solutions* (1993). The play is based on horrific situations of partition of 1947, every day's life and shows peak glimpses of stress at the center of life through identity, communal tensions between communities and its management by characters. Employing critical, analytical, and descriptive, approach the paper demonstrates how literary texts can contribute to the understanding and development of soft skills. As stress is at the center of civilizations in many forms hence its comprehensive understanding and management is crucial.

Keywords: Stress Management, Soft Skills Development, Indian English Drama, Mahesh Dattani, Psychology and Behavior.

Introduction:

The happy mind brings positivity forever. The calm soul spread energy everywhere. Thus, a mind or an individual feels happy or has a calm mind can think efficiently, works enthusiastically and blooms like a green canopy of a strong dense forest, where different forms of lives survive together harmoniously. If one pays attention on the above lines carefully, will understand that, it is the state of human mind which is described here, which is relaxed, calm. And is able to think, work efficiently and co-exist altogether. All of these exactly show the stress-free life and work life balance which is the need of the present generation. As stress has become an inevitable part of contemporary life, variously affecting individual's strength, psychological well-being and interpersonal relationships in private and public domain. Thus, managing the stress is the need of the time and understanding it comprehensively can add values to the life and bring harmony at individual and professional life and workplace. Thus, the ability to manage stress effectively and efficiently on time in different situations is recognized as a vital soft skill as well as the need of the time. Thus, the present paper considers literature especially the drama as a powerful tool and emotional response to human understanding and behavior to respond the stress, conflicts, and emotional turmoil and dilemmas effectively.

Among them all in broadening the understanding of stress management as vital soft skills, the Indian English drama has contributed significantly. It has shown human behavior and psychological turmoil of individuals deeply, variously and vitally. Especially the works and artistic pieces written by Mahesh Dattani has received worldwide fame, the depth, reality based portray of characters, the sufferings of the characters and the issues they faced all shows the real-life presentation. Thus, to show the stress management skills as a vital soft skill its comprehensive understanding via literary work *Final Solutions* is significant and apt.

I. Introduction of the Author:

The versatile playwright, writer and actor Mahesh Dattani was born in 1958 in Bengaluru, Karnataka. He is also a well-known India director. He is also the first playwright in English to be awarded one of the highest literary award in India i.e. *Sahitya Akademi Award*. He was initially interested to choose his career as a copywriter. Gradually his interest has shifted to writing as in his early life he read Edward Albee's play *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* And later the interest grew in writing especially in drama, as he influenced by the Gujarati playwright Madhu Rye's *Kumarni Agashi*. He has written many of the well-known works such as *Dance Like a Man* (1989),

Tara (1990), *Bravely Fought the Queen* (1991) *Thirty Days in September* (2000), and *The Big Fat City* (2012) etc. and the play *Final Solutions* (1994) has been taken to development the understanding about stress management skills and to understand the vivid and dynamic contribution of literature across the fields.

Dattani has addressed the societal reality, identity crisis, unaddressed communal tensions and issues pertaining to gender discrimination. The depth of his understanding and the real life presentation can be seen in his works the way it touches the depth and addresses the deep rooted stereotypes presents in the society. One of the striking features of his work is societal issues and identity crisis that suppressed or marginalized patriarchy or gender bias, religious prejudices, family structures and taboos. The *Final Solutions* has been taken to understand stress management and related dynamics. His book *Final Solutions and Other Plays* received Sahitya Academy Award. The play *Final Solutions* (1993) selected as best productions of the year, directed by Arvind Gaur, by Sahitya Kala Parishad.

Literature Review:

Mahesh Dattani's *Final Solutions* has been studied for its realist portrayed of characters, social reality-based issues and living dilemma surpassing ages. His use of language, moral reasoning through characters and presentation of understanding of communities is a significant achievement. The way, the author has depicted the stressful situation, its management and essential understanding provides the way to think and analyze stress management as a soft skill. Previous research highlights the core understanding of the characters; emotional and communal aspects; gender perspectives and disharmony. All these indirectly show the impact of stress at all the level. Hence this paper analyses the under searched area and perspective of stress management as soft skills through literature.

