Chapter – 4

Dialectics of Self-Affirmation in Mulk Raj Anand’s and Mahesh Dattani’s Writings
Most Indian novelists who write in English have a technical advantage over those who write in the native languages, Anand maintains, because they can imbibe the influence of Western writers and fuse the two values of East and West into a literature notable for comprehensive historical humanism.

This new humanistic approach, continues Anand, is characterized by detachment, engagement, and courage. Like a painter correcting his perspective by moving away from the canvas or a mirror held above phenomena, the novelist attains fuller comprehension by distance from the fray. Engagement, on the other hand enables him to achieve the passion fundamental to human experience and to human creativity. Finally only by courage says Anand, can the novelist discipline himself to say the 'unmentionable' things. The discourse of the fundamental human passions.... 'Poetry and courage' thus may sum up the aspiration of the novel in our time if such aspirations can ever be summed up.

As to how the novel may achieve this end, Anand responds:

The significant novelist broods upon human existence, feels himself at one with its sources, becomes obsessed in his soul with a theme, interprets experience, arranges the disarrangement, and produces a pattern, which may accord with the universal urges of man.  

In carrying out such a program, Anand prefers the Western dramatic method of novel writing to the oriental recitalist method. Chiefly on the basis of this dramatic as contrasted with recitalist narrative, Anand declares Tagore to be in the formal sense the first novelist of India.

Some people may wonder why... [when] before him Bankim Chandra Chatterjee had written copious fiction, I have chosen to call him [Tagore] the first novelist of India.... I want to differentiate between the old novel, or recital from the new novel in contemporary sense.... seeking the illusion of life through a dramatic sequence based on the a report or recital, which is a presentation of events in the light of the narrator's or someone else's external opinions.  

Among other things, dramatic method implies scenic presentation, dialogue, direct confrontation, and acting out of conflict. Anand does not, in his writing, discuss these matters much. He seems, however, to have them in mind when, asked about his theory of the novel, he writes:
The reason why I left philosophy... And resorted to the novel was because I felt that the illogic of logic in human life compels attention to insights into the characters and their slow inner growth. As also intuition, wisdom cannot be reproduced in didactic writing. The novel in its amorousness reaches the roots and corners of the sensibility and registers the conflict of feelings and vales in a more intimate manner.3

For instance, conflict in the plot structure of Untouchable is the analerotic complex of the puritan upper caste Hindus against whom Bakha is constrained to say: They think we are dung, because we clean their dung. My rejected hero can't put like a Professor of Psychology, but he says it in his own naïve manner. And his insights about the joy of the upper castes in seeing the our castes condemned to do the business of cleaning at the same time as they express disgust against the untouchable reflects the paradox of the puritan temperament, unified for generations into ritualistic orthodoxy. Only a novel can, with its imaginative suggestion, reach down to the metabolism and perhaps transform the reader’s consciousness by the empathy it creates, finding the rigid doctrinaire ideas, emotion, or myth.4

Anand’s defense of dramatic method against didactic writing recalls his conversation with Gandhi about the projected Untouchable:

(GANDHI) Why write a novel? Why not a tract on untouchability?

I answered that a novel was more human and could produce contrary emotions and shades of feelings, whereas a tract could become biased, and that I liked a concrete as against a ‘general’ statement.

The Mahatma said : ‘The straight book is truthful and you can reform people by saying things frankly.’

I said : Though I do want to help people, I believe posing the question rather than answering it.’

Gandhi said : As far as I Know, novels are generally about love and tell lies and make them gullible wit fine words.

I said : Novels are not only about love, but about anything on earth, if you value the thing and go behind it.’

This amused the old man.’5

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About dialogue, Anand in several places mentions the need for

'The skill be which the realities of life [can] be expressed in the short crisp sentences of ordinary speech, thereby refashioning the Indian languages.... Images and metaphor, [thus bringing writers] into daily contract with external and social problems and with the people.

In Indian novels generally, Anand sees a weakness due to the inadequacy of native phraseology for the sharp staccato utterance of contemporary industrial man.

One of the really insightful remarks of Anand relative to dramatic technique occurs in a discussion of the short story. Having remarked the subtle interplay of situation and character leading to climax and denouement in Western fiction, Anand observes that in Indian fiction the two elements are dissociated. Thus Indian stories, he submits offer merely a series of collisions, with little interplay of character and situation, unresolved crises, and abruptness of treatment. These faults Anand proposes to overcome in his own writings by adopting the more successful interplays of Western dramatic technique.

In dramatic characterization Anand's ideal novelist tries not to sit in judgment so much as to understand the motivations deep down in the subconscious minds of his characters...... the reasons for the hardness of heart and the evil nature of even those who become the instruments of oppression. The motivation, however, like the capacity of the human being for real growth,' are, at times, seen as determined by social and economic forces. Individual man reacting with industrial society creates the dramatic conflict which Anand sees as the heart of the problem of our time, the problem man. The challenge to Anand's novelist is to dramatize the interplay with truth, depth, and skill.

The Indian novelist writing in English, according to Anand, has a particular role to play in that synthesis of values sought by comprehensive historical humanism. He provides a kind of bridge between the values of Indian and post- Renaissance Europe, but also absorbing in the core of some of the most advanced thinking in the West and which our alien rulers concealed from us to a large extent by giving us a bad education or no education at all. Those truths chiefly concern the right and need of all men to freedom and equality if they are to achieve their potential. In Anand's literary theory this synthesis of the idealism or introversion of the East with the realism or
extroversion of the West, thesis expressionism, is an important part of comprehensive historical humanism.

Anand's literary theory thus derives largely from his Socialist and his humanist preoccupations. While Anand does not, in the available sources, refer to bhaktyoga as part of his literary theory, it is evident that he charges the writer with the responsibility of dedicated, selfless, personal service of his fellow man through literature, a role specifically defined in some of the novels as the writer's bhaktyoga. The novel form is, according to Anand, especially well suited for this end, i.e. as a vehicle for the author's message. In Anands's case this message is the evil of existent social, political, and economic institutions and the need for constructing a new society.

Anand's first ten novels, with subsequent reprints for some, were originally published and reviewed in England. Translations, especially of the first three novels, thereafter appeared in Russia (nine works), Holland, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Israel, Germany, Roumania, China, Spain, Malaysia, France, Hungary, Portugal, Bulgaria, Sweden, Japan, and several North Indian states. Many reprints of the novels, as well as first editions of the last three, came from Indian publishers, notably Kutub Popular of Bombay, a company which, by Sajjad Zaheer's account, Anand helped set up. In the United States—perhaps because of diminished interest in India during the thirties and early forties—Anand's novels have been little noticed. The Anand Bibliography lists only two printings here, both by Liberty Press of New York: The Coolie in 1952 and Two Leaves ans a Bud in 1953.

For the greater realism of his novels, Anand notes repeatedly, he used characters, situations, and episodes drawn from personal experience and recollection. 'I sought to recreate my life through the memories of the India in which I grew up,' he writes, 'with a view to discovering [its] vanities, [its] conceits and [its] perplexities.' Accordingly, the characters of the novels are

'the reflection of the real people I had known in childhood and youth. And I was only repaying the debt of gratitude I owed them for much of the inspiration they had given me to mature into manhood when I began to interpret their lives in my writing. They were not mere phantoms, though my imagination did a great deal to transform them.... They were flesh of my flesh
and blood, the obsessed me in the way in which certain human beings obsess an artist's soul. And I was doing no more than what a writer does when he seeks to interpret the truth from the realities of life. 6

Besides taking his characters from life, Anand pioneered, he says, in the choice of the poor as central subject matter for Indian novel writing:

'until I began to write about the outcastes, the pariahs, the peasants and the bottom dogs of my country and to resurrect them from the obscure lanes and alleys of the hamlets, villages and small towns, nothing very much had been heard or written about them in polite literature in the languages of our sub-continent...

I found myself going beyond the work of these three writers [Tagore, Sarat Chander Chatterjee, and Prem Chand] because the world I knew best was the microcosm of the outcastes and peasants and soldiers and working people... But, contrary to superficial allegations, there was not much self-conscious proletarianism in my attitude, as there was in many middle-class writers of western Europe, simply for the reason that I was the son of a coppersmith turned soldier, and of a peasant mother, and could have written only of the lives I knew most intimately.'

