India since ancient times has the history of communal violence and it has grown up witnessing all that goes with this sectarian divide and selective preferences. This undercurrent of mistrust runs unabatedly between the two most dominating communities in the sub-continent-Hindu and Muslim-as generation after generation this feeling of cultural and communal animosity is further transmitted to the coming generation, making the next moment frightening and scary for the inhabitants of this world. The mistrust between the two communities emanates on account of expression of cultural hegemony, difference in the religious practices and by playing the role of godfather by the majority. The finger pointing at each other as the narrow minded fundamentalists on both sides poses the biggest danger to the establishment of healthy relationship between the Hindus and the Muslims. Here the playwright Mahesh Dattani explores some possibilities for solution to the problem of communal divide in his play Final Solutions and ultimately suggests some remedies in this regard. The dramatist feels that liberal outlook with a conciliatory approach and respect for one-another’s beliefs, mutual trust and sharing of pleasures and pains can help in overcoming the man-made communal divide where individual will be treated as a human being and not as a Hindu or Muslim.

**Key words:** Sub-continent-Hindu, Muslim, mistrust, animosity, communal divide.

**INTRODUCTION**

The world we inhabit is saddened with imperfections; all around us we find perversions and wrongdoings flourishing very rapidly, various sorts of evils and ills make their presence felt at every passing moment in our life. This planet does not present a rosy picture before us and we the stakeholders here are found complaining and whining against every thing we have to put up with. Artists and authors since time immemorial repeatedly portrayed this picture of our world in their creations; John Milton in *Paradise Lost* through the delineation of his cosmic figures Adam and Eve robustly upheld the point that nobody who had eaten the fruit of knowledge could live in peace and harmony here and this view was further espoused by the modern American dramatist Arthur Miller in his play *After the Fall*, asserting that no one is innocent after the birth in this world. So, here man’s life is always in disarray where honesty, integrity and truthfulness are strangers and somewhat aliens. But despite all this, human beings of all hue and colour claim to be epitome of all that is good and noble; they always deny in accepting what they are inwardly and how their interiors function with regard to their perceived roles in the world around them. Man always has the tendency to put on various hats or masks in his milieu, and the obvious reason seems to the individual’s insurmountable craving to present him somewhat infallible and upright. What one does or how one behaves is the result of one’s inward longings, but his outward actions have no synchronization with what is passing through his mind. This gulf existing between what an individual actually is and what he presents himself before the outer world punctures the very dignified survival of man, and thus invites innumerable problems for him. Mahesh Dattani the first Indian dramatist to write in English tackles the issue of communal divide in his periodic play *Final Solutions* where the people belonging to two different religious communities Hindu and Muslim remain polarized on the basis of their respective religion and they have no love lost or mutual trust between. The playwright tries to reveal the causes of simmering discontentment
prevailing on the communal lines between the Hindus and Muslims and suggestively offers some remedies for this problem as he does not want to be seen moralizing directly: “Theatre to me is a reflection of what you observe. To do anything more would be to become didactic and then it ceases to be theatre” (Dattani, May 2001).

*Final Solutions* by Dattani was staged in the backdrop of the communal fever gripping not only India but also many other Islamic countries, particularly in our neighbourhood on account of demolition of Babri Masjid by the so-called Ramsewaks (worshippers of Lord Rama as per Hindu mythology) in 1992. The play by juxta-posing the people belonging to two different and dominating communities in India-Hindu and Muslim divided on the basis of their religious and cultural beliefs once again opens up the wounds of communal violence inflicted on humanity during partition. The characters delineated in the play fall into two categories; one group comprises of Hindus such as Hardika, Ramnik Gandhi, his wife and daughter Samita while the other comprises of Muslims like Javed, Bobby and their family members; even chorus which plays a very significant role in the development of action in the play represents these two communities. Dattani while delving deep into the psyche of his characters, analyses the process of their attitude formation towards people belonging to different community resulting in their communal preferences and abhorrence and consequently their aspiration for communal hegemony, and explores possibilities of finding a solution to the problem of communal divide and hatred. The past beckons us that in India there have always been clashes of cultural identities between the Hindus and Muslims and our partition in 1947 was also the result of this religious divide and cultural dissimilarities. Asha Kuthari Chaudhuri while supporting this point affirms:

“For the Indian, the most important battle for the establishment of a distinctive identity within a territorial location lay in the partitioning of India. National identities were conceived and took shape in accordance with the ideologues that formulated these on the basis of religions (and later, linguistic, ethnic, caste), identities. The gruesome rioting and communal/religious disharmony that took seed in 1947 has continued to throw up countless of such incidents independent to secular India” (Chaudhuri, 2005: 77).