One of the researches highlights identity crisis, character and their emotional conflicts by focusing on female characters in *Final Solutions*. The study also reveals, how suppressed emotions and feelings; unresolved fear can contribute to psychological strains. All these aid in analyzing the internal crisis with the literary text (Sharma 2020). This study helps to draw the clear lines between characters emotional aspects and struggles they faced. Near to this Krishnaiagh (2023) work also analyses cultural memory and trauma attached with characters and their psychological state. This gives insights to understand that identities have wider roots than religious beliefs. Further Kalaiselvan (2024) highlights communal tension and

conflicts resulted in character dynamics and societal differences. By analyzing the play the author signifies socio-cultural tensions in urban Indian life by efficiently noting Dattani's realistic portrayal of characters in true sense. Thus, in understanding the present works has highlighted the real life based socio-cultural and communal issues which pave the way to highlights the stress management skills through this literary text.

In literary analysis of the text *Final Solutions* the deeper understanding and the meaningful insights from the text pointing towards emotional conflict is clearly visible. On the other hand, Stress Management as a soft skill in more likely studied w.r.t. academic performance, psychological and educational studies. Thus, the comprehensive understanding and research on this literary text and understanding of Stress Management as a soft skill going to add a new dimension into the field. It will enhance the deeper literary understanding of the text in the domain.

Stress Management as a soft skill:

Stress Management is one of the vital soft skills hence the basic clarity about soft skills will enhance the depth of thinking, understanding and boosts comprehensive view. Thus, soft skills are the personal attributes and qualities that the individual shows in private and public domain. Soft skills are basically related to behavior, ones' interaction with oneself and with the others. Soft skills help to improve the performance, presentation, and way of behaving in all the spheres of human life. They bring personal and professional growth. They enhance work-culture, team spirit, and emotional bonds. They are different from hard skills as hard skills are technical in nature, related to a specific task or a job profile. On the other hand hard skills are non-technical, performance oriented skills. There are hundreds of soft skills such as personality development skills, communication skills, emotional intelligence skills, leadership skills, and teamwork etc. Stress management is one of the most essential and vital skill. By understanding stress management one can enhance the performance in the life as stress is one of the part of the human behavior. And Thus, its proper understanding let individuals to consider it as the expression of human behavior scientifically. Further logical understanding of stress management can provide relief to human, emotionally strengthen, and more relaxed w.r.t. the perspectives of life. As stress is basically the tendency of living creature, reflected through their behavior. It is cognitive aspect of human behavior. Even abiotic or non-living objects also face external forces such as temperature, wind pressure, time factor etc. as a stress force and resulted in internal changes. This further resulted into

degradation, erosion and cracks on the objects due stress mechanism. However this study highlights the domain of living creature w.r.t. individual cum public life and academic sphere. Hence in this paper, the discussion and research is related to stress management as a soft skill through literature has been taken under consideration. As the individuals in their daily life interacts with different level of stress and emotional situation. Hence not letting emotions or stress overpower anyone, its proper logical understanding can make individuals aware about the consequences. Thus, below is a process which describes how human responds to internal and external forces then respond to the situation or a scene, either the person responds to the situation as a life skill or take it as usual and again grappled in different unhealthy situations or by responding properly handles the situation well.

