Religion and Restriction
CHAPTER III

RELIGION AND RESTRICTION

Religion is referred to as a system of beliefs, practices, and values concerned with the sacred. It is related to the belief in the existence of a supernatural power, which ordains everything. The whole of humanity falls into various religious groups. Every religion has its own beliefs and practices. Although every religion preaches for love and concern for fellow human beings it has become a source of hatred, conflict and mistrust. It is opium which blocks the intellectual development of human beings inducing man to respond emotionally rather than rationally.

Religion, viewed as a guiding force and a source of moral prescriptions, has become a stifling factor restricting the free vision and thinking of the modern youth. Religious principles and practices are interpreted conveniently by different persons to suit their needs and ends. They are more in the form of strictures restricting people, curtailing their emotions, feelings and free will.

As conflict between Idealism and Realism has become a common issue in modern world some of the plays of Mahesh Dattani expose how religious Idealism restricts and oppresses the modern youth in their real life.
Besides the sexual discrimination of the *hijras* their presence is restricted by religion also. In *Sevens Steps Around the Fire* a religious connotation is given to the very origin of this cursed lot. Their presence, restricted to some limits, is very much desired on auspicious occasions like marriage and childbirth whereas they do not have the privileges of marriage and begetting children.

The term *hijra* is of Urdu origin. It is a combination of Hindi, Persian and Arabic, literally meaning 'neither male nor female'. Another legend traces their ancestry to the Ramayana. According to the legend, God Rama's followers followed him while he was crossing a river to go into exile in the forest. Rama, in order to stop the followers said, 'Men and women turn back'. Some of his male followers were taken aback and did not know what to do because they could not disobey his order. They, therefore, sacrificed their masculinity, to become neither men nor women, and followed God Rama to the forest. Pleased with their devotion, Rama blessed them. Hence, their presence and blessing in auspicious occasions like marriage and childbirth are desired in Hindu culture. Ironically, they are devoid of these two privileges.

On the day of the wedding of Subbu, Uma accompanies her husband to the wedding. As the preparations for the auspicious moment progress, there comes a group of *hijras* to congratulate and wish Mr. Sharma and Subbu. Champa, the head *hijra*, and Anarkali are present. When they start beating the drum and dance as they do on similar occasions, there comes Mr. Sharma in an angry mood. Enraged by the very sight of the *hijras* he shouts, "Stop! Stop it! . . . who invited you here? . . ." (38)
Champa immediately pleads with him, "Do not be so angry, sir. It is a happy occasion" (38). Mr. Sharma being guilty of the murder of the *hijra* Kamla feels their presence unbearable. He shouts, "Shut up. Get rid of them, someone" (38). However, he yields to Uma’s request to allow them to sing and dance as their presence and blessings on auspicious occasions like marriage and childbirth are desired and considered a good omen. The *hijras* start singing and dancing to bless the couple.

Though Mr. Sharma is enraged at the sight of the *hijra*, his religious moorings restrict him to send them out. Uma’s purpose of allowing the *hijras* to be there is to know the mystery behind Kamla’s murder. Hence, she uses the religious belief to make Mr. Sharma concede her request. It is a general belief among Hindus that *hijras* must present on happy occasions like marriage and childbirth to sing, dance and ultimately bless, since it is considered to be a good sign and auspicious. Otherwise, as it is believed, if they curse, it will bring misfortune. Anarkali tells Uma: “I sing with other *hijras* at weddings and when a child is born. People give us money, otherwise, I will put a curse on them. *(Laughs.)* As if God is on our side” (12). Their presence gets religious sanction only on auspicious occasions. At the same time their presence invites hatred on other occasions.

In *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai*, Ed and Kiran are to get married shortly. Ed is a homosexual who is least interested in heterosexuality. Kamlesh, brother of Kiran, was his former lover. When Deepali, their lesbian friend, learns about the marriage, she suggests that somebody should make Ed come out openly
to Kiran about his homosexuality. Kamlesh answers that it is impossible because Ed believes his homosexual inclination is the work of the devil. He now, therefore, goes to church regularly to get rid of the devil. He further gets treated under a psychiatrist to be "a real man". Kamlesh says, "He goes to church every week now. They put him on to a psychiatrist. He believes his love for me was the work of the devil" (85). Other friends urge Kamlesh to show Kiran the photograph in which Kamlesh and Ed are in a naked tight embrace.

Ed is clearly a homosexual who pacifies Kamlesh to be his lover even after his proposed marriage to Kiran. At the same time his religious faith in the form of shame restricts his freedom of being a homosexual. In order to gain freedom he wants to cover his shame with marriage. Hence, he considers his homosexuality as the work of a devil, and yet, wants both Kiran and her brother Kamlesh.

The religious teachings he has imbibed since childhood has taken control of his conscience so obsessively that he fears, he will be discriminated and isolated by his religion if he is known to the outside world as a homosexual. His religion does not sanction homosexuality. Religious ostracism impedes his freedom of being a homosexual. Similarly, the religious ideals and teachings everyone has imbibed since childhood have a concrete effect. The friends of Kamlesh are invited over a party in which Kamlesh is supposed to reveal his haunting problem so as to get out of it with the help of his friends. Hence, in order to help him, Sharad another lover of Kamlesh proceeds with a ritual to get rid of the photograph of Kamlesh with his lover Ed in a naked tight embrace, the possession of which is considered to be a hindrance for Kamalesh to forget Prakash.
SHARAD. Good. Now let's have a little ritual.

RANJIT. A ritual for God's sake!

SHARAD. Why not? The whole heterosexual world is run by rituals!

That wedding downstairs will go on for days!

KAMLESH. I will do whatever you tell me to do.

SHARAD. Now take a look at the picture. And say it out loud? 'As my friends, this city and God are witness to my vow, I break all ties with Prakash.' Then you will tear up that picture and throw it out of the window. Is that clear? (72-73)

They believe that a ritual with a religious touch alone can help Kamlesh get rid of his obsessive thoughts. It is taken to be a measure of purification like bathing. According to the Hindu belief water and fire are purifying agents. Bathing before prayer is a compulsory step followed by Hindus. Similarly, fire is worshiped by the Hindus because of its immense capacity to clean everything. Anything burnt is believed to be pure as gold is purified by burning. Sharad believes that by tearing the photograph into pieces and throwing it out, Kamlesh can get rid of his nagging thoughts. He thinks that the act can wipe out the memory associated with Ed.

In Do the Needful, Alpesh is a homosexual who is not interested in marriage. He is happy with his lover Trilok and cannot be happy with a woman. Unaware of his homosexuality his parents forced him into marriage, which ended
in divorce. In their desperate search for a second wife, they got Lata from Bangalore. The liftman of their flats considers the failure of Alpesh’s first marriage and the delay in getting another bride all due to his bad fate. Though Alpesh’s parents keep the new proposal as a secret, the liftman could know it. Therefore, when Alpesh’s father, Patel goes to the temple to perform a special pooja in connection with the new marriage proposal, the liftman surprises him by telling him that Alpesh should say “yes” to the proposed new marriage:

I hope Alpesh Bhaiya’s luck is good this time. They are in Bangalore? South Indians?” . . . Tell Alpesh Bhaiya to just say yes. Arre, he should be having two children by now! . . . Fate! It is all Fate! Have faith in your good Karma! (123-124).