Though the playwright clarified that he had not written the play keeping in view the then communally volatile situation, but a lot many critics, politicians and other prominent personalities from different walks of life viewed it from that perspective. Suresh Dube the spokesperson of Shiv-Sena a major political party in Maharashtra announced that his party would oppose the staging of *Final Solutions* in Mumbai because “some of those who watched it came to our shakha in Bandra and drew our attention to the controversial dialogues. I called up Dattani and asked him to show me the plays censor certificate, which he refused (Datta, The Times of India, Mumbai, April 3, 2010). Besides the most important issue of communal disharmony, the play also raises the questions regarding cultural differences, quest for the liberation of the self from the narrow boundaries, feministic concerns, human opportunism, as well as, man's attempt to run away from the reality and his preference for living in a masked glory. The playwright very deftly lets his audience have the feel of this façade worn by his characters, by portraying them in various situations and then delicately makes us see the blurred line between honesty and hypocrisy, integrity and diplomacy and reality and pretense.

The play depicts the scene of a Hindu family in a communal riots-ridden city where two Muslim boys Bobby and Javed have taken shelter from the Hindu mob represented through chorus wearing masks. The family comprises Hardika the old lady, her son Ramnik, daughter-in-law Aruna and Hardika’s young grand-daughter Samita. The past of Hardika when she was young is presented through the eyes of a fifteen year old girl Daksha. One keeps on traversing from past to present and to past in the timeline and become aware of the causes of communal distrust through the protagonist Hardika (Daksha); her longing for freedom and its suppression, probing of self about her faith in the Hindu mythology; the stone throwing and beginning of violence in the streets of Hussainabad, a small town in Gujarat, during partition in 1948 is again revisited when the two Muslim boys sought shelter in the home of Gandhis:

“This time it wasn’t the people with the sticks and stones. It was those two boys who were begging for their lives. Tomorrow they will hate us for it. They will hate us for protecting them. Asking for help makes them feel they are lower than us. I know! All those memories came back when I saw the pride in their eyes! I know their wretched pride! It had destroyed me before and I was afraid it would destroy my family again! (Pause) They don’t want equality. They want to be superior” (Dattani, 2010: 11).

Through Hardika’s attitude about the two Muslim boys in particular and Muslims in general, Dattani amply makes it clear that desire for cultural and religious hegemony is the main reason behind all this communal hatred and trust deficit between the two communities. Hardika’s comments and her behaviour is an expression of her superiority vis-à-vis the Muslims; she wants to be their saviour and godmother and by doing so she not only hurts their self-respect and pride, but also reduces them in her estimation of them. Her remarks about Bobby further prove that Muslims are not equal to them: “What was he thinking? Of us? That we were all the same?
Javed didn’t think. I hated him” (Dattani, 2010, 24). This attitude only helps in sowing the seeds of discordance, because all human beings irrespective of their caste, creed, sex, race or economic condition want personal dignity and to be treated with respect. Besides, we also find these elements of self-grandiose repeatedly in speeches by Aruna and Ramnik where the former after reluctantly offering water to the young boys at the latter’s persuasion holds the glasses in such a way so that her thumb and fingers don’t touch the part of the glasses touched by the lips of the Muslim boys and keeps these glasses separate from the others while the liberal and rational but guilt stricken Ramnik offers job to Javed in his shop:

“I have a shop in Kapda Bazaar. Not a very big shop—now. It used to be but…I could use your help. The shop is all we have now. We had a mill but…I got rid of it. I should have gotten rid of the shop and kept the mill…You’ll like the job. You can handle those Bohra and Memen women who usually pass by our showroom. You can stand outside and call them in. What do you say? (Javed does not respond. He is overwhelmed.) Please. I would be…happy if you say yes. I will be…it will be my pleasure to give you that job. That shop, it used to be…(Pause.) Take the job, please” (Dattani, 2010: 37).

