Chapter - 2

Communal Disharmony
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One thing that separates Mahesh Dattani from other contemporary Indian English playwrights is his ability to portray the contemporary social issues in a matter of fact and mundane manner. His plays dealing with communal issues successfully create a psychological tension amid the readers/audience. Situations concerning communal disharmony have been dealt with in numerous plays and novels. But Dattani looks at the issue with artistic disinterestedness creating an eerie and disturbing feeling amongst the readers of the concerned communities. In spite of his rootedness in the Indian culture, the plays of Dattani demonstrate a marked universality. He has the ability to transform the Indian, local situation on a larger global canvas, with such dexterity that the theme loses its limited appeal and acquires universal relevance transcending national and social frontiers.
Dattani analyses the theme of communal disharmony, in the Indian society, in his plays -- *Final Solutions, The Swami and Winston, Clearing the Rubble* and *The Tale of a Mother Feeding Her Child* – from varied perspectives. The Indian mosaic is multicultural, multilingual and pluralistic in matters of faith and ethnicity. Diversity is an inherent characteristic of the Indian society. The diversity in the Indian society is different from the British, American or Canadian multicultural experience. Culture and community are two distinct entities. India has both the plurality of culture and the plurality of community. But, at the same time, one cannot negate the fact that the ability to correlate and co-habit in a pluralistic society like India evolves only from similarity in culture. An assimilation of culture is perceptible in India that allows different communities to live together. In the West different cultures provide identity to individuals while in India such an identity is gained from community.

Communal issues have haunted the Indian society for centuries now. Indian communities have evolved their own defence mechanism that includes stereotyped responses and reactions. Political parties and religious fundamentalists anticipate these stock responses and conspire to initiate and instigate communal disharmony for personal or political reasons. The blame game that holds the other community responsible for all problems has continued. Dattani’s play *Final Solutions* examines the issue from this perspective. Both communities harbour a ‘we’ versus ‘them’ attitude. The prejudice against the other community has become a part of individual psyche like their genes. There is an ongoing combat that refuses to cease as:
"the demons of communal hatred are not
out on the street . . . they are lurking inside
ourselves."¹

Communal hatred is so deep rooted that even the joy of independence in 1947, was
submerged in the brutal holocaust during partition. The play *Final Solutions* uses
this sense of distrust during partition as the starting point for the drama. Daksha, the
narrator, voices the sentiments of both the communities when she refers to the hour
of 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 something I did not understand
> then. He said that before leaving, they had
> let loose the dogs. I hated to think that he
> was talking about my friend’s fathers . . .
> But that night in Hussainabad in our
> ancestral house—when I heard them
> outside—I knew that they were thinking the
> same of us. And I knew that I was thinking
> the same, like my father. And as their
> voices grew louder, I blamed them more
> and more for my father’s absence.²

Daksha lives with this detestation all her life. She locks herself up, symbolically,
from the outside world. There is a psychological yearning to break-free and come
out of her seclusions. Throughout the drama we see her banging on the door pleading to be freed from the self-created dungeon. Her problem is more psychological than real. She is cursed to drudgery and torment owing to the lack of communication and emotional affiliation with the other community.

Aruna is another character in the play who has unknowingly withdrawn herself from the outside world. She lives in a self-created shell feeling secure and secluded until two Muslim boys come to her house. The women in India, from both communities, act as custodians of religion and family traditions. Their upbringing, mainly confined to the interiors of the house gives them little opportunity to choose and desire. They learn from the elders and other women in the community, carrying forward the load of tradition and values bravely. Aruna also insists that her daughter, Smita should spend more time with Ba, the grandmother. Unknowingly she encourages Smita’s ignorant mind to endorse the prejudices and notions of a generation whose realities have now become history. Ramnik, the father opposes the view that his mother’s notions should influence Smita, though for altogether different reasons. Smita luckily does not fall prey to such unintentional influences. Going to college and mixing with other communities of the outside world saves her from self-imprisonment.

Javed, a school dropout, also cannot accept the outside reality. He too is a member of a closed community thriving on differences and prejudices. He is swayed by “cheap sentiments” (FS:205) and religious propaganda. He exhibits very rigid and uncompromising notions about religion. He is like the committed believers who remain ignorant about the political motive and are:
swayed by their own religious fervour, united by their fantasies of persecution, constantly reassuring themselves that this is their land by taking out processions (FS: 205).

Javed confesses that like the common Muslim mob he too feels inflicted with:

Delusions of valour and heroism. Of finding a cause to give purpose to his existence. 'The time has come', somebody would say. 'This is jehad—the holy war! It is written!' 'Yes!' I would say. 'I am ready.

I am prepared!' (FS: 205).

This fundamentalist attitude is also due to Javed's self-imposed withdrawal from the society. He is so overpowered by communal forces that he does not hesitate even to leave his house and parents.

The feeling of communal hatred crops from such incidents that inspire a feeling of difference and otherness in the young and innocent minds. Neither community, Hindu or Muslim, is unanimous when it comes to assistance and support within the community. But both the communities club together against each other, enhancing the divide, on issues least concerned with daily life. Religious and political fundamentalists enhance the cleavage to widen the hiatus between these communities. Faith or god whose preaching pursues permanent peace in the world becomes the reason for hatred and violence. Thus religion, which is supposed to be a unifying force, becomes a means to segregate communities in the hands of
fundamentalists. Innocent people cling to their separate gods for support and protection while the conspiring minds use the same gods for creating a feeling of fear and otherness.

This feeling of otherness, transmitted from one generation to another, is so deep rooted that it denies logical thinking in both communities. Children unknowingly put their foot in their father's shoes and despite the passage of time replications of violent incidents and stereotypical responses follow each other. Even forty years after the communal violence during partition, Daksha feels that nothing has changed outward appearance:

This time it wasn't the people with the sticks and stones. It was those two boys running away who frightened me (FS:172).

The paranoia from within forces her to falsely foresee and anticipate a repetition of violent and antagonistic reactions.

The sense of distrust in both communities is so high that Tasneem's father, Mr. Noor Ahmed, abruptly disconnects the phone while talking to Ramnik Gandhi, Smita's father. Both Ramnik and Noor Ahmed belong to the second-generation of post independence Indians. A sense of communal distrust has settled in them, though Ramnik appears to be more liberal, comparatively. The intolerant and exasperated feeling the communities harbour for each other has been very accurately exhibited by the use of animal imagery. When a lizard falls on the covered lid of a milk vessel Aruna says: "I- I just can't drink it now . . . knowing that ugly creature was so near it"(FS:173). The very thought of the other community becomes repulsive like the lizard. It does not cause any real damage but instigates a sense of
aborrence and irritation. Similarly, Hardika tells the Muslim boys “I hate the way you look! I hate the way you dress! I hate the way you eat!” (FS:223).