Mr. Patel goes to the temple and asks the poojari to perform a special prayer on Alpesh’s sake. Alpesh’s first marriage ended in divorce because of his inability to satisfy his wife, as he is interested in homosexuality. He shows the least interest in another marriage. At the same time his father believes to set right everything by performing a special prayer to please the gods. The liftman too believes that it is all because of one’s Karma. Alpesh’s father Chandrakant Patel wants even the liftman to pray for them so that Alpesh gets a bride soon.

CHANDRAKANT PATEL. Pray! Pray for us or I will kick you out on the roads. (124)

Like Alpesh, his proposed new bride Lata is also reluctant in the marriage because of her love to Salim, a Muslim terrorist. Lata’s parents do not agree
with her decision of marrying her lover Salim with whom she had premarital sex right in his hostel room itself. They are reluctant as Salim belongs to a different religion. Though Salim is married and a terrorist, Lata is determined to marry him. Salim’s religion allows him to marry even four wives. She thinks, therefore she can marry him. If she is not allowed to marry him, she wants to keep him as a lover out of wedlock. Moreover, she imagines of having another lover or even more than four extramarital lovers if Salim happens to go to Kashmir. Islam allows four wives. On the contrary Lata’s religion allows one husband and one wife. Hence, she thinks of one husband and more than four lovers. However, immediately her religion and Catholicism, the religion of her school restrict her even to fancy like that. She feels sorry for her thinking.

LATA (thought). Salim, I know you are allowed four wives? what’s the point in thinking of all that now? I will have to be content keeping you as a lover. How are we going to work this out? What if you have to go back to Kashmir? . . . I will have to find another lover. I can have more than four . . . Why do I think all this? I am a bad girl, I will rot in hell. Oh! Damn the Bangalore Catholic School, sending me on a guilt trip now. (126-27)

Her religion restricts her wish and desire. She blames her Catholic school upbringing for causing guilt in her for even fancying.

In Final Solutions, Daksha pours out her memories in her diary as she feels isolated in her husband’s house. As a young bride she feels that she has lost her freedom. She is just fifteen and married to Hari. She wished to become a
singer like Noor Jehan. When she hummed a film song, Hari’s parents wanted him to tell her not to hum or sing film songs. Her marriage has denied her freedom, even to sing a song. Traditional Hindu view is that film songs will pollute the mind of a young girl.

Daksha thinks of the communal riots in which her father was killed on the night of India’s independence. During that time they were living in Hussainabad. Her father had gone out and was killed on the roads. She and her mother were hiding in their Pooja room. Her mother was clinging to the idol of Lord Krishna, praying for the safety of her father. Daksha was thinking that the idol was just an ordinary doll similar to the ones she used to play with. Instantly a stone thrown by a rioter came crashing into their house smashing her entire collection of records containing songs of her favourite singers Shamshad Begum, Noor Jehan, and Suraiya. Daksha took it as a punishment by Lord Krishna for considering the idol a mere doll. Though Lord Krishna has nothing to do with the throwing of the stone, Daksha immediately takes it as a punishment given by the Lord for a ‘non-believer’. The religious observations in the family and environment from one’s childhood have their impact. The rioters discriminate people as Hindus and Muslims whereas the stone thrown by a Muslim rioter did not discriminate and spare the records of Muslim singers.

Daksha’s daughter-in-law Aruna being an orthodox Hindu housewife cannot skip her daily pooja. She believes that it is her daily pooja, which pleases Lord Krishna to protect her family. She asks her husband Ramnik Gandhi, “Who
do you think is protecting this house?” (173). She assures him “Our Krishna will protect us” (174).

No religion professes religious hatred. Every religion teaches love for fellow human beings. But people discriminate fellow human beings in the name of religion and instead of love they nourish hatred. Hindu-Muslim enmity has made Hindus consider Muslims aliens in India and similarly, Muslims isolate themselves as if they belong to a different nation but living in India. Even after nearly half a century, the bitter memories of partition still haunts the hearts of the people.

The Hindu as well as the Muslim chorus in the play echoes this notion. The Hindu chorus shouts, “This is our land!” (168), “Send them back”, and “Drive them out” (169). The Muslim chorus in turn shouts, “Let them send us back” (171) as if they belong to a different nation. On another occasion, the Hindu chorus expresses its doubt against the Muslims. They doubt that the Muslims have some hidden purpose behind their stay in India.

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. (176)

Daksha writes in her diary that when freedom was gained, as her father observed, the Britishers before leaving, “. . . had let loose the dogs” (167).
Religious bigotry, the by-product of Colonial Rule in India is still a haunting problem. It has become the foremost problem obstructing national development in India.

Hindu-Muslim communalism in India has its roots in the Muslim attacks on India during the tenth century when early Muslim conquerors attacked India more for plundering the wealth rather than establishing religious dominance. Communal bickering between Hindu and Muslim communities started when the Moghuls showed interest in establishing Islam by converting Hindus, destructing Hindu temples and constructing mosques over these temples. During the British rule, in order to keep their hegemony intact, the Britishers adopted the policy of 'divide and rule' which resulted in deliberate fostering of communal clashes. The relation between Hindus and Muslims were further strained during the freedom struggle when power politics came into play. Thus, though antagonism between Hindus and Muslims is an old issue, Hindu-Muslim communalism in India can be ascribed to the British rule during the freedom struggle. Now it has become the single largest serious threat to the secular ideals of India.

The British policy of divide and rule tolled the death knell of Hindu-Muslim religious harmony in India by which the co-existence of the two major religions of the country was at peril. Consequently, Muslims preferred to live in areas where Muslims predominate. Various reasons can be ascribed to this fact. Due to the inherent hatred between the two communities, Hindus rarely take Muslims as their tenants. Similarly, Muslims feel insecure in areas dominated by Hindus. They feel secure in places where Muslim population is greater.
Exchange of things or mutual invitations are rare in areas inhabited by Hindus and Muslims.

After nearly half a century Daksha sees a similar religious violence now. This period of half a century has not reduced Hindu-Muslim enmity even a little. A clash between the Hindus and Muslims erupted as a Hindu chariot was felled on a Muslim street.

The chorus wears the Hindu masks. They become more frenetic after putting on the masks. From the chorus, it is understood that the place has become tense as the Hindus and Muslims fight over. For the past many years, the Hindu chariot has moved on the same path without any trouble. But now, for the first time their *rath* is broken. Their enemies have broken their chariot and felled their Gods. One in the chorus raises the doubt that it could be accidental. The others claim that hitting the chariot with stones and slitting the *poojari*’s stomach with a knife cannot be accidental.

CHORUS 5. It could have been an accident.

CHORUS 2. The stone that hit our God was no accident!

