Chapter VI

The Violence Within

India has had a painful history of communal violence since the British divided the nation in 1947. Communalism is a practiced when a group of people follow the same religion, and have a common interest in social, economic and the political condition of that particular region. In India people inevitably perceive such interests through the lens of a religion and that is why communalism is a major issue. Tracing the existence of communalism Bipan Chandra writes, “Communalism was not a remnant of the past handover from medieval period, a ‘language of the past.’ It was a modern ideology that incorporates some aspects and elements of the past ideologies and institutions and historical background to form a new ideological and political discourse or mix” (Chandra 21).

In city space where every individual is self centred and has no time to get deeply into religion, the idea of hostility towards the other religious group looks absurd. Yet it is a reality—a painful one at that, which has been fanned by the vested interests of politicians and the powers that be. If we trace the history of this hostility in India we find that communalism has been part of public discourse in this country. Tracing the history of India, we observe that, prior to British rule, communalism had not taken on an ideological dimension. During the 1857 mutiny, it became clear to the British rulers that they would not be able to exercise control over India if the two main communities i.e. the Hindus and the Muslims lived in harmony. This understanding made the British government follow the policy of divide and rule.
Divide and Rule Policy

Lord Elphinstone, the British Governor of Bombay, in a Minute dated May 14, 1859, wrote: "Divide-et-Impera was old Roman motto and it should be ours" (Grover 306). As a result the representatives of British Empire, who were always apprehensive about Muslim communities, started extending goodwill to them. Not only this, the British sowed seeds of animosity not only between these two communities but among many others. Lala Lajpat Rai observed this strategy in Young India, "Hindus were played off against states and principalities, Jats against Rajputs and Rajputs against Jats; Marathas against both, Rohillas against Bundellas and Bundellas against Pathans and so on" (Malik 4). In a cabinet meeting held on February 2, 1940 Winston Churchill expressed his views, which were recorded as follows:

...he did not share the anxiety to encourage and promote unity between the Hindu and Muslim communities. Such unity was, in fact, almost out of the realm of practical politics, while, if it were to be brought about, the immediate result would be that the united communities would join in showing us the door. He regarded the Hindu-Muslim feud as the bulwark of British rule in India (Chandra 245 footnotes).

Before the 1857 revolt, a few communal riots in the modern sense had taken place. "Banaras (1809), Kiol (1820), Moradabad. Sambhal, Kashipur (1833). Shahjahanpur (1837), Bareilly, Kanpur, Allahabad (1837-1852) between Hindu and Muslims can be termed as communal riots..." (Rai 21). The British did face a dilemma but they preferred to face the administrative problems created by communalism rather than stopping it as unification of the Indian people. In 1897, Hamilton, the secretary of state wrote to Elgin, the viceroy:
One hardly knows what to wish for. Unity of ideas and action (among Indians) would be very dangerous politically, divergence of ideas and collision are administratively troublesome. Of the two the latter is the least risky, though it throws anxiety and responsibility upon those on the spot where the friction exists. (Chandra 248)

After the revolt of 1857, there were several Hindu-Muslim riots. The ones that happened like “in Bareilly (1871), Mau (1893), Mumbai (1893), Nasik (1894), East Bengal (1907), Peshawar (1910), Ayodhya (1912), Agra (1913), Shahabad (1917) and Katarpur (1918) are noteworthy…” (Rai 21). While discussing the communal hatred between these two communities we cannot ignore the major setback India suffered with the Ayodhya dispute.

**Ayodhya Dispute: Babri Masjid Vs Ram Janam Bhumi**

This dispute has a long political, historical and socio-religious lineage in India over a plot of land in Ayodhya, located in Faizabad district, Uttar Pradesh. Both the communities have seen this site as a bone of contention. On the night of December 22, 1949 Hindus entered the mosque and effectively converted it into a temple by installing an idol of Rama.

In 1984 the Vishwa Hindu Parishad launched a massive movement for opening the locks of the mosque whose ownership was disputed. Fanatical Hindus said it was the site of an ancient Ram Temple. On February 1, 1986 Faizabad Session Judge allowed the door of the mosque to be reopened. The Hindu worshippers were allowed to establish a Ram temple in the central sanctum whereas the Imam was not allowed to hold prayers in the mosque. A *rath yatra* was organized to spread the message of Ayodhya “*Mandir Vahin Banayenge*”, and captured the public
imagination for Hindu unity and nationalism. During the *rath yatra*, communal riots occurred at 26 places, killing 99 persons between 1st September to 20th November 1990.

In 1992 several hundreds of people from various castes including the OBCs, Dalits and tribals were deputed from many places to join the yatra. Later there were communal riots on a large scale in different parts of Gujarat. The most intensive were in Surat where they continued for over six months and claimed 200 lives. The year 1993 proved to be very tense in Gujarat which helped BJP to sweep the state assembly elections in 1995 (Shah 245-246).

**Gujarat Riots**

Gujarat violence was a series of incidents starting with the burning of the Hindu pilgrims returning from Ayodhya in Sabarmati Express train, passing Godhra on February 2002 and the subsequent communal riots between Hindu and Muslim community. The first incident of attack was instigated by the VHP leader, of Muslims having kidnapped three Hindu girls during Godhra train attack started at Ahmedabad, and resulted in subsequent stone throwing and later burning a Muslim housing complex known as Gulburg Society (Dugger A1). Large Hindu Mobs began attack in the districts of Ahmedabad, Vadodra, Saberkantha, first time in its history, Gandhinagar, Hansot, Kheda, Mehsana, Patan, Anand, Junagadh, Banaskantha, Baruch, Rajkot and later Surat (Jaffrelot 17). There were incidents of violence of the worst kind that are a blot on the plurality and harmony of the Indian polity.

This chapter incorporates the theme of communal violence as presented by Mahesh Dattani in *Final Solutions* and Manjula Padmanabhan in *Hidden Fires*. Rather than projecting violence as a result of primordial religious difference, Dattani
considers the unstable historical conditions in 1947 and in 1992 as catalysts that generate essentialist religious identities. Set in these contexts, communal violence is shown as a response to anxieties over material resources, insecurities generated by the implosion of the former certitudes, and panic over the sudden collapse of the long standing social and political orders. Dattani deliberately invokes the spectre of Hitler’s final solutions to the problem of exterminating Jews in Europe. While Mahesh Dattani’s play *Final Solutions* has post partition communal violence as its backdrop of Ayodhya dispute, Manjula Padmanabhan’s *Hidden Fires* has a context of Gujarat Riots in front. Rather than presenting it as a communal hatred between two major communities Padmanabhan has given a universal form to these monologues. Padmanabhan shares her ideas in the author’s note:

> These monologues were written at the time of the Gujarat riots in 2002. I began with the intention of making a record of what was happening in Gujarat, but by the time I finished ‘Invocations’, the last of five pieces, I realized it was pointless to tie them down to specific dates or personalities or governments. The despair I felt in 2002 was no different to what I had felt during the anti-Sikh riots of 1984 or while reading about the pogroms against the Jews in Hitler’s Germany. There is a sameness about violent mobs that transcends nations, communities, religions, and politics. We go to war because of imagined differences between ourselves and our enemies but we are all much more the same than we are different. It was in the name of that sameness that I wrote these pieces. (Ashmita theatre Group web)

Shashi Tharoor considers the main reason for this communal problem as India’s long history as he writes ‘I’ll tell you what your problem is in India. You have
too much history. Far more than you can use peacefully” (205). Communalism is specifically an Indian concept which signifies the strong identification with a community of believers based not on religion but also common social, political and specially economic interests which conflict with the corresponding interests of another community of believers sharing the same space.