In attacking Indian institutions, Anand employs, in his novels, direct and indirect means. Direct assault occurs in the author's own commentaries and, in narrative or dramatic framework, as discussion and debate between characters or monologue and soliloquy of single characters. Indirect attacks appear in plots, settings, situations, episodes, above all in characterizations, as these are affected by Indian institutions.

Major social institutions which Anand portrays as wholly or partially damaging to individual human persons are caste, religion, aspects of sex and marriage, and system of education. In the scope of this essay it is obviously impossible to treat these topics in detail. The chapter proposes only to summarize what Anand has done with the subject and to give some examples. Again, it is extremely difficult to disentangle Anand's treatment of varna, caste, color, class, and communalism. Differentiation is further complicated by Anand's presentation of these categories in process of change, of revolutionary development. The discussion cannot possibly always maintain clear-cut divisions; it only hopes to suggest some aspects of
the human distinctions as, in Anand's novels, they affect India's emergence into the modern world.

Anand's novels present caste as only one element in the complex texture of social and economic particularism and inequality in Indian society. The author nevertheless sees this system as crucial, 'tying together all the other elements into a rigid structure. At every level of society the characters more or less precisely understand their caste positions and except for the reformers, acquiesce in caste cruelties. Thus the Brahman cook Santu, of the Indian regiment in *Across the Black Waters*, reflects on some new twists in the system, induced by the war:

They [the soldiers] were his superiors in rank.... Though they were inferior to him by caste, because he was a high-caste Brahmin. But his was the kind of transformation every one had long learnt to take for granted, because it was the prestige of rank and higher pay which was the proper measure of authority created by the Sarkar; the old distinctions between the learned man, the warrior, the shopkeeper and the rest were only subsidiary, applied on suitable occasions, but otherwise only retained in the official files. And to Santu, the Brahmin turned menial, every sepoy was a man of the higher species, "Sarkar," government. 

Among Anand's Brahmins, Santu stands nearly alone as a sympathetic figure. For, with untouchability, Brahmanism is a major target of Anand's attack on the Indian social order. Even Brahmins of lowly occupation-waterboys, cooks, other menials-are typically portrayed as grasping, hypocritical, lascivious bullies, distinguished only by circumstances and crudeness from temple priests and family chaplains. Such figures are Lachman of *Untouchable* and Varma and Lehnu of *Cooie*.

Major Brahman villains, however, are those in honored places: Pandit Kali Nath of *Untouchable*, who attempts the seduction of Bakha's sister; Mahand Nadgir of *The Village*, who connives with landlords and money-lenders against the poor; the temple Brahman who curses the *Cooie* Munoo because he cannot pay for 'free water'; Pandit Bhola Nath, who attacks the child Gauri in *The Old Woman and the Cow*; Munshi Mithan Lal, more vidusaka than villain in *The Private Life of an Indian Price*; Pandit Suraj Nath, the avaricious hypocrite of *The Road*; and, elsewhere, 'Swarms of miracle making, money grabbing, unscrupulous Brahmin priests,
wrapping.... All violence and infamy... in the habiliments of words and chants from the holy books. Such direct and indirect indictments of Brahmanism in India abound in the novels of Anand.

At the other end of the scale are the untouchables, about whom Anand wrote in his first novel, Untouchable (1935), and in his last thus far, The Road (1963). In the first especially. Anand depicts the filth, poverty, disease, and degradation of the sweepers of excrement in a country where the toilet is little known and elimination performed everywhere. Eighteen-year-old Bakha is probably too handsome, strong, intelligent, and sensitive for belief; his sister too modest and refined.

Direct attacks occur in the last section of Untouchable and are spoken respectively by the English Christian missionary, Colonel Hutchinson; Mahatma Gandhi; and by the young poet-editor Socialist, Iqbal Nath Sarshar.

The Missionary at first wins Bakha’s attention and sympathy by his account of Christ as the god-man who sacrificed himself equally for Bhangi as well as for Brahman. Then the missionary estranges the boy by his, to Bakha incomprehensible, stress on sin. Gandhi, invoking his own experiences, puts the case more powerfully; but he, too, relies on religious sanctions and the sense of sin:

While we are asking for freedom for the grip of a foreign nation, we have ourselves, for centuries, trampled underfoot millions of human being without felling the slightest remorse for our inequity. For me the question of these people is moral and religious. When I undertook to fast unto death for their sake, it was in obedience to the call of my conscience...The fact that we address God as the ‘purifier of polluted souls’ makes it a sin to regard anyone born in Hinduism as polluted – it is satanic to do so... All public wells, temples, roads, schools, sanatoriums must be declared open for Untouchables.

The strongest case against untouchability is made by the Poet. Setting religion aside, he attacks the institution as offensive on human grounds and hails the humanly contrived machine, the toilet, as the means of sweeper liberation:

Essentially, that is to say humanly, all men are equal...we must destroy caste, we must destroy the inequalities of birth and unalterable vocations. We must recognize an equality of rights, privileges and opportunities for everyone...the legal and sociological basis of caste having been broken down by the British - Indian
penal code, which recognizes the rights of every man before a court, caste is now mainly governed by profession. When the sweepers change their profession, they will no longer remain Untouchables. And they can do that soon, for the first thing we will do when we accept the machine, will be to introduce the machine which clears dung without anyone having to handle it—the flush system. Then the sweepers can be free from the stigma of untouchability and assume the dignity of status that is their right as useful members of a casteless and classless society.

The case against untouchability, presented so directly in the last pages of the first novel, reappears in the short late, The Road, almost thirty years later. Here the effort of an enlightened landlord, a rare creation for Anand, to unite caste groups and untouchables in building the read indispensable for modernization results, successively, in tragedy, collaboration, and reversion to separatism, but not without permanently affecting the untouchable boy, Bhikhu. In another procedure rare for this author, Anand omits all direct commentary in favor of a simple dramatic narrative which sees Bhikhu in the end take the new road out of the village Govardhan ‘towards Gurgaon, which was the way to Delhi town, capital of Hindustan, where no one knew who he was and where there would be no caste or outcaste. Anand has not missed the point that such a decision, credible in the 1960’s would have seemed unrealistic in Bakha’s era, the early 1930’s.

Anand’s depiction of caste shows, too, that no one is ever so low that someone else is not lower, that snobbery flourishes everywhere. Among the untouchables, washermen hold themselves higher than leatherworkers; leatherworkers insists on preceding the sweepers. Bahkha himself despises that beggars, a congeries of many castes. Munoo the coolie, a fallen Kshatriya, also feels superior to the beggars; he has ‘read up to the fifth class’ and has ‘served in a Babu’s house where a Sahib once paid a visit, The plantation coolie Gangu, also a Kshatriya, disdains a fellow collie, ‘because in his mind, the Bikaneris were all associated with low, ugly paupers and street beggars, and he still felt the pride of the once well-to-do peasant in his bones. Nur, of The Lament for the Death of a Master of Arts, himself deprived of a job, for being a confectioner’s son, cuts his friend and protector Garna because Garna is the son of a vegetable man.
Anand’s indictment of caste is complicated in some of the novels by his tendency to show it as yielding in importance to class considerations. Munoo, The Coolie, for example, declares:

Whether there were more rich or more poor people, however, there seemed to be only two kinds of people in the world. Caste did not matter, I am a kshatriya and I am poor, and Varma, a Brahmin, is a servant boy, a menial, because he is poor. No, caste does not matter. The Babus are like the Sahiblongs, and all servants look alike. There must be only two kinds of people in the world: the rich and the poor.

Equally strong passages occur in other of the novels. The tactic of underplaying caste or birth consideration in favor of rich – poor dichotomies and capital- labor oppositions is a major part of Anand’s socialist literary strategy. With few exceptions all the novels attack lalas, banias, and shopkeepers less as claimers of caste privilege than as more or less wealthy men who cheat and rob the poor. In the long run, however, class remains only another complication in the ancient system.