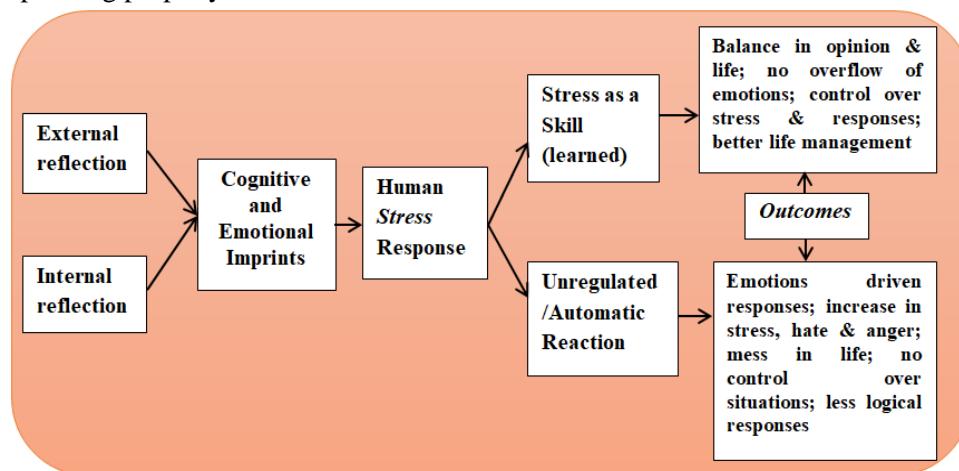


Fig. 1: Process and Conceptual Framework to analyze Stress Management as a Soft Skill

Here, the *figure 1* analyses the Process and Conceptual Framework of Results and Response by individuals considering Stress as a skill or common response/reaction. It also depicts the response given to stress by individuals and its outcomes. The model explains how individuals respond and react to stress in any given situations. It considers any outer (External reflection) or inner/internal (Internal reflection) forces that provide stimuli at cognitive and emotional level from where the human starts responding to stress. The response could be as louder as it gets reflected in anger or shouting; or it could be simply keeping quite oneself, both the two situations reflects the human stress response.

The framework further distinguishes between two types of stress responses i.e. common, unregulated or automatic stress response and the other one is stress management as a soft skill. The initial response shows common responding patterns which leads to unhealthy behavior and emotional turmoil. It is characterized by emotions driven, easily leads to increase in stress, anger, and emotions, illogical decision-making and chaos in life. Thus, this form of response to stress shows lack of self-awareness which is prerequisites of stress management; lack of control over emotions, which further leads to increase in conflicts and psychological imbalance.

On the other hand, the second response which treats 'stress' as human response to internal and external forces with understanding will react less; try to balance more; control the overflow of emotions. It represents learned ability and reflective response to any sudden or auto-generated situations as well. Here, the individual demonstrates the grasp over personal feelings, emotions, and over spontaneous thoughts. The emotional regulation, balanced thinking, self-control and constructive decision-making is reflected through the response by the individuals. Thus, it is clear that stress also can be managed and learned to deal with it effectively. And hence the role of stress management as a soft skill is significant as well as the need of the time. The basic components of stress management can be presented via a representative chart:

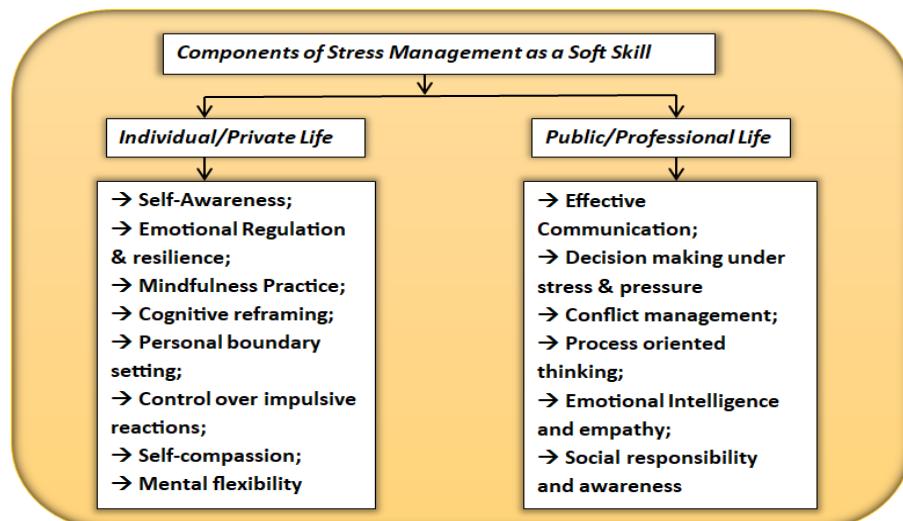


Fig 2: Components of Stress Management as a Soft Skill at different Level

The *figure 2* highlights the components of stress management as a soft skill. It is broadly divided into two groups one is at individual level and the other at public life or professional level. Understanding of the components highlight the role of managing stress at individual/private domain such as at family level, with friends and relatives, here informal communication dominates hence emotional spontaneity can be much stronger. Hence self-awareness, emotional regulation and resilience, mindfulness and cognitive reframing is required to handle the stress well. In contrast the at public or in professional life stress management as skill is crucial as the professional demands performance, perseverance and output based learning and results as well. Hence in professional life, stress management is a key to growth and progress. It resulted via effective communication, decision-making under stress and pressure, conflict management as well. And in go the components of stress management complements each other at different level in all walks of life. Thus, rather looking at them separately it is essential to understand them variously but in real life they overlap and sometimes work together for better outcomes.

Stress management as a soft skill reflects certain characteristics such as emotional intelligence, leadership traits and negotiation skills. It further reflected via verbal and nonverbal communication tactics, strong hold over soft skills actually help individual to understand the situation well and with effective communication one can handle it well. Thus, the stress management is one of the most remarkable skills need to be learn in 21st century due to its urgent need in both the individual and public domain. As the life is full of tasks, judgments, responsibility, uneven handling of pressure, standard of living and goals based. Thus, in individual and public sphere especially in modern time stress is at all level. Hence stress management as a skill should be at the center human mind and heart.

Stress Management Skills as a Soft Skill through *Final Solutions*:

One of the well-known plays *Final Solutions* is written by Mahesh Dattani. It is a socio-political drama written by Dattani in early 1991. And in 1993 it was first performed in Bangalore, India. It was first published in 1994 as a part of his Sahitya Akademi Award winning book named *Final Solutions and Other Plays*. This work has also won Sahitya Akademi Award in 1998 in the same year it is selected as the best productions of the year which was directed by Arvind Gaur, by Sahitya Kala Parishad. The play *Final Solutions* has been taken to understand stress management as a soft skill; its understanding and related dynamics.

The drama deals with communal conflicts between the two prominent communities. And tells the story of two Muslim young men who were in search of seeking the protection, come across the Hindu family, who offers shelter and protection in a communal riots to these young men. The work explores religious bigotry, communal tension, identity crisis, conflicts between moral and societal values. It also explores the characters those who were the part of the partition trauma and their experiences. Dattani's portrayal of real life based scenes, add value and meaning to it. Rather than leaving everything aside or presenting one community as a culprit of communal tension, instead he chooses to show the real communal conflicts among the communities. His choice of words and expressions add more value and life to the characters. The play highlights the past experiences and present treatment by the characters where morality, ethics and conflicts increases the dilemma.

The play highlights the stressful incidents of the past which has shaped the present actions of the characters such as Hardika's (the mother of Ramnik) diaries present the past trauma of communal conflicts take living shape in the actions of her next generation. As the mother of Smita, Aruna, an orthodox lady, stood against the protection given by her husband to the two young Muslim men Javed and Bobby. It shows past experiences were still guiding the actions of the then generation. It also signifies that the stress, characters were having in the past became the barrier for the present actions. Thus, this play highlights self-awareness and adaptability is one of the essential aspects of stress management as a skill. On the other hand the behavior of Smita who is more rational and calm, the way she handle the situations and helps in the protection of the two young Muslim men shows her understanding of present, pragmatism and reasoning. Thus, this character also highlights the **moral conscience** and **democratic attitude** which is reflected in stress management. She has also shown **calm, rational, hopeful behavior**, in typical situation also she behaved rationally hence she is the witnessing character who can inspire others to manage the stress well in odd situations.

