Mahesh Dattani is a keen observer of Indian society. Almost all his plays reflect and refract the complexities of contemporary Indian society. The remarkable point is that his tone and attitude is never didactic. The play Final Solutions is no exception to this and deals with the issue of communal riots. He exposes the nexus between politicians, police and public during the times of communal riots. Dattani is aghast and surprised to witness the conversion of friends into strangers when the religious matters crop up. Final Solutions is a magnificent work that attracted the critics worldwide and ultimately in 1998, he won the Sahitya Akademi Award for his collection of plays Final Solutions and Other Plays. Dattani considers the play as a “turning point in his career as a playwright, it is deeply entrenched in the question of multiple identities that become enmeshed with familial identities – issues that we shall consider elsewhere. (Chaudhuri 39)

It would not be out of plays to remind ourselves that India has a rich living tradition of theatre for millenniums and also has faced several religious conflicts in past extending to the present. Religious conflict in South Asia has also been called religious communalism which appears to be a product of ideological differences but in truth, it is nothing but political maneuvering of social issues sprung from self-interests of politicians. The historian Gyanendra Pandey rightly accuses the British colonizers for creating the immense religious communalism present in South Asia, by firmly categorizing South Asian as either Muslim or Hindu. Thus, in the eyes of the British, South Asians were members of communities first, and individuals, later. This emphasis put on community would eventually lead to the creation of political institutions that dominate India today such as vote-bank politics. As Arjun Appadurai states, “…exoticization and enumeration were complicated strands of a single
colonial project and that in their interaction lies a crucial part of the explanation of group violence and communal terror in contemporary India” (115). Historian David Ludden also opines in the same vein: “In India, communalism is based on the fundamental idea that Hindus and Muslims constitute totally separate communities in essential opposition to one another…It represents each collective identity as a community alive through all time, it enables past memories and emotions to fill the present and each Hindu and Muslim to become a sentient vehicle of communal experience” (12).

India was partitioned in 1947 with the assumption that the two communities would live peacefully but the tension was never ever lessened; rather it has been mounting continuously. Historian Romila Thapar notes that since the partition, communalism in India has permeated 'sensitive' aspects of everyday life (5). Despite India’s secular government and long history of religious pluralism and tolerance, since 1947 there have been a number of violent conflicts between Hindus and Muslims. Yet, the violence that followed the Babri Masjid demolition in 1992 was not the product of inevitable tensions between Hindus and Muslims, but the product of the politically-motivated theatrical events of the Hindu Right that had been simmering because of the continuous minority appeasement.

Muslims and Hindus are not the only victims of religious violence in India. In 1984, India’s Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, was assassinated by her two Sikh bodyguards in retaliation for her ordering the Indian Army to storm the Golden Temple in Amritsar to capture Sikh terrorists taking refuge there. Following the assassination, thousands of Sikhs were murdered throughout India, with the worst violence occurring in New Delhi. In 2008, Christians living in the state of Orissa were the targets of religious communalism instigated by Hindu nationalists.

In the last four decades or so religion has so deeply, steeped into the minds of Indians that it has made people to equate their self-respect with their religion. And any assault that is made on their self-respect is avenged by a series of attacks, murders and rapes on the rival
community. India is a witness to the long historical developments in 30 years in its agency of theatre as well as communal violence. Using the power of theatre in the nation, *Final Solutions* is a plea for the end of communal violence in India, with one of the worst examples being the Ayodhya Dispute. Regarding this dispute, Vijay Nair observes:

All his early plays premiered in a theater festival organized by Bangalore’s leading English newspaper at the time, the *Deccan Herald*. That is, until he wrote a play called *Final Solutions*. In 1992, the Babri Masjid, a Muslim mosque in the city of Ayodhaya, considered by the Hindus to be the birthplace of their god Ram, was demolished by a rampaging mob. The aftermath of that event led to a flaring of communal tensions and sparked riots between Hindus and Muslims in many Indian cities. *Final Solutions* was Dattani’s response to the violent events and a plea for tolerance.

Here we must not forget that the civil rights of Shahbano were turned down by the then Indian government who reversed the Supreme Court decision in the Parliament which forced even the broad-minded liberal Hindus to think on the communal line resulting in the Fall of the disputed structure. *Final Solutions* was Dattani’s response to the violent events and a plea for tolerance. In this connection, K. Satchidanandan observes:

Communalism being the worst form of materialism divorced from being anything that is sacred and oriented towards worldly wealth and power, can truly be combated by a higher form of the sacred that combines the secular ideal of human equality, democratic awareness, identification with the suffering alleviation of by poverty to resistance to a deep inner inquiry and belief in the holiness of all forms of life, those who turn religion as mean to attain state, power and world status are indeed the most irreligious of all, for they profane the most hallowed on usurp even the last refuge of the spirit from a world where the best lack all the conviction and the worst are full of passionate intensity by joining the ignorant armies that class might. (112)

For Dattani, his plays are a medium to reflect the reality of the society, as well as to provide a space for solutions. Final Solutions projects two generations, who have been the victims of communal violence and have different approaches towards communal violence.
The play, due to its theme and popularity, was translated into Hindi by Shahid Anwar. It was first performed by Dattani and Preetam Koilpillai and group at the Guru Nanak Bhawan, Bangalore on July 10, 1993. It was staged just after the event of Mumbai riot. In 1998, it was performed in Hindi, directed by Arvind Gaur for Asmita Theatre.

The well-known stage director Alyque Padamsee is very sensitive when he comments on the play: “The demons of communal hatred are not out on the street… they are lurking inside ourselves.” (CP 161). He exposes how the self-interests of some vested groups are served by the communal riots. Hegelian dialectics holds true about the conflictual relations that occur in every aspect of society leading to thesis and antithesis but when it comes to communal riots, synthesis vanishes. Politicians colour these conflictual religious issues into deep hatred to such an extent that the ultimate product is communal riots. Humanity and compassion towards fellow beings get submerged under the venomous hatred born of religious hostility. Heart predominates over mind with religious sensitivity reigning over logical reasoning. The loss of mind brings the people in the category of mob that works but never uses mind. They are feared and emotionally blackmailed that if they will not come out on the issue, their religion is in danger. As Padamsee 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 fear and anxieties. (CP 161)

The above comment is true in the context of the play in which chorus No 4 and 5 use their mind, symbol of the Hindu representatives, in the beginning but they get more aggressive till their questions become statements. By the end of it, they are an unruly mob crying out for blood. So the man, he becomes part of the mob, ceases to be the same rational man. He never thinks on the fact that the hatred and distrust that would be created in society will last for a long time. As Hardika, an old female character in the Final Solutions, remembers her past and when the communal riot occurs again after 40 years she tells: “After forty years… I opened my diary again… Yes, things have not changed that much.” (CP 69)
In this context, the very insightful and sharp analysis of the nationalist conceptualization of India’s Islamic legacy is taken up by Dattani in his well-performed play *Final Solutions*. Dattani complains scathingly about the fundamentalists’ use of religion as the most potent weapon to destroy the communal harmony so that they can meet their abysmally cheap ends. The symbols of religious identity are very aptly used to provoke the masses that would turn them into a fanatic, aggressive mob at the most appropriate moment. Religion is a mere ploy in their hands to further their interest in life and cherished their desired goal. Identity politics underlying the Hindu-Muslim tension in India has to be clearly grasped to explain the causes of communal riots as well as large scale killings that have taken place in recent years. These are the some issues which Mahesh Dattani foregrounds as a serious socio-political problem plaguing our nation today – the communal disharmony between Hindu-Muslim in *Final Solutions*, dealing with the recurring rhetoric of hatred, aggression, the monetary and political exploitation of communal riots, the chauvinism and parochial mindset of the fundamentalist, in the context of the India of the 1940s interspersed with contemporary India.