CHORUS 3. The knife that slit the poojari’s stomach was no accident!(168)

The Hindu chorus turns into a violent mob crying “Send them back? Drive them out?” (169).
The Muslim mob is infuriated. From the conversation of the Muslim chorus, it is clear that they are blamed by the Hindu mob for breaking the chariot. The chariot fell in the Muslim street. One in the chorus questions if it was built by them — the Muslims. Someone responds that it may be due to manufacturing defects and the builders are to be blamed. Yet another asks whether the Hindu God does not have a warranty.

CHORUS 1. Their chariot fell in our street!
CHORUS 2. Their God now prostrates before us!
CHORUS 3. So they blame it on us?
CHORUS 1. Was the chariot built by us?
CHORUS 2, 3. Blame the builder of those fancy thrones.
CHORUS 4. A manufacturing defect!
CHORUS 5. Doesn’t their God have a warranty? (171)

The Muslim chorus turns emotional, echoing the fears of the Hindu mob. The Hindu mob, according to the rumours, blames that the Muslim mob has razed the Hindu temples, broken the chariot and are going to bomb the Hindu streets. The Muslim mob asks why they (the Muslims) should do these on the Hindus. Finally, they turn to move while one among them asks, “where to go?”, which reveals the feeling of uncertainty in the minorities. It is very clear, as in the case of the Hindu mob, the Muslim mob is equally innocent of the origin of the trouble. The Hindu mob has assumed that the Muslims had caused all the trouble. Similarly, the Muslim mob has believed the rumours that the Hindus
have blamed the Muslims for breaking the temple and chariot and is supposed to bomb the Hindu streets.

CHORUS 3. They say we razed their temples yesterday.

CHORUS 2. That we broke their chariot today.

CHORUS 1. That we'll bomb their streets tomorrow.

CHORUS ALL. Why would we? Why? Why? Why would we?

CHORUS 5. (emotionally) Why would we?

CHORUS 1, 2, 3 and 4 spit

CHORUS ALL EXCEPT 5. Let them send us back.

*They turn to exit.*

CHORUS 5. (meekly). Where? (171)

The Muslim mob does not know that it is only a rumour and they do not know who spread the rumours. Similarly, they are as innocent as the Hindu mob of the real culprits who have actually committed all these. Evidently, the religious faith of both Hindus and Muslims has turned them fanatics and does not allow them to forget the past animosities. Religion stands as an obstacle between the Hindus and Muslims preventing the nurturing of brotherly feeling. Religion instead of being a binding force and a moral guide has become a source of fanaticism. Chaman Ahuja while commenting on the plays of Usha Ganguli writes that in India “... religion is being transformed into savage fanaticism” (138).

Aruna, Ramnik's wife, wants her daughter Smita to go and spend time with Baa (Hardika? older Daksha). Ramnik does not like the idea because he is
afraid that Baa would picture Muslims as demons, because she has the bitter memories of the partition still in her. The religious enmity sown in the minds of both Hindus and Muslims during partition restricts one to trust the other. Hindus discriminate the Muslims unaware that by doing so they isolate themselves from the Muslims. Similarly, the Muslims by way of showing distrust on the Hindus isolate themselves from the Hindus. Discriminating people by religion and branding them as demons are the worst practices in a civilized social set-up. Equally worst is elders imposing their own religious views on the younger generation. Indian society is a whole with many parts like Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Parsis, and others. It is obligatory on every part to repose trust and faith on every other part. Each part should not try to break away from the whole. Religion, which has to be a uniting force has become a cause of discrimination and disintegration.

India is a pluralist society composed of many religious groups, which are further divided into many sub-groups. Among various religious tensions in India between different religious groups, Hindu-Muslim religious conflict has become a perennial and the most disturbing problem.

Baa, afraid of the riots outside, comes out of her room asking Aruna to be careful and to keep the doors closed. Aruna answers that their God Krishna will protect them. Baa, who is not convinced, thinks that the same violence has erupted again and says as earlier: "Be careful, I said! (Almost to herself) The dogs have been let loose" (174).
The Hindu chorus, on the streets, doubts why the enemies are still staying on their land even after getting what they wanted. According to the Hindu chorus, the enemies stay to spy their land. It is highly pathetic to a secular, democratic nation like India where two of the major religious communities treat each other as enemies. What sets them apart? Ironically, no individual Hindu or Muslim is an enemy of another individual Muslim or Hindu. Yet, as a group they become the prey, because of some forces, to view each other with enmity. As Alyque Padamsee in his "A Note on the Play" writes, "The mob in the play is symbolic of our own hatred and paranoia. Each member of the mob is an individual yet they meld into one seething whole as soon as politicians play on their fears and anxieties" (161).

At this stage two young men appear. One of the two, Bobby is frightened but the other, Javed, asks him to keep walking pretending to know nothing. Javed claims to know many friends in that place. Bobby requests him to promise not to meet any of his friends there again. The Hindu chorus confronts them. The two declare that they lost their way in that town as there was no bus to their place, Jeevnagar because of the curfew. Bobby answers them calmly whereas Javed responds a little rudely. The chorus searches them. Chorus 1 takes away the money found in their pockets. It finds a bus ticket from Jeevnagar in Javed’s wallet. From the date of the ticket it is understood that they have been there in the town for the past few days. The chorus suspects them. They take out a handkerchief with a knot from Bobby’s pocket. The chorus puts it on Bobby’s head. They take out a cap from Javed’s pocket and put it on his face. He wears it
on his head with dignity, whereas Bobby removes the handkerchief from his head. The chorus makes sure that the two are Muslims. It puts on the Hindu masks and chases the two. They reach the house of Ramnik, knocking at the door, crying for protection. Ramnik and Aruna hesitate to open the door for a minute, but later Ramnik opens the door. The two hurry in and shut the door behind. Hardika does not like them being allowed in. She questions herself why did Ramnik allow them in. She blames their people, the Muslims, for killing Ramnik’s grandfather.

The deep-rooted religious belief and the hatred for any other new religion restrict Aruna and Hardika to allow the two Muslims in their house. Their faith cannot accommodate a new faith. They resist entry to the new religion. It is invasion and intrusion needed to be opposed. Asha Kuthari Chaudhuri writes: “The outside (Babban and Javed) is in a sense allowed entry, after severe resistance from within (Aruna and Hardika), . . .” (40).

Ramnik asks the two if they were thirsty. Though they are thirsty they tell him that they do not want water. They fear that they will not be given water in a Hindu’s house. However, Ramnik demands Aruna to give them water. She is shocked. Her conservative religious belief does not allow her to give water to them. She reacts to Ramnik as if he had asked her to go and kill somebody. Showing much reluctance on her face, she places two glasses of water before the two men. She hopes that the two would not drink the water. On the other hand, they gulp down the water quickly, which shocks Aruna again. She replaces the glasses by holding them delicately with her thumbs and index fingers on the
sides, which have not been touched by their lips. She takes them away and keeps them separately from other glasses.