The character of Ramnik (the husband of Aruna), who offered the shelter to the two wandering Muslim boys named Javed and Bobby in the communal riot, shows his sensitivity and understanding of present situation. It also highlights his **quick decision-making in risky situation** where there is a communal riot going on in the society. As his own wife stood against offering the shelter to the two young men, but Ramnik stood by his decision and this shows his **firmness on his own decision**. It

also become evident by Ramnik's act that he has controlled the situation otherwise the two young men would be in the hands of hundreds. This act shows his **courage, practical behavior aligned with resonate actions** which is also one of the hallmark of stress management. Even in later part of the play, it is revealed that Ramnik's actions were guilt driven as in the past his father's betrayal of a Muslim friend in a communal riot was the inspiration behind Ramnik's offering of a shelter to Javed and Bobby. However the **practical actions of Ramnik, his choice of practicality and safety of the boys and care** towards them justify his actions in that moment.

The character of Aruna (mother of Smita), tradition, and culture driven orthodox lady symbolizes the institutional power. Her past prejudices based on the trauma of partition and thrust to protect religious purity let her to deny the shelter to the boys. This shows the emotional mismatch and lack of empathy in the present psychological situation of the two boys by Aruna's character. Thus, the character of Aruna shows the **rigidity, respect for the age old norms, rituals**. Her devotion to keep the tradition pure is also one of the conscious traits the character has shown. Apart from this, Javed and Bobby, the Muslim young men were also suffering from the communal riots. These two boys were given the refuge by Ramnik's Gandhi family, a Hindu family. Ramnik's liberal attitude and faith in the goodness has a significant impact on these two young men. Javed who has suffered from discrimination chooses the path of extremism. The **social hate and isolation** made his condition more stressful which is reflected in his behavior as well. He was not able to handle the stress and out of self-control he chooses the path of extremism.

In contrast to Javed, Bobby was also one of the young Muslim men, who has depicted as calm, composed and thoughtful. His act of saving the idol of one of the Hindu God shows his awareness, respect towards religion and religious sentiments. Even the saving of idol which was laying in bad situation made the play's peak point of sentiments. This act also shows the balance between social and personal values. Thus, the character of Bobby shows his resilience, open mind, respect towards culture and people. This also shows his mindfulness and managing the stress in such harsh situations as well.

Thus, the present work shows the importance of managing stress in stressful conditions leads to integration of behavior and social harmony at personal level which can be seen in the following way:

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Literary Work	Stress Management as a Soft Skill	Demonstrated by Characters
Final Solutions	Self-awareness of emotions and surrounding	<u>Smita</u> , <u>Bobby</u> and <u>Rammik</u> demonstrate control over the situation at broader level; <u>Aruna</u> shows self-awareness w.r.t. religious norms and social tension
	Emotional intelligence in stressful situations	<u>Smita</u> and <u>Rammik</u> display this attitude; <u>Bobby</u> 's act of saving an idol also shows EI.
	Believe in oneself and rational decision-making	<u>Rammik</u> 's act of providing refuge; <u>Bobby</u> 's act of saving an idol, both shows self believe and quick decision making
	Adaptive coping strategies	<u>Ramink</u> and <u>Smita</u> 's help to <u>Javed</u> and <u>Bobby</u>
	Empathy, tolerance and patience	<u>Rammik</u> and <u>Smita</u> 's non-biased to act of saving other community people <u>Aruna</u> 's patience to balance her family life
	Resilience during crisis	<u>Ramink</u> , <u>Bobby</u> and <u>Smita</u> demonstrate this quality
	Social responsibility and leadership under stress	<u>Bobby</u> 's act of saving an idol, handling his life and managing <u>Javed</u> 's attitude; <u>Smita</u> 's open minded behavior shows leadership traits; <u>Rammik</u> 's introspection to save the two young men
	Cognitive reframing and social harmony	Despite past trauma of communal riots <u>Rammik</u> was mentally ready to protect those boys, <u>Bobby</u> 's awareness about social values.

Fig.3: Understanding Stress Management as a Soft Skill through Final Solutions

Thus, the play and the characters have shown the exceptional qualities and presented such real life portray and incidences of the past. The play demonstrates the stress and rigorous conditions and the handling of stress as a skill well. All these shows stress can be managed as a skill hence it is the need of the time to comprehensively understand stress management as a soft skill.

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