Dattani has accepted in his interview that he is not a devout Hindu believing in rituals. His concern has been more with gender discrimination and homophobia rather than religion and its communal off shoots. It would appear that Dattani’s social consciousness led him to address the contemporary social issue of religious communalism in 1991. However, unlike gender discrimination and homophobia, which Dattani had been exposed to in his career as a Bharatanatyam dancer, religious conflict was an issue that didn’t affect him directly. For Dattani, the importance of religion was limited to just a cultural heritage that he has bequeathed as legacy from his devout religious parents. Dattani enjoys visiting temples and has images of the Hindu deity Ganesha hanging on the walls of his apartment. Since he had never been a victim of communal hatred, he had not been very sensitive towards the issues born of religion. And so *Final Solutions* didn’t originate in his mind; rather it originated in the
mind of Aleque Padamsee, the celebrated Indian advertising and theatre personality. It was Padamsee’s concern with communal conflicts that he approached Dattani to write a play on communal riots— as aspect of societal conflict to be addressed through the medium of theatre.

Dattani asserts that Final Solutions would never have come into existence if it weren’t for Padamsee, who "was most concerned with the rise of religious fundamentalism and was certain of a pogrom brewing that would destroy the cultural harmony of the country yet again." (MMP 30). He remembers Padamsee’s role in the improvisation in which two Muslim boys were running away from a mob that was out to kill them and who sought shelter in a Hindu household. This improvisation made Dattani see the dramatic possibilities in the plot and started writing the play Final Solutions. Several incidents of communal riots in Gujrat made Dattani, himself a Gujarati, ponder over the issue who explains his reasoning behind the setting of Final Solutions in Gujarat:

I had interviewed a factory owner [in Gujarat], where just a couple of days before I met him, there was a huge riot in his factory, because a Muslim drank...they had separate pots of water, drinking water, for Hindus and Muslims. Something about not enough water, or there was not enough pots, so he drank from one and there was bloodshed and he was beaten up and suddenly I realized that you know, Gujarat, has this veneer of being polite and peaceful and humble and of Gandhi and all that, and then there’s this violence that’s been simmering and it just needs some kind of explosion and then it ignites. (Padamsee Interview 2010)

After Dattani finished an initial copy of the script, Padamsee organized another improvisation with actors in Bombay and Dattani edited the play based on the suggestions that came up during the process (Padamsee Interview 2010). By December of 1992, the play was complete and in rehearsals for its premiere performance at the Deccan Herald Theatre Festival in Bangalore. However, religious communalism, the social issue that Dattani was trying to address with Final Solutions, would prevent the play’s premiere that year. The play would not have a life on stage until seven months later. Padamsee was an immense help with getting Final Solutions back on its feet. Dattani notes that although Padamsee “with all his
wisdom, managed to get it passed through the censors”, even with an advertizing legend like Padamsee who “attracts all the big sponsors, this was one play which none of his sponsors were willing to buy”. Not deterred by this, Padamsee invested his own personal savings into the play and “made it possible for Final Solutions to have a life on stage” (Padamsee Interview 2010).

When Padamsee and Dattani decided to have a premier of the play "a whole section of the auditorium was filled with practising Muslims who were keen to see the play." (MMP 31). The important thing was that the actor who had played the role of Javed was not a Muslim and this gave Dattani the confidence in the power of the dramatic art. He observes, “This is what marked my departure as a playwright. I wanted my writing to explore areas that people wanted to be kept in darkness. In doing so, I was clearing the clouds that loomed over my life and my identity as a dramatist.” (MMP 32)

The year 1947 was an important year for both the communities. Freed from British Colonial Yoke, a section fragmented from Muslim community formed Pakistan based on theocratic principle. Whereas, a major section of Indian Muslims decided to stay in their own county, India, founded on the principles of democracy and secularism. While the political establishment was celebrating the achievement of Independence and the formation of sovereign states, ordinary citizens were reeling from the shock of neighbours turning on each other and the dislocations where many were uprooted from the homes their families had lived in for generations. Although there have been several literary representations of the violence, of this traumatic severing of countries on religious and ethnic lines, there has been very little attempt in literature to link what is now obvious to most sociologists and even to the layman.

The point that has been pushed to the periphery is that the issues of communal tensions and fault lines with which India is grappling today had been sown during 1947 partition by the politics of the time and the religious fanatics. They did not lose anything but the brethren suffered as a result of their actions. Partition and consequent slaughters sowed
hatred, mistrust animosity and anger which both the religious community has in their psycho
and it keeps surging up into communal tensions intermittently. *Final Solutions* is a rare
literary/dramatic text that connects our contemporary context with the unforgiving trauma of
1947. This play places a modern liberal family in the middle of a communal riot—while two
Muslim men seek sanctuary from the fundamentalist Hindu mob baying for their blood
outside the house, inside the Hindu family must face their own demons—of the past as well as
the present. How far is the past from our here and now?

The play opens with the image of five masked individuals dressed in black. Dattani
has labeled this group of characters “the Mob/Chorus”. Each member of the Mob/Chorus
has two masks: a Hindu mask and a Muslim one. The Mob/Chorus remains on top of a large
crescent-shaped ramp for most of the play. Beneath the ramp is the home of the Gandhis, a
middle-class Hindu family, in present-day Amargaon, Gujarat. The Gandhi family comprises
the elderly survivor of the partition of India and Pakistan, Hardika (who was earlier known as
Daksha), her son Ramnik, her daughter-in-law Aruna, and her granddaughter Smita. On
another level of the stage is Daksha’s room in 1948. Thus the play is divided into three
spaces: the realm of the Mob/Chorus, the home of the Gandhi family, and the memory of
Daksha. At various points in *Final Solutions* these three separate worlds interact and overlap
with each other.

The play begins with the scene of destruction of the chariot and images of Hindus
deities during the RathYatra festival while the Yatra is bypassing the Muslim majority area of
the city closely/nearby. Consequently, riots have erupted in Amargaon and curfew had been
imposed in the city. The mutual trust has been shattered that existed between both the
communities and they are shown holding each other for the prevalent disharmony in the form
of the riots.

The communal violence between these groups brings back Hardika’s memories of the
partition and her life as a new bride in 1948. Her memories are expressed throughout the play
through the character of Daksha who is shown reading from her diary. The Gandhi family is safe within their home and although Smita is worried for the safety of her Muslim friend, Tasneem Ahmed, the family is having a relatively peaceful evening. This tranquility is disrupted when Bobby and Javed, two young Muslim men, arrive at their doorstep begging to be let inside. The Mob/Chorus, who has donned their Hindu masks, are after Bobby and Javed and threatening to kill them.

Hardika and Aruna have their own reasons for which they are unwilling to open the door of their home to Bobby and Javed. Hardika's reasons are personal and are a result of his father's murder by the Muslims, whereas Aruna is an out and out Hindu devout and for religious reasons she is unwilling to let them enter her household. Hardika still harbors resentment against Muslims due to the events that had occurred in her life following the partition and thus protests against Bobby and Javed’s presence in her home. Through the character of Daksha, the audience is able to slowly see the two factors that are the source of the adult Hardika’s animosity towards all Muslims. The first was the murder of her father in her hometown of Hussainabad, which became a part of Pakistan during the partition.

The second reason for which she is reluctant to give space to Bobby and Javed is the physical and mental treatment of torture that was meted out to her when her in-laws and husband learnt about her relationship with Zarine, her Muslim neighbour. Her son Ramnik is a secular Hindu and much more hospitable to the boys. However, the audience later learns that Ramnik’s kindness is partly driven by the guilt he feels over running the business his father acquired by cheating Zarine’s family after the partition. Ramnik’s wife Aruna is a deeply devout woman who feels extremely uncomfortable with Muslims sitting in her home and drinking water from her glasses. She believes that their touch is polluting.