Mahesh Dattani is the first Indian English playwright to receive Sathitya Akademi Award for his play *Final Solutions*. This play was actually commissioned before the destruction of the Babri Masjid in 1992, but was first performed only the following year, in Bangalore on July 10, 1993. It deals with three generations of communal history and focuses on the problem of communal disharmony between Hindu and Muslims in contemporary urban scenario of India. Due to immense success and appreciation, the play was also translated into Hindi by Shahid Anwar and directed by Arvind Gaur for Asmita Theatre in 1998. Dattani reckons the play as a “turning point in his career as a playwright, it is deeply entrenched in the question of multiple identities that become enmeshed with familial identities—issues that we shall consider elsewhere” (Chaudhuri 39).

Written and performed during the days of high communal tension and violence in urban India, the play continues to remind of the recurrence of communal violence in our country across ages. The play focuses on the changing mindset and identities in urban space that reinforce the communal divide in the society. The play also interrogates the role of politicians, the police and general public at the time of communal riots. Interestingly the plural -‘Solutions’- in the title renders various interpretations of the first word -‘Final’. The title of Dattani’s play ironically resonates to the pitch of Hitler’s “Final Solution” “Die Endlösung” as he planned to exterminate all the Jews in Europe and the world. Thus Dattani evokes the dark
shades of religious bigotry, intolerance, communal violence and mutual hatred that
tear apart the people of our country. The play contends various solutions for the
vicious cycle of violence and bloodshed. As every community, section and class of
our society has its own solution to the crises no ultimate solution emerges:

    RAMNIK. (angrily) Now you are provoking me! How dare you blame
    your violence on other people? It is in you! You have violence in your
    mind. Your life is based on violence in your mind. Your life is based
    on violence. Your faith is based... (Stops, but it is too late.) (Collected
    Plays 198)

These lines depict that it is not easy to find any final solution to the problem as
the utterances are not of one character or of one community but of many. The play has
two major types of characters: secularists and fanatics. It is interesting to note that the
sense of ‘Otherness’ is inscribed into the psyche of almost every character no matter
which side he belongs to.

Dattani’s portrayal of the post-partition communal violence in the play is not
to highlight the tragic events but to bring the audience face to face with the “primitive
logic” of consciousness. Alyque Padamsee in his introductory lines to the play—“A
Note on the Play”—underscores the dramatist’s externalization of communal hatred
and paranoia as he writes “The demons of communal hatred are not out on the
street... they are lurking inside ourselves”(161) in terms of the mob which is
symbolic of this hatred. Dattani offers a journalistic report of the events, never
sentimentalising the issue for presenting a simplistic vision. It advances the
objectivity of an urban social scientist while presenting a mosaic of diverse attitudes
towards religious identity in the city that often plunges the country into inhuman
strife. Yet the issue is not moralised, as the monsters of communal hatred are located not out in the street but deep within us.

The action of the play takes place partially in the urban household and the other half takes place in ‘real’, ‘forbidden’ public space. Dattani is usually charged with the complaint that he doesn’t “know what is happening...on the streets” but the fact is that *Final Solutions* was banned from Deccan Herald Theatre Festival in 1992 because it showed “what is happening out there on the streets” (Multani 35). The communalism is basically particularist [India] consciousness among the Indians so that they are Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus first and Indians second.

The play ponders on various issues of the major communities in different contexts and situations. It discusses the problems of cultural hegemony, where whosoever belongs to a minority has to suffer in the presence of majority. For instance, Hindus had to suffer at the hands of Muslim majority as in case of Hardika/Daksha in Hussainabad and Muslims like Javed suffer in the midst of the prejudiced majority Hindu community. This results in communal riots and culminates in disruption of normal social life, further hampering the progress of the nation.

*Final Solutions* takes into account the apparently friendly relations between Muslims and Hindus and the simmering undercurrent of mutual hatred, at the time of partition. The family in the play comprises members of different age groups, symbolizing past and present. The plot stretches to over half a century. While the future is depicted through young people like Smita, Bobby and Javed, the present is through Ramnik and Aruna, and Hardika, the grandmother of Smita. The past is represented sometimes by Daksha a fifteen year old newly married young girl, writing
her diary and then as a grandmother in her late sixties (in the present) teaching her children and revealing the family’s past. Major events are presented through her eyes.

The stage directions help the audience to experience the shifting contours of time. Dattani keeps shuffling the frames:

> Within the confines of the ramp is a structure suggesting the house of GANDHI’S with just wooden blocks for furniture. However upstage perhaps on an elevation, is a detailed kitchen and a Pooja room.

> On another level is a room with the roll top desk and an oil lamp converted to an electric one, suggesting that the period is late 1940’s. This belongs to the young Daksha, who is in fact the grandmother, also sometimes seen as a girl of fifteen.... Hardika should be positioned and lit in such way that entire action of the play is seen through her eyes.

> (Collected Plays 165)

The setting of the stage emphasizes Dattani’s assertion that a family unit represents society. While not much attention is given to the living space of the Gandhi family, the only elaborate sets are the kitchen and a pooja room. This is significant as really, it is largely through food habit and religious identity that we draw the lines that separate us from each other. The ‘Otherness’ of the other community is manifested through food and religious beliefs.

The play opens with Daksha reading some lines from her diary. Daksha is the mother of the central character of the play, Ramnik Gandhi. She oscillates between her two identities—that of a girl of fifteen and of an elderly woman, who has witnessed forty years of freedom. But one thing that remains common to her past as well as present is communal violence. “After forty years… I opened my diary
again... Yes, things have not changed that much” (Collected Plays 167). Daksha, the diarist belonged to a Hindu shopkeeper family during the partition period when her family also participated in the event of partition. She recalled her father’s dream of partition:

    My father had fought for that hour. And he was happy when it came.
    He said he was happy we were rid of Britishers. He also said something I did not understand then. He said that before leaving they had let loose the dogs. I hated to think that he was talking about my friends’ father... but that night in Hussainabad in our ancestral house-when I heard them outside- I knew that they were thinking the same of us. And I knew that I was thinking the same, like my father. (Collected Plays 167)

The chant of the chorus in the background alternates between the voices of Hindus and those of Muslims. The words used by the chorus clearly indicate the communal disharmony and its painful consequence that are soon to be experienced by the characters of the play. In the stage directions Dattani gives a clear hint about the nature of the chorus:

    There are five Hindu masks and five Muslim masks. The mob/chorus become the chorus when they “wear” either the Hindu, or the Muslim masks but when referred to individually, they remain Chorus1, Chorus2, etc. the players of the mob/chorus do not belong to any religion and ideally should wear black. (Collected Plays 165)

Dattani presents a real picture of city space where tension occurs the moment people assert their religious identity. A vehement demonstration of religious identity.
threatens the members of the other community who also begin to mobilise their
identity around their religious affiliation. Thus, the threats and counter threats
postures raise the tension between the communities. This is very well portrayed by
Dattani with the use of chorus. The fanaticism due to religion and its impact on people
is convincingly stated when he writes “Once they are behind the masks, they become
more fanatic” (Collected Plays 168). Once the religion overpowers humanity the
bigots come out in the street. The impact of fanaticism is so powerful that man loses
his rational approach.

The action mostly takes place in Amargaon where Ramnik stays with his
family and the first instance of general rift in the play becomes visible when Ramnik
Gandhi calls Noor Ahmed, Father of Tasneem about the well-being of his daughter
and Noor Ahmed cuts off the call. While writing this play Dattani objectively presents
the abhorrence prevalent in both the communities. Just as conservative Muslims who
are repellent towards Hindu community show their intolerance, similarly conservative
Hindus harbour a strong dislike for the Muslims:

CHORUS 1. Why did they stay?

CHORUS 2. This is not their land. They have got what they wanted.
So why stay?

CHORUS 3. They stay to spy on us.

CHORUS 4. Their hearts belong there. But they live on our land.

CHORUS 5. They are few. They can’t do much harm.