Owing to the sense of prejudice and hatred, a feeling of distrust prevails in both communities, mainly during the testing times of communal violence. The hatred is not personal against individuals; it is collective and against the symbols that mark the differences in religion and belief. Both communities cling to their personal identities and gradually learn from their surroundings to abhor the distinctive otherness of the other community. Unfortunately no one realises the fact that home and community become the breeding grounds for this hatred. In the name of preserving tradition, culture and faith people keep magnifying differences that exist in the two religions. Aruna tells Javed:

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

The gaps and pauses in these sentences are more expressive and destructive than the uttered words. Though not pronouncing the religious identity of the boys Aruna communicates the difference and the hatred that exists in the society. She continues to say:
We don’t allow anyone to fill our drinking water. No outsiders. . . . We bathe our god with it. . . . It has to be pure. It must not be contaminated (FS: 209).

She continues to defend her-self and her religion. The views she expresses are the part of a collective psyche. There is no sense of conscious awareness that such views are based on the foundation of religious differences. The unconscious mind echoes itself when she says:

I don’t want all this violence. How can I, when I won’t even harm a goat or a chicken? (FS: 210).

The very mention of slaughtering animals for religious sacrifices by Muslims again brings to the fore the difference between the two communities. The Hindus consider themselves to be non-violent mainly because they are believed to be strictly vegetarian. The Muslims, on the other hand, are seen as violent for being non-vegetarians. Ramik too echoes the same sentiment when he, out of anger and frustration, loses his temper. Javed’s assertion that the Hindus provoke Muslims make Ramnik lose his temper. He becomes aggressive and even the mask of patronage and tolerance cannot conceal his real emotions:

How dare you blame your violence on other people? It is in you! You have violence in your mind. Your life is based on violence. Your faith is based... (Stops, but it is too late) (FS: 198).
The distinct identity of one's religion does not allow the amalgamation of beliefs:

A drop of oil cannot merge with an ocean
of milk. One reality cannot accept another
reality (FS: 196)

becomes a postulation that works as hindrance in the coming together of the two communities.

The attitude of both the communities, during the testing times of communal violence, results from the awareness of their stratified position in the social structure. The majority community plays a patronising role while the minority feels self-pity and helplessness. Fear makes both communities retaliate with aggression. Ramnik Gandhi symbolises this patronising attitude of the majority community. He not only provides the two absconding boys refuge in his house, against the wishes of his family and the mob outside, but also insists that the boys should eat, drink and stay in his house, feeling safe and secure under his protection. A sense of sacrifice and patronisation becomes evident when Ramnik says:

I am sure those crowds will go home in a short while. If you are hungry, I could get you some milk. There's only a little for the morning tea but . . . . (goes to the kitchen area). I insist you take it. Perhaps the offering could have some symbolic significance. (Finds the milk and pours it in the same glasses they drank water from.) I have always maintained that if you want
peace... that is, if you treat peace as a commodity and you go looking for it—you will find it hidden in the armpits of the majority (FS:191).

Similar attitudes that suggest the conscious feeling of knowing one's power being the majority is perceptible in the statements of Aruna, the behaviour of Daksha and the business rivalry of Wagh and Hari against Zarine's father. When Javed criticises the Hindu community, Aruna cannot restrain herself:

**ARUNA (Quietly):** Who gave you the right to criticize us? We who have given you protection (FS:190).

'We' here stands for both the Gandhi family and the Hindu community. Daksha too plays a patronising role. On learning from Kanta, the maid-servant, that Zarine's mother was doing some embroidery work to meet the household expenses she goes to Zarine's house with a saree. Daksha gives the saree to Zarine's mother and says: "Any design she pleased, I told her" (FS:203). The patronising attitude of Wagh and Hari also becomes evident when after having conspired to burn the shop, owned by Zarine's father, they offer to buy it at half the price. Javed tells Ramnik:

It must feel good... being the majority...

... it is in your every move. You must know. You can offer milk to us. You can have an angry mob outside your house.

You can play the civilized host. Because
you know you have peace hidden inside
your armpit (FS:192).

The blame game becomes a sort of defence mechanism for both communities. They wash away their sense of guilt by accusing the other community for everything, even their own deeds. The assertions of the chorus representing both the Hindus and the Muslims share similarity in tone, words and aggression. The dramatist has very appropriately used the technique of masks. The same group of chorus wears the Hindu and the Muslim mask alternatively, as the scene demands. Apart from limiting the number of characters on stage it serves a very important symbolic function as well. The masking and unmasking of individuals suggests that the individuals belonging to both communities are similar and benevolent but under communal tensions they acquire a stern expression of aggression symbolised by the masks; wearing the masks makes them malevolent. But their reactions to the other community still remain very similar. The Muslim chorus blames the Hindu community and the Hindus blame the Muslims. What else can the grieved people on both sides do? The Muslim chorus says:

**CHORUS 1:** Their chariot fell in our street!

**CHORUS 2:** Their God now prostrates before us!

**CHORUS 3:** So they blame it on us?

**CHORUS 1:** Was the chariot built by us? ...

**CHORUS All:** we are neither idol makers nor breakers!
CHORUS 5: But they blamed it on us!

CHORUS All: Why did they? Why did they? Why?

CHORUS 5: *(emotionally).* Why?

*Pause*

CHORUS 3: They say we razed their temples yesterday.

CHORUS 2: That we broke their chariot today.

CHORUS 1: That we’ll bomb their streets tomorrow.

CHORUS ALL: Why would we? Why?

Why would we? *(FS:171)*

Similarly, when the chorus wears a Hindu mask the reaction against the Muslim community is equally antagonistic and aggressive:

CHORUS 1, 2, 3: For forty years our chariot has moved through their mohallas.

CHORUS 4, 5: Why did they?

Why did they today?

CHORUS 1: How dare they?

CHORUS 2, 3: They broke our rath.

They broke our chariot and felled our Gods!

CHORUS 1, 2, 3: This is our land!
How dare they?

CHORUS 1: It is in their blood!

CHORUS 2, 3: It is in their blood to destroy! (FS:168).

The attitude of the minority is mixed and different. Javed is aggressive. He is full of hatred and contempt for the other community. He volunteers to fight against the Hindus, in the name of 'Jehad'. He says “I believed it was a cause for my people” (FS:197). He declines the offer of job when Ramnik asks him to work at his shop. Bobby is more submissive and unsure. He feigns and adopts a compromising nature. He is neither like the fundamentalist Muslims in his community nor like the liberal Hindus. He changes his name in college, from Babban to Bobby, in order to hide his real identity. Bobby is a Christian name and suggests his conscious effort to maintain an identity different from both the Hindus and the Muslims. But after completing college education he again wants to change his name to Babban. He confesses to Ramnik:

... I was ashamed of being myself. ...

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

The attitude of Zarine’s father, similarly, exhibits fear and helplessness after his shop gets burnt down. His distrust for the Hindu community becomes obvious when
he refuses the offer for job in the shop owned by Wagh and Hari. He “spends all his
time at home, smoking a hookah and collecting all his community people” (FS:202).