The mob standing outside keeps on shouting to send out Javed and Bobby. They shout to open the door or they would break in. Ramnik asks the mob, why they want them out and what harm they have caused. The mob replies that they want to stop them before they harm, they want to tame them before their passions inflame, and they want to thwart them to live peacefully. The mob calls Ramnik a traitor. It goes on urging him to open the door. He is stubborn and refuses. Aruna is frightened and wants Ramnik to throw the two men out. When she goes to open the door, Ramnik pushes her aside asking her, “What are you trying to prove?” (182). He is determined to protect the two from the mob outside. Bobby and Javed feel relieved and thank him.

Politicians play upon the susceptibilities of both the Hindus and the Muslims. They have paid-rioters and make sure that no solution is reached to stop the violence. The violence started with the felling of the chariot and killing its priest. The chariot lies broken on the Muslim street. The curfew is imposed and the government has not taken any steps to recover the chariot. No decision has been taken. The Hindus take it as a great insult to leave the chariot on the Muslim street without recovering and renovating it immediately. The Hindu chorus reveals its doubt over their leaders: “We doubt the leader’s intentions. They want our blood to boil. They have succeeded” (188). It laments that the leaders have succeeded in their mission. They understand their mistake after a lot of bloodshed and bitter enmity. Satish Barbuddie’s estimation of the play
substantiates this observation. He writes, "The play mocks at the politicians who use people as their puppets. These puppeteers are the real culprits" (103).
Religion is a very sensitive issue, which needs much care to handle. Politicians often make use of the sensitive nature of the people to instigate violence in order to achieve their personal goals.

Later, Ramnik thinks that the two would feel hungry. Therefore, he goes to the kitchen, fills milk in those two glasses kept separately in which the two were offered water and gestures them to drink the milk. From Javed’s words one can understand that he feels insecure because he belongs to the minority. All the trouble in him is due to the inferior feeling of being the minority and the ultimate fear of insecurity.

JAVED. It must feel good.

RAMNIK. What?

JAVED. Being the majority.

RAMNIK. Yes, I never thought about it.

JAVED. About feeling good because you are the majority?

RAMNIK. No, about being the majority.

JAVED. But, sir, it is in your every move. You must know. You can offer milk to us. You can have an angry mob outside your house. You can play the civilized host. Because you know you have peace hidden inside your armpit. (192)
The Muslim chorus too expresses the same fear. One in the Muslim chorus expresses a sense of identity crisis, which troubles him a lot. He questions whether he should allow himself to be swallowed up by the majority who refuse to recognize him or should he and his people hide into anonymity to escape from being hounded by their enemies. Is it possible for them to lose their identity?

CHORUS 1. Should we be swallowed up? Till they cannot recognize us?

Should we meld into anonymity so they cannot hound us? Lose ourselves in a shapeless mass? Should we? Can we? (196)

The feeling of being a minority has given him the fear of insecurity. A sense of insecurity in a democratic secular set up weakens the spirit of democracy. The minority’s state of having lost hope is revealed when Chorus 1 says, “A drop of oil cannot merge with an ocean of milk. One reality cannot accept another reality” (196). According to Ram Ahuja:

The Indian Muslims, not surprisingly, tend to consider their future as a question of ‘Us’ versus ‘They’. When they make their demands known, as any segment of society would do to voice their grievances, it more often than not explodes into an orgy of Hindu-Muslim violence which leads to the accusation of foreign incitement (249).

Daksha reads her diary in which she has written the events that followed Independence. Hindu-Muslim enmity has instilled hatred and contempt for each other, considering the other as bad people and enemies. One day Hari tells her that violence has stopped and all bad people have left for Pakistan. Hari wishes to
stop his studies in order to join his father in his cloth mill. Daksha does not like the idea because once he joins his father he will become a brainless boredom. He will be much delighted in donating money for building temples and celebrating festivals. He will feel like 'a complete human being' if he can sponsor on tours of various sadhus and saints.

DAKSHA (reads aloud). . . . our community people come to collect donations for building temples and celebrating festivals. They will sit on the steps while he asks them questions about the various sadhus and saints whom he is sponsoring on tours. That will make him feel important. Then he will feel he is somebody. A complete human being.

His whole day of money-making will have meaning for him. . . (197)

All religions, invariably, have instilled in human beings the importance of donating in the name of religion. It is a way of showing love for fellow human beings, which is a basic teaching of all religions. However, this commonness among religions has taken a negative twist in the contemporary world to discriminate people in the name of religion by donating money to harm the people of other religion. According to S.L. Doshi and P.C. Jain, "Fear of God, fear for doing evil things, charity, living a sacred life are all patterns of behaviour which arouse feelings for a religion" (289). Giving alms and making donations for religious causes are considered religious obligations. For many, it is a sin not to give alms and donation. Hari thinks that it is his moral obligation and that he would be a complete human being if only he could donate for religious causes.
Lewis A. Coser argues: "... religion, one of the forces that created within individuals a sense of moral obligation to adhere to society's demands" (136).

Though caste and religion are ascribed to an individual by birth no one is a fanatic basically. It is all the grown-up people who instil religious and caste feelings making one a fanatic. Javed has become a religious fanatic when he felt helpless for being a minority. His sense of a minority, fear of insecurity and his environment forced him to find solace in religious fundamentalism. He shouts at Ramnik:

JAVED. I believe in myself. Yes! What else have I got to believe in? It's people like you who drive me to a corner and I have to turn to myself and my faith. I have a lot to thank you for! At least, now, I am not ignorant of my history and faith. (198)

Ramnik is surprised when he comes to know that Javed is a rioter who is hired by people to create tension and violence. He assumes that Javed does it all for money. However, Bobby defends that Javed has changed himself and he is no more a hired hoodlum. Javed prevents Bobby from defending his cause, because Ramnik will never believe him. Javed tells Ramnik that it is people like him who had made him feel insecure and treated men like him as untouchables and second class citizens, responsible for changing him and others violent. The disbelief of the Hindus make the Muslims fanatics and force people like Javed to identify with other fanatics like him. Their quest for identity unite them to defend themselves from their 'enemies'.
Biased view on the other religion leads to discrimination. When one discriminates the others, ultimately both stand apart as two uncompromising discriminated groups. Even after forty years of Independence, as Hardika writes in her diary, “things have not changed that much” (167). It is a sad reality to note that forty years has not healed the wounds in the minds of people belonging to the two religions. Those who really suffered and those who created hatred and enmity are no longer alive, yet the later generations are unable to patch up the differences between them, may be none wants to patch it up.

Religious hypocrisy is another factor hindering religious harmony. Ramnik’s hypocrisy that he is a liberal minded person gets revealed when Javed tells him that danger hides in hypocrites like him and there is nothing danger outside.