The rest turn and look at Chorus 5
CHORUS ALL except 5. Time will tell who they are. Whether they mean harm. \((Collected\ Plays\ 176)\)

When the chariot leading the procession is broken and the pujari is killed the chorus wearing Hindu masks sings:

CHORUS 2,3. How dare they?

CHORUS 2,3. They broke our rath.

They broke our Chariot and felled our God!

CHORUS 1, 2, 3. This is our land!

How dare they?

CHORUS 1. It is in their blood!

CHORUS 2, 3. It is in their blood to destroy. \((Collected\ Plays\ 168)\)

The chorus is the omnipresent entity throughout the play. When Chorus wears masks of Muslims, they sing:

CHORUS 1,2. They hunt us down!

They’re afraid of us!

They beat us up!

We are few!

But we are strong! \((Collected\ Plays\ 179)\)

Shashi Tharoor in his book \textit{Riots} writes about mob:
A confused clamor of hatred, violence, weapons, assaults. In the end, no one is responsible. Or perhaps a while community is responsible. People pull out bombs and knives, then melt away into the darkness. We are left with the bodies, the burned and destroyed homes, the legacy of hate and mistrust. And it goes on. (238)

Ramnik Gandhi saves the Muslim boys, Bobby and Javed while the chorus all the while curses these boys and exhorts people to kill them. They call Ramnik a traitor for protecting the boys. Javed is a bit reluctant to abuse the mob as he knows that these people are from Ramnik’s community. That is why when Javed calls them bastards he is promptly stopped by Bobby. Ramnik, however, typifies a liberal, enlightened city-bred person, who has the moral courage to point out the wrong doing of his own community too:

JAVED (looks at Ramnik). Sorry.

RAMNIK (annoyed). Why are you apologizing to me? Of course they are bastards. They beat you up, didn’t they?

JAVED What I meant was, they are your own… (Collected Plays 183)

Act II starts with the growing unrest among the chorus represented by the mob. Ramnik Gandhi saves these boys out of a personal motivation; his sense of guilt about his grandfather and father doings in the past is the driving force behind his conscience and structured liberalism which becomes obvious when he says to Aruna, “I have to protect them! I need to protect them” (Collected Plays 182).

Angelic Multani explains the subtext of the play by writing:
The subtext is clear -- the home/family/society/nation are firmly Hindu, the two young men, literally and metaphorically the outsiders, the transgressors. The daughter, Smita is immediately sent inside to her room by her father, the tolerant insider who alone has the power to save the two men from the intolerant outside. The construction of the other is emphasised also by the obvious image of the sexual threat posed by the other – when Smita comes out of her room and greets the two by name her entire family is aghast. (Multani 114)

Smita, the daughter of Ramnik Gandhi is rigorously interrogated by her mother and great grandmother about the two boys who have taken refuge in their house. Smita’s wary introduction about Javed and Bobby makes her family members more skeptical. The play takes a new turn when Smita introduces Javed as Tasneem’s brother and Bobby as Tasneem’s fiancé.

Ramnik is a progressive secularist—not only does he save Javed and Bobby from the mob, he also forces his wife Aruna to serve them water. Aruna is reluctant to do so and only does it when convinced that they wouldn’t actually drink it. After they do she picks up the glasses gingerly and keeps them separate from other glasses in the kitchen as if they were supposedly ‘contaminated’. Ramnik resents the alliance that Javed and Bobby build up in his home:

RAMNIK. (suddenly, angrily) Don’t get so defensive.

BOBBY: (taken aback) I...I’m not being defensive. All I said was we aren’t thirsty.

RAMNIK. How dare you suddenly join forces? In my house.
BOBBY: I—I don’t understand

RAMNIK. You have finished college while your friend has dropped out of school. You made that distinction very clear.

BOBBY. Only because we were being clubbed together… (*looks at Aruna and away*) unreasonably. But why do you feel I’m being …?

RAMNIK. We resented being clubbed together.

BOBBY. Well, I’m not a college dropout. (*pause*) Well—yes, I resent it.

RAMNIK. Yet when you were uncertain … about the reception you would receive. You clubbed yourself together unreasonably. You said we are not thirsty. You spoke for the two of you. (*Collected Plays 184-185*)

Actually Ramnik is as conscious about the Otherness as his wife Aruna. However, while Aruna articulates this clearly from her sense of security as a part of dominant community, Ramnik suppresses his prejudice. But Dattani through the character of Ramnik Gandhi makes it clear that there is a thin line between tolerance and prejudice, when one is conscious of a divide. When Ramnik Gandhi speaks of trouble he immediately refers to the Muslim families that live in their galli. “They’ve never bothered us, until now” (*Collected Plays 192*). Later when he learns that Javed is looking for a job, he offers him a job in his shop, “You can handle those Bohra and Memen women who usually pass by our showroom. You can stand outside and call them in.” His guilt as a usurper is reflected when he stops short of saying that the shop
he own belonged to a Muslim once: “It will be my pleasure to give you that job. That shop, it used to be—[pause] Take the job, please” (Collected Plays 194).

Ramnik’s actions suggest direct compensation for the wrongs done by his grandfather and father. It was his family that had caused Zarine’s father’s shop to be burnt in riots, after which they bought it at a fraction of its cost. Still rather than considering Javed as a young man, who deserves the job, he sees him as a representative of those wronged by his forefathers. So community never really becomes irrelevant even for the liberal-minded.

We also learn that forty years ago at the time of partition Hardika’s father had become a victim of communal violence. This revelation is also followed by another confession by Bobby, when he discloses that his real name is Babban and he is also a Muslim. Babban’s compulsion for changing his name to Bobby unfolds later when he confesses that he changed his name for avoiding being in a limelight as he belonged to a minority community. He wanted to be accepted more readily:

BOBBY. Yes. Like being apologetic. For being who I was. And pretending that I was not a part of my community. For thinking that I could become superior by not belonging. Nobody called me Baboon in college. I chose to be called Bobby. (Collected Plays 201)

In the play the names are suggestive of identity. Mahesh Dattani skilfully chooses the name of the only secular person as Ramnik Gandhi. The last name Gandhi adds a new dimension to the character of Ramnik and facilitates the building of his image as a non-violent person. It is only in the end that we realize how Ramnik Gandhi is wearing a garb of non-political person.
Similarly the place where these riots take place is called Amargaon. *Amar* in Hindi signifies one that never dies. It is left to the audience and readers to decide whether they want to associate Amargaon with undying spirit of people fighting against communalism or as undying hatred that Dattani is referring to. Just as a proper noun refers to the individuality or inherent properties of an object or person, a name cannot be proper unless it marks, or symbolizes the properties ascribed to. To be recognised by a proper name signifies respect for the choice and meaning of this name, just as proper names accord a measure of uniqueness and subjectivity to persons or groups.

As Zizek argues, “[the identity of an object] is the retroactive effect of naming itself. It is the name itself, the signifier, which supports the identity of an object” (95). This notion of reiterative practices of naming as a creation and fixation of identities and of use of names as claims to certain identities, properties, or entitlements, is a central thread. The underlying argument throughout is that politics of identity generally is driven by the paradox that no identity, no sense of community, and no imputed property of a place ever can be self-evident or stable. There are always multiple meanings, many narratives and inherent instabilities within such entities. One can say that rigidity of the designator ultimately is impossible or that the name never can become completely proper. (Hansen Web)

In Act III, the accusations and counter accusations are exchanged between Ramnik and Javed. Smita, a secular character, tells her mother not to impose on her religious prejudice anymore. Life can only be enjoyed if it is devoid of anger and hatred. For Dattani a play is never really finished only an approximation is given in
the printed text; Michael Walling calls it “the kaleidoscopic approach to the text” (Dattani 229).