The Muslim chorus, suggesting the collective feelings of the community,
also presents the sentiment of prejudice, guilt, distrust and helplessness. These
attitudes in individual characters and the collective feelings attributed to class
response present a mode of defence mechanism. Accusing the other community,
portraying themselves as victims and their opponents as the offenders is a strategy
adopted by both communities to validate their aggression.

**CHORUS 1, 2: They hunt us down!**

They’re afraid of us!
They beat us up!
We are few!
But we are strong!
They beat us up!
They’re afraid of us!
They hunt us down!
They want to throw us out! (FS:179).

Similar sentiments are voiced again when the Muslim chorus says:

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 a curse it is to be less in number! (FS:208).

Thus people in both communities harbour the feeling of betrayal and distrust for the other community. In their helplessness they can only ask questions to themselves. There are no answers available. Both communities silently suffer their agonies for a psychological problem requires a psychological remedy. The real world outside, manipulated by politicians and fundamentalists, is too cruel and complex. Ramnik’s question to Bobby realistically points towards the agony and behaviour of the Hindus and the Muslims when he says: “We are not very different, are we?” (FS: 201).

Administrative apathy and political compliance also aggravate the pain and suffering of the ignorant victims in both communities. People who rely on media reports through newspapers and television tend to believe what is presented to them. The gaps that appear in the media coverage are filled with rumours that further add fuel to the already tense situation. Terrified population attack and retaliate in anticipation of violence. The real cause of trouble, in the play, seems to be a Muslim locality ‘Kareem Bagh’ that shares proximity with the Hindu locality. As published in the newspaper:

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 and it keeled over right there in the mohalla. The idols were broken (FS:193).

When another chariot was brought to recover the broken idols it was refused entry by the authorities. The imposition of curfew does not allow the recovery of the idols from a Muslim locality for four days hurting the Hindu sentiments:

**CHORUS 1:** Has no decision been taken?

*(To Chorus 2)* Our chariot lies broken in their streets! But we are not allowed to enter their streets!

*Chorus 2 rises slowly.*

**CHORUS 1:** Of what use is this curfew?

*(To Chorus 3)* When there is unrest in our minds! Have we to let them insult us? To close our eyes while they stab us? . . .

**CHORUS 1:** There is heartache. We doubt the leader's intentions *(Picks up his Hindu mask.)* They want our blood to boil. They have succeeded. *(Wears his mask)* (FS: 188).
Political parties use both hired as well as motivated people to start such riots. Javed who says that he volunteered to create trouble in the name of Jehad was transported to the venue of the incident in police van. He says:

In the vans, I was with several other youths like me. We arrived in Kareem Bagh minutes before the rath arrived (FS: 206).

And after the arrival of the rath the 'hired hoodlums' (FS:205) shouted slogans and pelted stones as they had been instructed. The stones and knife, to kill the Pujari, were provided to them at the venue itself. Smita who knows the truth about Javed tells her father, Ramnik Gandhi:

**SMITA:** 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! (FS:195).

The entire incident of communal violence, in the play, appears to be a well orchestrated and managed show organised by the nexus of the politicians, the police and the religious fundamentalists. They play their parts with adept slyness while the innocent public blames the other community for the incident. When Ramnik Gandhi threatens to get the two Muslim boys arrested for their confessed involvement in inciting the riots he is surprised at their response:

**BOBBY:** Pardon us, but that was very naive.

**RAMNIK:** You mean they won't arrest you?
JAVED: Arrest me? When they have been looking the other way all along. How do you think we got into the street? In their vans.(FS:204).

And when Ramnik helplessly says: "perhaps I should throw you to the mob."

(FS:204) Javed replies very sarcastically:

Maybe they aren’t being paid overtime.

(Laughs bitterly.) . . . Next time they should have a round of introductions so that we do not end up killing each other. At least not unintentionally. Ha! You want to throw me to the mob? I am a part of it. You have been protecting me from people like me. I’m no different from them! No different, do you hear? I do what they are doing—only on a different street!(FS: 204).

Thus the war between communities is more calculative than real. People who thrive on communal differences have planted it deliberately in the people’s psyche. A feeling of false pride inherited by individuals of both communities grows with the passage of time. In the name of imbibing their tradition in the next generation, the members of both communities sow the seeds of hatred. They animate the differences amid the practices of the two communities and advocate strict adherence to exclusive celebrations of rituals and religious festivals. Even their attire and behaviour points towards the discriminatory religious identity. When the Hindu mob
scuffles Javed and Bobby on the street they identify them as Muslims on the basis of knotted handkerchief that is used by Muslims to cover their heads while praying, and Javed’s prayer cap. Similarly, when Ramnik orders his wife to serve water to the two Muslim boys she feels as though he had asked her to kill someone. She very reluctantly obeys her husband. Her gestures and the way she carries the glasses back to the sink, with two fingers, tells more than any dialogue could have managed. Dattani very effectively deals with this theme of communal disharmony in his plays. He unveils a new dimension of the problem, the psychological dimension that has been ignored by the society all these years.

The play does not suggest any radical solution to the issue for there are no immediate remedies. Just as communal hatred becomes a part of the growing individuals’ psyche, in the play; similarly its eradication should also be attempted during the initial years of a growing generation. Music could have become a unifying force but partition had an adverse effect on the unifying ability of music as well. The dividing forces concretised the abstract feeling that has the potential of healing and, abstract music gained concrete recognition through the singers. The play very skilfully uses the symbol of music. Daksha secretly visits Zarine’s house mainly to be able to listen to the songs of Noor Jehan. Zarine, a Muslim, and Daksha, a Hindu, have one thing in common. They both love to listen to the songs of Noor Jehan:

**DAKSHA:** We both listened and sang along with Noor Jehan. Three voices singing together in perfect unison. Every now and then our eyes would meet and we
would smile as we continued singing—as

if, if we stopped, Noor Jehan would stop

singing for us (FS: 203).

The song also transports Daksha into an imaginary world where she feels like the

heroine in the talkies, and becomes oblivious of her surrounding.

The play is intertwined with repetition of music that connotes multiple layers

of meaning. First, the play presents music as a remedy to revive the rigid society.

Music has the power to penetrate communities. It has no religion. Music can ease

the blows of cruelty and callowness. It has the ability to eliminate the differences of
caste, class and creed. It appeals to the heart and can create an emotional binding

that is more humane and lasting. Music can replace religion only if religious

fundamentalists and corrupt politicians stop isolating people in the name of God.

Jonathan Swift rightly says:

We have just enough religion to make us

hate, but not enough to make us love one

another.¹

Neither the Muslim God nor the Hindu God could save people from dying during

partition. In fact it was due to their identification with a religion, a different God,

that the people got killed and tortured. Daksha remembers the attack on her house at

Hussainabad. Her mother clung to the idol of Krishna for security and protection

while the Muslim mob threw stones and attacked their house:

A stone hit our gramophone table, breaking

it. Krishna chose to destroy what I loved

most. My entire collection of records
broken. Lying about like pieces of glass.