The play covers three generations in a period of more than five decades, beginning with partition of India after independence to the early 1990s. Hardika the main character represents the first generation followed by her son Ramnik and daughter-in-law Aruna, and the couple functions as a link between the first generation and the young like Samita, Babban and Javed. As a skilful artist, the playwright’s use of flashbacks makes the play a powerful study in time and space where past and present mingle in the eyes of Hardika: “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” (Mohanty, 2005: 113). Even chorus plays a vital role in the development of action in the play. All three generations encounter religious animosity and mistrust prevailing on the communal lines. Outwardly everything seems fine between the people belonging to two different communities; Hindus and Muslims, they have social ties with one another but inwardly there is an undercurrent of abhorrence and mistrust obvious enough for the audience to realize what marks the establishment of healthy relationship between the communities having cultural differences. Dattani shows how we transfer our own perceptions, impressions and viewpoints to the younger generation and this transferring of cultural hostility is revealed through the outbursts of young Daksha who later on as Hardika can never trust the Muslims:

“My father had fought for that hour. And he was happy when it came. He said he was happy we were rid off 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 friends’ parents...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” (Dattani, 2010: 5).

Man becomes what his milieu or culture bestows upon him and Hardika was no exception in this regard; as she grew up she became more and more suspicious about the people of Muslim community.

The issue of religious bigotry is dealt with very minutely by the playwright and it assumes enormous importance in the background of our history and cultural variety. Our forefathers witnessed a lot of bloodshed, violence and atrocities perpetrated by one community or the other where both parties had equal share in robbing others of their fortune and honour. Even the hardliner fanatics like Aruna can hide her true face of communalism in the guise of hypocrisy and the gift of gab while convincing Javed about her respect for other religions:

“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…Samita has so many friends who are not…All religion is one. Only the ways to God are many” (Dattani, 2010: 55).

Such oratory will not be heard in the best of courtrooms by the legal luminaries. If as advocated by Aruna, all religions are equal then why do we have to witness the inhuman and bestial acts of violence and utter lack of mutual trust? While this religious fanaticism makes one the zealous worshipper of his religion at the same time a bitter critic of other religions, full of hatred and intolerance, as it becomes evident when Javed mockingly speaks to Aruna about Samita:

“You said the same thing to her. What I told Babban, you told her…you said you wouldn’t listen to her criticism because she was not proud of her, what did you call it? Inheritance. I said religion. Same thing, I suppose. (Pause) We are not very different. You and me. We both feel pride” (Dattani, 2010: 61).

All this happened on account of fundamentalists and bigots who were involved in ego clashes and one-up-man-ship and gradually passed this distorted value system to the coming generations. Such religious clashes are still everyday occurrences in our country, but a few of them in the past moved the humanity across all classes and communities, because the ugly face of communalism does not recognize the peace loving, God-fearing man, and all are at the receiving end in such communal frenzy.
like killing of Sikhs in 1984, bomb blasts in Mumbai in 90’s, demolition of Babri Masjid in 1992, and Godhra violence in Gujarat in 2002. Alyque Padamsee raises a pertinent question in this regard:

“Can we shake off our prejudices or are they in our psyche like our genes? Will we ever be free or ever-locked in combat…Arabs against Jews, Whites against blacks, Hindus against Muslims? Are they any final solutions?” (Padamsee, 2000: 161).

So far as the religious harmony in India is concerned, it is an unfamiliar land, because here the peace loving people of any community can be instigated and aroused by the bigots and fundamentalists for their selfish purposes. Javed in the play is also a stooge in the hands of such nasty people:

Samita (to Ramnik). They hire him! They hire such people!
Ramnik. They who?
Samita. 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! (Dattani, 2010: 38-39).