No concrete solutions are provided in this open-ended play to the problem of communalism but it raises questions of secularism and pseudo secularism. A Hindu has always inherited a preconceived notion of what a Muslim is like. As Vijay Tendulkar in his essay “Muslims and I” points out, “A Muslim meant someone with a beard. The word also conjured up an unclean appearance, uncouth behaviour, lack of education and culture. Muslim was someone you stayed away from” (Tendulkar 63).

In conservative Indian families, there has always been a tacit dislike for disapproval of everything associated with Muslims, to the extent that everything touched by the latter is considered to be contaminated. Muslims too are aware of this aversion and respond in the same manner. Dattani himself in his preface to his anthology, Collected Plays, proclaim, “I am certain that my plays are true reflection of my time, place and socio-economic background” (Dattani XV). He marvels what the future of his art in the new millennium will be “in a country that has a myriad challenges to face politically, socially, artistically and culturally” (Dattani 162).

A striking feature of the play is that whether it is Mob/Chorus or whether it is liberal secularist Ramnik Gandhi, everyone articulates ‘Otherness’ in one way or the other. Tendulkar in his Essay “Muslims and I” recalls his childhood days and his perception towards this community:

I remember one such occasion. I was hurriedly brought home from my school nearby, and my elder brother who had grown a beard was pressurized by the family to shave it off for the time being. These were sure signals that a communal riot had started in the city. On such
occasions, Hindu would shed any resemblance to a Muslim, take extra care to look thoroughly Hindu and make it a point to avoid Muslim localities till things got normal again... In their routine existence, most Hindus had very little to do in Muslim localities anyway, except passing through them in a tram or a bus. For them, it was an alien part of the city, segregated in their psyche like the prostitutes’ area. During riots, one strictly avoided even passing through the Muslim area for safety’s sake till the tensions between the two communities were officially over... But even as a child I would hear of incidents in which a Muslim Hawker or a beggar who strayed into the Hindu locality was promptly stabbed. As a rule, any recounting of such incident would necessarily involve recounting a similar incident of a Hindu being stabbed in a Muslim locality. It was perhaps both the Hindu listeners and narrators to convince themselves that violence against a Muslim was simply a case of squaring of the account, a tit for tat and therefore perfectly justified. (Tendulkar 61-62)

Similarly in Act III apart from the full growth of each character, we find a lot of truth behind communal riots is revealed. Mob is nothing but is a hidden fire in every individual who under the influence of religious fanaticism changes as part of a mob. Javed sarcastically says the truth as he has no fear of the mob no different from them. “I do what they are doing—only on a different street!” (Collected Plays 204). Another disclosure builds momentum in the play when it is discovered that Javed in one of those who were brought to Amargaon for rioting. At this disclosure the suppressed instinct of ‘otherness’ Ramnik Gandhi secretly experienced comes out clearly in the form of allocating blame.
RAMNIK: Why do you distrust us?

JAVED: Do you trust us?

RAMNIK: I don’t go around throwing stones!

JAVED: But you do something more violent. You provoke! You make me throw stones! Every time I look at you, my bile rises!

RAMNIK. (angrily) Now you are provoking me! How dare you blame your violence on other people? It is in you! You have violence in your mind. Your life is based on violence. Your faith is based… (Stops, but it is too late.) (Collected Plays 198)

This sudden shift of allegation by Ramnik from individual to community and what he stops short of saying simply that there cannot be a final solution to the problem. This blame game suggests continues unabated with each community passing the buck to another. The characters discuss the reasons behind this hatred and also points out how with time it is becoming more intense as no one is trying to heal the old wounds. The young generation really wants to escape this vicious circle of hatred and bloodshed but the more they want to escape it, the more they get entrapped.

Dattani has raised many issues in his play. He highlights how rising consumerism, ongoing failure in education, hyper individualism, confused moral reasoning, and unsatisfactory love relationships have contributed to a chaotic urban space. In city space people lose their identities. This anonymity gives them extra courage for violence as they have no fear of getting caught.

Javed shows Ramnik that Ramnik is not as liberal as he thinks of himself, to be just as by Zarine makes Daksha realize that she is not innocent as she thought of
herself. The playwright drives home the idea that by accepting violence, remaining silent, believing that the majority is doing a favour by tolerating the minority are indirect ways of participating in violence. Similarly when Aruna expects the two men to be grateful that the Gandhis gave them shelter and Daksha felt that Zarine should be grateful that she wanted to be Zarine’s friend, the same attitude is suggested. Dattani clearly states that friendship and favour cannot be bargained or asked for. These are the few instincts that come from within.

The adult Hardika’s hatred for Muslims is primarily fuelled by Zarine’s “betrayal”. Even though Hardika claims her father’s murder in Hussainabad is the reason why she cannot tolerate Muslims, the audience soon realizes that this is not the only reason. Towards the end of the play Hardika gets into an argument with Javed. After she blames “his people” for the murder of her father, he retorts, “You blame us for what happened fifty years ago. Today if something happens to my sister can I blame you?” to which Hardika replies, “What happens to your sister doesn’t concern me!” Javed questions her saying, “It doesn’t concern you?”. Hardika explodes, “She deserves it! Your sister deserves it! Zarine deserves...”. Hardika then catches herself and asks Javed, “What did you say your sister’s name was?” He tells her that his sister’s name is Tasneem to which Hardika replies, “Oh. I thought it was Zarine” (Collected Plays 60-61). With this slip-up, it is apparent that Hardika’s fury rests with Zarine, not Muslims in general. Tragically, had Hardika known the context of Zarine’s anger, her hateful prejudice towards Muslims could have been prevented. Hari and “Wagh” were the ones who had burned Zarine’s father’s shop in the first place. They had done this because they wanted a shop of their own and because they had heard that Zarine’s father was thinking of starting a mill like theirs. When Daksha visited Zarine’s home, she was unaware of this fact but Zarine wasn’t, hence Zarine’s
cruel treatment of Daksha. Hari had beaten Daksha for going to Zarine’s home, not because she had “eaten” with Muslims, but because he was afraid that she would find out about his actions. Sadly, by the time Hardika learns the truth, it is too late for her to make amends with Zarine. However, Dattani offers the audience a ray of hope with Hardika’s final line “Do you think— do think those boys will ever come back?” (Collected Plays 64), suggesting that Hardika wishes to apologize for the way she treated Bobby and Javed. This is her first step towards tolerance.

The play, Final Solutions, is also the story of a young baffled boy Javed, who becomes a victim and a terrorist and is exploited by politicians in the name of ‘Jehad’. He is trained for the terrorist activities and sabotaging. He is sent to a Hindu ‘Mohalla’ where a ‘Rath Yatra’ is being organised. Javed is so overwhelmed with the fervour of ‘Jehad’ that he throws the first stone on the ‘Rath’ causing chaos, ending up in the killing of the ‘Pujari’ and crashing down of the ‘Rath’. Javed is saved from the violent mob by his close friend Bobby and they both get shelter in Ramnik Gandhi’s house, where a general discussion on the causes of Hindus and Muslims hatred results in a revelation of strange secrets of terror, greed, avarice, and communal hatred.

Through the character of Javed, Dattani has portrayed the pathetic life of a terrorist who is never at peace with himself or with others. Javed has an outrageous nature; his fiery nature makes him a puppet in the hands of politicians. He used to be like a hero in his school; good in studies and cricket; “smart and cocksure”. A minor incident changes his life completely. Once an old fanatic Hindu man picks up the letter kept in his house by Javed, with the help of a cloth and also wiped the gate touched by Javed, made him feel abhorrent towards the whole Hindu community and he ended up choosing hatred as a way of life. The incident agitated him and the next
day he threw pieces of cow meat in the backyard of the old man. Suddenly, his friends stopped talking to him, “And for Javed he was - in his own eyes no longer the neighbourhood hero” (*Collected Plays* 201). Smita tells her father that his parents have disowned him, “They threw him out. He did not leave them, His father threw him out” (*Collected Plays* 195). The option chosen by Javed is not something out of the ordinary. Many young people after facing such prejudice from the other communities end up choosing something like this. D. P. Sharma in his book *Victims of Terrorism* says, “It was, therefore, not surprising that young adolescents who themselves were terrorised later became terrorists and that in a situation in which they were brought up, the resort to terror tactics became a way of life. The experiences of children of Kashmir highlighted the dynamic relationship between terrorisation and terrorists particularly because of its crucial combination of psychological and psychotechnological forces operating in a social context” (Sharma 190). Such young adolescent persons easily catch the attention of selfish men who lure them towards the path of hatred. Javed’s parents, however, disown him leading to his further alienation.