Shamshad Begam, Noor Jehan, Suraiya.

The songs of love that I had learnt to sing with. Those beautiful voices cracked (FS:167).

Music is a unifying force and has the ability to bring the warring communities closer. The sounds of music can transcend the communal divide and affect emotions of both communities signifying the oneness of human heart. The reverberations of music create nostalgia for the unified pre-independent India with two communities happily living in one nation. But such reminiscences have become fragile and short lived because the music of love can be cracked with just the petting of one stone.

Another solution, the play hints at, is to mix and merge with the other community to such an extent that the distinct religious identities efface. Exclusive values and seemingly opposing goals, symbolising distinct ideologies towards the common aim of life create a feeling of distrust and fear. In a bid to possess exclusive ideologies communities aspire to hold rituals and traditions so sacred that even the touch of a non-believer appears contaminative. These discriminating ideologies create distinctions like 'their God' and 'our God' their religion and our religion and encourage an opposition that creates a 'we' versus 'them' attitude that influences all aspects of life — social, political, religious and so on. Aruna is horrified when the two Muslim boys offer to fill water for her house. The very touch of the Muslim boys seems contaminative to her but when her own daughter Smita opposes Aruna’s conservative and discriminative attitude she concedes allowing the boys to fill water for domestic use but not for bathing the Gods. She feels defeated
and sits down. When Smita asks: "... shall I ask them to help?" Aruna immediately replies “But not Gods vessel. You fill that up” (FS:214). But conservative attitudes are common in both communities. Smita says “He is more touchy than we are” (FS: 214). Javed too presents an extreme and exclusive perception of Islam. His rigid and intolerant attitude is perceptible throughout the play. The very sound of the ringing of prayer bells makes him sniff with uneasiness. He tells Aruna “We aren’t exactly falling over each other to fill water for you” (FS:214).

Both Javed and Aruna ultimately feel cheated by their extreme religious adherences. Aruna says: “Am I a bad person? I always thought of myself as a good person” (FS:214). Javed too experiences the same feeling and confesses that he was blinded by his faith and did not realise what he had chosen in the name of Jehad. Bobby could feel that the troublemakers were hired hoodlums but Javed could not. He feels cheated and says, everyone knew:

Except someone as blind as me. . . .On the bus, there were a dozen of them. And I told them I was prepared. Everyone approved.

We were one. United. I really felt proud.

Oh, what a fool they must have thought me to be! (FS:205-26).

Aruna represents the exclusive Hindu attitude that unknowingly enhances differences in the name of tradition. Javed represents a more fundamentalist and aggressive attitude in the name of Jehad. Both these mental attitudes have percolated into the behaviour of the people belonging to the two communities. Smita is very outright in defying family tradition and refuses to carry the load further:
You can do whatever you want to do. But don't expect me to be a caretaker to something I don’t want on my back (FS: 213).

Bobby on the other hand cannot express himself. He tries to evade religious identity in an effort to escape reality. He tells Smita:

I never could express my feelings as well as you do. Maybe my religion oppressed me far more (FS: 213).

These attitudes in the characters depict religion as a dividing, suppressing, and suffocating force. Religion can enhance life and bring unbounded happiness only if the two communities understand that an inclusive common path towards the realisation of the highest reality, 'God', could save them from falling prey to fundamentalist and political forces. The Hindu God or the Muslim God does not humiliate anyone. God does not discriminate on the basis of caste, community or creed. He only welcomes the warmth of whoever approaches Him. Both communities should realise that holding the other God sacred is not sacrilege. Craving to hold one's communal identities as restricted and rigid has created a harmful situation in which both communities experience the tragic flaw of not realising personal weaknesses while convicting the other community with conviction. This attitude creates an illusion; an inbuilt failure to realise that in religion:
there is too much that is sacred. But if we understand and believe in one another, nothing can be destroyed (FS:225).

Final Solutions depicts the mind-set of three generations of Indian citizens belonging to the Hindu and the Muslim communities. The immediate issue confronting the third generation, post independence, youth was not communal disharmony but love. Javed and Bobby enter Ramnik Gandhi’s house not to discuss religion but to clarify and discuss the relationship between Javed’s sister, Tasneem, her fiancé Bobby and Smita. They frankly discuss the issue and instantly solve the problem:

BOBBY: We didn’t accidentally land up here. At your place... Javed wanted to ask you something. (Moves away.)...

JAVED: It is about Tasneem... She is a good friend of yours and I don’t want you making sacrifices for her.

Pause

SMITA (understanding): No. I am not making any sacrifices.

JAVED: So, I just wanted to ask you whether there is any thing between you and Bobby—still.

SMITA: No. I am not making any sacrifices. There’s nothing between us...
anymore. It was just a . . . There wasn’t much between us.

JAVED: I see. Thank you. Tasneem loves him very much (FS: 216-17).

The older generations cannot discuss their problems through frank and logical deliberations. They usually try to elude the significant questions and seek refuge in tradition, custom, religion, self-pity, distrust or aggression thereby enhancing the communal difference and the psychological tension. Daksha does not know the truth about Zarine’s family. Her contempt and hatred for Zarine is magnified to such an extent that she hates the entire community. Aruna escapes into ritualistic practices and does not intend to know the ‘other’. She acts as a custodian of tradition that thrives on the theory of difference and contamination. Ramnik too cannot speak his mind to anybody—not even his wife. The feeling of guilt and the hatred against his own parents and family is evident in his attitude. He does not want Smita to be influenced by her grandmother. He always criticises his wife, Aruna, and tries to embarrass her. He has become a sadist who loves to inflict psychological pain on his wife and mother. He does not trust his daughter, as he cannot accept that she knows two boys from the other community. Thus the difference in the attitude of the three generations becomes evident. Daksha and her generation harness hatred, Ramnik has a feeling of guilt while Javed, Bobby and Smita can resolve issues through dialogue. This is one of the solutions and optimistic view that the play indicates.

*The Swami and Winston* is yet another play that discusses the theme of communal disharmony. Although it is a radio play with a whodunit plot, the untangling of the murder mystery by Uma Rao, reveals the present disintegrating
social fabric that propels communal and cultural decay. This play is a sequel to *Seven Steps Around the Fire*. Uma Rao is the daughter of the Vice-Chancellor, daughter-in-law of the Deputy Commissioner of Police and the wife of the Superintendent of Police. She is a student in Social Science pursuing research in the causes of “violence in India”. The second volume of the *Collected Plays* consists of three detective plays. The third play in the series is *Uma and the Fairy Queen*. Dattani’s experimentation with the detective genre does not take him away from the contemporary Indian reality. In an interview with Hindol Sengupta of Indo-Asian News Service dated July 10, 2004 Dattani says:

I have always been interested in the detective genre. I grew up with Agatha Christie, P.D. James and, of course, Sherlock Holmes and watched all the noir films like the 'Maltese Falcon', so that interest in the genre has stayed.  