JAVED. You would have let the mob kill me. And you wouldn’t have minded if (points to Bobby) he had died as well. You don’t hate me for what I do or who I am. You hate me because I showed you that you are not as liberal as you think you are. (Goes to the main door and stands outside.) There’s no danger outside now . . . (198-99)

Alyque Padamsee writes: “The demons of communal hatred are not out on the street . . . they are lurking inside ourselves” (161). Ramnik appears to be a tolerant, liberal-minded Hindu with progressive ideals, morally superior to his orthodox wife Aruna. He offers a job for Javed in his cloth-shop to convert his religious fanaticism. He protects Javed and Bobby from the Hindu mob. He
stands against his men — the Hindu mob, and his wife ignoring her opposition to give shelter to the two outsiders. When she moves to open the door to send them out he becomes a little violent, pushes her aside roughly, not allowing her to open the door. He compels her to give them water and later he himself offers them milk. He boasts that he is highly accommodating, harbouring two Muslims, and protecting them from getting killed by the Hindu mob. However, as the play progresses the superficial nature of his liberalism is exposed.

Like Ramnik, many are embodiments of anger, prejudice, mistrust and hypocrisy. Surprisingly, every one behaves like a civilized gentleman hiding these qualities. However, it shows up anytime, at the slightest provocation. As Vivek Benegal says, the play "... is really a remarkable examination of the prejudice and deeply held mistrust which lies just beneath the skin of our liberal, secular attitudes and which has a tendency to surface and surprise us"(61).

When Javed goes out saying he needs fresh air, Bobby narrates to Ramnik what made Javed a rioter. He corrects Ramnik that Javed is not a paid or hired rioter, but a volunteer. He then recollects the very incident, which made Javed turn against the Hindus. Bobby and Javed were friends who grew up and attended school together. Javed used to be a hero among his friends. One day when they were playing cricket on their street, the postman was seen delivering letters to the neighbours. He dropped one of the letters, which Javed picked up to give back to the postman. As the postman was in a hurry he asked Javed to deliver the letter to the addressee. When Javed opened the gate of the addressee, he was stopped by a booming voice, "What do you want?" (200). Javed mumbled something as he was frightened by the voice. He lost his usual firmness within
The man ordered him to leave the letter on the wall and to get out. He then came out of his house with a cloth in his hand. He wiped the letter before picking it up, wiped the spot on the wall where Javed placed the letter and then wiped the gate before getting inside the house. This left an indelible scar in Javed. The prayer bell of that house was so far a part of the regular din of the locality, which no one cared to single it out. From that moment the prayer bell fell on the ears of the boys, isolated and distinct. The next day the street witnessed the man screaming out on the streets. He was yelling at windows, running like a mad man with tears rolling down. It was said that someone had dropped pieces of meat and bones into his backyard. Bobby could understand who was behind it. Later whenever they heard the bell of that house they were reminded of that incident.

After listening to Bobby’s narration Ramnik wanted to know why Bobby did not throw meat into the neighbour’s backyard though he was as angry as Javed. Bobby did not do that because he felt ashamed of being a minority. He thought that he could become superior if he is not identified as a Muslim. Here again the identity crisis in the minority gets expressed in a different way. The feeling of insecurity makes them hide their selves, their religion and their very identity itself. Discrimination forces one to lose one’s identity. As Bobby says to Ramnik:

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. (201)
Bobby could escape the oppressive fear of his Muslim identity, as his name does not reveal it. He preferred to be called Bobby instead of Babban, his actual name, because Bobby does not disclose his Muslim identity as Babban does. At college his friends called him, mockingly, Baboon instead of Babban. Bobby represents the angst and fear of the insecure minority Muslims. Fear of insecurity leads to uncertainty. Instead of making one secure and wise, religion turns one insecure and cowardice.

Religion, which ought to enlighten, empower and make one wise has disarmed Bobby, making him feel insecure devoid of individuality, identity and the innate power. He feels helpless for being a Muslim. Therefore, he alienates himself from his community in order to hide his Muslim identity and to make him superior, secure and safe. Karl Marx's "... theory of alienation" argues Ian Craib, "is about the loss of human powers in society, the way in which a particular type of social organization alienates us from our world" (88). The theory substantiates the case of Javed and Bobby.

Religious markings like Hindus putting saffron or sandal paste on their forehead, Muslims wearing prayer caps or handkerchief on their head and keeping it in the pockets, Sikhs wearing turban and growing beard are all marks of identification of one man from another in the name of religion. In On a Muggy Night in Mumbai, Bunny, who is a Sikh despised his turban, long hair and beard, as he wanted to be a popular TV star. He did not want to "... end up playing a stereotypical Sird in all those movies" (89). Thus, Bunny in a sense,
could liberate himself from the restrictions of his religion. This false pretension
was absent in Javed and he took it to be his pride. Finally, Bobby blamed
Ramnik (the Hindus) being partly responsible for making Javed a rioter. Ramnik
too feels ashamed now. The pride in him is absent whereas Javed who whistles a
tune in a jubilant mood appears with a great sense of pride.

Aruna and Smita enter the living room asking whether it is safe to go out
to take drinking water from the tap outside. Javed volunteers to help them in
filling water. Aruna refuses his help expressing her views:

ARUNA (to Javed). Please try to understand. We have nothing against
you. It is only that, we have our ways and customs and ... and ... we
are all equal. There is no doubt. We respect your religion and we
wish you well. Why, we have friends who are ... Smita has so many
friends who are not ... All religion is one. Only the ways to God are
many. (209)

Ramnik cannot control his laughter because all these days he used to say
this to Aruna. Today, Aruna says it to Javed. Smita has taken a brass pot from
the pooja room to fill up water. She urges her mother not to waste time so that
she can go to sleep after filling up water. Aruna tells Javed, “We don’t allow
anyone to fill our drinking water. No outsiders” (209). She instructs Smita, “We
bathe our god with it, Smita. It has to be pure. It must not be contaminated”
(209). Every religion is unique in some way. Hinduism has its own rituals,
ceremonies and customs as other religions too have. However, the others view its observance of purity as untouchability.

The Hindu view of life is based on attaining salvation (*Moksha*). According to it man is altogether composed of desires (*Kama*). If a man dies leaving any desire unfulfilled he is bound to take rebirth in order to fulfil his desire. Man strives to eradicate desires so as to attain *moksha*. Hence, on getting rid of desires, the mortal becomes immortal and attains salvation (*moksha*).

Attaining salvation needs observance of many basic principles of Hindu way of life. Pollution and purity are important in Hinduism. Maintaining physical distance from the members of other social groups is a feature of Hinduism as it is composed of a hierarchy. Hence, it gives importance to avoidance of inter-caste marriage, and personal life of an individual on occasions like birth, marriage, menstruation, death, offering prayers, etc. The concept of pollution is different from cleanliness and it is related to birth. One has to purify oneself, simple or elaborate, according to the seriousness of the violation of rules of purity.

As Hindu social hierarchy is based on *varnas*, segregation is inevitably maintained in order to keep oneself pure, free from pollution. Hindu religion supports the segregation of castes in social relations, worship and religious beliefs. Idol-worship is a distinctive common feature of Hindu religion. Different idols for different gods are worshipped on different occasions. Temples, the seat of idols, are inevitable and as Ram Ahuja writes, "... the idea
of not allowing Melecchas (including Muslims and untouchables) in these temples was more in the nature of protecting the temple from pollution rather than confrontation with another religion" (5).