In spite of all this Javed is an inherently good person having a warm heart. The allegations made about him make him sob. Bobby alias Babban, a sincere friend of his, is always there to bring him back to normalcy. Dattani also emphasises how difficult it is to rebuild the image of such persons in society. When Bobby tells Ramnik, “He did not do it for money... They did not hire him. He volunteered” (*Collected Plays* 199). Ramnik says, “Doesn’t that make him even more repulsive” (*Collected Plays* 199). Javed’s own parents do not understand him let alone the outsiders. Hardika does not like him, though she does not have any complaints against any of the two yet for Javed she says, “I don’t like the one called Javed, I hated him” (*Collected Plays* 183).
It is a tragedy that people like Javed who once fall victim to terrorism cannot lead a normal life. Society refuses to accept them. And often they end their lives either in a fight or become target of police firing or commit suicide. In the twenty first century they are rather prepared to die along with their target becoming the suicide bombers. Javed tells Ramnik that no one from the police would come to arrest him as they were given assistance by the police only and he has no fear of the mob as the mob is also paid for agitating:

JAVED. (sarcastically) May be they are not paid over time (Laughs bitterly) And they attacked us! They are not very systematic. Next time they should have a sound of introductions so that we don’t end up killing each other. At least not unintentionally. Ha” You want to throw me to the mob? I am a part of it. You have been protecting me from people like me. I am no different from them! No different, do you hear? I do what they are doing – only on a different street! (Collected Plays 204)

Ramnik Gandhi, who seems to be quite liberal, intelligent and understanding stands exposed for his hypocrisy and pretence in the end. Ramnik knows it well from the beginning that his father and his grandfather had burnt the shops of their Muslim friends. He suffers from the complex and is willing to compensate by offering them jobs. But it never occurs to him that killing of Hardika’s father could have been an act of revenge. He praises Bobby for helping Javed, and sheds his false pride and a fanatic’s faith in his religion. Ramnik tells Bobby. “You are brave. Not everyone can get off. For some of us, it is not ever possible to escape” The words haunt Ramnik and he wants to make penance for it. No one in the house is familiar with this truth. The question raised by the young Muslim boys force Ramnik to confess and lose his mind.
In the end he tells Hardika that her husband had burnt his Muslim friend’s shop because Ramnik knows that she had only a few years to live now so they would not have to suffer long for it. Ramnik tells Hardika:

RAMNIK: *(looks at her with pity)* “It’s their shop. It’s the same burnt-up shop we bought from them, at half its value.

*(Pause)* And we burnt it. Your husband. My father. And his father. They had burnt it in the name of communal hatred... You have to live with the shame only for a few years now” *(Collected Plays 226)*

Ramnik finds it too hard to keep all the burden of agonising secrets in his mind. He does not want his wife, Aruna, to suffer from the agony of this sin. That is why Aruna is busy with her daily rituals as usual, even after a fight with Smita over the rituals. She is shocked by the rude behaviour of her daughter who is not willing to change her ways. When she wants to know about Ramnik’s anxiety, he simply says, “There are things that are better left unsaid” *(Collected Plays 226)*. He desperately wishes the boys to accept a job so that he can liberate himself from his pain and also absolve himself from the feeling of guilt.

There are six individual characters in the play. Dattani has consciously or unconsciously tried to pair characters of same ideology. Bobby and Smita share the same ideology of rejecting their religious identity. Smita because she feels stifled and Bobby because he feels ashamed. The relationship that they share also comes to an end as Smita dismisses it as a passing affair. “It was just one veinning. A conversation that got a little personal. Nothing more.” *(Collected Plays 217)*. Similarly Dattani has drawn a very close parallel vis-a-vis the characters of Javed and Aruna. Both have full faith in their religion and are intolerant of the other religions. They are finally forced
to realize the tolerance for the other religion is necessary. Daksha and Ramnik Gandhi are overtly liberal but covertly they are also benefactors of communal violence.

The chorus plays a distinct role in the play as it not only represents the individualistic mindset of the city dwellers but one gradually sees the idea of religion getting stronger and stronger in their mind. As Chorus 4 and 5 who were just representatives of Hinduism in the beginning turn more aggressive till their questions become statements. The Mob, at most of the places, uses the image of animals, those that are related to particular communities. The images of 'pig', 'swine', 'mouse', 'rat', 'lizard', etc, hints at the communal hatred and contempt toward the other community. The words of Mob are a clear indication of communal disharmony in society and its consequence are experienced by all the characters. Dattani uses the role of chorus in the play effectively. The moment an individual becomes a part of the mob, he/ she ceases to think rationally resulting in the eternal hatred between the communities. That is why when Hardika opens her diary after 40 years she finds that even after such a long duration things have not changed that much. In Final Solutions Dattani has tried to expose the defunct role of administration during and after the riots. In the play Ramnik threatens Javed and says that he will call the police to arrest him but Javed mocks at the police:

RAMNIK : Turn you over to the police. (Pause)

JAVED (Suddenly bursts out laughing): Turn me over to the police! (Laugh again. Bobby can’t help but join in the laughter.)

RAMNIK (turns red): I didn’t know the idea of going to jail would
sound funny to you.

BOBBY : Pardon us, but that was very naive.

RAMNIK : You mean they won’t arrest you?

JAVED : Arrest me ? When they have been looking the other way all along. How do you think we got into the street? In their vans. They will arrest me. Don’t worry. To please people like you. And a few innocent Muslims to please everyone." (Collected Plays 204)

All the characters in the play have a reason to justify their action. Daksha hates Muslims because her father was killed in a communal riot, and her friendship is rejected by Zarine, a young Muslim girl, whose father’s shop was burnt in the riots (by Daksha’s father-in-law). Ramnik Gandhi turns a secularist to atone for the sins committed by his father and grandfather. Javed, the young Muslim fundamentalist and member of a gang has long nursed resentment against the world because of the otherness and demonization of his community and religious identity by the dominant community. Aruna is an ordinary devout Hindu, secure in her unquestioning faith and sense of right and wrong. Bobby seems desperate to escape from the baggage of social, religious and communal identities. Similarly Smita, daughter of Aruna and Ramnik Gandhi want to get away with the ‘narrow domestics walls’ of communal hatred.

Mahesh Dattani wrote this play in 1988. Even after 24 years every word and every phrase of this play is significant and relevant to the present times. In an interview “The Conflict Continues” given to Zara Khan on August 2, 2012 on being asked “If you were to write Final Solutions now, how would it be?” he replied:
It would be about the political engineering that’s creating the conflict between the North Indians and the Maharashtrians in Mumbai. We as a nation are so terrified of terrorists, we go the other way, and a lot of innocent people are unnecessarily tormented in the name of cleansing the country of terrorism. If I were to do a Final Solutions today, it would be about the conflict between the State and the people. (The Hindu)

Through the characters of Daksha/Hardika, Dattani not only acknowledges the role partition played in relation to religious communalism in South Asia today, he also suggests that the very nature of religious conflict in India is much more complicated than Muslims and Hindus simply hating each other due to ideological differences.