All the three detective plays by Dattani focus on lady detective Uma Rao. Jeremy Mortimer, Executive Producer, BBC Radio Drama, in the introduction to the second volume of *Collected Plays* says:

Uma Rao has all the hallmarks of a successful sleuth. She is fiendishly intelligent (rather more so than her unfortunate husband), she is fearless, and her motivation is entirely honourable. She wants nothing more than to see justice
done, and the guilty punished. She also has that quality, shared by Miss Marple and Sherlock Homes, of being able to assume the mantle of invisibility when she so chooses. Not literally of course, but she knows that she can insinuate herself into situations where the uniformed police would be unable to go.\textsuperscript{6}

The ease with which Uam Rao solves the intricate murder mysteries actually reveals the veneer over more intricate issues. \textit{The Swami and Winston} reveals the social, political and personal causes of the divide amid the Hindu and the Muslim community. Sitaram Trivedi is a “right wing Hindu fanatic” (SAW:304). He is portrayed as a cunning contriving and ambitious man with political links. He wishes to use religion to promote personal benefits. Dattani very effectively brings out the malpractices of hardliners belonging to both the Muslim and the Hindu community. Just as Javed, in \textit{Final Solutions}, represents the fundamentalist view of the Muslim individuals similarly Sitaram Trivedi gives words to the perceptions of the Hindu individuals with extreme fundamentalist approach:

\textbf{SITARAM TRIVEDI}: There are two types of Europeans. Ones who understand and appreciate the depth and complexity of Hindu philosophy and others who feel threatened by it. The world will realise the greatness of the Hindu way of life. Wait
and see. It is a question of time. They can’t be blind for ever even if they choose not to see. They will have to open their eyes sooner or later. We shall have our temples all over the world.

UMA. And at Ayodhya?

SITARAM TRIVEDI: Time will tell.

UMA: What if it leads to a civil war? The horrors of partition all over again. Is Hindu pride worth all that? Isn’t there any other way of establishing Hindu pride (SAW: 303).

This conversation between Uma Rao and Sitaram Trivedi presents two different views of Hinduism. Even the Swamiji at the ashram is polite and accommodative of diverse religious views. He represents yet another perception of the accommodative Hindu religion. The Swamiji represents spiritualism. He is so humble and accommodative that he does not suspect Sitaram Trivedi who has deviously planted his own daughter in the ashram. Sitaram Trivedi has contrived to marry off his daughter Radha to Charles, kill Charles and his sister, Lady Montefiore and then inherit their land in England to build a pseudo Ashram. Just as Javed in Final Solutions does not realise that his feeling of hatred and violence towards the other community is the result of collective delusion and misapprehension craftily promoted by politicians and religious fundamentalists for
personal and political benefits even Sitaram Trivedi does not feel the qualm for his conduct. He even tries to defend the cold blooded murder of Lady Montefiore:

I—I didn’t want any of it for myself. (His breathing is heavy). I—I only wanted to help the Hindu cause (SAW:325).

The lack of trust and prejudice for the other community becomes evident when Masood the taxi driver is suspected and arrested for the murder of Lady Montefiore. The police and other people suspect him largely due to his religion. He pleads for mercy and sympathy when Uma meets him:

What is my crime? Being a Muslim? I tell you they will not have arrested me if I was not a Muslim! Who will believe me? You are also a Hindu (SAW:300).

The play also highlights the nexus between the politicians and the police. In spite of knowing the fact that Sitaram Trivedi had fired bullets on Uma, the superintendent’s wife, and Charles, Uma is asked to deny the fact in the court by her own husband.

Unlike Final Solutions, Clearing the Rubble does not depict direct confrontation of people or conflict between religious ideas. It adds another dimension to the issue of social discrimination—the dimension of caste. Caste is believed to be a Hindu tradition in which people belonging to different castes acquire social hierarchy based on birth, parentage and family-profession. The profession of the earlier generations is acquired by the succeeding generations. The inherited family trade, over a period of time, develops into a shared identity and caste. Some works are considered low while some high. People born in such a
family that traditionally performs the low jobs come to be identified as low castes while those born in the families with higher professions belong to the higher castes. Thus caste like community also depends on birth and parentage. Just as one cannot choose ones' parents one can also not choose caste and community. Both caste and community are labels of identity that also define and determine social relationships.

Muslims living in the Indian sub-continent are also affected by the caste system and its inherent discriminations. *Clearing the Rubble* is the story of a low caste Muslim cobbler family. It is, in other words, a story about a family that belongs to the minority amongst the minority. Dattani wrote this play for the B.B.C. Radio. It was written to be broadcast on the first anniversary of the devastating earthquake that shook Gujarat in January 2001- Bhuj, a district in Gujarat, was one of the worst affected areas. The play was first broadcast on the B.B.C Radio on 17th January-2002. The technique adopted in this play is entirely different from the one used in *Final Solutions*. The Radio Play happens to be an entirely different genre as it mainly focuses on the listeners. It has more scope for the play of imagination. At the same time it also has its own limitations as it requires learned listeners for better comprehension. A stage play on the other hand appeals through both audio and visual means. The scene, the scenery, the background, the space, the use of lights, colours and visual affects along with music, expressions, dialogues and pauses create a holistic effect that instantly and comprehensively appeals to the spectators. The maturity of Dattani, as a playwright, is perceptible in his judicious use of the accessories available in the two types of plays. In the *Final Solutions* he very aptly divides the stage into different levels. The level that shows Daksha, suggests the period of partition. The furniture and the oil lamp suggest the period, as late
nineteen forties. On another level is the house of the Gandhis that suggests the confrontation of ideas in the post independence generation. On the third level is the chorus/mob with Hindu/Muslim masks dominating the stage throughout the play, on a crescent shaped ramp. In the radio play only three voices are heard. These voices belong to the three people whose lives:

were affected by the earthquake. An English journalist in the region at the time of the catastrophe goes back to Bhuj a year later. He is trying to track a boy he had met when he was helping with the relief effort.

We also hear the story of the boy's mother,
herself trapped in the rubble.

Thus, *Clearing the Rubble* is primarily the story of the English journalist, Jeffrey, a Muslim boy, Salim and his mother, Fatima.

*Clearing the Rubble* also shares certain similarities with *Final Solutions*. Both these plays deal with the theme of communal psyche. The dislike and distrust for the other community, devoid of any logical or reasoned thinking is common to both plays. Moreover both of these plays have been presented from the narrator's perspective. Daksha narrates *Final Solutions*. We see the events unfolding before our eyes not as they happened but as seen, heard and comprehended by the narrator. Similarly, in *Clearing the Rubble* the reader gets to know only the version of the three-narrating voices. It lacks an omnipresent narrator who could provide a more extensive and pluralistic perspective. Dattani, therefore, in these plays presents only a limited view of the social reality. These plays are imaginative works of art
reflecting contemporary social problems but should not be seen as alternative for social documentation. It would also be incorrect to presume that truth is therefore absent. These plays present the possibilities of fiction to function as truth, or induce the effects of truth through discourses engendered with collective semblances to the perceptions of reality.