A striking example of the relationship appears in The Big Heart. Here Anand coordinates caste, class and communal affiliation with a completeness not apparent in Coolie or The Swird and the Sickle. Like some of Anand’s coolies, the coppersmith Thathiars claim ‘the second highest caste (kshatriyas), though they are degraded for following a dirty profession.’ The machine age has occasioned a partnership of production between Murli of the Thathiars and Gokul of the Kaseras, ‘a slightly more pretentious caste,’ which sells utensils made by the Thathiars. But Gokul ‘had never intended the partnership to involve eating and drinking with the low Thathiars, or to be on intimate social terms with any members of the community.

The aspirations of Thathiar Murli to move up, with his family, into the Kasera caste provokes a disunity among the coppersmiths which, added to the heretical workship of the Aga Khan by some of their women, the revivalist beliefs of peaceable Arya Samajists and fanatical Sanatanis, the quarreling of political factions, the worker’s blind fear of the machine, Ananta’s illicit liaison, and Hindu-Muslim hatreds fomented by the enemy prevent the successful consolidation of the workers against their Capitalist masters. In no other novel has Anand so attempted to organize a whole social, economic, and political picture. While his attack on Capitalism is, if
anything, more vehement that ever, his inclusion of caste complications renders his messages more that usually realistic.

Anand's condemnation of the caste system is epitomized in his account of the writhing of Untouchable.

[the hero is] a rare human being, whom I had known form my childhood and adored as a hero because he was physically like a god, played all the games superbly, and could recite whole cantos from the epic poem Heer Ranjiah of Waris Shah... I was not, however, remembering him in Boy's Own Paper mood of hero worship. Even on the level of commonsense reality, I was ware of his tragedy. That this otherwise near perfect human being was a sweeper who was always being humiliated by most of our elders on account of his low caste, was not allowed to go to school, even if his father had sent his (which he would not have), flawed his excellence, for no fault his. And though patronized because he was a good worker and obedient, he was suspected of leading all the young people astray and therefore was vigilantly watched and kept at bay. The contradiction between the inborn qualities of this youth and the down and out status to which he was condemned, may have been the cause of my broodings about him... I glimpsed the truth that the tragedy of my hero lay in the fact that he was never allowed to attain anything near the potential of his qualities of manhood.

Caste in India has traditionally been based on religion, on concepts of dharma and karma resting, in their turn, on a view of reality as essentially transcendental. For Anand, then, religion is the true bete noir.

Anand's most pervasive and bitter attacks against the Indian social order are directed against religion in the sense of a mystical appeal to trans-human forces and the expression of that appeal through 'superstitious' ritual. As usual Anand attacks through direct commentary and through dramatization. It is difficult to select any one novel as more relevant than another to this theme, all are permeated with the attitude that religion is the opiate of the people,' the major tool of Capitalists, landowners, money-lenders, merchants, and priests for subjugating the poor and maintaining vested interests. The attack focuses on two levels: the popular religion of the lowly, the illiterate, women; and the rationalized religion of unenlightened educated groups like the Arya Samaj, the Sanatanis, Congress.
The Village and The Road are strong in portrayals of popular Hinduism, with its fear of avenging gods, its personal ritualistic devotion to chosen deities, its notions of karma dharma, and maya as providing explanation for present suffering, motivation for present action, hope for future good. The end result of popular religion, as Anand portrays it, is fatalism, passive acceptance of present evils as somehow divinely ordained and best endured without revolt. Such an attitude is viewed as radically discouraging to social change and productive of what one character describes as the abjectness into which the gentleness of their religious faith and the power of their priests... had schooled them.

After Reggie’s assault on the coolies in Two Leaves and Bud an Sajani’s death from malaria induced by polluted water, the coolie Gangu’s religion of fatalism' leads him to remain silent, to suffer and to stifle the bitterness of his experience, to forgive, to cut the cancer of resentment out his heart. The Mohammedan fired of Maqbool in Death of a Hero shares with his Hindu neighbours, the traditional fatalism of the villager, who has accepted all kinds of tyranny as the inevitable punishment of the poor as the evidence of his guilt in the eyes of Allah. Begum Mehtab Jilani of the Same work philosophizes:

Life is cruel. As a woman I have known this truth. We have to accept because, in the eyes of Allah, we deserve punishment. The only way, son, in which the cruelty can be affected is by obedience to destiny. What is written in one’s fate will be.... We have to take our refuge in our love for our family and in our belief in God. 9

The women of The Big Hear reflect Anand’s version of popular Hindu thinking:

But the damp Fate which envelops the dark corners, the nooks and crevices of the festering lane, the Destiny which had played havoc with the moldering walls of the houses, reasserted itself as the two fatalists, Karmo and Bhagu, began to moan over their misfortunes, resuscitating heir belief in Karma, recognizing and accepting their role on earth as due to faults they and theirs had committed in their past lives and, overcome by self-pity, they shed tears and cried: This life is not worth living! All we can do is to do some good deeds and prepare for the next.
Count Rampal Singh of *The Sword* rehearses the common charge against the peasant that if the ryot is evicted or beaten by the landlord or his but burned down, or he falls ill, he sits patiently... thinking it is the will of God.' Such peasants are seen to scatter at the faintest gesture of disapproval from the priests,' and so 'God appeals to the imagination of the peasant and can still be exploited.'

Anand thus portrays the lower classes as resistant to change because of religious fatalism. The upper classes, on the other hand, he depicts as paying allegiance to the Vedic religion of the this Arya Samaj and, in that capacity, equally averse to revolutionary change. Anand's Samajists, educated, middle class men, generally aspire to wealth and status, work for independence chiefly for the market's sake, contemn the lower classes, oppose Communism, defend Capitalism, and decry violence as disruptive to Indian interests. Krishan's father in *Seven Summers becomes* a Samajist to improve his social position; Murli, in *The Big Heart*, invokes the Samaj as a status symbol. Anand's most prejudiced version of the Samjist- Congressman in Tiwari of *The Sword and the Sickle*, whose speeches reveal his biases:

I meet the peasants in the courts every day; they are a difficult people. They have grievances against the landlords, but they are grasping with each other. Almost all the cases I have handled for some time have been between tenants who have a little land which they plough patiently, and farm labourers who are jealous of the tenants. Even though they have themselves lost their property through sheer negligence and sloth... I have no faith in the morals of this mob of lazy farm labourers who really want to evade work. Look at the hundreds of them who sit in the roads of Allahabad, preferring to beg rather to do an honest day's work.

The riot has tended to become a crude, stupid earth serf, a boor, an uncivilized hater of all beauty, a slave of the soil.... His vision is narrowed, his soul is filled with superstitions and he remains at the mercy of his own nature, taking things for what they are, accepting everything as fate.

Our ancient rishis thought out all these modern western ideas hundreds of years ago, so we shouldn't slavishly copy Europe. And our ancestors understood not only the whole of organic life but the way it transcends itself and become super-organic, God.'
As in other respects, The Big Heart offers more rounded portraiture. In contrast to Tiwari, Mahasha Hans Raj here represents an Arya Samajist humanely and sincerely religious, if by Anand norms unenlightened. Like the important wisdom figure of the same novel, Purun Singh, Hans Raj has endured imprisonment and legal persecution for nationalist activities. On the debit side his is priggish and ascetic (usually a bad quality in Anand’s view), anti-Western, anti-machine, anti-communist, anti-Modernist, anti-violence, a defender of religious Capitalists, and an unswerving Gandhian. In urging his program, Hans Raj appeals to the mystical sense of religion which Anand deprecates:

The Western ethos has made machinery the New Messiah. The source of all higher and better life comes to man from his spiritual mind, but they are for abolishing personality. Mahatma Gandhi has said that it is every man’s duty to resist the Sarkar and the evils of Europe which are flooding into the country. Only the evil, remember, not the good. And the sage knows that our happiness lies in the acceptance of our duty which is greater than all petty considerations of want and family demands. We re men, and men owe obedience to some God of Higher Power like Duty. We must, therefore, submit and sacrifice everything to this higher thing which lives and acts through us, otherwise we are doomed. Our land has been known for the greater value it has placed on this higher power, on this something which is superior to us all.¹⁰

Attempting realistic characterization, Anand notes the tension of the Mahasha who, believing in the ancient spiritual splendour of the Vedic Age yet knows that most of the other members of the revivalist Arya Samaj, as well as the Congress, were the very men who, contrary to their religious ideals, where hastening the industrial revolution in India for profit. “These betray, according the Hans, the ideals of the true Samjists, who seek to purify life by giving charity and honouring the duty they owe to their dharma.