The play further highlights that being in majority or minority also determines our thought processes and subsequently our response towards the people of other community. While the majority group fails to acknowledge the equal status of the minority, the latter raises the finger at the dominant majority group for becoming their destiny makers. Javed being a minority who appears a bit upfront and direct in his views unmasks what lies in the heart of Ramnik:

Javed. It must feel good.
Ramnik. What?
Javed. Being the majority. (Drinks.)
Ramnik. Yes, I never thought about it.
Javed. About feeling good because you are the majority?
Ramnik. No, about being the majority.
Javed. But, sir, it is in your every move. You must know. You can offer milk to us. You can have an angry mob outside your house. You can play the civilized host. Because you know you have peace hidden inside your armpit. (Dattani, 2010: 35).

Hardika in her odyssey is also reminded of similar experiences during partition when she belonged to the minority group; her father became the victims of the communal violence. The chorus 1 and 2 representing as mob of two warring communities throughout the play serve as a sharp comment on the issue minority/majority.

The experience and the incidents which happen in our life make us aware of our identity and with the passage of time we identify ourselves with the image thrust upon us. No one after birth is communal but one becomes and here, we all have fair share in transforming liberals into fanatics because it is reciprocal. No one comes clean on this front except a few voices unheeded. The one isolated incident of delivery of a mail to a Hindu neighbour by Javed and the wiping of the letter with a cloth, as well as, the place where it was lying by that Hindu before taking it made Javed realize who he was, how he was different from others, and the next moment we had a different Javed searching for his own community and belongingness. After this first time, he became aware of the ringing of the prayer bell and the religious implications associated with it started stirring his mind. Now, he was full of rage and contempt for the Hindus. So, every individual is a by-product of its milieu and the responsibility for making the bigotry flourishing and spread of communal hatred lies not only on those who are involved in the acts of violence in the streets but more so, on those pseudo liberals who sit in the safe precincts of their drawing rooms and endlessly talk on communal hostility and its danger to the civic society till they empty out a bottle or two of imported scotch. Equally responsible are the so-called religious, showy people on both sides of the communities who perform religious rituals so that, they can go high in the estimation of themselves by the people of their sect.

Now the question that stares at us is can there be a solution to this larger than life problem of communal divide and hostility which we are facing till today? The playwright tries to answer this question through the delineation of certain judicious, even-headed characters with their rational and constructive approach in the play, where experience (Ramnik) and youth (Samita, Babban, Javed) provide a hope in this regard. Ramnik Gandhi seems to be the only sensible human being among the seniors, always adopting a conciliatory approach towards one and all. He is not the hardened communal like his mother and wife Aruna. His heart is full of compassion, affection and fellow-feeling towards the oppressed ones, that is why he extends the helping hand to the two Muslim boys and saves their lives from the violent mob by giving them shelter in his house, even against the strong protests from his wife and mother. He never wants his daughter spend much time in the company of his mother because he fears that the old lady can impress the tender mind of Samita with communal tinge. Therefore, he argues with Aruna about Samita’s spending time in the company of Hardika:

Aruna (sternly). Samita, go to Baa and sit with her till I call you.

Samita makes to go.

Ramnik. I think Baa will be fine. There’s no need. Aruna. She hasn’t spent much time with Baa. She must learn to be with elders.

Ramnik. Baa will ramble on about old times and bore her to tears.
Aruna. Good. If she did, it will be ten times longer than the Ramayan.

Ramnik. Baa doesn't tell her everything that happened. Aruna. Good. If she did, it will be ten times longer than the Ramayan.

Ramnik (seriously). Baa does not know. Or she pretends she does not know everything.

Aruna. She will tell her what happened to her. And that is the truth, isn't it?

Ramnik (angrily). I don't want her telling my daughter that those people are all demons! (Dattani, 2010: 11-12).

The person of Ramnik is like a puff of fresh air in the stifled environment at home and he unleashes positive energy all around him all the time. For people like Ramnik, the dramatist feels can make a new beginning for peaceful co-existence of the Hindus and Muslims and mutual confidence between the two communities can be restored again. But even Ramnik also, has to bite his nails at the scathing comment of Javed about the suspicious environment prevailing at his home when he questions Samita on what she knows about Bobby and Javed: “We do love our own blood. Unlike you who treat your own like shit, which can't be touched” (Dattani, 2010: 32).