*Final Solutions* is a play that the writer was inspired to write unlike *Clearing the Rubble* that he was commissioned to write. Dattani successfully probes the patterns of Indian psyche in both communities, in the *Final Solutions*. Though the drama depicts four decades from 1947 to 1987 - the story holds true and can be applied to understand the Indian society both before and after the depicted period. It transcends the concept of time and space and can be equally effective at any place where the Hindu and Muslim population lives. The wounds of partition and the scars of discrimination come alive along with tales of friendship and valour because the experience has become a part of the collective unconscious. *Clearing the Rubble*, on the other hand, is based on a recent natural calamity. It is a tragedy but cannot be compared with the tragedy of partition. *Final Solutions* gives voice to the sentiments of both the Hindus and the Muslims whereas *Clearing the Rubble* does not allow any Hindu point of view. Dattani has merely taken the well dramatised concept of discrimination hatred and distrust from the *Final Solutions* and used it as a background to assess a recent natural calamity of earthquake. Taking the comparison a bit further it may be aptly said that *Final Solutions* is a creative work written for the expression of the self with collective native intuitive suggestions whereas *Clearing the Rubble* is a professional work written for the colonial radio
audience. In the preface to the first volume of *Collected Plays*, Dattani accepts that he is a professional artist:

> I write for my plays to be performed and appreciated by as wide a section of the society that my plays speak to and are about. This is perceived by some as 'selling oneself', or 'prostituting one's art'.

One cannot deny that *Clearing the Rubble* is a creative work of art though partially limited by its genre – radio play – and its immediate audience.

The play opens with a sense of loss. All the three main characters, symbolised by the narrating voices, lament their personal loss in the very beginning. The initial dialogues by these characters are monologues revealing their immediate thoughts. Salim tries to recollect the names of his schoolmates, injured during the earthquake:

> SALIM (thought): Rahul lost his left leg.

> Pasha lost his sight. Nilima lost her . . . I don't remember now, what she lost. Her teeth? ... And I lost my mother, my uncle, my aunts, my grandfather and my grandmothers . . . I have lost every one now, except for Jeffrey (CR: 65).

This tragedy is not confined to an individual or a community. As the names of Salim's schoolmates suggest, the entire population of the village must have experienced death, devastation and decay. The loss conveyed by Salim's thought is primarily physical and corporeal. Death with its icy hands deprived the child of the
proximity of the family members. His loss clearly explains a child's emotions and longing for the physical presence of elders signifying support care and confidence. The only positive possibility/hope here for this orphan child is the presence of Jeffrey, who in spite of being a foreigner, and an unknown individual instantly appeals to the child through his gestures of care and support.

When the play opens, Jeffrey has come to 'Kutch' for the first time to cover the story of the earthquake. Before reaching Kutch he had experienced his own sense of loss in terms of inter-personal relations:

**JEFFREY (thought):** First Nora left me . . .
we both wanted it I know but, she could
have tried . . . harder . . . Then Jennifer. I
was never there for Jennifer . . . I try hard
to be there for Salim (CR:65).

His loss is also a personal loss but on an emotional level. He regrets the loss and tries to compensate it through help and care for Salim with whom he has no relationship except a humanitarian sympathy.

The third voice is that of Fatima, Salim's mother. When the play opens she is supposed to be buried alive under the devastated hospital building. Her two daughters lie dead near her under the same rubble. She sits beside them helpless and hopeless:

**FATIMA (thought):** Allah be Merciful! . . .
Take me away from this unjust world now.
I will hold the bodies of my daughters till I
follow them to your world. I have no more
strength to call out to those people who
help others but not us (CR:65).

Fatima’s loss, revealed through her thoughts, is different from the loss of Jeffrey and Salim. Her loss epitomises the loss of faith in the human world and society. She calls it an ‘unjust’ world and longs to be in God’s world which must be 'Just'. Her thoughts are coloured with her experience of being a woman who belongs to minority and a cobbler family. Her position in the hierarchy of social structure thus represents the farthest end at the edge of the periphery. Her distrust in the world is primarily due to her position and perception. Her thoughts indicate her belief that people deliberately ignore her cries for help, which is not true. Thus all these three voices represent three different dimensions of the tragedy on personal levels.

A sense of distrust, on a larger level, prevails in the Muslim community against the majority. The play does not portray any incident to support this distrust. So like the Final Solutions even here, the collective psyche in the community may be held responsible for the lack of trust. Any individual’s perception begins with his or her recognition of contingencies and subsequent constructions of self as a part of his/her exclusive community. The individual thus is constantly engaged in self-examination by conscious endeavours to replicate the practices of the preceding generations and thereby reconstructing the past. Ultimately, the individual ends-up in a blind spot of social discrimination. She/he becomes a victim of self-knowledge. Salim imagines that the doctors from his village have been called away to 'Anjar and Bhuj' by the authorities owing to communal bias towards the minority. He tells Jeffrey that the doctors, who "could have stayed here just as well", have been called away because "we are muslims" (CR:69). This perception of the minority as the
oppressed, gives them a feeling of otherness. It may not be a true perception but the world is not what it is but what we perceive. Similarly Salim's mother's helplessness is blamed indirectly on the majority community when she says: "A curse be upon the people who built this hospital!" (CR:70). Jeffrey, a foreigner initially wins the confidence of the under-privileged community not by actually extending any meaningful help but by gesturing to help and care. Salim perceives a ray of hope in Jeffrey and pleads him for help. Similarly, when Jeffrey tells the head and other men of the village that together they can try and bring a crane from the city, the head looks at him with 'respect' and 'acknowledgement' believing that Jeffrey is on their side. Jeffrey despite being an alien is trusted by the minority mainly because the social practices that enhance discrimination and hatred towards the other community do not affect his relation to the community. The community sees him as the unprejudiced and sympathetic third person. The apparent source of discrimination between English and an Indian is not community but colour of their skin. Jeffrey is aware of this discriminatory feature:

they do not notice the colour of my skin in
the dark. In the night, I am one of them

(CR:68).