A foil for Hans Raj is Satyapal the student, a fanatical Sanatanist who, to the religious views of Hans Raj, adds hatred of foreigners, craving for revenge, and determination to burn and destroy the enemy as quickly as possible in the name of the Eternal Law. It is Satyapal, with his accomplice Professor Mejid, who precipitates final tragedy by inflammatory speech.
One of the indirections by which Anand attacks religion is the use of holy men, sadhus or ascetics. A few of these are merely escapists, like Sitalgar the Good who ministers to the Mahant in The Village and Dayal Singh of the same novel, who villainy. In Bakha's dream they stand in a cremation ground pouring the ashes of the dead into their hair, drinking hemp and dancing in an orgy of destruction. In Coolie Munoo observes naked ascetic growing lean by pyres of burning wood, surrounded by devotees with offerings of food, fruit and flowers; and yellow - robed, clean - shaven mystics, with clouded eyes intent on something which people called God, but which for the life of him Munoo did not Know and could not understand.

In The Sword and the Sickle holy- men provocateurs, engaged by Capitalist hired police, effectively disrupt the organizational meeting of the proposed Kisan Sabha.

The 'man of religion' par excellence in Anand's novels is Mahatma Gandhi. His name and philosophy are never far from the heart and lips of the characters, high and low alike. As in Untouchable, Gandhi figures importantly in The Word and the Sickle, when the peasants approach him in Allahabad to ask help in redressing grievances. He encourages them to patience, non-violence, all - embracing love; he does nothing to help them concretely.

Anand's portrayal of Gandhi is mostly. Along with adverse remarks, the first novel pays tribute to his campaign against untouchability, to his exhortation against fear, to his promotion of Hindu-Muslim unity, to his ability to unite the nation in its fight for independence. Later novels, however, pay more attention to what Anand portrays as Gandhi's pernicious effect on India. Referring to the Mahatma, Anand's 'approved' characters use phrases like absurd cow-protection activities, exaggerated humility, taste for flattery and for power over others, faked smiles of courtesy, detached, remote, bloodless asceticism, stress on sin, futile and apathetic doctrine of ahimsa. It is, however, Gandhi's lack of concrete interest on behalf of the peasants, his basic defense of most Indian social institutions, and his fight against technology that evoke strongest attack in The Big Heart as well as in The Sword and the Sickle. In one of the milder passages Purun Singh answers the questions why Gandhi, 'a worshipper of truth,' maintains friendship with the rich:

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While Anand’s novels show sympathetic acceptance of much Western thought in social as well as political and economic spheres, towards Christianity they display little understanding or sympathy. When Christianity does appear, as in Colonel Hutchinson’s preaching of the Gospel, Lal’s interview with the Bishop in Across the Black Waters, the love interests of Clara Young of The Old Woman and of Dorothy Thomas and June Withers of The Private Life, it is quickly dismissed as a religion productive of narrowness, easy toleration of war, self-indulgence, arrogance, stress on sin, and hostility to sex. A single vivid image in Death of a Hero is drawn from the life of Christ. Indian troops entering Baramula find

‘the body of Maqbool Sherwani tied to a wooden pole in the stables, with the word ‘Kafir’ written on the lapel of his shirt... The body looked almost like a scarecrow, but also like that of Yessuh Messiah on the cross.’

The original of Indian drama can be traced back to the Vedic period. As a manifestation of our national sensibility Indian drama came into existence as a means of exploring and communicating the truth of things and was popularly hailed as the “Fifth Veda”. Iyengar, defining the scope of Indian drama said that it was envisioned to “comprehend to whole are of life, ranging from the material to the spiritual, the phenomenal to the transcendent and provide at once, relaxation and entertainment, instruction and illumination”.

Bharata’s Natyashastra in Sanskrit discusses the minutiae of ancient stagecraft and displays consciousness of all major aspects of drama, namely, stage-setting, music, plot-construction, characterization, dialogue and acting. Sanskrit drama flourished under patronage of the court till the twelfth century but gradually ceased to be performed on the stage and entered a period of decadence which led to its virtual extinction. What replaced it was the theatre of the people and music, dance and drama was witnessed in varying forms. The “jatras” of Bengal, the fold plays of Tamil Nadu like Satharam, the “yakshaganas” of Andhra and Karnataka, the “kathakali” of Kerala, the “kirtaniya” of Mithila, the “Bhavai” of Gujarat and the Ramlila plays of North India – all these forms of entertainment had little value as literature but were characteristic of Indian culture, and represented a transition from the classical Sanskrit drama to the modern Indian drama. By 1920, a new drama in almost all the Indian languages came to the fore, it was a drama largely influenced by prevailing movements like Marxism, psychoanalysis, symbolism and surrealism.

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For certain reasons which need to be identified, the development of Indian English drama has not been able to keep pace with that of poetry and fiction. The theatre movement in English has always trailed along far behind the flourishing prevalence of Indian poetry and fiction in the same language. It was as early as 1871 that Michael Madhusudan Dutt wrote the first Indian play in English, Is This Civilization? There was, however, no follow-up creative dramatic activity for years, one reason, perhaps, being that the total commitment required on the part of the playwright, the actor and the audience could never really be co-ordinated for a living dramatic experience. Also, it is difficult to lend conviction to a dialogue in English between two Indians who normally converse in their mother tongue. The difficulties, however, have been overcome by many and the pre-Independence era saw the emergence of literary giants like Rabindranath Tagore, Sri Aurobindo, T.P. Kailasam, Harindranath Chattopadhyaya and Bharati Sarabhai, who, through their plays, gave a fillip to the growth and development of Indian English drama and opened up new vistas in the genre. This pre-Independence crop of dramatists, despite the poetic excellence, thematic variety, technical competence and symbolic and moral significance of their works, did not give enough weightage to the actability and "stageworthiness" of their plays.

One of the earliest Indian dramatists to show interest in producing drama for the stage was Asif Currimbhoy, hailed by many as "India's first authentic voice in theatre". His plays — The Hungry Ones, The Captives, An Experiment with Truth etc. reveal a social purpose, a philosophical basis and dexterous stage-craft. Currimbhoy is fully alive to the basics of theatre and maintains that "good theatre does not depend upon language or geography; rather it depends upon inherent situations, and of course, conflict." M.K. Naik, equally conscious of the prerequisites of good theatre visualizes the plight of still born playwrights who lack viable dramatic action.

Some notable contemporaries of Currimbhoy know for their contribution to Indian English drama are Nissim Ezekiel with a volume of three play to his credit, Gurcharan Das, who based his Larin Sahib, a play in three acts, "on events in the Punjab in 1946 – 47 .... Reconstructed from documents and letters exchanged by the principal characters" and Girish Karnad, who originally wrote in Kannada and then translated his plays into English himself. Shyam Asnani, critically evaluating the works of these playwrights, draws attention to the prevailing misconceptions about
the nature of drama. Drama, he says, is not just good literature, it has to be effective as theatre. To endorse his belief he quotes J.K. Styan's assertion that drama is a dramatic construct "realized" in theatre, where the word in the play - text becomes "fleshed out" as it were. A play is a living experience and needs a real theatre and a live audience. Recent attempts at experimentation in theatre - oriented plays are commendable and include works like Pratap Sharma's A Touch of Brightness, Shiv K. Kumar's The Last Wedding Anniversary and Balwant Gargi's The Knife.

Contemporary Indian drama in English translation has made striking innovations and successful experiments in terms of thematic concerns as well as technical virtuosities. It has been increasingly resorting to history, legend, myth and folklore drawing sustenance from their springs of vitality. Mohan Rakesh, Badal Sircar, Vijay Tendulkar and Girish Karnad are vibrant representatives of the India drama of the present times in Hindi, Bengali, Marathi and Kannada respectively. They do, however, also represent Indian drama at the national level for they dramatize universal aspects of modern human life in India.