Smita, Ramnik and Aruna’s daughter, is also very uncomfortable with Bobby and Javed’s presence, but for a different reason. Prior to the actions of the play, Smita and Bobby had a brief romance with each other, which they later decided not to pursue. Now Bobby is
engaged to Javed’s sister and Smita’s friend Tasneem. Smita also struggles with her relationship with her mother, whom she describes as “stifling” her with religious rituals. Bobby, whose real name is Babban, is a secular Muslim who tries to hide his religious identity. Javed, on the other hand, is a Muslim youth with a strong sense of identity. After becoming a victim of religious prejudice during his childhood, Javed has started working as a hired hoodlum who is paid to start riots. In fact, he was one of the rioters who disrupted the Rath Yatra. Bobby has been trying to persuade Javed to give up his profession.

The most important part of the play centres on the single night when each of the six different characters encounters each other under the same roof. Though there is a sense of discord and disharmony among them yet even in such a tense atmosphere, dynamism has been impacted by their encounters; old alliances are broken and new alliances are formed again to be broken. The static religious boundaries are dissolved to allow some space for new boundaries. The play reaches its climax in the early hours of the morning when Bobby enters the Gandhi family pooja (prayer) room and picks up the image of the deity Krishna to Aruna’s great distress. The Mob/Chorus in both Hindu and Muslim masks begin to pound the floor in rhythm. Bobby proclaims that he is touching God and nothing is happening to him. Upon seeing Aruna’s horror he tells her “if we understand and believe in one another, nothing can be destroyed”. He then turns to Hardika and states, “And if you are willing to forget, I am willing to tolerate.” (CP 63). Bobby and Javed exit and join the Mob/Chorus on the ramp.

Ramnik unburdens himself after the departure of Bobby and Javed and tells Hardika about their own sin of destroying her friend’s family business. Upon hearing this Hardika realizes that the real reason why her in-laws forbade her friendship with Zarine was not because Zarine was a Muslim, but because they were trying to cover up their own crime. Crushed, Hardika asks Ramnik why he didn’t tell her this earlier. Ramnik claims he did not want her to have to live with the guilt. Hardika then asks “Do you think - do think those boys
will ever come back?” Ramnik replies, “If you call them they will come. But then again- if it’s too late-they may not” (CP 64). The seeds of mutual hatred and bitterness again make Javed and Bobby stand amongst the masked Mob/Chorus and thus the play ends.

Language is used as tool of empowerment as the protagonists are given access to the tongue of the elite class and a person is identified by the quality of English s/he speaks. Roopa in Tara is identified as less educated class. Daksha was of a generation of pre independence India when girls continued to be married at a tender age with little education. When she reads out from her diary about the memoir of her past, her words at once become mixed up with formal language and the Indian vernacular in a perfect blend to give it a shape of indigenous English which is witnessing more and more of code-mixing and code-switching over the years. The terms she uses as khoja woman, tonga-driver, smoking a hooka (CP 175) are examples of code-mixing. Again terms like galli (lane), charpai (cot) Baap re! (Sign of surprise, exasperation), wagh (tiger) (CP 175) etc. in running sentences add to code-mixing. Dattani often uses these devices to enhance the effect on the audience by using several Indian words like pooja room, mohallah, rath, poojari, chokra teasing the girls, pooja-paath, pallav, mehandi, baap re!, hookah, galli, paan, haram ki aulad, matka, sethani, topi, karma, supari, gaddar, dupatta, mere own khoon ne mujhhe maar daala. Daadi, attars etc.

The playwright is successful in making the themes and characters appropriate and relevant. We realize that the audience and the stage players become one as what is played on stage is what we encounter every day, yet we fail to deliberate for a solution. Javed is close to any tragic hero like Hamlet with the only difference that the former repents his action and the later suffers procrastination of inacting, but both of them undergo a change of heart and an existential dilemma. Both Javed and Aruna are archetypal characters, who cling to their faith and live with their past. She cannot see that Muslim touches her God or bring water for drinking or puja purposes and the same we see, as common characteristics of all religious faiths, off and on in Indian society.
One of the solutions as suggest to understand God in a better way by shunning away from any prejudice and by living a life on individual pattern the way Smita and Bobby have adopted Dattani has put forward for us all to understand. As a final solution, Bobby decides, “one final deed to be done.” (CP 223) and while Aruna stops him coming near the puja room, Bobby picks up the idol, “See! See! I am touching God!” (CP 224). The mob/ chorus as public voice support it with pounding voice that they are not idol breakers. Bobby shows that God is not so silly to burn someone into neither ashes, nor He minds any human touch and “He does not cry out from the heavens saying He has been contaminated.” (CP 124)

The final scene is the crux of preceding dialogues wherein Javed shows that God is in love with every creation regardless of their religion. God places the spirit of humanity above every religious pedestal. God doesn't discard other religious community rather God discard the Shams and hypocrisy prevalent in religious deprived of humanity:

See, Javed! He doesn’t humiliate you. He doesn’t cringe from my touch. He welcomes the warmth of my hand. He feels me. And He welcomes it! I hold Him who is sacred to them, but I do not commit sacrilege. (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 it belongs to a human being who believes, and tolerates, and respects what other human beings believe. That is the strongest fragrance in the world! (CP 224-225)

Bobby sees himself as a human being who believes, and tolerates, and respects what other human beings believe. Bobby's liberalism troubles Aruna who believes in purity strongly and thus she wants to know if there is anything left sacred in the world. Bobby answers so truthfully:

The tragedy is that there is too much that is sacred. But if we understand and believe in one another, nothing can be destroyed …. And if you are willing to forget, I am willing to tolerate. (CP 225)

This reminds us of the great Shakespearean dictum, "forget and forgive". No rules and regulations can restore the harmony between Hindus and Muslims but their own forgetting
and forgiving. Mutual respect and mutual understanding are the only pillars that would ensure peaceful existence for Indians. The shocking revelation of the play is reached in revealing a big secret from Ramnik to his mother Hardika of his family. The mercenary gain that one party derives from the communal riots of the past is the baggage of guilt of his father's 'black' deeds that Ramnik has carried for long. The shop of Zarine, Hardika's friend, had been burnt down by Ramnik's father and grandfather in the name of communal hatred. After which they bought it at a fraction of its cost. Ramnik clearly acts out of a personal motivation – his sense of guilt is the driving force behind his conscious and structured liberalism. That's why he was offering a job to Javed in that same shop just to amend his forefather's misdeeds. Ramnik has never revealed the guilt of the past to his mother, saving her the weight of the burden that he has had to carry all alone. It also explains the reasons for Ramnik's extreme tolerance. And when this is revealed to a crushed Hardika, who seemed secure in her hatred of the other party, shatters her sense of being in the right. She asks Ramnik:

   Hardika. Do you think … do you think those boys will ever come back?

   Ramnik. If you call them they will come. But then again – if it's too late – they may not. (CP 226)

   After the last lines of the play, there has been turbulence in the audience wherein a passivity regarding religious issues has been shattered. Breaking the rigid frontiers, audience has been persuaded to think and judge in the right spirit of a human being and not as a religious identity. The play promotes/ encourages the religious communities to open a dialogue for rectification of the communal misgivings and misunderstandings. The frontiers of questioning have not been limited to India only; rather the frontiers have been pushed to encompass the whole world and entire humanity. It is a confrontation between Arabs and Jews, whites and blacks, Hindus and Muslims, traditional and modern, and above all, between the innocent general people and crafty politicians.

   Dattani, with his keen eyes, has done his research as an unbiased analyst. Without being prejudiced, he underlines the hues of communalist attitude in Hindus as well as Muslims. The rigidity of the collective consciousness and sensibility of the communities formed on the
bedrock of stereotypes and clichés is realistically portrayed. While tackling with the theme of transferred resentments in the context of family relations, he also presents the main cause of riots today and that is through the paid people by corrupt and selfish politicians.