In fact the role of Jeffrey in the play is romantic and adventurous. He resembles Robinson Crusoe, the protagonist in Defoe's novel by the same name. Robinson, the hero, is shipwrecked. He manages to reach a deserted island whereas his companies don't. He takes some tools with him and begins life anew. He helps other victims, on the island, before leaving for England and later again returns to see the island. The resemblance between Jeffrey and Robinson becomes perceptible, as
Jeffrey is also emotionally wrecked and shattered when he reaches a far-off imaginative village in Gujarat, named Malliya. Like the Island in Defoe’s novel, it is a village cut-off from the outside world. The bus halts seventeen kilometres away from the village and this distance has to be covered on foot. He is the only person from the outside world who has managed to reach this far-flung and unknown vicinity. Jaffrey, on reaching the village witnesses the aftermath of the devastating tremors. The village appears to him, initially, devoid of life. The only thing visible is the heap of concrete and remains of buildings reduced to rubble. He meets an injured boy, Salim. Salim is not worried about his injuries. He laments his helplessness to save his mother and sisters, trapped under the rubble of the hospital building. The head of the village had gone to the town to plead to the authorities and request them to send cranes and equipments so that the people entrapped under the rubble may be saved. He only managed to get an assurance that the equipments will be sent later. Jaffrey, who carries medicines for personal use, gives first aid to the wounded boy. He is a journalist by profession but tries to help the people in the relief work. He induces the villagers to go with him to the town in order to fetch the necessary equipments and the crane. On reaching the rehabilitation office he approaches a German volunteer who, after hearing his story, hands him the keys of a truck loaded with crane and other necessary equipments. The Indian authorities obstruct the way and attempt to restrict the villagers and Jeffrey from driving away the truck without their approval and permission. Jaffrey and his companions exchange blows with the authorities and run away with the loaded truck. After reaching the village they are able to save a few lives. Salim, the injured boy, succumbs to the fatal injuries but his mother, Fatima, is saved. Jeffrey leaves for
England. After one year, like Robinson Crusoe, he too returns to the village to reassess the situation. He meets the ghost of Salim on the outskirts of the village. The ghost recognises him and talks to him. Jeffrey realises that life in the village has continued despite the devastations and much has changed in one year. He too begins to think that the best way to live is to live with one’s rubble. The most cherished things that one longs for exist somewhere in the rubble of life itself. Every one must learn to live with one’s own rubble, emotional or otherwise.

Another associated theme that *Clearing the Rubble* presents is the theme of identity and recognition. The population that lives and dies on the fringe of the periphery craves to be recognised by the population that holds centrality and power in the social structure. The characters representing marginality constantly experience a dilemma. The dilemma whether they should transcend their religious and social identity in order to gain a broader social acceptability or stick to their traditional identities in spite of the affiliated restrictions and deprivations. Fatima, Salim’s mother, analyses the situation better than her husband. She bravely endeavours to alter her family’s social identity by defying social restrictions. In spite of her husband’s unwillingness she becomes a labourer and works at the construction site of the hospital. While addressing her dead daughter, in thought, Fatima confesses:

\[\text{... Your father when he was alive did not want me to work on this building. As it is a cobbler's is not a very respectable profession but he did not what his wife to be a labourer (CR:74).}\]
Fatima is conscious of the social strata and the stigma associated with caste and profession. She defies the conventional view of her husband and first becomes a labourer on the construction site and later a domestic help in the 'Patel House'. She also sends Salim to school so that with the acquisition of knowledge he would become a better breadwinner than his father. Salim's father wanted to teach him the family trade but Fatima was aware that in the land where people barely have sandals on their feet how would he find work mending them? She says:

I wanted Salim to go to school. I did not want him to be a cobbler like his father

(CR:74).

Fatima is portrayed as a calculative woman with a dream to attain social progress for her family. She does not give up easily. Her decisions are shaped by her limited resources. She tries to relive her unaccomplished desires through her children. She takes stern decisions for her children's future. Fatima succeeds in sending Salim to school despite opposition from her husband. She very contemplatively sends Mumtaz to work, despite her young age, so that Salim could study and have better prospects when he grows-up. Addressing the corpse of Mumtaz she says:

Think. If we had suffered a little to send Salim to school, when he grows-up he could earn much, much more. We will be more wealthy, and you will find a husband who can support you well. That is the honour I was seeking (CR:75).
The play also sheds light upon the fact that there is a caste-based discrimination within the Muslim community as well. Salim becomes aware of this discrimination, as a child, when he goes to school. Narrating his experience at school Salim says:

I was suddenly amongst boys and girls from different castes. I was too little then to realize it, but as the months and years went by, I began to feel inferior to them. There were other Muslim boys too. But somehow they treated me differently (CR: 78-79).

Another incident that brings out this deep-rooted social discrimination even in young school going students becomes obvious when Salim is asked to pick-up and throw away a stinking dead rat from the classroom. The older boys tell him that being a cobbler’s son it is his duty and even the teacher maintains a conspicuous silence. Fatima was aware that in order to ascend the social ladder one needed to gain more power through knowledge. She sees Salim as her dream and the future of the family. She does not want her son to learn the family tradition and trade:

... because as a cobbler you would continue to be a low caste. It is true we are Muslims and we are all equal in the eyes of Allah, but in the eyes of others, as a son of a cobbler I know you would be treated differently (CR:76-77).
Salim, even as a child, could feel the discrimination and bias. He “felt ashamed of being a Muslim and the son of a cobbler” (CR:77). When a new boy joins his school Salim deliberately lies that his father is a farmer. He knows that it wouldn’t be long before everybody found out about his fabricated deceit still he wanted to be seen as an equal by the other boys, even if this feigned equality were only momentary.

Salim’s struggle thus becomes a struggle for equality and recognition. Even after his death he continues to exist as a ghost on the fringes of the village. His only desire remains that the government should recognise and acknowledge his existence in the world. Dattani very successfully brings out the irony accompanied with government apathy through the ghost of Salim. The pain and agony of being ignored both in life and after death have been very artistically and effectively conveyed through Salim’s departing words to Jeffrey:

All of us, want to leave our mark behind.

Even if only on a piece of paper in a government office, if not an impression on some unknown person’s mind (CR:82).

The Tale of a Mother Feeding Her Child is yet another play that discusses the theme of social discrimination based on caste and the economic condition of an individual. This play, though not intended by the author, may be seen, as a sequel to Final Solutions and Clearing the Rubble, the two plays discussed in this chapter. It carries the theme of discrimination further towards the periphery and further away from the centre. Final Solutions discussed the theme of communal discrimination while Clearing the Rubble deals with discrimination based on caste and community.
**The Tale of a Mother Feeding Her Child** concerns itself with the life and experience of a low caste poor Indian widow. It is primarily a play concerned with women as a minority. The issue of caste and economic bias will figure predominantly here while women related issues will be discussed in greater detail in the chapter captioned, 'The (Dis) joint Indian Family.' Another similarity amid these three plays is that all of these plays use Gujarat or the Gujarati community as a background against which the incidents and events unfold themselves.

*The Tale of a Mother Feeding Her Child* is a monologue. Anna Gosweb, an English woman, writes it retrospectively. She had visited India during her teens. During her visit, she developed intimate relations with her escort, a labourer from Gujarat. She cared little to know about the man and his background, as she did not contemplate a serious relationship then. She later confesses that it was one of those wild trips that, at nineteen, you think will take you to paradise and nirvana. But the man had retained her address. When the play opens Anna Gosweb embarks on her second journey to India after receiving an emotional and pleading letter, begging her for financial help, from Jaman Gopalia, a low caste poor villager from Gujarat. He had met Anna at Goa where he worked as a labourer and escort in order to earn some money so that he could pay the debt his father owed.