While Mohan Rakesh presents the total absence of communication between one man and another in contemporary life, Badal Sircar depicts the existential attitude of modern man in the present times. Tendulkar focuses on middle - class life in India and shows the isolated individual's confrontation with adverse circumstances and hostile surroundings. He strongly believes that ideas are firmly entrenched in one's psyche at an early age and "our attitudes have a lot to do with what we internalize in our early formative years". Girish Karnad, the Kannada playwright, shows the absurdity of modern life and its passions and conflicts with the help of various myths and legends, his objective being re-interpreting of the past from the vantage - point of the present.

Often compared to luminaries like Henrik Ibsen and Tennessee Williams in his practice of stagecraft, Mahesh Dattani, the thirty - eight year old playwright from Bangalore, along with Manjula Padmanabhan, has given a fresh lease of life to Indian drama in English. Whereas Padmanabhan presents in her plays (for example, in Harvest) a dehumanized and unpalatable world, Dattani's works are less grim and forbidding though generally about the unwelcome and unpleasant things of life. What is most notable about Dattani's dramatic art is that the stage for him is no plain expanse of space but a complex multidimensional area in which vital incidents placed
in time may be viewed and reassessed, an area in which atmospheric details related to humidity and air – temperature, insignificant though they may seem, are not overlooked. The arena of performance for him is a space in which the written text of play assumes the form of an enactment and the use of masks represents a deep ritualistic meaning.

Dattani confidently challenges the traditional denotations and connotations of the words “India” and “Indians”. He places on them constructs that are far removed from the ones prevalent in modern theatre but are meaningfully related to social, cultural, sexual and religious issues that hold centre stage in life in the present times.

Mahesh Dattani has an array of themes to offer in his plays and the issues he chooses to project are the most topical but also the most controversial ones. *Seven Steps Around the Fire* is the heart – rending story of a “hijra” Kamala, who happens to fall in love with the son of an affluent minister named Subbu. When the fact of her being a “hijra” is revealed to people, she is mercilessly murdered. Her deprivation in terms of essential femininity instead of arousing sympathy and a feeling of compassion is looked down upon; she is discriminated against and ultimately murdered. A sense of horror and injustice prevails for it is not by choice but by sheer misfortune that she is what she is.

*On a Muggy Night in Mumbai* is a tragi – comedy that deals with the travails of the gay community. The play is like a charter of demands for homosexuals whose activities are absolutely taboo in the Indian society. Their sexual proclivities are still strongly forbidden by social custom and are greatly offensive to the prevailing moral and social code. Kiran is the play innocently remarks, “I really wish they would allow gay people to marry.” Dattani, here, clearly pleads for social sanction to homosexuals.

*Do the Needful* is another of Dattani’s plays that deals with the problem of homosexuality but what makes it different is that there is grafted onto it a love interest which cannot culminate in marriage because of communal consciousness in the Indian society. The play is a fabric of complex relationship, which expose the fact that the institution of marriage today has lost its sanctity and is nothing but a compromise to promote personal ends. Lata and Alpesh pursue their extra – marital love liaisons even after they have tied the knot, marriage being only an expedient mode of coexistence.
Bravely Fought the Queen deals with women from affluent homes fighting against patriarchal dominance as it prevails in India. The title of the play is derived from a poem in Hindi about the indomitable Rani of Jhansi. Dolly Trivedi, the chief protagonist, has to brave the onslaughts from her violent and unfaithful husband and her tyrannical mother-in-law, who, even in her paralytic, diseased state, holds on to the reins of domestic governance. The technical achievement of Dattani in this play deserves special mention for his realization of the stage as a multi level space in which time is perceived in its simultaneity and is projected as stratified and tiered.

Tara is predominantly a play about gender discrimination and about the Indian parents’ preference for a male child over a female one. It is the story of a pair of twins, a boy, Chandan, and a girl, Tara, who love each other immensely but are separated from each other by design. Tara, persistently maltreated by her mother, eventually dies. Though her death, Dattani demonstrates the unfortunate consequences of differentiation between children on grounds of gender.

Dance Like a Man is a play set in Chennai where dance is an integral part of life and a favourite mode of aesthetic expression. Ratna wants her daughter Lata to achieve distinction as a danseuse as she herself had been thwarted in her desire to make her mark as a dance artist because of the repressive patriarchal dominance exercised by her father-in-law, Amritlal, who expected all the members of his family to prostrate themselves before him. Rebellion surfaces in the family the very moment Amritlal breathes his last.

Where There’s a Will is another play in which Dattani’s recurrent motif of patriarchal paramountcy appears. A woman is generally looked upon as a commodity; her prime functions in marriage are to dance attendance upon her husband and to be an exciting partner in bed. This undemocratic nature of man is what repulses a woman, be it daughter, wife, daughter-in-law or mistress. The plot of the play revolves around the tyrannical patriarch, Hasmukh Mehta, who is a terror for the members of his family when alive as well as when dead. Even after his death there is no relief for them for he hovers oppressively around them as a ghost, persecuting them as when alive. The humour in the play, however, is a major redeeming factor and has its source largely in the interjections and asides of Hasmukh as a ghost. Also, Dattani’s depiction of a visible / invisible and audible / inaudible ghost extends the scope of naturalistic drama.
Dattani's *Final Solutions*, first staged in Bangalore in 1993, focuses on the problem of communal disharmony between the Hindus and Muslims in India, especially during the period of the post-Partition riots. The analysis of the cause of friction between the two communities offered by Dattani carries conviction as it is endorsed by a study of human psychology offering valid explanations of the proclivities and susceptibilities of individuals under circumstantial pressure.

The psychosis that prevails among the Hindus as well as the Muslims in India after the event of the partition of the country causes a chain of neurotic reactions to even the most inconsequential of happenings. Dattani's purpose in depicting the post-Partition communal violence in India at the very outset is not to convey to us events as they actually took place but to impress upon us the consciousness that a more primitive logic now prevails. The realization that there is a total absence of restraint in the perpetration of tragic violence leads us to the painful experience of confronting an advancing foe all set to demolish the human laws of love and mercy. Dattani, however, does not charge his descriptions of the incidents of brutality and monstrosity with feelings; rather, he offers journalistic reports of the events. He bypasses the emotional aspects of the historical situation because it is not to his purpose. He subordinates the specific events of history to an analysis of the situation as it prevails. His focus is on a "failure of understanding" between man and man.

No wonder then that in terms of performance Shwa's plays are anti-naturalistic. Dattani too takes up an issue and is out to prove a point but he does not allow the play to be reduced to the level of a discussion. Even in *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai*, which of all of Dattani's plays comes closest to a discussion, there is plenty of dramatization. It is true that all through the three acts there is no change of scene except for Kamlesh, Kiran and Ed moving up to the empty space for sometime during the second act. Almost the whole of the play is a single scene-Kamlesh has invited his friends to his flat. They-Sharad Deepali, Ranjit, and Bunny-comes and sit through the whole play talking. But it is during their conversation that the knots of the complex relationships open up. Kamlesh and Prakash were lovers once and Kamlesh found it difficult to cope with his separation from Prakash. Sharad helped him get over the trauma. The two were carrying on happily until Kamlesh jilted Sharad. On this particular evening Kamlesh has invited all his friends over to his place to make them promise that they would never mention his affair with Prakash to anyone, to his
sister Kiran in particular who has undergone the trauma of a divorce and is now about to marry Ed. Both the relationships of Kamlesh and Prakash were lovers once and Kamlesh found it difficult to cope with his separation from Prakash. Sharad helped him get over the trauma. The two were carrying on happily until Kamlesh jilted Sharad. On this particular evening Kamlesh has invited all his friends over to his place to make them promise that they would never mention his affair with Prakash to anyone, to his sister Kiran in particular who has undergone the trauma of a divorce and is now about to marry Kd. Both the relationships of Kamlesh and Prakash and that of Kiran and Ed are delicately poised until the revelation at the climax of the first act that Prakash and Ed are the same person. Though there seems to be little movement in this play, the characters sit together and talk and through their talk tension builds up to a climax of revelations and self-discoveries. Each act has its own build-up, its own dramatic confrontation and its own climax and revelation. And in this dramatic confrontation it is not just the characters who are involved but also the audience. As the play draws towards the end the true face of the characters are revealed and the audience is made to go through catharsis of emotions.