In an interview, Dattani says, "Theatre to me is reflection of what you observe. To do anything more would be to become didactic and then it ceases to be theatre…. I write plays for the sheer pleasure of communicating through this dynamic medium." (Nair 24). It's Dattani’s enthusiasm for realistic portraiture that leaves the audience spellbound. His realistic depiction pushes the audience to analyse the myriad of issues prevalent in Indian society. He likes to pull out taboo subjects from under the rug and place them on stage for public discussion. In Final Solutions he does not provide any ready-made solution to the problem of Hindu-Muslim riots. He only presents the complicated problem from every possible aspect. That is why he does not go for unnecessary detail, but points at relevant matters necessary for understanding the causes behind the tension that develops into riots. In our day-to-day existence, those relevant matters take place in front of us but we neither bother about them, nor do we think that these apparently innocent matters lead to vicious situations. Through his presentation of some real social issues on the stage, Dattani compels us to think over them.

Through the play, Dattani takes us inside a Hindu kitchen and a Hindu worship room where we find something that we are habituated to see every day and tend to ignore that as prejudice of the aged housewives. But we cannot ignore those prejudices which are projected as social issues in Final Solutions. We are forced to feel the pain that an ostracized person feels when treated as an untouchable. The subtle and covert ostracization carried out in religious disguise breeds more hatred in the person who is victimized thus creating a vicious cycle of hostilities. When a thirsty Muslim needs water, many Hindu fanatics hesitate to offer him water in their own glasses fearing that the touch of a Muslim would get the glass contaminated. Liberal persons sneer at such behavior but hardly analyze how the hatred expressed through such behaviour creates similar hatred in the mind of the person who is the
object of hatred. Hatred breeds more hatred and the result is riot. Dattani brings out the result
of hatred through the projection of a real situation:

Aruna goes to the matka and quickly pours out water into two glasses and places them
very delicately in front of the two men. They both quickly gulp down the water.Obviously they were thirsty. Aruna is aghast. She was sure they wouldn't drink….
Aruna holds the glasses with her thumbs and index fingers on the sides which have
not been touched by their lips. She takes them away and keeps them separate from the
other glasses. (*CP* 185)

Aruna does not keep her hatred secret and finds no cause to be ashamed. Dattani has
noted that even Ramnik who comes out as liberal, follows Aruna in those "small matters."
When he offers milk to them, "he pours it in the same glasses they drank water from" (*CP*
191). The average Hindu people who are deeply religious have a sense of superiority in them,
when compared to Muslims. Their opinion of virtual monopoly over purity leads them to
force persons of other religions touch their drinking water. They fail to understand logic
when religion and its clichés dominate their mindset:

Aruna: *(to Javed)* 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 … *(but)* we don't allow anyone to feel our
drinking water. No outsiders.

Smita: Mummy, please!

Aruna: We bathe our god with it, Smita. It has to be pure. It must not be
contaminated.

Smita: You are making it worse by explaining.

Aruna: But that is the real reason. *(to Javed)* So there is no need to feel offended. (*CP*
209-10)

Dattani very skillfully portrays the indifference that the religious bigots have
enthused, in Aruna's behavior when she eyes Bobby with a condescending attitude and treats
him as if he is impure and his touch will pollute her. Bobby draws our attention to the vicious
cycle that this hatred begins by reciprocating the bitterness; Bobby tells how such hatred
replaces the positive emotions in a man by negative emotions and changes him completely. Bobby describes how Javed, who loved playing the hero with the neighborhood boys, was totally changed after he experienced the hatred of a man in his locality:

A minor incident changed all that. There may have been others which Javed did not talk about. I can't remember how it started. Oh, yes. There was the cricket match … We were playing cricket on our street with the younger boys. The postman delivered our neighbor's mail. He dropped one of the letters. He was in a hurry and asked Javed to hand the letter over to the owner. Javed took the letter … and opened the gate. Immediately a voice boomed, 'What do you want? I can still remember Javed holding the letter and mumbling something, his usual firmness vanishing in a second. 'Leave it on the wall,' the voice ordered. Javed backed away, really frightened. We all watched as the man came out with a cloth in his hand. He wiped the letter before picking it up, he then wiped the spot on the wall the letter was lying on and he wiped the gate! We stared at him as he went back inside…. We all heard a prayer bell, ringing continuously. Not loud. But distinct…. The next day, the neighbour came out screaming on the streets…. Someone had dropped pieces of meat and bones into his backyard … I didn't speak to Javed for many days after that I was frightened of him…. And for Javed, he was–in his own eyes–no longer the neighbourhood hero. (CP 200-201)

Through a clear depiction of what happens in any town or village in India, Dattani lays bare the fact that hatred breeds hatred and when the stone starts moving, it is difficult to check its movement.

As Dattani is a dramatist par excellence, he incorporates incidents which are directly related to the plot and precisely paints a clear picture of how riots are instigated by handfuls of fanatics, who aim to destroy the cultural and social harmony of India by sowing hatred. The incident of breaking the chariot of the God during the Hindu religious festival of Ratha yatra started tension among the devotees and their anxiety for keeping up the honour of their God combined with hatred against the other religious community unleashed a torrent of abuse leading to riot. Ramnik describes the incident:
The Rath yatra started as it does every year from the Vishnu Mandir a few hours before midnight. It passed Shanti Road, Nehru Gardens, and when it reached Kareem Bagh, the trouble started. Nobody knew how. They say someone threw stones at the idol. Someone else says it was sabotage. It was very unfortunate that the axle of the chariot broke it keeled over right there in the mohalla. The idols were broken .... There was violence. Another chariot was to be brought there to pick up the broken idols, but ... was refused entry. Curfew was imposed and for some reason the idols have been lying there for four days! ... There was rumour that a poojari was killed, but nothing was mentioned in the news. (CP 193)

Riots break out not because of the literal injustices done to a community; rather riots are the outcome of a venomous mastermind who deliberately creates situations of animosity and hostility. And it is this opportune moment where mutual hatred and disbelief is high when miscreants incite and provoke violence. And in no way does the violence give justices to any community; rather it starts a turning gyre of injustices. As Smita reveals the real identity of Javed, the fact of hiring hooligans for causing riots by the political parties for their own benefit comes up. Smita says, "Those parties! They hire him! That's how he makes a living. They bring him and many more to the city to create riots. To … throw the first stone!" (CP 195). This is how riots take place in India and Dattani presents a realistic picture of what actually happens in Indian society in the name of Hindu-Muslim riots. The picture during the last part of nineteen forties was not much different. Daksha's diary offers a detailed picture of what happened at that time and Ramnik's explanation of how it happened and what purpose it solved shows that Indian society has not much changed since then. Daksha wrote:

Last year in August a most terrible thing happened to our country. We… gained independence.... My father had fought for that hour. And he was happy when it came. He said he was happy we were rid of the Britishers. He also … said that before leaving, they had let loose the dogs. I hated to think that he was talking about my friends’ fathers .... But that night in Hussainabad in our ancestral house – when I hear them outside – knew that they were thinking the same of us. And I knew that I was thinking the same, like my father. And as their voices grew louder and louder, I
blamed them more and more for my father's absence. The windows broke, one by one…. The stones came smashing into our home…. I could see the fire they were carrying, reflected in the broken glass lying around us. \( CP\ 166-167 \)

Reflecting on the incidents recorded in her diary—"a young girl's childish scribble," she says—Hardika observes that things have not changed that much. Through the observation of an elderly person Dattani touches the core of the social problem that remains the same after so many years of independence.