Varnas and castes are different but mistaken as one and the same. Varna is the division of people into groups based on aptitudes, abilities and vocations. Varna, unlike caste is not associated with birth. An individual or a group was entitled to a varna membership by satisfying the qualifications. Any individual or a group could find a place in any of the varnas, if the individual or the group satisfied the qualifications. On the other hand, caste refers to division of people into groups on the basis of birth and giving particular privileges to some groups and denying similar privileges to others. Caste is believed to be the greatest blot on Indian culture, since it has divided the society into conflicting camps.

Ram Ahuja further notes: “Islam does not believe in idol-worship. It is monotheistic and non-hierarchical, that is, it believes in equality. Though both Islam and Hinduism are oriented to the principles of holism (collectivism), yet in Hinduism, holism is linked with hierarchy while in Islam, holism is differentiated from hierarchy” (15-16).

Aruna wants others to understand that how she feels in her house is her own business where others need not feel offended. Hence, if others cannot respect her belief, they must at least learn to tolerate it. She believes in her faith and hence, feels it is the truth. Ramnik asks her, “When I can’t tolerate it, how
can they?” (210). Smita acknowledges her father that Aruna is wrong and she has to face and admit that it is truth only because she believes in it.

Smita feels embarrassed as Aruna goes on explaining her faith. Her mother’s orthodox views and the way she wants others to observe them are no more endurable even to her father and her. Aruna has imbibed all the religious ideas from her parents and grandparents who have thrust upon their religious views on her. She in turn imposes it on her daughter Smita. She has unshakeable belief in her faith and thinks it is the only true faith. She is a proud inheritor of her religious faith handed down to her from many generations of her forefathers and saints. Hence, she wants her daughter to be like her — praying, fasting, purifying herself all day and listen to her religious stories unquestionably. As C.S. Lakshmi writes “... we all grow up accustomed to certain cultural practices and beliefs that shape our attitudes to other faiths” (4). Aruna cannot even imagine any other faith. Unlike Aruna and her times, Smita has many religions before her. She knows well that her religion is one among the many religions and almost all religions teach the same. She does not want to inherit unquestionably what her mother had inherited. As a result she blames her mother that her unaccommodating religious views have made her feel like a rat in a hole. She does not feel proud of her mother’s inheritance because it “stifles everything else around it” (211) and her too.

Aruna feels offended and says to Smita that she does not want to hear it from one like Smita who is not proud of her own inheritance but wants to run away from her own faith because of her prejudice. Smita answers, “... not
belonging makes things so clear" (211). She could see clearly how far her mother is wrong. She hates hypocrisy or over-reaction to religious duties. She knows well that her mother's religious notions are wrong. Therefore, she openly opposes her: "I can see so clearly how wrong you are" (211). She further makes her mother understand that she feels threatened and insecure just because the other two newcomers do not believe in all that she believes are true. Aruna, unable to tolerate any further, asks Bobby and Javed, "Are you happy?" (212). She thinks that Bobby and Javed have changed Smita and caused conflict in the family.

Smita has all along these years been silent, showing no protest to her mother. Aruna was under the impression that Smita is in complete agreement with her. On the other hand, Smita actually did not want to make her mother feel offended. Further, her father would also be happy feeling victorious over her mother. However, her mother's religious notions, Smita feels, are beyond endurance. Hence, she says to her mother that her religion stifles everything else around it. She frankly tells her mother, not to burden her anymore with her religious prejudices.

Daksha’s mother-in-law Gaju was also one with much rigidity, like Aruna, in her religious observations. She wants to take a splendid bath before Lakshmi pooja to make her clean. If somebody happens to touch her after the bath and before the pooja, she would go through all the elaborate bathing process once again. Unlike Gaju, Daksha’s mother would sprinkle some Ganga jal if anyone contaminates her by touching. Daksha recollects how Gaju used to bathe:
... You should see her bathe! Sorry, hear her bathe. It sounds like there’s a herd of elephants splashing about in our bathroom. And the amount of water she needs! Baap re! Kanta has to fill sixteen buckets of water in the hando for madam before Lakshmi pooja or on Krishna Janmashtami. And God help Kanta if anyone touches Gaju after her bath and before her pooja. She will go through the whole bathing routine again. My mother was sensible that way. If anyone contaminated her by touching her, she would just sprinkle some Ganga jal and be done with it.

... (174-75)

Being too rigid, Hinduism invites criticism even from within. Aruna’s all rigid religious rituals have brought in criticism from her own daughter as well as husband.

The Hindu chorus expresses its concern, which almost echoes that of Aruna’s. The chorus is worried over its future which it feels is threatened. The Hindus feel that much of their Hindu legacy is fading away. Further they fear that they cannot be complacent about their glorious past, which rendered them safety. They are worried over the pseudo secularists who do not know anything about the greatness of the land and are in league with those people who have brought shame to their nation. This sense of superiority inadvertently makes them discriminate others.

Aruna feels helpless to hear Smita’s views of religious conceptions. She was shocked when Smita says that her religious notions stifle her. She never
thought that her daughter would have such a dissatisfied perception about her own religion. Hence, she fears that the earth under her feet has slipped away all of a sudden. Her religious faith and her family never accommodated the views of other religions. In a country where Hindu-Muslim religious animosity has taken deep roots due to various historical reasons, it is not much unusual for one like Aruna to feel disgusted when the younger generation shows a different religious view. Aruna’s religious background is unaccommodating which never allowed her to experience a broader religious outlook. It has never given her space to think beyond her religion, and is much limited. Hence, she feels helpless.

Smita is a person with a secular outlook. She does not want her mother to impose her religious prejudices on her. She boldly tells her mother that she is wrong. Aruna again questions Smita “Where do I go from here?” (213). Smita gives her a fitting reply: “You can do whatever you want to do. But don’t expect me to be a caretaker to something I don’t want on my back” (213).

Smita here represents the new generation to which she belongs. The younger generation hates the older generation for thrusting upon them their preferences and phobias. Having its own free outlook, broader view and understanding it wants to break away from the established old-fashioned social order which is oppressive and refuses to accommodate anything new. In the process of imposing its views, the older generation fails to understand that change is a necessary and indispensable social feature. Aruna wants Smita to uphold and adopt the value system that she had imbibed whereas Smita who had a different
exposure to life finds it difficult to agree with the views of her mother. A clash of confused value systems between the mother and daughter brings in tension.

SMITA. Don’t! Please, mummy, don’t try so hard! You are breaking me. Ever since I was small, you have been at me to go to the temple, make garlands, listen to you reading from the Gita. I love you, mummy, that’s why I did that. I listened to you and I obeyed you. I tolerated your prejudices only because you are my mother. May be, I should have told you earlier, but I’m telling you now, I can’t bear it! Please don’t burden me any more! I can’t take it! (213).