In the end Ed emerges as the most pathetic character, Kamlesh too loses the sympathy of the audience. But what the dramatist really wants to show is that it is not just the fault of the characters. It is the society that encourages such hypocrisy by not allowing the Individual to be what it wants to be. Society imposes its own norms one must conform to. Not following them is a sign of perversity. Homosexual relationship is not permitted-hence the entire hide and seek. Hence Kamlesh suffers, Bunny leads a double life-denies his own nature when he says he is ‘happily married’ Ranjit has chosen the easy way out by leaving India for Europe where he can be more himself, and Ed turns out to be the biggest victim of his own double game. An extract from the play explains the situation clearly.

Kiran: I really wish they would allow gay people to marry.

Ranjit: Oh, they do. Only not to the same sex.

Dattani is not interested in revealing where his sympathies lie but society versus individual is a theme to which he goes back again in Dance Like a Man. Here it is the family — family as the microcosm of society—that lays down its unwritten rules. Jairaj follows his heart’s desire and comes a dance but has enraged his father in
the process. Amritlal Parekh is disappointed because his son’s, dieas of happiness do not fit in with his. He says” I have always allowed you to do what you have wanted to do. But there comes a time when you have to do what is expected of you. Why must you dance ?"  (415) Understandably enough, it is no easy for Jairaj to dance to a different tune and there are times when he wonders whether it has been worth all the sacrifices. All his life he has tried to achieve perfection but has always made mistakes. It is only after their death that he and Ratna, free from the demands of family and society, are able to ‘dance perfectly. In unison. Not missing a step or a heel. “ (447)

To reach this state, they have paid a great price - Jairaj has compromised on his manliness and Ratna on her motherhood. One of Jairaj’s deepest regrets till the end is that he has not been able to dance like a man. Ratna has been a successful dancer but she has had to pay the price with the life of her son, Shankar and for the rest of her life the albatross hangs from her neck. So strong is the feeling of this guilt that the mere mention of her child’s name puts her off.

Such is life once a wrong is done it has to be borne all along. There is Baa, in Bravely Fought the Queen, a living embodiment of the past carrying her own burden of guilt. Her granddaughter Daksha was born a spastic because of her. She had provoked her son Jiten to beat his wife Dolly because her mother was her father’s mistress. The guilt hangs heavy on Baa once she realizes her fault. But the damage is done. She tries to make up for it by giving away her house to Daksha and making Praful the trustee. Nothing, however, can alter the fact that Daksha is not a normal child. The tragedy is writ large in the scene where Dolly reveals that her child was seriously disabled at birth by Jiten’s violence. She begins to dance as Daksha would dance - a disjointed movement that a spastic would make. There is not atonement for this crime the guilt must live on. Michael Walling, the producer of this play in London, gives the greatest tribute to the playwright when he says. “Isn’t that the way she dances?” It seems an innocuous line on the page. But this writing is writing beyond words: this is theatre.”

In Tara the context is different, the issue in question is different, but the guilt is very much the same - the ramifications are different. The play deals with the cultural constructions of gender that always gives preference to the male over the female. Tara and Chandan are conjoined twins whose physical separation is manipulated by their mother and grandfather to favour the boy over the girl. The
twins had three legs between them. The tests showed that the girl provided a major part of the blood supply to the third leg. Chances were that it would survive on the girl. But the mother had a private meeting with the doctor and bribed him to agree to give both the legs to the boy. The whole effort went in vain because the leg very soon became a lump of dead flesh on Chandan and had to be amputated. To think that it would have been part of Tara! The mother, however, becomes a psychological case. Her guilt eats her up from within and she does not live long. It is Chandan who lives with the shame of it all. He escapes to London, changes his name to Dan, and tries to repress the guilt by living in a strange land. Failing to do so, he tries to get over it by writing the story of Tara but ends up writing the story of his own childhood and discover.

The most remarkable element which Dattani highlights is the absurdity of the situation in which the woman is trapped by birth. In Bravely Fought the Queen, he presents the same picture: traditionally bound, organized and manipulated by patriarchy in all ages by established values, norms, roles, and gender perceptions, they are guided by idealism that prescribes unequal means, methods and routes to achieve the so-called "wholeness" for women, motherhood and wifehood being the dual crowns of womanhood. It is the man who has defined this unequivocal term, as motherhood is disciplined by males and they further justify themselves through religions, myths, science, politics, economics etc.

Homosexuality is another significant subject matter chosen by Dattani. In Bravely Fought the Queen, Dattani takes up the problem of homosexuality of a married man which ultimately mars his conjugal life. Old Baa's second-daughter-in-law Alka has to suffer the reluctance of her husband who is a big failure in his business, just because lie is in the trap of this dangerous sexual disease. The same theme occupies the central slot in the play A Muggy Night in Mumbui. Here it seems to be a hobby of the elite class of society. M.K. Naik calls it the record of "Their changing mutual relationship, their revelations, their self discussion and self discoveries, though they are all sailing ill the same boat; each has his/her own oar to put in his/her own flag to hoist." There is a female character Deepali, too, who is an aggressive lesbian. All characters -Kamlesh, Shard, Ed, Bunny, Ranjit and Deepali - seem to be of different constitution but equally defiant of the institution called marriage, ridiculing the wedding music in the final Act. Dattani's Do the Needful also
culminates in confessions of homosexuality by Alpesh whose hope for a better life is ruined for the same reason. Perhaps Dattani projects homosexuality as mode of sexual perversion which finally drags one down, isolating from the social platform, destroying conjugal relationship, forcing to suffer in solitude. It also points towards the postcolonial design and concept that is responsible for dichotomy evident in its continuous erosion of moral and spiritual values and discipline.

For the healthy growth of any art, both feeling and form should walk hand in hand. However deep and profound the feeling of an artist be, it fails to arouse poetic response in readers if it is not well formed. Both feeling and form are reciprocal. They are not two separate entities e.g. train and engine or boat and boatman; they are like a tree in which its different parts make an organic whole. A true art is meant for teaching and preaching. Its primary duty is to give delight; its purpose is chiefly aesthetic. History is replete with several instances where only those poets and artists reached the zenith of perfection who maintained a perfect blending of both feeling and form. Mahesh Dattani comes in this category of writers who champion the cause of true art, free from any theory, universal in taste and flavour, appealing to all sections of society, never bound to any caste, class and creed.

Mahesh Dattani puts the eternal question, with his play, Final Solutions, that every now and then rankles one’s consciousness - are the human beings real humane? It propels us to perennial problems as to what’s that one should have priorities - Religion, perennial ideals or compassion for other human beings. Besides studying these issues from a social point of view, Dattani also analyses as to how these issues alter the equations within as family.

Dattani has made a unique use of the Greek and the Indian theatrical techniques including the use of the chorus and the masks to communicate a story of troubled individuals engendering a disturbed society. He tries to analyse the root causes that fuel India’s simmering communal cauldron, though the dramatist himself confused for the consequences of it. There are two evidences where we found the dramatist’s great confusion. Firstly, in Act III,

CHORUS 1. A drop of oil cannot merge with an ocean of milk.

One reality cannot accept another reality. {Act III, p.40}
It suggests the dramatist’s defeat for establishing a harmony between the two communities. Whereas, in the same act, Bobby, the Muslim boy picks up the image of lord Krishna, cries out,

Your God! My flesh is holding Him! Look, Javed! And he does not mind! He does not burn me to ashes! He does not cry out from the heavens saying He has been contaminated! [Act-III, p.73]

Again, he says,

Look how He rests in my hands! He knows I cannot harm Him. He knows His strength! I don’t believe in Him but he believes in me. He smiles! He smiles at our trivial pride and our trivial shame.

Both these acts of Bobby suggest the dramatist’s positive approach or may be called the Final solution suggested by him of this predicament.

The dramatist also touches upon the delicate question of gender equations within an Indian family. The scope of time that Dattani’s play encompasses is vast with it stretching from the late 1940's to the present day. The script of Final Solutions was ready was ready in 1991. Dattani reserved the rights to do the first production in his hometown, and was ready to launch it in December 1992 at the Deccan Herald Theatre festival, the platform for all of his productions until then. However, in December 1992, riots had broken out in several parts of the country after the demolition of the Barbi Masjid, and the organizers of the festival thought it prudent to ban the play. Dattani came out strongly against the ban. Finally it was produced in 1993 at Bangalore.