Dattani doesn't spare the politicians, who are predators in actuality. It’s the political parties who victimize the common men to reap their personal interests of vote-banks. They polarize the common men by throwing them into the boiling cauldron of religious egos. A nexus among the political parties and the business magnates is another face of the problem that has been laid bare through the activities of Ramnik's father and grandfather. Young Daksha sensed that her father-in-law's family was too materialistic to appreciate her finer sensibilities. She was denied the opportunity to go to Zarine's house and she was told that they were full of false pride. Unable to know the facts, she also developed hatred against the Muslim community.

Since partition of 1947, the politically and economically motivated politicians have not at all let the fire of hatred douse; rather they have tacitly added fuel to the fire. History is not led to be past; rather it's living in the present: Very cunningly, past is made alive by indoctrinating in innocent minds, the very germs of hatred, misgivings and bitterness.

As a young girl, Daksha was intelligent enough to understand that her in-laws kept something secret from her. But it was beyond her imagination that the secret was about their criminal act of burning up the shop belonging to Zarine's family. She innocently told her husband that they could offer a loan to Zarine's father for starting a new business and what followed was not at all an exaggeration. Dattani gives us a real picture of Hindu household during the nineteen forties when a daughter-in-law was denied all sorts of freedom including the freedom of query. This aspect has been conveyed to us as a record in Daksha's diary:
Last night after dinner, when I was cutting supari for him, Hari (her husband) was looking at me very strangely…. The reason why Hari looked at me so strangely was because I had just asked him why we couldn't give Zarine's father a loan or something to start his business again, since he didn't want the job we had offered him. Hari always chews on his collar when he is nervous. I observed his mouth searching instinctively for his collar when I asked him that question. But he quickly checked himself and bit his lip instead. He said something strange too. They hadn't offered Zarine's father any job. In fact he hadn't even asked for one. Then why did he come to our mill, I questioned Hari. That is when for the first time Hari became angry with me. I had never expected him to. He shouted so loudly…. And he called me names. Names that are too shameful to mention to you. My cheeks went red. We were silent for a long time and I forgot about Zarine's problems. I was too confused. And yet, I wanted to please Hari…. And my cheeks went red again. Not with shame but with anger at myself. (CP 215-16)

Daksha has been sensitive enough to second the injustices one has to encounter for being a woman. She gives accounts of gender discrimination which society boasts of. Earlier patriarchy was overt in suppression and dominating later, i.e., after 60 years patriarchy is still prevalent but in a very subtle form, as Smita accounts and speaks. The crude way of suppression is replaced with an invisible one, the kind of which is found in Tara also.

Dattani's purpose, then, is to project how prejudice is formed and how it continues to corrode the healthy atmosphere in the society. Final Solutions serves the dramatist's purpose well through a life-like portrayal of Indian society. As a play, Final Solutions is not born out of artistic impulse; rather it was meant to be a play which aimed at portraiture of real life events–events that shattered the life of a common man. Alyque Padamsee, being a theater expert, was aware of his duties and obligation as a human being and as a citizen of India. He could foresee the future of Ramjanmbhoomi Campaign and pained by the foresight, he commissioned the play. Padamsee wanted the issue of religious communalism to stir the conscience of the common man, to shed off the religious blindfolds and to debate and discuss the issue. The following issues emerge out of the discussion of the play:
i. Dattani tries to establish in the play that the issue of communal violence and communal frenzy is not a religious problem only but the confrontation of ideologies springs out of socio-cultural traditions that have become old and outdated.

ii. In the role of chorus/mob, Dattani deconstructs the psychology of rumours in the formation of the perception of human behavior.

iii. In the character of Hardika and Javed the unexpressed anger accumulated out of the bitter experiences of past suggests that the communal prejudice becomes the part of collective unconscious and subsequently, they become integral part of human personality.

iv. The quick shift of responses of different characters from positive responses to negative responses and further from negative to positive, suggests that frenzy is a state of irrational behavior and its pace cannot be measured in context of logical justifications. In this respect, Dattani gets success in constructing mob psyche in Final Solution. This mob psyche indirectly contributes to keep the flame of anger, prejudices and difference alive.

v. In Final Solutions, Dattani admits that communal frenzy is not an individual behavior. The various characters in the play follow the process of transference of anger to seek a release of their own tensions.

vi. In the characters of Smita, Hardika and Aruna, Dattani admits that women have greater consciousness and deeper realization of communal and religious identities.

vii. The major focus is given in this play on the construction of the psyche of violence. Communal violence is not an innate human behavior but it springs out of the hostile and apathetic social experiences. The resentment and anger adopted by Javed, Hardika, Aruna and others appear as an expression of their suppressed energy and as a mechanism of self defense.
The conversions, crisis and emotional convulsions of difference characters in this play, suggests that communal conscious is a burden on human psyche and each individual retains autonomy of the self to construct an independent human identity beyond the imposed religious ideologies.

It is obvious that Dattani is himself haunted by the basic question and makes the readers/audience ponders over it – Where is the final solution to the above themes? Asha Kuthari Chaudhuri pertinently comments, “While never making the overt comment, Dattani handles the difficult contours of the play with a subtle dramatic mechanism of using the family to mirror the community, as also using the community to reveal the hidden ugliness within the family unit." (40)

While optimistic and analytical, Dattani would never really offer easy resolutions, it is also interesting to see how he negotiates the terrain and the search for the solution to the core issues of the play—individual/familial/communal/national finally ends with the younger generation who carry much less of the historical burden than the scarred psyches of their predecessors. And even if individual scars do exist, as in Javed’s case, they would be quick to heal.

The title *Final Solutions* is a reverberation of the term, "Dic Endlosung" which means Final Solutions. The term denoted Nazis’ play to exterminate the Jewish population of Europe. Padamsee finds the ideologies of the Nazis parallel with the ideologies of the Hindu Right as he states in 'A Note on the Play': “Who was responsible for the humiliating state in Germany after World War I? Blame it on the Jews! They had siphoned off all the money! Who is responsible for us becoming a third-rate nation? Get rid of the minorities and Ram Rajya will return!” (*CP* 161). Yet the title *Final Solutions* is more than a reminder of the worst genocide based on religious identity that the world has seen in the past hundred years.

The play demonstrates that the issue of religious conflict is not so simple an issue that can be solved overnight. Since every community is fanatic to an extent regarding one's religion,
which it would require time for solutions to come up. Dattani is seeking tolerance via dialogue that would only be possible if communities come face to face and try to identify the goodness in other community. A peaceful coexistence is only possible if people accept religious pluralism. However, while characters like Javed, Aruna, and Hardika may not overcome their prejudices within the course of the play, by the play’s conclusion, the audience can see that these characters have clearly started on the path of tolerance and understanding. By being forced to spend the night together, Javed, Hardika, Aruna, Ramnik, Bobby, and Smita, have taken the first step towards religious pluralism: dialogue. Scholar of Comparative Religion and founder of The Pluralism Project at Harvard University, Diana L. Eck asserts that, “pluralism is based on dialogue”. She explains this saying, "The language of pluralism is that of dialogue and encounter, give and take, criticism and self-criticism. Dialogue means both speaking and listening, and that process reveals both common understandings and real differences. Dialogue does not mean everyone at the “table” will agree with one another. Pluralism involves the commitment to being at the table – with one’s commitments."

Dialogue plays a very important and crucial role in the progress of the play. All six of the main characters in Final Solutions undergo a transformation in the course of the play through the process of dialogue. There is a transformation in the perceptions, opinions and hostilities ingrained in their hearts towards each other. Javed may not be able to completely trust Hindus at the end of the play, yet the audience sees him begin to respect them as he spends more and more time with the Gandhis. By sharing with his mother the past actions of their family, Ramnik enables Hardika to begin a crucial process of reflection and forgiveness. It is through self-questioning and dialogue borne out of Bobby and Javed's presence that Smita is able to express her true feelings to her mother about the indoctrination of religious ideals since her childhood.