The events of the world’s most massive human displacement in the twentieth century remain alive in the memory of many South Asians. During the research process, Dattani recalls meeting a young Punjabi woman who invited him over to meet her grandmother. The elderly woman was, as Dattani describes her, “a very nice lady and a very polite lady”, yet she could not allow herself to forgive Muslims because of what she had been through during the events of the partition in Punjab, which was one of the worst affected areas at the time of communal violence. Dattani says that due to the woman’s tragic experiences, he could sympathize with her nature of prejudice (Dattani Interview 2010).

Like this Punjabi grandmother, the characters of Daksha/Hardika had traumatic experiences during the partition. Before she was married, Daksha lived with her parents in the town of Hussainabad in Sindh. During the partition, Daksha was forced to leave Hussainabad with her mother after a Muslim mob vandalized her
ancestral home and her father was killed. In the final act of Final Solutions, Hardika angrily describes her father’s murder to Javed and Bobby, “He was beaten up on the streets! While we were waiting for him at home to take us away from the hell, he was dying on the streets!” (Collected Plays 222). The murder of Hardika’s father has obviously contributed to her prejudice against all Muslims. However, it is interesting to note that in the play’s first few minutes, Daksha does not refer to the death of her father while describing the partition. In fact, according to Daksha the most traumatic experience she endured during the partition was the destruction of her record collection, “A stone hit our gramophone table. Krishna chose to destroy what I loved most. My entire collection of records broken. Lying about like pieces of glass. Shamshad Begum, Noor Jehan, Suraiya. The songs of love that I had learnt to sing with. Those beautiful voices. Cracked....” (Collected Plays 167). This symbolic “cracking” of her records not only represents the cracking of Daksha’s world, but the literal cracking of India and Pakistan in the partition. The destruction of the records of three Muslim singers is what Daksha chooses to describe in her diary, a place where she records her most intimate thoughts. This indicates that her father’s death is not the only painful memory that haunts her but memories of many shared moments with friends on the other side of the border have created a void that cannot be filled.

In fact a beautiful Khoja girl mentioned by Dattani’s mother as her childhood friend was clearly the inspiration for the character of Zarine. Dattani has portrayed Zarine as beautiful and witty, and most importantly, like Daksha, she is a die-hard fan of the iconic singer Noor Jehan. This shared love of music becomes the basis of Daksha and Zarine’s friendship.

Thus we find that Dattani discusses the problem of communalism in a rational and humanistic way. Even in the cities the evils rooted in the communal psyche of
people from all religions are brought out with utmost clarity. Since the play is an experiment in time and space and falls under the category of memory play, it results in a lot of introspection on the part of the viewers. It is ironical that the cases of similar kind still haunt our society be it the 2002 Gujrat riots, Godhara carnage, 2012 riots in Assam or the recent Muzaffarnagar riots. The only reason for such vicious circle of death and violence is a “transferred resentment”, to use Alyque Padamsee’s term.

**Many Facets of Violence: Hidden Fires**

Manjula Padmanabhan’s *Hidden Fires* is a compilation of five monologues that vividly bring multifaceted violence to the forefront. These monologues illuminate and tackle the issues of violence manifest in different forms in our society—Violence of intolerance, violence in condemnation of others’ community and nation.

Padmanabhan, in her attempt to grapple with violence in society came out with these intense and thoughtful pieces. Jayant Kripalani sums up the raison d’être of the writing of these monologues:

> When I saw the first riots in 1992 in Bombay I felt completely helpless…and then came Gujarat and what happened there is open knowledge, very well covered up open knowledge. I happened to speak to Manjula over the phone during the riots. And I was being my normal helpless self, saying, wish I could do something. And within twenty-four hours, the first of these monologues arrived. (*Hidden Fires* vii)

The plays addresses the Gujarat riots but the whole anthology according to Jayant Kripalani, director, forced him to think not as the situation in Gujarat but “I started thinking of them as monologues representing all of us, in all the situations we
encounter. And thinking about the sheer non value we put on human life in this country" (*Hidden Fires* viii).

In the first monologue *Hidden Fires* a man confesses that he had ‘stamped out’ countless ‘hidden fires’ —human lives that are less than human to him, merely faceless threats to his own security—and then one fine day finds himself on the receiving end of the same ruthless treatment by the ‘Other’ group who also tried to destroy his hidden fire, following the rule that “when you see a fire, stamp it out” (*Hidden Fires* 4).

The monologue starts with a man and his active involvement in communal violence. He justifies his action as he feels this was in the best interest of his family, community and country, “When your life’s in danger, you’ll do anything to defend it. Won’t you? When your country’s in danger, you’ll do anything to protect it, won’t you? That’s what we did. Defended our selves. Saved our country. We saw fires and we—stamped them out (*Hidden Fires* 4). He justifies his violence in the name of protection and wellbeing of his country and his people.

This man’s disgust towards the people who spread violence on the street has been depicted with the numerical account of their existence rather than by calling them people. As he says that some people are not people. They share the street with us but deep inside they always have scorn for us and this very hatred makes them non-human. The speaker runs a shop and while supplying the material to the customers he hears some noise out in the street, As he comes out of his shop he sees seven to eight persons running behind a half dead man. Rather than saving that dishevelled person who was running to save his life he comes in his path and in a few seconds the mob crushes this man on the spot:
I heard the crunch of his bones as they broke him. Scorching red juice spurted from his nose. In his final moment, he looked straight at me.

The heat of his life was like a blaze in my face! And then... he was out.

*(Hidden Fires 3)*

The feeling of Otherness makes him lit this fire of violence threatening cities and destroying countries. Similar things happened when the speaker read a newspaper item where the number of deaths increased from two hundred to ten thousand in six months. With the advent of modern lifestyle it has become difficult to judge a person from which community he belongs to as the speaker puts it: “Now everyone wears the same clothes, the same marks on their foreheads, the same spectacles and ties... sometimes I have a trouble guessing: is that one of Them or one of Us” *(Hidden Fires 5).*

So though it is difficult to judge the contemporary milieu, commonality of violence makes us one. But the law of the jungle says that the weak is always eaten up by the stronger ones that is why deer is always a prey of lion. It is ‘normal’ that the deer run from the lions. If the law of the jungle is broken it leads to chaos. So the speaker who belonged to the majority always felt the law of jungle is applicable to him and he kept on stamping the fire till the day came when he and his family were brutally beaten up. They killed his wife. They strangled his son and pissed in his mouth. They did not listen to anything. All they said was “*Hidden fires. You have hidden fires. And we’ve got to put them out*” *(Hidden Fires 6).*

The mob loses all reason at the time of violence. That is why neither the speaker nor the mob understood the reason. All of them were following the law of jungle where it is always a struggle of existence for the weaker animals. The
comparison of the mob with the animals in jungle simply depicts the height of brutality and savagery that a man achieves when he follows the law of jungle on the street. The speaker suffered because he also followed the same law:

   Show me! I begged them. Show me one sign that I am different to you!

But all they said was, We need no reasons, don’t you see? That’s the law of jungle. You believe in it too, don’t you? Just like we do. You say you’re a lion, but your great-grandmother, three generations ago, She was a deer- someone told us-and that makes you a deer! And that’s your hidden fires. So we’ve got to put you out. ...They told me to go far away and never come back. They told me to forget about my shop, my house, my property. And that was all they said. (Hidden Fires 6)

These lines bring the memory of partition in our mind when people were forced to leave their homes and their property due to the hidden fires of hatred. The monologue ends with the plea of this man to listen to him but the stage directions simply convey that he will not forget what happened with him and the hidden fire will continue burning in his heart. (lights and audio dim while he talk. Till all that remains is a small red flickering pin-point of light on the front of the man’s chest)

This monologue allegorically signifies the state as a jungle which is suggestive of variety of inmates and savage desires. The obvious idea that the big animals will eat the smaller ones in jungle is suggestive of justification that any community gives during riots.