At the NCP in Bombay, Padamsee put on a spectacular production of Final Solutions. In the beautifully designed auditorium, with a revolving stage surrounded by galleries on three sides, well trained actors, live musicians, a chorus with breathtaking masks and choreographed movements put on a spellbinding show. Padamsee traveled across India with his production. Since then the play has had several shows and continues to be popular with a cross-section of Indian and foreign audiences.

Dattani employs an innovative narrative technique. The whole play is presented as if it were viewed through the eyes of Hardika, the grandmother in the Gandhi family. Hardika can also be considered as a type of chorus because it is
through her jottings in her diary and through her reflections and reactions that the narrative progresses. In a very unique device employed by Dattani, the teenaged avatar of Hardika named Daksha is simultaneously present on the stage to inform us of the situation five decades back.

Ramnik Gandhi in the Gandhi household, represents such as the voice of restraint. He is a man with secular outlook and is an epitome of liberalism. His wife, Aruna, is lost in her own small world of daily ‘poojas’ and rituals and seldom involves herself with the exigencies of the outside world. Smita, the daughter, is a modern college going girl who shares her father’s liberalism but, does not make it evident till the very end when her father asked the reason, for remaining silence, she, as a dutiful girls, skilful replies:

Because...because it would have been a triumph for you-Mummy. And I couldn’t do that to her (Aruna is visibly moved by this remark to Ramnik). How easy it would have been for us to join force and make her feel she was wrong. How easy to just push her over because you will have me telling her exactly what you wanted to tell her yourself. (To Aruna) what would you have done? Shut yourself from us? We wouldn’t let you forget that the spirit of liberalism ran in our blood and that you were the oddity - you were the outsider! [Act III, p.60]

Here, Smita’s sound for liberalism stands for an individual. It suggests the individual’s cry for a freedom, neither for a Hindu nor Muslim. As an individual she confessed her true feelings before her mother that -

It stifles me! Yes! May be I am prejudiced because I do not belong. But not belonging makes thins so clear. I can see so clearly how wrong you are. You accuse me of running a way from my religion. May be I am...embarrassed, Mummy. [Act III, p. 57]

Well, cultural prejudice is one of the rigid causes for the communal riots. Aruna, Smita’s mother, does not allow any other caste to enter her kitchen and Pooja room. Moreover, she does not like Javed and Bobby, the Muslim boys, to fetch the water. When Bobby takes the Krishna’s idol in his hand, Aruna is completely finished. She breaks down:

Oh! Is there nothing left that is sacred is this world? [Act III, p.74]
Thus, culture and religion are the two sides of the same coin. In the other words, culture prejudice is mostly related to religions prejudice in the community. Hindu culture was hated by Muslims and the same on the other part. Muslims used to kill Hindus for that prejudice only. Poojari of Javed’s story is the best example of it. But Smita’s is the sheet - anchor for the dramatist’s hope for the Final Solution. If she says her own religion stifles her, it shows her unprejudiced belief in religion. Again, in her joke with Bobby and Javed, She naked the hypocrisy of our society:12

May be we should all run away from home Javed. For five minutes every day. So we can quickly gulp in some fresh air and go back in. [Act III, p. 67]

Into the opinion of Dr. Radha Ramaswany, this idea of the family as an oppressive social structure, perhaps another sign of a society caught between tradition and modernity, runs through all of Dattani’s Plays.

Another character of Hardika, the grandmother, is the most prejudiced of all as she carries a baggage of hate from the past. She believed that her father was beaten to death by a Muslim mob.

The instability of the outside world, soon distabilises the peace in the Gandhi family. This happens when two young men Javed and Bobby seek shelter from the blood thirsty mob out to eliminate them. The liberal and large hearted Ramnik allows them sanctuary in his place much to the resentment of Hardika and the anger of the Hindu mob baying for the blood of the two Muslims. The mob tries various means to lay hands on their prey, including reminding Ramnik that, he too was a Hindu and that Muslims were their enemies, who could never be trusted. Seeing that Ramnik would not budge from his stand of protecting the asylum seekers, they even threaten him, call him a traitor and stone his house. As often happens in such a charged atmosphere, the police who are supposed to play the role of the protectors go into hibernation and allow chaos to reign supreme. Aruna’s attempt to call the police for help goes vain with them untraceable. Aruna then becomes panicky and wants Ramnik to hand over the Muslim youths to the mob. But Ramnik is unrelenting and even forgiving at Javed’s uncivilized outbursts. When Javed apologises after calling the mob "bastards", Ramnik says,

Why are you apologizing to me? Of course, they are bastards. They beat you up, didn’t they? [Act I, p.24/25]
After making Aruna see reason, and getting her to agree at the barbarity of handing over the boys to the mob. Ramnik, in a chivalrous manner, stresses on the need for Bobby to be confident about himself and his wants. In spite of the puritanical Aruna being dead against entertaining Muslims in her house, Ramnik asks her to provide water to the boys, which is nothing less than sacrilege for her.

Meanwhile, the mob works its slogan shouting crescendo and warns Ramnik thus:

You mad-man! They'll stab you in the back! They'll rape your daughter! You heard us? Throw them, out! [Act I, p.28]

The Hindu idea of Muslims being barbaric community full of violent people is echoed by Ramnik when he says:

How date 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 ... (stops, but it is too late.)

Bobby, too points out to Ramnik That such riot-rousers like Javed are born because they are provoked into such despicable actions by the prejudices of the majority community. He narrates how Javed was leader in school and how one incident in which a Hindu neighbor labeled Javed and the Muslims as untouchables, changed his outlook towards the Hindus. Javed took revenge on the neighbour by dropping pieces of meat in his backyard. This incident robbed him of is heroic status and altered of course of his life forever. From then on, whenever he heard the Hindu religions bell such as the neighbor used during his prayers his temper rose. Thus, he became an easy prey for political parties to use him as a weapon to achieve their own selfish purposes.

This act of defiance gave people such as Javed a sense of pride. Javed, Hardika and the Hindu and Muslim chorus are drawn by a strong sense of injustice done by the opposite party and feel that by opposing the other community, tooth and nail, they are being patriotic towards their religion and towards themselves. This attitude of theirs could be because of the blinkered vision they possess which in turn could be a result of their lack of education and also because of the historical circumstances.
However, intellectuals like Ramnik and Bobby are not so sure of their responses. They are torn between a sense of fidelity towards their religion, the ideals of the people of their own community and a sense of what is right? Hence, they try to escape from the awareness of being a Hindu or Muslim. Bobby confesses to the same state of diffidence:

Ramnik: And yet you didn’t throw meat into your neighbour’s backyard?

Bobby: That’s because I was ashamed of being myself. He wasn’t.

Ramnik: Ashamed?

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.

Ramnik confess that he too had frequently wanted to escape from the confines of his religion. Hence he could empathise with Bobby:

Ramnik: We are not very different, are we?

Bobby: (puzzled), Hum?

Ramnik: We both feel shame.

Communal violence is not an isolated phenomena or an accident arising out the actions of one or two hot headed individuals. It is an organized crime, planned and executed in a professional manner, with the tacit support of the state machinery. The protagonist of communal violence share the same platform and are mirror images of each other. They are dummies of the people who care or damn for religion.

And are more interested in furthering their vested interests by instigating trouble. Javed talks of active police support for furthering his cause:

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?

However, Javed confess how very soon when sanity returns, people like him realize the futility and the horror of their actions. But by then it would be too late. They then regret being brainwashed into terror in the name of religion, patriotism and
self-respect. Javed remembers how he had been swayed by calls of Jahad and feels ashamed:

Now that I am alone... a hate myself. It was different when I used to attend the meetings.

I was swayed by what now appears to me as cheap sentiment.

[Act III, p. 50]

Javed remembers with disgust how he, after throwing the stone at the rath, was determined to stab the pujari. But, his good self overcame the bad and the knife dropped from his hands. However in the ensuring confusion somebody took the knife and completed the action for which he had set out.

Then in a well planned manner the chariot was broken and the pujari and the Hindu Gods felled. This communal flare up is thus a politically motivated action and also a result of the pent up insecurity of Muslim youths Javed who are constantly insecure of their minority status. The chorus: I suggests this:

What must we do? To become more acceptable? Must we lose our identity? Is that what they want? Must we tolerate more? Does our future lie in their hands? Is there anyone more unsure, more insecure than us? Oh, what curse it is to be less in number!