Ramnik wants to know why she did not tell him all these days how she felt. Now it is for Ramnik, Smita gives a bit of her mind. She knows it well that her father could understand how she feels. But she could not openly say it out just to avoid hurting her mother by joining forces with her father. He will feel triumphant and find pleasure in hurting her mother. Unlike the older generation, the younger one are very clear in their observation. Smita could have become rebellious in the house but for her love and respect for her mother. Yet, she has come out openly when the time has ripened. She requests Aruna to join her in filling up the water. On seeing her giving the bucket to Javed, Aruna asks her to fill the brass pot herself because it is the “God’s vessel” (214).

Bobby takes the bucket from Javed and joins Smita to fill up water. Javed approaches Aruna explaining her that there is not much difference between them; because she had told Smita that she would not listen to Smita’s criticism as she
was not proud of her ‘inheritance’. Javed makes it clear to Aruna that he too had told the same to Bobby that Bobby was not proud of his ‘religion’. The idea is same but they have used two different words. Aruna used inheritance and Javed used religion. Hence, Javed claims there is no difference between them when both of them have pride in them on their respective faith. Javed joins Bobby and Smita to fill up water from the tap outside.

Hardika, staring at both Javed and Bobby, enquires them harshly why do they remain there still. When Bobby answers that Smita had asked them to wait for the breakfast, Hardika tells them that they have to wait till Aruna finishes her pooja. She asks them, “Have you ever thought of going to Pakistan?” (221). Javed answers her sarcastically that he prefers Dubai. Hardika tells them further, “There you can live the way you want. Without blaming other people for your failures” (221). She adds that they should have done it earlier as she and her family left Hussainabad when her father died. She asks them, don’t they want to know how it happened?

Bobby says that it does not matter to him. Yet, Hardika tells them that her father was beaten up on the streets to die while she and her family were waiting and praying for him to take them from Hussainabad. Bobby says again that it does not concern to them and they do not want to hear it. Javed asks her why she should blame them for what happened fifty years ago. He questions her, “Today, if something happens to my sister, can I blame you?” (222). Hardika gives him his own answer that it does not concern to her. She thinks of Zarine so that she
says, "She deserves it! Your sister deserves it! Zarine deserves . . . what did you say your sister’s name was?" (222).

Religion has caused discrimination and hatred between the Hindus and the Muslims mutually. Above all, both are not ready to forget the bitter past and thus the enmity grows instead of disappearing. Javed does not want to know what happened to Daksha and similarly, she is not ready to listen to him. Daksha's husband beat her for visiting Zarine’s house and she puts the blame on Zarine. She could not forget that all these years because she belongs to another religion.

The crux of the problem between Hindu-Muslim tension is mistrust and misunderstanding and showing indifference at the misery of the other. Hindus do not show even the basic concern for their Muslim brethren at their sufferings. Similarly, Muslims show their indifference to their Hindu brethren at their misery. The baseless fear that the other would eliminate them breeds hatred between the two. Religion restricts them and has taken away the basic quality of "humanness" in these human beings. S.S. Sharma observes in this regard:

The fears and anxieties of the two communities are partly an aftermath of partition. Then there is the feeling of being second-grade citizens. There is the sensitivity to music being played near a mosque. There is the Hindu sensitivity in the matter of general Muslim food habits that go against vegetarianism. There are fears of contamination. Politicians exploit most of these things and hired goons help them. Saner voices like Bobby’s are drowned, ignored or brushed aside. Pent up feelings take a violent shape. (96-97)
The difference between the Hindu culture and the Muslim culture when incited by communal miscreants leads to hatred and enmity on each other breeding contempt and anger. Every one experiences anger in some form or other almost every day. Anger is a negative emotion, which can cause violence and jeopardize relationship. Hindus and Muslims do not trust each other. Ramnik and Javed reveal this Hindu-Muslim distrust:

RAMNIK. Why do you distrust us?
JAVED. Do you trust us?
RAMNIK. I don't go about 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 . . . (198)

The wordy duel between Ramnik and Javed goes on, accusing each other. The flames of hatred are still in their heart of hearts. C.S. Lakshmi says “. . . we all carry a lot of baggage deep inside. It surfaces when provoked by events, statements or circumstances, and then colours the way we respond” (4).

Distrust between Ramnik and Javed has led to anger. Ramnik and Javed stand as samples of their respective religion. Ramnik’s anger has stripped his liberal minded personality exposing his hypocrisy. Similarly, Daksha wanted Zarine to be her best friend. She admires her beauty: “I have never met anyone
as pretty as her! What a complexion! It’s true that Khoja women are the prettiest in the whole world” (175). At the same time she hates the place where Zarine lives. It is a place “... where they sell unmentionable things” (175). She hates Zarine’s food. Therefore, when she visited Zarine’s house she vomited on seeing their food. Her husband Hari came to know about it, and he mistook that Daksha vomited because she had taken food from Zarine’s house. Hari, an orthodox Hindu cannot even imagine his wife eating in a Muslim’s house. Hari who refused to believe her plea, beat her.

Daksha recollects this when she reads her diary. She tried hard to make him believe that she had not eaten any food from her friend Zarine’s house. She requested him not to beat her and cried to him to stop beating her. Consequently, she was confined in the house. Recollecting the incident now, she blames that her family hurt her because of Zarine. She now tells Bobby and Javed, “I hate the way you look! I hate the way you dress! I hate the way you eat!” (223). Ramnik requests her not to blame them. But she reiterates, “I cannot forget, I just cannot forget” (223).

Unless the Hindus and the Muslims forget what happened during the partition, religious harmony will be elusive. The Hindus cannot tolerate the way the Muslims eat. For the Hindus cow is sacred whereas the Muslims eat the meat of cows. Similarly, the observance of purity for not being contaminated is viewed as untouchability. Hence, each religion should strive for peace and love for humanity and respect the other religion instead of nurturing hatred and finding fault with the others’ way of life. Sangeeta Das shares a similar view:
Lack of accommodation between the two communities and unacceptability gives rise to acrimony resulting in terrorism and anarchy. The play itself is a question mark on this age-old enmity between the two communities wondering if there would ever be a final solution to this endemic problem. (114)

Daksha had a fascination for the songs of Shamshad Begum, Noor Jehan, and Suraiya — all Muslim singers. Songs do not discriminate people whereas it unites. People discriminate each other in the name of religion. Discriminating people in the name of religion, thrusting age-old religious beliefs on others, and thereby, denying space and curtailing free thoughts are very much oppressive to younger generations like Smita and Bobby. The so-called liberal-minded hypocrites and the older generation refuse to accept and accommodate rational changes. Their stubborn, primitive, irrational religious notions are stifling from which Smita and Bobby want to liberate themselves. These hypocrites are really the sinners who deny freedom to the poor religiously oppressed voiceless people. Alka Tyagi writes: “Javed is not the only sinner. Ramnik, Aruna and Hardika — all have played their part and ultimately have to share the burden of guilt” (195).