The theatrical event of the Rath Yatra, which forms the background of the play, led to immense violence in the Gandhi’s hometown of Amargaon. However, as the play progresses,
the audience can see that it has also created a critical opportunity for dialogue between the play’s characters. Dialogue has been sued as a cool not only within the play, rather it has been used equally to promote dialogue within the audience. In the play, situations are created so that Gandhi and his guests enter into a dialogue to discuss as well as assess the realities of religious communalism, and same is done by the audience after watching the play. A self-searching creeps in the audience leading them to engage in dialogue.

This chapter encapsulates multifarious themes and concepts under the umbrella of issue of religious communalism. Dattani beautifully explores the relations between religious communalism and the impact of partition till date. The way memory embitters the religious communities and how it shapes religious identities that are hostile to each other, are also covered by the playwright in Final Solutions. The conflict inner as well as outer – is in a continuous struggle in the relation between the individual and the community. The treatments of these themes by different productions have caused audiences to reflect on them in new ways. The analysis of Anwar’s Hindi-Urdu translation demonstrated that the dialogue of the characters in Hindi-Urdu was more realistic and believable than the English version, and this heightened these themes even further. The reality which the play depicts before the audience is disturbing and heart rending at times yet it provides a space for self-introspection, and a reflection to seek the truth bare of all impositions from communal forces.

Incidents like burning of the Sabarmati Express in Godhra, Gujarat and the demolition of the disputed structure/ Babri Masjid in Ayodhya were two of the worst cases of communal violence South Asia has seen in recent years. In spite of a gap of more than two decades the tremors of the events are still felt. Soutik Biswas asked this in his recent article “Has Gujarat Moved On?” He noted that Gujarat’s Muslims “have moved on in their own small, meaningful ways” such as improving Muslim education in the state, citing that “More and more Muslims are sending their children to schools and colleges. In 2002, there were 200 Muslim educational trusts in Gujarat. Now, there are more than 800” (Biswas 2012).
However, the memories of the violence remain alive in the minds of the victims. As Noorjehan Abdul Hamid Dewan, a survivor of the violence in Gujarat, reflects, “How can people forget the riots and move ahead? People don't forget. They simply remain quiet in fear.” (Biswas 2012).

The great proponent of Epic theatre, Bertolt Brecht advocated strongly for epic theatre just because he wanted to jolt the audience out of passivity. And he found that is was theatre alone that wouldn't allow the audience to remain silent but to think, analyse, speak and act. Throughout this work, I have referenced philosophy scholar Paul Woodruff and his work *The Necessity of Theater*. The title of Woodruff’s book brings into focus the significance of theatre. Theatre is an intrinsic and necessary element of human culture. Woodruff asserts that along with language and religion, theatre is one of the three basic cultural needs of human society. He marks, “Theater is everywhere in human culture, as widely practiced as religion” (11). Woodruff’s words hold especially true for the South Asian context. Just as every region of South Asia has its own unique languages and religious practices, each region also has its own specific tradition of dramatic theatre. With theatre being as inherent a component of South Asian culture as religion or language, it is an ideal medium for the promotion of religious pluralism. Apart from being an essential element of human culture, theatre also has the power to create a platform for dialogue. An effective production of a play like *Final Solutions* provokes, disturbs, angers, shames, questions, and inspires an audience to speak out. As Woodruff writes, “Theater is immediate, its actions are present to participants and audience.” (17). It is also “the art by which human beings make human action worth watching in a measured time and space.” (39).

By the medium of theatre, participant and audience are bound in a reciprocal relationship that provides a discursive space via dialogue in which participant and audience accept as well as reject, associate as well as disassociate simultaneously. And these simultaneous reactions and responses bring a transformation in the notions and ideologies of
audience. If the participants and the audience of a performance are able to meet and interact in a talk-back session following a performance, the bond between them is further cemented. And it is in these discussions that theatre artists and audience members often strive to find the final solutions to religious communalism.

Dattani envisions India as a nation which assimilates 'Unity in Diversity' to the core. But the demon of religious communalism creates a rift in his dream. Through his play, he wants to dispense away with the charms created by religious conflicts. He wishes to foster compassion, co-operation and unity in his countrymen. He seems to be dead against any type of ‘ism’ and wants to see each and every man of the country an Indian at first and then anything else. In this respect he seems to be very much influenced by late Sadananda A. Shetty, the founder editor of the ‘One India: One People’ who observes in his poem ‘Who Am I’:

Am I a Hindu first or an Indian first?
Am I a Muslim first or an Indian first?
Am I a Christian first or an Indian first?
Am I a Bhuddist first or an Indian first?
Am I a Brahmin first or an Indian first?
Am I a Dalit first or an Indian first?
Am I a South Indian first or an Indian first?
Am I a North Indian first or an Indian first?
Am I the President of India first or an Indian first?
Am I the Prime Minister of India first or an Indian first?
Am I the commander-in-chief first or an Indian first?
Am I a supported of only ‘ism’ first or an Indian first?
Am I a white-collar/blue collar worker first or an Indian first?
Am I a youth/senior citizen first or an Indian first?
In all cases you are Indian First, Last and Always.
Be a proud Indian. Make this Country Great, Strong and United. (Shetty, Last cover page)
Thus Dattani explores issues of identity, memory, suffering and loss and resulting ‘other’-bashing, either/or terms of reference within the larger political context through the various products of this play. He tries to bring the communities to face each other with all their hostilities, doubts and misgivings so that they are able to purge their souls of the impurities. Through his beautiful and impeccably realistic presentation of Hindu and Muslims, he tries to fill the crevices that divide Indian into self-centred religious communities. His primary concern as a writer of drama is to expose the various maladies of society and whenever necessary to give some proper solutions through the medium of literature. He seems to be very certain in protecting his vision of secularism in which both the communities live together with happiness.

It is not difficult to conclude that the Ghost of Partition stalks South Asia, haunting the minds and souls of many of its people. It bequeathed a negative, aggressive and violent mode of thinking, behaving and realizing a political objective. Dattani is at pains to depict the power struggle of ideologies that started since partition and is carried till date in the embittered hearts of both the religious communities. Final Solutions is a ray of hope towards dispelling the bitterness and providing a scope for co-existence through dialogue. A clear and strong message from the Security Council of the United Nations and major states outside it to India and Pakistan to abandon the path of conflict may also help. Perhaps a process of forgiveness for the crimes committed during Partition initiated by intellectuals from both sides can miraculously lead to reconciliation and mutual acceptance. Whatever it is, Dattani’s intention is clearly to bridge the gap between people, and set straight some of the events of history distorted by time so that they are no more partitions of hearts or of countries. Nikhat Kazmi appreciated, "Mahesh Dattani's 'Final Solutions' is that rare look at a socio-political problem that defies all final solutions….Arvind Gaur's competent direction…. intense, topical and artistically mounted, Asmita's 'Final Solutions' brought back memories of Habib Tanvir's rendition of 'Jis Lahore nahi Dekhya' and Saeed Mirza's 'Naseem." (Times of India).
Mahesh Dattani excels in stage craft and art. His theatre is true to life. In *Final Solutions*, he not only deals with the complicated and intricate issues of communal hatred and social-supremacy feeling but also provides a gateway towards solutions to these conflictual relations. He has employed flashback techniques in this drama. So he invests multilevel sets. I’ve used time and space in different ways in my plays. I think all the tools of theatre are available to a playwright and you just use them the way your sensibility allows you to use them.