The power of the monologue is the revelation of the human face of the ‘Other’ within ourselves. The play is realistic in presenting the widespread stereotype of a dehumanized city population that ultimately leads to violence. The monologue
acknowledges our hidden complicity with the antagonistic forces. It also presents the identity of the hidden protagonist who is not the speaker individually but the prevalent hatred in the hearts of unnamed fellow beings.

The second monologue *Know the Truth!* is about a young woman who is anchoring a TV Show “*Know the Truth!*” but ignores the call of the viewers about the violence on the street, refusing to admit that the government or the civil agencies can be wrong. She is insisting that situation is under control. The monologues question the integrity of the media in situations.

The monologue starts with the young woman, Pranam Shanti anchoring a television show “*Know the Truth!*”, “Today’s topic of discussion is the problems affecting few regions of our country” (*Hidden Fires* 10). She conveys to the viewers to share their grievances with her through telephone. She also tries to pacify the viewers by telling them the government is doing its level best to cope up with this violence and at this moment she gets her first call about the areas that are affected by these conflicts and why can’t they name these regions. She answers this question in a diplomatic manner:

(***Smiles Charmingly**)... Well! That’s certainly a leading question...the reason we cannot identify any of the areas where the army has been called out is, of course, that the situation is still a little uncertain. We cannot risk further instability by drawing attention to those states and towns in which a few unrelated incidents of the violence have occurred. In the past, when we followed the policy of revealing everything there is to know about the situation, it only resulted in prolonging the chaos. (*Hidden Fires* 11)
And then Pranam Shanti tells the viewers that in few seconds she will show the live footage of the affected area. But instead of showing the live footage she shows the fabricated news shot at a market place where the channel shows the video that is shot for the tourist promotion in the Rajasthan market at the time of Pushkar fair where Rajasthani villagers are seen haggling with the camel. This fabrication of the news simply questions the ethics of journalism. Further the news is twisted with yet another video that followed the market video that was shot in the studio showing

“(Visual shows a shot taken in a studio, of a child-actor dressed in Rajasthani peasant clothes. He is holding up his elbow, which has been covered in a huge white bedsheets with red ink splashed on it to suggest blood)” (Hidden Fires 11).

Then she switches to the next caller, Mr Anand, who asks about the actions taken by government about the prevailing disturbance on the streets of his city. To this question the anchor deflects from the issue of serious problem of disturbance in the city signifying violence and moves to the petty issue of water supply problem; and later while answering a question she refers to this problem as a “LOCAL problem” (Hidden Fires 12) clearing the government’s stand on such issues about “no violence after 8 pm on the weekdays”. The next call is heard with a loud crackling and the sound of static. But the call was abruptly cancelled and she explains that the connection was lost and while the engineers check the fault she will play a direct message from one of the leaders. The speech of the Leader starts with stressing upon the biggest lie “ABSOLUTELY NOTHING TO FEAR” (Hidden Fires 12). He appeals to the viewers not to trust the radio and tele-broadcast of the foreign news agencies who are showing the live burning, gang rapes in the city. He emphasises that such news “MUST BE IGNORED” (Hidden Fires 13) as these agencies are trying to malign the culture and image of the nation. He says that such disturbances are normal
in the process of nation building. As long as citizens avoid overreacting when they are faced with the rapist gangs or mobs and the foreign news agencies we will achieve normalcy in less than half a year.

And then the show anchor takes over to attend another call. The caller is known to the anchor as she had also called her last week. The anchor asks the young caller to share some good news. These dialogues seem fabricated. The young caller Puja refers to the happiness and contentment that people have in her city. She says that nothing is wrong in her city. They are not facing any problems of water and power. Overall she tries to tell the television audience to imagine the happiest Indian city. Once again the programme anchor takes the centre stage and repeats the same ideas of peace and prosperity around the world. “Let’s not forget: for every riot or rape, there’s still some sunshine somewhere! Yes, my friends! Let’s concentrate on the cheers, not the tears!” (*Hidden Fires* 14). Then she takes another distressed caller Ms Khushboo who tries to tell her the reality of the street violence, the noise of the bomb but Pranam Shanti pretends hearing the sound of firecrackers and tries to convince her that “sometimes firecrackers DO sound like bombs!” (*Hidden Fires* 14). Even when Khusboo tells her the horrible reality of mob breaking down the neighbour’s door, Shanti refuses to acknowledge that and tells Khushboo that may be she is just imagining too much. She trusts the words of the Establishments more than the real victims of violence. She concludes her show by telling the viewers that this young caller experiencing nightmares and illusions of the violence “That can’t happen in our country” (*Hidden Fires* 15). This is how she signs off from her show “Know the Truth!” with a positive note.

The third monologue *Famous Last Words* is a game show with a sinister edge, in which the young host plays games with real people. He invites people to come up
to the stage and speak "correctly". If they donot do so their fellow beings will be killed by the host: "it’s for serious game-players. Deadly serious. For tonight’s game I am going to ask members of the audience to call out letters. Each correct guess will register on this board. Each mistake will result in random termination of members of the audience" (Hidden Fires 18).

Remaining silent is not an option. To spare the sight of deaths he will spare you the sight of these minority deaths but you will hear the sound and with the second tick there will be a small fire. Once the entire screen is covered with fire, the time of the audience will be considered over. And all the participants have to lose their life “you’ll ALL go up in flames” (Hidden Fires 19). When he starts the game one of the participants wants to quit but this option if not available:

Sorry! Not an option! Didn’t they tell you, before you signed up for this show? Leaving was not an option? Because—hey! It wouldn’t be much like real life, would it? I mean in real life we don’t even get to decide whether or not we’ll be born, never mind whether or not we’ll agree to slaughter our fellow citizens when we come of age. (Hidden Fires 19)

So he says this game is very much like real life. One cannot make many choices when it comes to freedom. We cannot decide whether or not we want to be born and where we want to be born. Also, it is pure chance to be born in a family belonging to a majority or a minority community. That’s why if you have participated in this game, let the fate decide whether you are lucky or not. “If you are unlucky, you’ll take a bullet for tonight’s missed catches” (Hidden Fires 19). So the game
suggests the mob psyche for whom anyone is a target, whether or not they know that person’s religious identity.

The rule of the game was that with every minute of inaction, one person from the weaker section will be killed no matter whether the person is a male or a female or young or old. And then after a minute bell rings no one answers it. It is followed by “(... a pathetic shriek. In the screen at the back of the stage, one flame flickers into view)- there’s the first victim’s voice!” (Hidden Fires 20).

The playwright gives an interesting option to deal with such violence in the form of remedy in the game as the speaker suggests: Only four choices. “They die, you die, we all die or nobody dies, okay?” (Hidden Fires 20). This is what is available in the city—either to see someone or yourself or your family being killed in the violence or stay in peace by being silent or in other words be complicit in the crime. The playwright also wants the readers to understand the real cause of violence and that is silence. If you will not speak against it you will have to suffer. That is why riots and violence are common in the city space as the inmates have no time to speak for the ‘other’ and even for themselves as everyone has his own engagements or commitments to complete. The uber individualistic aspect of the city inmates also questions: Why me? Why can’t some else speak up. Or the sometimes the idea that someone else will take initiative also delays a proper action against violence.

_Some else will speak up. Someone else will lose nerve—and call out a letter. It doesn’t have to me—it doesn’t need to be me—and there’s a lot of space left on that screen at the back—no way it’ll fill up before someone guesses the word! (Hidden Fires 20-21)._
The game continues. One gentleman guesses the answer but as the answer is wrong, the speaker punishes someone from the audience. On a superficial level the monologue seems to be the game but deep inside it brings to the fore whole debate on communal violence where most of the time the innocent become the victims just because they share the same space with those who harbour hidden fires in their heart. The game continues with another shot of elimination. And of course many guess are made— some right and some wrong; wrong ones taking lives of the innocent audience. Finally a word was formed and that was “C-O-M-P-A-S-S-I-O-N” A word that brings light to the dark reality of violence. As the speaker adds, “Compassion, everybody, yes, that’s the word, a good word for these bad times- yes! And now… (Ding!) (He returns to the display board and begins to flip the revealed letters up so that each display is blank once more)” (Hidden Fires 23).