Ramnik knows how he was able to acquire the shop of Zarine’s father at throw-away price, which was burnt by his father and grandfather during communal riots and that is why Zarine’s father refused to take any help from Ramnik’s father when offered, because any self-respecting individual would have denied the patronage which hurts his pride and we find the same response from the third generation when Javed declines the offer of job to him by Ramnik. As the truth constantly pricks the conscience of Ramnik, he finally decides to tell this secret to Hardika who always remains prejudiced against the Muslims:

Ramnik. I just can’t enter that shop any more. I can’t bear thinking about it.

Hardika. What?

Ramnik. I didn’t have the face to tell anyone. For me there’s no getting off. No escape.

Hardika. What are you talking about?

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

(Pause) And we burnt it. Your husband, my father and his father. They had it burnt in the name of communal hatred. Because we wanted a shop. Also they learnt that...those people were planning to start a mill like our own. I can’t take it any longer. I don’t think I will be able to step into that shop again...When those boys came here, I thought I would...I hoped I would be able to...set things right, I—I wanted to tell them that they are not the only ones who have destroyed. I just couldn’t. I don’t think I have the face to tell anyone.

(Pause.) So, it wasn’t that those people hated you. It wasn’t false pride or arrogance. (A Noor Jehan song can be heard very faintly.) It was anger.

Hardika (crushed). Why didn’t you tell me? All these years.

Ramnik. You have to live with this shame only for a few years now. (Dattani, 2010: 75).

Here Ramnik himself feels guilty ridden because by acquiring that shop unethically, he finds his complicity in the wrongdoings on the Muslims. One is reminded of similar situation of man’s effort to absolve himself of his involvement in the inhuman deeds of slaughtering the humans on the basis of racial cleansing in Arthur Miller’s Incident at Vichy. When Von Berg the Prince comes out of the interrogation room, he is holding a pass of liberty; he is free, for he is not found guilty of brotherhood with his fellow prisoners. But he understands, however, that no man can deny his relationship with humanity and so, he hands over the pass of liberty to Leduc and owns his complicity in evil. Ramnik's offer of shelter and job, like Von Berg's gesture, is a redemptory act for his guilty conscience, remarks Santwana Haldar:

“Ramnik’s guilt consciousness is thus perfectly used for dramatic purpose by Dattani. It is his guilt consciousness that prompts him to do something for the two young men who have fallen prey to the anger of the Hindu fanatics. He behaves as liberal because he cannot forget the sin of his father and grandfather. The structure of the play is based on this guilt consciousness which is introduced as a major theme” (Haldar, 2008: 84).

Dattani like Miller convinces the readers that, they too have some responsibility towards humanity at large.

The playwright directly did not answer the question raised by himself in Final Solutions; rather he drops certain hints with dialogues of his characters in wiping out this communal malaise, which has caused a lot of disquiet among the people living both sides of the borders. The characters of both the communities, Hardika, Aruna and Samita on the one hand while Babban and Javed on the other were revealed to have inherited or received communal identity and fractured value system in the milieu of which they are a product and are repeatedly reminded of who they are and where they belong to as, affirmed by Javed before Ramnik:

“I believe in myself. Yes! What else have I got to believe in? It’s people like you who drive me to a corner and I have to turn to myself and my faith. I have a lot to thank you for! At least now I am not ignorant of my history and
faith" (Dattani, 2010: 42).

The sense of belongingness is asserted through the use of words like ‘us’ and ‘ours’ and ‘you’ and ‘yours’ and these words are indicators of the existence of chasm between the two communities:

Ramnik (annoyed). Why are you apologizing to me? Of course they are bastards. They beat you up, didn’t they? Javed. What I meant was, they are your own… (Dattani, 2010: 24-25).

Javed calls people throwing stones at the Gandhi’s house as ‘your own people’ (Dattani, 2010, 33). The playwright puts the onus on both the communities for their lack of camaraderie and harmony:

Ramnik. Why do you distrust us?