Dattani has analysed the issues of communal hatred from the grass root level. He persuades the audiences towards introspection as well as a critical self-assessment about one's myths, beliefs, faith and rituals. He advocates a path of co-existence rather than self-centeredness, paying equal respect to other community's religious faith and creed as one pays to his/ her creed. Prejudice and bias against the other community is harmful. The dramatist also dismisses the idea of sending the Muslim community to Pakistan as foolish one. It is not the solution nor is it possible. Dattani has woven some other themes along with the main theme of communal turmoil. They are liberal ideology, guilt consciousness, transferred resentment, articulating one’s own voice and anger etc. *Final Solutions* can be called the protest against subjugation of fanaticism, blind faith, patriarchal code, women, etc.

The chorus and mask have been used by Dattani in a symbolic manner but with a deep underlying eternal meaning–one is borne as a human being but his/ her surroundings colour and categorize him/ her into race/ colour/ creed and religion. Interestingly the mask keeps changing on, but the players of chorus remain the same. All human beings are alike. The mask is appearance; humanity is reality, supreme truth. The players put on alternatively Hindu-Muslim masks and become the Hindu Muslim mob. It suggests that communal identity is outer form of the individual, and human identity is the permanent and transcendent to all. When men are under masks, they question the identity of others and give chase to the other. It can be said that mask is like opium. Under the impact of it, man
behaves irrationally and causes chaos and destruction in society. In other words, communal hatred is caused under the intoxication of prejudice and blind faith.

Dattani has depicted double role of Daksha very purposefully. The young Daksha is quite unbiased and innocent. There is no hatred in her heart towards Muslim community. She is befriended to members of Muslim community. Old Hardika is quite biased especially with Muslim community. She was unhappy with her husband and in-laws attitude towards Muslim community. But now she feels that they were right in their behavior. She received the cruel and barbaric stroke of communal riots in Husainabad. She writes how her house was attacked and her father was slain by the Muslim fanatics. Daksha received physical punishment and mental torture for mixing and eating with Muslim family. She was shocked and grieved. But later on, she realized that Muslim has the wretched pride and ill will against the Hindu. Critically speaking, Dattani presents two view points of the same person in terms of communal attitude. However, at the end, she again realizes that she was falsely prejudiced against Muslim community especially Zarine’s family. Ramnik told her that her husband and his father got their shop burnt to get it less price in the name of communal trouble. At the close of play, she is disillusioned and her false notions are removed. Her attitude and feelings are purged.

Hardika is the synthesis of past and present. The expression of anger occurs as self defensive mechanism not as manifestation of belligerence. Human emotions as most vulnerable to attain biased dimensions when the class of ego sets in and logics fail and Dattani depicts this in 'Final Solutions' very beautifully, aptly and intricately. In the battle of egos, false prejudices of every community are pitted against each. Hardika's psychological journey through her double role is a testimony to this. When asked by Ranu Uniyal about Final Solutions, Dattani replies, "It is basically, dramatically, about two Muslim boys running away from a mob that is out to kill them and they seek shelter in a Hindu household, seemingly liberal minded and their presence through the night triggers off memories for the matriarch, the older woman, the grandmother." (181)
Dattani has utilized diary as a significant tool to inter-relate and depict the reciprocal nature of past and present. Like Chorus, diary too is an eye-witness of the history of partition forty years back. It is a communication device for talking with spectators. It provides Daksha full freedom of criticizing and making mockery of her in-laws’ family. Dattani in an interview with Sachidananda Mohanty says:

Daksha “through the device of her diary she begins a dialogue with the audience and that is offered to Daksha because she can make fun of her in laws, she could talk very honestly about her feelings, about her friendship with the Muslim girl etc. directly to the audience and that space is denied to her with the other members of her household including her husband and these are memories that she has retained even in her old age and these memories are triggered off and feelings of prejudice that had developed over years are brought out in present day situations. So Daksha becomes a symbol of our historical vision, our sense of history, how prejudice is formed and how we deal with the situation today.” (Qtd. Rashmi Jain)

The play is a fine fusion of social realism, political allegory, imagination and indigenous language. Through it, Dattani has been successful in showing how seeds sown in history are being reaped today by the communal opportunities resulting in multiplication of hatred and bloodshed, itself creating further histories. Dattani's concern is not only the projection of communal atrocities; rather he provides a discursive space to the audience for seeking solutions by a secular and non-sectarian mode of narration. The chorus has been a powerful tool to clarify the public/ audience opinion about any rioting situation, polarizing mindset of both Hindus and Muslims and a voice of synthesis issuing out of the dialectics of the problem. With the pluralization of the term ‘solutions’ the dramatist perhaps, suggests that there are multiple solutions possible if only we understand the term religion in pluralistic term, paralleling it to humanity.

The next play in this chapter is Brief Candle (2010) which was performed on July 5, 2009 at Sophia Bhabha Hall, Mumbai. Commissioned by Prime Time Theatre Company and produced and directed by Lillette Dubey, the play presents a poignant story which is tragic,
humorous, farcical but elevating. The play comprises seven scenes and is set in a hospice ward where seriously ill patients put up an energetic farce in memory of their friend, Vikas who breathed his last on account of AIDS related cancer. Vikas, who was one of patients of the hospice, had written a play which had provided sufficient space to all the patients who were counting the last days of their lives, but who were willing to extend support to one another. Ironically but satisfyingly Vikas had divided the roles to the characters and made them live the pleasure of their perfect life which is now only a dream for them. Invariably Vikas is also enacting his own part. The play focuses not only on the palliation of chronically ill patient’s pain and suffering, but also on their emotional and spiritual needs.

The play opens with play within the play which was woven by Vikas’s psychoanalytic and imaginative mind. Vikas and Deepika were very happy with their relationship while aspiring for Medical Degree. They were batchmates and lovers in their Medical College days. They loved each other passionately but got separated on account of their different attitude towards their profession. It is quite evident from their following dialogue:

Deepika. I love you. You know that.

Vikas. What? (Laughing)

Deepika. Kiss me.

They kiss

Vikas breaks away first, offers her the joint.

Deepika. It’s making me sick.

Vikas. It’s the best crap money can…

Deepika. Vikas. What’s all this about dropping out?

Vikas. Do you really see me as a doctor? I mean healing people is cool, but all this medical degree and stuff. For what? Start a clinic? You and I bound till eternity to some shitty building? I’d rather just go where I want to or where I am needed.

Deepika. So you joined medical college because your father wanted you to? What happened to your rebellion then?
Vikas. It seemed like a good idea at that time. I do want to help the world more. But I can do that now. Why waste three years in this shithole?

Deepika. And- what about us?

Vikas. Come with me.

Deepika. Be a dropout? Like you? … You know I won’t do it. You are dumping me. (BC 14-15)

Vikas decides to drop out but Deepika does not. That creates differences between the two. After a few years the situation changes, Deepika becomes a doctor and Vikas, suffering from AIDS cancer, has come to the hospice of Deepika just to get some love and sympathy from Deepika and breathe his last in her arms. Vikas tries his best to make Deepika feel his need by reminding about their past but going back to the past was not very pleasant to Deepika. It was rather painful for her. Betrayal of the past and the truth of the present were really very tough for her to cope with. Breaking all the cards with Vikas she is trying to maintain just a professional relationship. It is evident from the following dialogue:

Vikas. Doctor!…where is she? Where the fuck is she?
Shanti. (To Mahesh). Fetch her. Now!

Mahesh goes to Deepika, standing in a separate space.

Deepika is troubled and we can see it is a tough decision for her to make.

Mahesh Doctor, please.

Deepika. Give him more morphine.

Mahesh. He doesn’t want it, he wants- Deepika. There is nothing I can do! Let me know when he is gone.