The gulf between the rich and the poor vis a vis the high caste and the low caste becomes perceptible in Jaman's letter to Anna. Jaman's agony and frustration towards life is reflected in his letter to Anna:
I hope your God has been kind to you and favoured you with a good husband and many children. Our Gods have failed us, or should I say that they did not succeed in reaching us. They were too busy favouring our brethren in the cities and of course, the higher caste people of the villages (MFC:565-66).

In all probability this letter must have influenced Anna’s views about India. While travelling to Gujarat from Delhi she observes:

The next thing I know is I was peering through the thick glass to look at hell itself. . . . There were patches of green land, the ones I came to know that belonged to higher caste farmers. But I knew that they didn’t belong to Jaman or his family (MFC:566).

The discrimination between high caste and low caste becomes perceptible even in their possessions as though God has also conspired to favour the higher caste and acted with prejudice and partiality during the famine.

After reaching Saurashtra, Anna locates Jaman's house with great difficulty. Jaman has been a victim of drought and died before Anna reaches his village. She visits his house and meets his widow and his daughter, Shanti. The entire village and mainly the area inhabited by the low caste were affected by epidemic. The
drinking water was available at a price, unaffordable for the poor. The water they drank was contaminated and unfit for drinking. Anna finds the situation extreme and deplorable. She even finds it difficult initially to communicate with Jaman's wife and other women due to language barrier. But as love and life can overcome the hindrances of language, the women quickly learn to comprehend each other's emotions. Anna cannot control her emotions on learning about Jaman's death:

... my outburst was received by the villagers as a sign that I had known Jaman intimately. No words were necessary for them to understand that we were linked sometime in the past (MFC: 567).

Jaman's wife has her face covered with a big traditional veil still the tears rolling down her cheeks and the sweat under her nose display her sorrow and drudgery. She is a poor and hapless widow who has been rendered passive due to tradition, poverty and ignorance. Her daughter, Shanti, is weak due to the epidemic and malnutrition. Anna has brought with her the photograph of her daughter, Jennifer. This photograph becomes the bridge initially to communicate with the family of Jaman. Women do not need words to communicate. They can also communicate through expressions and images.

Jennifer, Anna's daughter, was the child born as a result of the temporary and illicit relationship she shared with Jaman. Thus Shanti and Jennifer are foster sisters and even the response of Jaman's wife towards Anna suggests her awareness pertaining to this illicit relationship. It is this shared past that has forced her to travel back to India and a famine hit unknown region—(Saurashtra). Anna has thus come
chasing her dream and a desire to know the father of her child, Jennifer. She has come to India not to reclaim any relationship but to acknowledge the fruit of an unintended instinctive past. Even Jaman's wife seems to be aware of this relationship her husband shared with the British women. Anna could see that Jaman's wife's "lip tightened" (MFC:568), when she first confronted Anna Gosweb.

Anna interprets this gesture of Jaman's wife as her repulsion. She knows that:

Nobody can be mature about such things. I didn't have the words to tell her that it was just one of those one night things. I wanted to tell her that he slept with me only for the money, probably to buy her a new sari or something. . . . I got a great deal more out of it. More than I wanted really. I—I was only nineteen! Of course I am glad I have Jennifer . . . (MFC: 568).

Jaman, thus becomes the common shared past for these women. But when Anna learns that Jaman has named his daughter Shanti, after her "new age name" (MFC:568), she feels as though "[A]ll at once, she was a part of me. I was connected to it all . . ." (MFC: 568). It is primarily owing to this unuttered desire of saving herself as Jaman's Shanti that she even goes to extremes in her efforts to save Shanti. Shanti, Jaman's daughter, is dehydrated due to the lack of water intake. She is nearing a sure death. Her mother, her aunt and other women from the community have given up hopes and appear prepared to accept the inevitable. But Anna is strong-minded and wants to leave no stone unturned. "They couldn't help her any
more, but maybe I could" (MFC:570). She picks-up Shanti in her arms and rushes towards the bus stand. Even at such a critical juncture Jaman's wife cannot bring herself to board the bus owing to the caste discrimination:

Jaman's wife stopped a little away from the bus. I felt annoyed with her for taking this caste thing so seriously but I didn't know any better then (MFC: 571).

Anna Gosweb, being a foreigner, was not affected by the caste discrimination. In her desperation she elbowed other people and rushed into the bus. She even kicked one upper-caste man out of the bus and bribed the bus driver to drive fast. Her desperate attempts to save a low caste girl from sure death and her compliance with the deprived minority against the powerful majority is similar to the attempts made by another British, Jeffrey in *Clearing the Rubble*. Just as when a small town, in tremor struck Kutch, in Gujarat was denied a timely assistance to clear the rubble Jeffrey along with the villagers attacks the authorities and drives away with a vehicle full of equipment and relief material. Similarly, in this play, a British woman comes to the rescue of the deprived low caste Indian women and saves a girl who was nearing a sure death.

The struggle between the downtrodden and the deprived low caste Indians and their upper-caste landlords thus presents a realistic but hazy picture of rural India. Mahesh Dattani has the ability, rare in contemporary Indian writers writing in English; to feel the pulse and vibration of a thriving culture and vital nation along with its blue blooded differences and cold-blooded discriminations. But if discrimination on the basis of caste and economic status is a pan India phenomenon
the milieu of all these plays being Gujarat presents a distorted view of the state as prejudiced and biased. It is probably the writer’s unconscious endeavour to relocate to his roots in Gujarat, as his parents hail from the state, that he situates the tale – *The Tale of a Mother Feeding Her Child* in a secluded village of Saurashtra. At the same time the presentation of British characters, Jeffrey and Anna Gosweb, as sympathetic and aggressive supporters of the deprived and hapless minority owes to the fact that these plays were written to be broadcast on B.B.C. radio, primarily for the British audience. All this said and done one cannot deny the fact that all these plays present relevant social issues in a convincing manner.
NOTES


2 Mahesh Dattani, Final Solutions in Collected Plays (New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 2000), p.167. All subsequent citations from this play are from this edition and henceforth referred to as FS in parentheses.


4 Mahesh Dattani, Swami and Winston in Collected Plays Volume Two (New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 2005), p. 301. All subsequent citations from this play are from this edition and henceforth referred to as SAW in parentheses.


7 Mahesh Dattani, Clearing the Rubble in Collected Plays Volume Two (New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 2005), p. 61. All subsequent citations from this play are from this edition and henceforth referred to as CR in parentheses.


9 Mahesh Dattani, The Tale of a Mother Feeding Her Child in Collected Plays Volume Two (New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 2005), p. 565. All subsequent citations from this play are from this edition and henceforth referred to as MFC in parentheses.