The stone that cracked Daksha’s entire collection of gramophone records containing the beautiful voices of Shamshad Begum, Noor Jehan and Suraiya is symbolic of the unwieldy religious notions, which restrict and take away the freedom of the religiously oppressed, voiceless people. Unconscious and conscious fears and prejudices rule.
Ramnik, Hardika, Aruna, Smita, Javed and Bobby are all victims of religious oppression who lost their freedom and voice to the stifling and restricting religious notions. Every one has one’s own prejudiced, religious views. C.K. Meena’s observations in this regard are relevant here:

Ramnik is your average ‘tolerant’ Hindu who, at first glance, seems morally superior to his orthodox wife Aruna. But, as the play progresses the superficial nature of his liberalism is exposed. Aruna expects her own unquestioning faith to be accepted by her daughter Smita who, instead, feels stifled by it. Hardika’s deep-seated hate as well as Javed’s militance have their origin in childhood experiences. Unlike the provocative Javed, Bobby’s is the ‘moderate’ face of Islam that is ‘acceptable’ to mainstream society. But lurking within his lack of aggression is shame; he tends to be apologetic about his religious identity. (10)

Dattani clearly as well as tactfully puts forth the various sources of the problem. To arrive at a solution, it is essential to understand the problem first. Hence, by presenting the problem and its sources he suggests the possible solutions too.

Hindu-Muslim animosity has a long history. The roots of hatred are deep and require time and untiring efforts on both sides to root out hatred so that religious harmony is achieved one day. The unrest and communal violence in India between Hindus and Muslims has its origin in the partition riots. A sense of loss of identity and inferiority in the Muslims that they are less in number and the
resulting fear of insecurity are the aftermath of partition. This forms the basis for many troubles. Whether one is a Hindu or a Muslim, a rioter is a rioter. The Hindu mob from which Ramnik protected Javed is no different from the Muslim mob. The only difference is that they create trouble at different streets. People like Javed are swayed by the feeling that they are fighting for their motherland, to save their faith and to get four of their enemies for every one of them. The society makes people glued to their faith and history. They are compelled to think of their religion, custom and history but often with a negative impact. Further, absence of mutual belief is the cause of trouble between the two religions.

Aruna, a staunch Hindu lady, believing in purity and distaste for the other community; faces opposition from her own daughter Smita who feels that her mother’s unaccommodating religious sense stultifies her. She is too strict in her religious observations and believes that the entry of the two Muslims Bobby and Javed would contaminate the purity of her house. She feels it an intrusion into her religious faith. But this intrusion enables and empowers Smita to reveal her true sensibility and free herself from the stifling prejudices of her mother.

Ramnik with his entire superficial secularist’s image has lost his credibility as a trouble-shooter as he stands exposed of his hypocrisy. Smita emerges out as the fittest person with her radical perceptions.

Aruna’s all strict religious view has caused Smita “feel like a rat in a hole” (210). Smita feels that the home stifles the younger generation. The parents demand their children to follow their footsteps without questioning. The
children adapt to the changing customs and lifestyle. The parents fail to realize the amount of time spent by the children outside of the house. They spend a major part of a day out of their house with friends of their age. Naturally, they imbibe the practices to which they are exposed to. Smita feels one should run out of home at least for five minutes every day in order to breathe some fresh air.

SMITA. Maybe we should all run away from home like Javed. For five minutes every day. So we can quickly gulp in some fresh air and go back in. (219)

Bobby has been silent and unassertive initially. However, at the end of the play Bobby picks up the idol of Krishna and tells everybody: “He does not burn me to ashes! He does not cry out from the heavens saying He has been contaminated!” (224). Aruna is taken aback. She feels uneasy at seeing this act of Bobby. He tries to wake her up: “. . . if you are willing to forget, I am willing to tolerate” (225).

Bobby shows the image to everyone crying, “See! See! I am touching God! (224). He tells that the God does not mind being touched by his flesh. The God does not burn him to ashes crying out that the touch has contaminated Him. He says that the God rests in his hands peacefully because the God knows that Bobby cannot harm Him. The God knows His strength. Though Bobby does not believe in Him, He believes Bobby. Bobby tries to bring Javed and Aruna to their senses to shed their false pride. Bobby’s touch of the idol does not
contaminate it. The God is not infuriated by his touch. It is only the general view that contaminates and infuriates.

In many cases the hatred and misunderstanding arise out of some personal causes conveniently passed on as a common cause. Besides the age-old enmity between the two communities, hidden personal causes too form the basis for enmity. Daksha, Ramnik and Smita have personal reasons behind their grudge which surfaces in the course of the play.

Ramnik appears to be a secularist who saves the two outsiders Javed and Bobby from the Hindu mob. For Ramnik pretence has become a way of life and keeping up face is an essential survival strategy. At the end of the play it is understood that Ramnik’s secularist act is all because of his guilty conscience. The shop in his possession was bought by his father and grandfather at half its worth from Zarine’s father after setting fire to it in the name of communal riots. Hence, at the end he stands exposed, proving himself a hypocrite and not a secularist. Hardika hates the two Muslims in particular and Muslims in general because of her own personal grudge against the Muslims for killing her father on the streets during the partition communal riots. Smita, inadvertently reveals her anger over Bobby and Javed because she had to sacrifice her love for Babban to her friend Tasneem, sister of Javed. Her hidden love for Babban (Bobby) shows that love does not restrict itself to religion, caste and creed. Daksha, a Hindu, visits Zarine’s, a muslim’s, house. There is no discrimination. Zarine’s house is almost same as Daksha’s. She says, “Their house wasn’t very different from ours”(202).
Ranmik is not at ease because of his remorse for the black deed of his father and grandfather. His pretence is pitiable because it is his struggle to liberate himself from his nagging inner guilt. He offers the Muslims shelter, water, milk and a job for Javed to set right the black deeds of his father and grandfather hoping to free his conscience from the oppressive guilt. Ramnik makes it clear to Hardika that Zarine’s people hated her not because of their false pride or arrogance but because of their anger for setting fire to their shop in the name of communal riots. “It wasn’t false pride or arrogance. It was anger” (226), over the other for our own black deeds and the hatred remains forever, obstructing religious harmony. Ramnik, who is torn apart by the oppressive guilt, longs for freedom from this ever disturbing remorse. Satish Barbuddieh writes: “We have to oust anger from our lives if we want to live peacefully” (103). Anger is a hindrance obstructing peace. If the Muslims and the Hindus go on nurturing anger against each other, peace can never be a reality. Reena Mitra too shares a similar view: “Life can be lived peacefully only if anger is expunged from our gamut of human emotions” (93).

Religion thus has become a stifling and oppressive part of a man in his individual as well as social life. Instead of making one self-righteous it makes one guilty. It makes people fall apart discriminated. It restricts human beings to love one another but makes them hate mutually. The free vision and broad thinking of human beings are restricted by religious notions which compel people to think of a religious sanction for every action. Consequently, too much of restriction forces people to view religion as an unwanted burden on their backs.
Mahesh Dattani’s plays expose the hypocrisy of the people and how their notions of sexuality ostracize and oppress the “other”. In addition to the concept of sexuality, religion makes deplorable restrictions and intensifies the nature of marginalization. Finally, culture also plays its maligned role in manipulating this minority with its so-called stereotyped views. Hence the following chapter dwells upon culture and stereotypes.