Deepika exits. (BC 21)

Vikas tries his best to make Deepika realize her importance for his life but fails to get any positive response from her. He shares his feeling with Mahesh very frankly. He rests his head on his shoulder, puts his arm around him and putting his arm says; “That is what I needed just a touch. But she would rather give me extra morphine.” (BC 18)
Vikas fails to make Deepika realize the eternity of their past relationship. Hence he left behind a play as his sole legacy in order to make Deepika understand the truth of their relationship from a neutral perspective. He openly says: “One day you will act in my play. There is a role in it for you. I will touch you with this play of mine. From the dead. (Gesturing to touch her) Mortmain.” *(BC 16)*

Vikas was so lovable a person that he had created a special space in everybody’s heart. After his departure from this world every member of the hospice wanted to feel his love scene through his play. Deepika who was afraid of her past, however, didn’t want to feel his presence anymore. So, she doesn’t want the enactment of his play, while others are in favour of it. The following dialogue makes it obvious:

Deepika: I did have a word with the committee. We have collectively arrived at the decision that we should do something else. So, you see. It’s not just me who feels that way.

Shanti: They wanted a comedy, we will give them one. Vikas wrote this as a comedy and that is the way we will play it. No one except us will understand that it’s about

Shanti stops speaking as she looks at Deepika.

Shanti: About something else. Deepika is upset.

…

Amrinder: You have counselled each one of us and one of the things, if not the one thing, that you stressed upon was to let it all out. To talk, to learn to forgive, to see yourself and love yourself.

Deepika: This is not about counselling. He was not a counsellor. He was a passionate man with strong views on everything and everybody. He knew he was dying. He felt strongly about each one of us. So he put it all down. *(Holding up the script)*. This is about him, not us. Now, it is no longer about him. It should be about us. I don’t want any of you to live your life through his eyes. *(BC 22)*

After a long discussion with Shanti, Amal, Amerinder and Mahesh, Deepika finds herself defeated. Everyone has his/her own strong reason to love him. On the other hand
Deepika has her own reason to rebel against the presence of his past. The enactment of the play would be like screening through her past when Vikas’s omnipresence shall be felt all along. Hence she is opposed to the enactment of his play, as is stated by her in the following lines: “He chose to come here. He had very high expectations of me. I failed him, and so he wrote this play. He is angry with me. And I refuse to be a victim of his anger.” (BC 26)

Deepika is under no compulsion to allow the enactment of this play, as she is the Incharge of this hospice. She feels that the play would give the impression to the public that she was a heartless creature for Vikas. She is shocked by the remark of Shanti when Shanti says that she promised Vikas to help Deepika live through his absence. She bluntly reacts and says:

I am not in mourning! I am not suffering in silence! I can live through his absence like I can live through the absence of any of the ones who don’t make it! (BC 27)

In spite of the protest of Deepika it was finally decided to see the enactment of the play Hotel Staylonger, with the setting of one large curtain, with the ‘face of cancer’, hollow eyes, sallow skin, tufts of hair etc. They had shown a face that is ravaged by the effects of chemotherapy and is now ready to give up the struggle. On a high level at the top of the face, Vikas has a keyboard that he plays in different modes. The play presents a poignant tale revolving around a hotel near the airport. As the characters in the play await their departures, they end up in comic situations as they entangle themselves in surreptitious dalliances and complicated love affair. The metaphor of arrivals and departures for life and death leaves them with a reflection of their own struggles and needs.

Vikas spent eight months in the hospice and he went through the mental dilemma of the other hospice members who were fighting for their survival. He lived through everyday’s vision and expectations for their life. He made a little effort to give them space or ideas to enlighten their life and give momentary relief from their daily dull routine. It is stated by Amol during his conversation with Deepika in the play:
Amol. You have to treat everyone like a rotting tree that is about to fall. You are interested in the tree only till the rot is removed. The tree survives or the tree falls down once the rot is taken out. You wait to see what happens. And then, on to the next day.

Deepika. *(Nodding)* Maybe so. maybe so…. *(BC 25)*

Though the experience is short and momentary, it provides them an opportunity to get rid of their pain and misery. Amerinder who is suffering from prostate’s cancer, knows that there is no medication available which can restore his feeling of maleness. Living with this kind of incompleteness is worse than death for him. Amarinder narrates his own experience of the hospital:

My first stay at the hospital. The biopsy was made and I woke up feeling sore inside. I don’t know how I allowed it. They never told me that they will be drilling inside my body. At my core. What made me a man? Climbing a mountain, playing a game of hockey, knowing I could satisfy a woman in bed. All that was under attack with a group of needles probing at my prostrate, through the wall of my rectum….I lay there thinking of the results of that biopsy….what will I choose? To live? And deal with the loss? Instead of vitality flowing through my loins, bear the embarrassment of urine dribbling down my pants and not even noticing it? I wanted to live! With everything I had! *(BC 23)*

Similarly, Shanti is suffering from breast cancer. She expresses the agony of a woman who comes across the biggest irony of her life when she discovers a blood clot in her bra after two days of her marriage. A lady who was just in the process of mingling with her groom, even her own reflection made her shy, and all of a sudden, she was exposed to world of doctors, lab technicians, nurses whosoever and whatsoever. It is quite evident from the statement of Shanti:

On my wedding night my husband put on some music and danced. He wanted me to dance with him…. Finally I said no. I did not want to make a fool of myself, not on my wedding night. He gave up after a while…. He began to caress me as I lay frozen. I didn’t feel anything. He began to unbutton my blouse. I moved away. I wasn’t being coy…. How could I? I hadn’t seen my own breast in the mirror…. How could I to
this-man? He was patient. He waited for two days. Then I let him embrace me, but I could not show myself to him. Ever….

Silence

Our maid showed me the blood stains on my brassiere…. She insisted

I go for a test…. I lay exposed to the technicians, … one of them marked my lumps, treating my breast as if it were already a piece of dead flesh…. they grew and came back till they took it all out. A part of me that I had barely felt. That I had never seen fully myself. Gone. (BC 31-32)

Both of them were suffering from same sense of deficiency in their life and sailing in the same boat of identity crisis as is evident from the following dialogue:

Shanti. But I saw Amar. I saw Fear. The same fear that I had. It wasn’t the fear of death. It was the fear of….

…

Vikas. It is the fear of losing something that you have and did not even think of the possibility of not having. But now when there is a real danger of losing it, you begin to understand its true worth. And then you are afraid you will have to live without it for the rest of your living moments…. (BC 24)

Only Vikas understands their sense of inferiority and struggle for survival. Keeping in this view, he created roles for them. If Amerinder got a chance to feel the enthusiasm of a real man who can fight for somebody and propose a lady for the night, Shanti got a chance to live a life of a young energetic, lively lady, who can attract anybody. They made a good couple which represents all the shades of life. Sometimes they show their excitement which gradually turns into disappointment and at the next moment they give support to each other and dance waltz with full enthusiasm, to fetch the colours for their life again.

Amerinder. Darling I can see again.

Shanti. Oh my darling! I am so happy I could cry!

Amerinder. Come on, let’s complete the dance we started. (BC 36)

Characters in the play want to give the impression that life is an endless ongoing process. At the end of the play Deepika addresses the advice directly and says:
On behalf of Avedna, Cancer Research Hospital and hospices. I thank you all for being here tonight. Hotel Stay longer is a comedy written by Vikas Tiwari. As you all know he was a victim of cancer as a result of AIDS. He lived at our hospice for eight months. He died knowing that he was surrounded by people who cared. And that makes a difference. \((BC\ 47)\)

The play comes to an end with the characters dancing happily. It gives us a message and the message is as has been pointed out by Deepika herself, that “all of us have a right to live as long as we can and to laugh at our follies. Vikas Tiwari lives on through this play” \((BC\ 47)\)

It can be easily noticed that Dattani has the critical eye to see such aspects of human existence that often go unnoticed. Even here, his focus is on the social problems in the lives of patients suffering from cancer and AIDS. The setting of the play makes it obvious that life must go on as long as possible and that too with fun and mirth even in the face of death. The hilarious force with several funny situations succeeds in underscoring the significance of the quality of human existence rather than its length.