The promising points which the study of the play offers for establishing amity and good-will between the two communities are the nobility at heart, space for self-expression, open-mindedness and tolerance for other’s dissenting note, respect and regard for one another’s cultural values, a society sans ego and sans prejudice and initiation on the part of both the communities to look beyond the narrow communal lines. Ramnik’s gesture of offering milk to Bobby and Javed is an effort to show that he is liberal in his outlook, though he confesses that majority plays a vital role in bringing peace and that’s why Javed’s accusation of Ramnik has meaning: “You don’t hate me for what I do or who I am. You hate me because I showed you that you are not as liberal as you think you are” (Dattani, 2010: 43).

In Samita the playwright has presented a rational and liberal voice who doesn’t want to belong to or bind herself to any hollowed religious beliefs; this classification of communities on religious basis and then adherence to any of their narrow sectarian principles stifle the free thinking Samita who argues with her mother:

Samita. How can you expect me to be proud of something which stifles everything else around it? It stifles me! Yes! Maybe I am prejudiced because I do not belong. But not belonging makes things so clear. I can see so clearly how wrong you are. You accuse me of running away from my religion. Maybe I am… embarrassed, Mummy. Yes. Maybe I shouldn’t be. What if I did what you do? Praying and fasting and…purifying myself all day. Would you have listened to me if I told you you were wrong? You will say yes, because you are certain I wouldn’t say that then. All right, so we both are prejudiced, so what do you want to do? Shall w all go back to sleep?
Aruna. Does being a Hindu stifle you?
Samita. No, living with one does. (Dattani, 2010: 57-58).

Samita is unlike her mother and grandmother; she doesn’t agree with the arguments given by her mother, rather she differs with her and to the utter dismay of Aruna voices, her disapproval of her opinion in a rebellious manner: “This is a time for strength! I am so glad these two dropped in. We would never have spoken about what makes us so different from each other. We would have gone on living our lives with our petty similarities” (Dattani, 2010: 58). Samita appears to be the matador ready to take on the bull of communalism by its horns and puts her mother in place for her conservatism and absurdities: “We would not have let you forget that the spirit of liberalism ran in our blood and that you were the oddity, you were the outsider!” (Dattani, 2010: 60).

Dattani makes Samita the mouthpiece of all the three youths in the play when she expresses he wish before Bobby, a wish that should be harboured by one and all, irrespective of caste, creed, age or sex: “Maybe we should all run away from home like Javed. For five minutes every day. So we can quickly gulp in some fresh air and go back in” (Dattani, 2010: 67). Samita feels that every one of us is capable of creating freedom for him provided one has the will power and the rational approach in life.

The dialogues of Bobby and Javed are also endowed with hope so far as the solution to the problem of communal ill-will is concerned. Bobby’s speech to Aruna regarding her performance of religious rituals and her concept of ‘sacredness’ forms the gist of the whole play, and here we are provided the final solution to the problem of simmering discontentment among the Hindus and Muslims towards one another:

“…You can bathe Him day and night, you can splash holy waters on Him but 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” (Dattani, 2010: 74).

When one starts realizing the implication of the views put forth by Bobby then no one will ask us to leave for Pakistan or India, there will be no blame game as who did what and to whom and why in the past and the lines uttered by Chorus 1 that ‘A drop of oil cannot merge with an ocean of milk. One reality cannot accept another reality’ will remain pointless. Samita, Bobby, and Ramnik make the plea that we need to belong to all the creations of the Almighty and be concerned about the pains and pleasures, trials and tribulations, aims and aspirations of all the mankind without any selectivity on racial or communal grounds. When we are able to assimilate all the diverse forces running through our social fabric, Hardika, Aruna or Javed; then we hope a new pattern
based on humane qualities will emerge and this will as Bobby suggests pave the way for the **final solution**:

“The tragedy is that there is too much that is sacred. But if we understand and believe in one another, nothing can be destroyed. *(Puts on his footwear and looks at Hardika).* And if you are willing to forget, I am willing to tolerate” (Dattani, 2010: 74).

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