However, the game does not end here but continues. The new word is guessed but this word is not the magic cure. “Can there ever be just one solution?” (Hidden Fires 23). This question by the speaker makes us think about the title of Mahesh Dattani’s chef-d’oeuvre Final Solutions. No solution for this problem is considered perfect because of the involvement of various communities of different ideologies and different perspectives.

The game continues with this reasoning and the speaker once again tells the audience to look at the rules and regulations for participating. Though the game ends for the day but is revived in the next edition of FAMOUS LAST WORDS. The ending of the play suggests the reason for recurrent violence, as till now we have not been able to figure out the words that can cure our society from this problem.
The fourth monologue *Points* is not about the violence but is closely related to the topics that often become the reason for violence in the streets, that is, narrow fundamentalism and communal strife. The monologue, *Points*, refers indirectly to the riots and the denial of all the sectors—whether municipality or the media or the Establishment refuse to acknowledge rampant brutality. It thus extends the play’s reach into a universal challenge to all societies to examine their culpability in the aftermath of violent acts. The woman in *Points* uses the candle to convey her message. She tells the audience that the flame of the candle depicts the spirit of the country. Then she describes what the country means to her. She says that neither it is restricted to a political region nor to boundaries, or visa offices or armies. For her, her country is the earth on which she stands when she steps out of the house. It is the place where she breathes the air and gets sunshine. In the second point she says that the country is a political region also. As it has boundaries; it sells visa; it has army; but all these things are just part of the country. We cannot define our country by these things.

Then in the third point she discusses the rights and duties of a citizen. She says that she belongs to the country. The country doesn’t belong to her, simply illustrating that we cannot claim the country as our own or some else’s. No one can take it and no one can bring it back. It has all the quantitative qualities like volume, area and value but country after all is more than a land mass. These features alone do not define our country. As our country exist in time, it has had a beginning. Her fourth point is about the beginning. The country began when the earth began. The plants were its first citizens so claiming the country as its the indigenous citizens is based on falsehood. We are not its first citizens. We have no idea when the subsequent tribes arrived in this country so there is no sense of claiming our right to be its citizens. In the next
point she talks about guessing “who we are?” (*Hidden Fires* 27). This question of identifying ourselves with some religion or with some group amounts to a mistake. What we are today is not what we were in the beginning; so separating us from the rest of the world on the basis of our superficial identity is only our naiveté. It is just the rearrangement of matter. Everything in the world is rearrangement like plants air, water, sunlight et al.. Animals are rearrangement of plants; humans are rearrangement of both plants and animals. Our identity is not only restricted to what we are but it is also what we speak, thought in our minds and our feelings and our ideas. It also includes our desires, personalities and hope. We cannot be measured by any weight or height; we are also what we breathe. After this she refers to the things that cannot be grasped by us—the so called essence of our selves just like the flame of the candle. This last point is about reality. She says even if we don’t understand reality we all still know it. We cannot tie it down; neither can we own the reality. Reality is the essence of everything like the wick of the candle that she ignited before discussing these points.

The fifth monologue is *Invocation* that reminds us about the Hindu tradition of chanting different names of gods and goddesses to invoke them for blessing. Though each word signifies the same essence of spiritual power, yet there are different meaning attached with that name’s each signifying its own identity. Padmanabhan in this monologue makes a list of the names of ordinary people to create a memorial to all those killed by violence with no fault of their own. It brings to the fore the sordid, reality that one’s name sometimes becomes the cause of one’s death in this country:

I began to think of all the violence we have heard about and been a witness to: the bomb-blasts in Bombay and the riots which followed them. The Anti-Sikh riots and the violence in Kashmir; the riots in
Assam and the killings by and of Naxalities, the decimation of tribals,
and the horror of Partition. (Hidden Fires 37)

Then the speaker begins to think of the other deaths that have occurred at different places in this world:

Then I began to think of all the other deaths that have occurred,
elsewhere in the world, of people whose names have passed out of the sunlight of life and into black night of unmemory. The victims in Bangladesh, in Kosovo, in Sri Lanka, in Afghanistan, in Iraq, Indonesia and the Philippines, in China, in Argentina, in Rwanda, Nigeria, the Congo and the South Africa, in Vietnam, in Cambodia, in the plains of North America, in the jungles of South America, in the deserts of Australia...how endless is this list! How heavy with unremembered blood! (Hidden Fires 38)

The speaker discusses the Holocaust memorial of the Jews. In Berlin six million died in Europe but their names have not been forgotten then why the names of the victims of communal violence are forgotten in our country? The speaker says that the way we invoke God by chanting one thousand names the speaker wants the God of democracy to wake up. The speaker also gives the remedy by telling that rather than listing the names of the victims, we should list the names of those who are involved in violence.

Cities in India have periodically witnessed violence. A common form of collective violence has plagued the country's urban environment since independence. Caste, community and regional ties also cause tensions leading to violence. There are
other types of urban violence which is not necessarily collective but is witnessed in everyday life.

Sujata Patel (1993) discusses the intricate relationship between urbanization and communalism. She argues that communal violence in India and the politics of communalism have to be analyzed within the context of the emerging economic relationships peculiar to urban growth in India, the crisis of the nation, and specifically, of the distribution of property and power as it is manifested in urban India. According to her, communal violence in India is a response to, and a reaction against, the breakdown of the system and the inability of the ruling groups to create a new one which can accommodate the aspirations of all.

While the first monologue *Hidden Fires* throws light on the simmering hatred among the people of different communities and how one day it took the shape of riot. The *Invocation* reminds us how the names were picked from the government records and then people were victimized just because of the communal frenzy. *Know the Truth* refers to the role of media and it questions the integrity and responsibility of the media to present the truth in a sober manner. Last but not the least *Points* is the vision of Manjula Padmanabhan, where she moves from the specific to the general and questions the idea of ownership of the nation. This idea has been aptly summed up in the following words of Saba Naqvi and Smruti Koppikar:

India is a nation that was born in the bloodshed and displacement of the Partition riots. In its DNA, it inherited the schizoid gene of being a large Hindu nation with one of the world’s largest Muslim populations. It was a historical fault line that was exploited for politics time and again. Ahimsa was the Gandhian ideal we paid lip service to but the
reality far too often was mass violence. In urban ghettos, in the old cities across the land, small riots were part of the cycle of life. A religious procession would be taken out, a skirmish would take place, curfew would be clamped, a minor riot would have just taken place or been barely averted. (Outlook February 28, 2002)

The play, thus, highlights violence, avarice, weaknesses, selfishness, and opportunism of the urban population. Woven into the play are the issues of class and communities and the clashes between traditional and modern life styles and value systems. The plays discussed in this chapter are not didactic plays. Yet they provoke us to re-examine the most wretched form of violence and materialistic tendencies that we have fallen prey to. As K. Satchidanandam observes: Communalism being the worst form of materialism divorced from being anything that is sacred and oriented towards worldly wealth and power, those who turn religion as mean to attain state, power and world status are indeed the most irreligious of all" (212). Playwrights like Mahesh Dattani and Manjula Padmanabhan, therefore, have contributed immensely to modern Indian literature by interrogating presumptions that have led certain segments of society astray. More importantly, their plays illuminate how important it is for us cherish the secular ideal of equality of all human beings—adhering to different ethnic groups, different religions, different nationalities and different linguistic groups—and finally work towards alleviating pain and misery from the world.