Meanwhile, in a related development Aruna widens the communal wedge by suggesting that the water with which she bathes her Gods would be contaminated by the touch of the Muslim boys. The height is reached when she sees no reason for the Muslims to be offended at this sight. She represents the Hindu majority when she says that they have no reason to be offended by her actions! While Aruna is the conservative face of Hinduism, Smita her daughter, like her father represents the liberal voice. However, unlike, her father for the love of her mother, she does not voice her priorities. Hence, she lives with her freedom stifled by the religiosity of her mother. She, like her Hindu father and the Muslim Babban, wants to escape from the strictures imposed by her religion. However, this escape would never be easy because the fanatical Hindus or Muslims would castigate them by labeling them pseudo-secularists. The Hindu chorus wants to revitalize themselves because:
Our voices grow hoarse. Our bellowing pales in comparison to the whisper of a pseudo secularist who is in league with the people who brought shame to our land. Half hearted, half backed, with no knowledge of this land greatness.

The split in the society brings in a split in the family. Alyque Padamsee, the director of the play comments,

As I see it, this is a play about transferred resentment... a play about a family with its simmering undercurrent. Ramnik, the father, transfers his resentment at his own father's black deed to his mother - Hardika - Smita, the daughter, hits out at her mother, Aruna when she can't cope with her hidden love for Babban, the outsider. Hardika, the grandmother, builds up a hatred for Zarine, her best friend, and her community because she herself can't stand up to her own in laws. Aruna, the mother, seems to be the best adjusted, until her daughter shakes her belief in her religion. Is life a forward journey or do we travel round in a circle, returning to our starting point?

Meanwhile, there is a brief interlude of love in the midst of hate when the love relationship of Bobby and Smita is hinted at. The three friends share light moments when they go to fetch water from the well. Here too the communal element creeps in when the liberal minded Smita makes Javed touch the sacred pot to prove that his touch is not going to pollute anything.

However, Hardika continues her harangue against the boys. She tries to tell the disinterested boys the story of the death of her father and tries to pin the responsibility of the incident on them. At that time a dramatic incident happens. Aruna enters after a bath and starts her daily Pooja when she starts ringing the Pooja bell, Javed and Babban advance towards her. In spite of her protests Bobby enters the Pooja room and picks up the image of Lord Krishna very delicately and respectfully. He wanted to prove that the Hindu Gods did not consider them idol breakers and were not angry and prejudiced against them. He says:15

Your God! My flesh is holding him! Look, Javed! And He does not mind!

(To Aruna)

You can bathe Him day and night, you can splash holy waters on Him but you cannot remove my touch from His form. You cannot remove my smell with sandal paste and attars and fragrant flowers because if belongs to a human

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being who believes, and tolerates, and respects what other human beings believe. That is the strongest fragrance in the world! [Act III, p. 74]

The end of the Third Act brings a final twist in the tale when Ramnik confesses that he could not bear to go to his shop again. For the first time he leaks out a burdensome secret that he had carried with him since decades. Ramnik says,

So it wasn't that those people hated you. It wasn't false pride or arrogance. It was anger. [Act III]

Hardika learns to her horror that her father and husband had burnt down the Muslim shop so that they could purchase it at half its value. Hardika is shattered to learn this and all of a sudden she realizes the futility of all these years of animosity. This confession connects the present with the past. It shows how rootless hatred is. Hardika had been very accommodating of the Muslim in her teenage years. She was very much attracted to Zarine and was fascinated with her family and loved Muslim singers. However, she was misinformed of the shop burning incident and believed that the Muslim anger towards her family was baseless. She has an idea that Zarine's father rejected her father-in-laws offer to give him a job because of his false pride. She, therefore, started hating the Muslims and was deeply prejudiced against them. That is why Ramnik's confession left them speechless.

Thus, Dattani probably suggests that the only 'FINAL SOLUTION' to this problem of communal hatred is to have fair faith on each other rather than trusting half backed historical details. One should unburden oneself of the malignant baggage of one's past and start afresh with the realization that neither the Hindus nor the Muslims can be wished away. One has to live together and the best bet is to live together peacefully. The dramatist's continuous attempt for the final solution of this predicament is also mirrored in his language of the play. For instance, in Act I, CHORUS 4, 5, ask,

Why did they? Why die they today?

Again, in the same act,


CHORUS 1. Why did they stay?

CHORUS 2. This is not their land. They have got what wanted. So why stay?
Thus, this word “Why”, puts before us by the playwright for some specific cause. Even though suggesting the final solution of the problem, he expects something from all of us. Certainly, a fair on each other will solve the problem but we, all, should have to practice on it sincerely. Millions of people belonging to different religions, believe in the Almighty.

Although no one has seen Him or heard Him, still people believe in Him only because of faith. No one has traced Him, still He lives in every heart where the candle of faith is lit. It is only because of faith in him that the virtues of goodness and honesty have prevailed in this big bad world. Faith in Almighty prevents people from doing any harm to the under privileged persons. It reminds us Milton’s welcoming words about faith:

O Welcome purr-eyed Faith,
White handed Hope,
Thou hovering angle, girl with
Golden wings

Here, the poet emphasizes on Faith that gives hope and hope inspires man to face life even during the times, when the going gets tough. Mahesh Dattani attempts the same in his Final Solutions by projecting the characters like Smita, Ramnik and Bobby who fight against the prejudiced of Hardika, Aruna and Javed their Faith.

To read Final Solutions as a play that preaches communal harmony would be reductive. Many among the middle-class metropolitan but nevertheless caste-conscious English language theatre audience, read and responded to the conflict between Aruna and Smita as that between tradition and modernity. Communal stereotyping is discouraged as Javed recognizes in himself and Aruna a similar pride in their faith.

Final Solutions contains many of Dattani’s trademark dramatic qualities. It is a family drama, and as John McRae points out in his introduction to Final Solutions and Other Plays, is thus part of the highest dramatic tradition leading from the Greeks to Shakespeare, Williams and Ibsen. McRae refers to several other features of Dattani plays, each of which teachers and students will find useful to explore in detail: Dattani’s technical experimentation with time and space, craftsmanship, use of a very
1990s Indian English idiom, humor, and his ability to reach out to wide-ranging audiences through his contemporary concerns.

Plays in Kannada, Marathi or Gujarati routinely stage more than one hundred shows and they play to crowds much larger. English plays in India have even enjoyed this comfortable sense of belonging. Girish Karnad can be described as Kannada playwright, Vijay Tendulkar as a Marathi playwright, and Badal Sircar as a Bengali playwright. Mahesh Dattani, however, is described as an 'Indian playwright in English.' The adjective 'Indian' used here is unnecessary in the other descriptions-their Indianess is, as it were, taken for granted. While Dattani enriches Indian English Language by applying the words like Sankar, matka, Gillies, Setline, Mohalla, Mithai, Duplatta, Jalebis, chokra and so on.

In comparison to other literary genres Indian English drama has achieved a little but in the hanging perspective the realms is full of fruit bearing possibilities. In this connection it will not be an exaggeration to quote R.K. Dhawan who observes: "Very recently Indian drama shot into prominence. Younger writers like Mahesh Dattani and Majula Padmanbhan have infused new life into this branch of writing."

Needless to say, Mahesh Dattani, a young man of only thirty-eight, is a promising playwright. This young playwright stands out in a group of high profile critics and writers. Dattani puts drama on a very high pedestal. In an interview with Sahidanada Mohanty, Dattani argues:

"We, I think this is a wrong perception prevailing among the academics, especially the view that writing for the stage is inferior to writing a novel or writing poetry. I think it is important to keep in mind that the playwright is actually craftsman. He is a 'Wright' and not 'write'."

Significantly, Dattani doesn’t write on conventional subjects. Dattani’s remarkable success with an Indian idiom is responsible, to a large extent, for the wide audience appeal of his plays. The variety of linguistic techniques that Dattani use to achieve this Indianess’, and whether this English is a pan-Indian language or region-specific, are matters for exciting discovery.
END NOTES


3. ibid., p-37

4. ibid., p-43.


