

‘Transformed Resentments’: *Final Solutions*

Introduction:

Oliver Kenneth observed that ‘problem play’ is that “which explores a particular social problem. Such plays are sometimes known as ‘thesis plays’ because they mount and work out an argument...their ideas constitute some issues of deep concern to the dramatist with which he wishes to engage the minds and consciences of the audience” (quoted in R. Manjushree, 203). Written in 1991, Dattani’s *Final Solutions* was first performed in July 1993, when India was undergoing perhaps the greatest threat to its integrity and secular image after the British-sponsored partition riot, following the demolition of Babri Masjid (mosque) in 1992. In an analysis of Miller’s *Incident at Vichy* and Dattani’s *Final Solutions* Sengupta remarked, “they each deal with a historic moment that demonstrates contextually how violence can be common to racism, (organized) religion, and national imagining” (Sengupta, “Of Race/Religion...”, 215). Hence, the play seeks to address the colonial legacy of communalism working its way through the binary opposition between “we” and “they” and the logic of mutual exclusion. The consequence is not limited to the visible performance of communal riots. The present play concentrates on uncovering the invisible channels through which the wounded feelings are transformed into, to echo Alyque Padamsee, “resentments” (Padamsee, 161).

Religious attitude proves to be the product of history and religion is the key determiner in imagining the nation founded upon the “two nation” theory. The sense of history mingled with religion on the execution of the policy of divide and rule, and the separatist forces circulated through the entire body politic of the rubric of colonial and postcolonial state. Naturally, in the play history emerges as an active participant in changing societal pattern. As Angelie Multani rightly points out, “History is evoked and used by almost every character as a justification/rationale/excuse for each fresh outbreak of violence” (quoted in Banerjee, 281). Negotiation with history is made through diary and other various devices. The playwright uses a technique akin to the Stream of Consciousness.

The private and the public level compliment and overlap each other: “The mob in the play is symbolic of our own hatred and paranoia” (Padamsee, 161). The manipulation of past and present symbolizes a larger process. Anxiety and fear of one community- “Must we lose our identity?” (*Final Solutions*, 208) - Is countered by the sense of insecurity of the other – “Thwart them. So we may live in peace” (FS, 181). As Banerjee pertinently remarks, “... the theatrical gesture of the continuous stage of the Mob/Chorus in stylized and ‘becoming’ postures suggests extended selves of the characters that are stripped off of cultural restraints as fluid locations where communal hatred reigns” (Banerjee, 282). The facelessness of communal rioters can well be discerned in the quoted lines from *A Bend in the Ganges* by Manohar Malgonkar: “The sound in the far distance was only too familiar. It was the war-cry of a mob on the prowl, something like the roar of a distant sea. It was always the same, whether Hindu or Muslim...” (Quoted in Ketaki Datta, 276-7)

Dattani introduces a family to show the working of the emotions at a micro level. The narrative of national independence is interspersed with that of the colonization of a young girl through marriage. The subtlest way she is subjugated is, through an interpretation of her experience, locking her up within the boundary of a knowledge that serves and perpetuates her colonizers' interest: "she", as Padamsee observes, "builds up a hatred for Zarine, her best friend, and her community because she herself can't stand up to her own in-laws" (Padamsee, 161). Aruna, confident of her "samaskara" and protected by a history/myth, finds it natural to avoid a touch of the other community and claims, "If they cannot respect it, they must learn to tolerate it" (FS, 210). Ramnik's apparent liberalism and resentment of orthodoxy, motivated by the knowledge of sin committed by his forefathers and based on majority's sense of security, disappears at the slightest provocation.

The minority is not whitewashed, but a reexamination is made of the so-called natural attitude that thrusts a Muslim boy into a corner where he finds nothing but "myself and my faith" (FS, 198), to take pride in, to identify with and to give meaning to his existence. The identity based on logic of exclusion, asserts itself by violent negation of its other to escape anxiety of extermination.

The play touches a highly emotional chord as the Muslim boy Bobby holds the idol of Krishna in his hand: "I hold Him who is sacred to them, but I do not commit sacrilege" (FS, 224). It is not the denial of experience, rather a relocation of it; and the recognition of the point in which "... past has to be forgotten if it is not to become the gravedigger of the present" (Nietzsche, quoted in Champagne, 129), that might envisage

a possibility of dialogue: “If you call them they will come. But then again -- if it’s too late -- they may not” (FS, 226).

Alyque Padamsee sees *Final Solutions* as a play of “transferred resentments” (Padamsee, 161) -- be it Ramnik’s resentment of orthodoxy motivated by the sense of guilt and impossibility of escape from the sin committed by his forefathers, or Hardika’s rage against Zarines (Muslims) and their “wretched pride” (FS, 172) resulting from her inability to question the authority of her in-laws to insult her and incapacity to have an access to the truth and to question the hegemonic authority. The play is also remarkable for an innovative use of chorus which exhibits the way paranoia hardens doubts into conviction and drowns individual voice into mob hysteria.

Commenting on the title of the play, the playwright himself remarked, “The title is in the plural [*Final “Solutions”*] to suggest that Hitler’s pogrom . . . can [recur] and *has* recurred in different ways Bigotry and nationalism need not go together, although that is what both Nazism and the . . . Hindutva movement were trying to do” (quoted in Sengupta, “Of Race/Religion...” 216). The hate campaign is projected through the framework of history while the potential of theatre is explored to promote tolerant togetherness which alone can interrogate the stricture of exclusion and inclusion. However, the multiple “solutions” subverts the possibility of any finality and “The title of Dattani’s play on communal violence and tensions in contemporary urban India itself calls to attention the apparent insolubility of this situation...It is, indeed, this very search for a final solution, which in many ways perpetuates the cycle of violence and hatred” (Multani, quoted in Banerjee, 286). The plurality resists monolithic absoluteness of the

“solution” which remains open ended. As Shanta Gokhle comments: “What saves Dattani from the pitfall of equilibrium, from the deadening effect of symmetry, is his historical vision. He shows that communal attitudes have evolved over a period of time and are often based on ignorance” (Quoted in Banerjee, 280).

History:

Time present and time past

Are both perhaps present in time future

And time future contained in time past. (Eliot, 2).

The narrative of the play builds through the reworking of a historical process which is the architect of the attitude of today, and the locale where both the public and private merge, creating tension and interrogating the validity of things unquestioningly accepted. Dattani deploys a very effective means of condensing the huge time span of almost sixty years in a manageable miniature frame through the character of Daksha/Hardika. We view the play through her eyes -- both literally and metaphorically, and as a consequence, she assumes almost the status of a narrator, dominating and dominated by the textual politics beyond her control. The co-existence of Daksha, the fifteen year old self of Hardika and the aged matriarch is made convincing and convenient to achieve dramatic effect by positioning them on a higher level -- indicating a hyper-real and cross-time existence.

Since the play is presented as a part of an act of writing a diary, the essentially subjective nature and interpretation of the experience and events put down by the narrator

as well as the instability and “made up” character of the very subject is pointed out time and again. Interestingly, the diary comprises “A dozen pages before. A dozen pages now. A young girl’s childish scribble. An old woman’s shaky scrawl” (FS, 167) -- both the periods excluded from the centrality of mature/adult/authentic knowledge, and thus, giving an alternative view point of the world mediated through their feelings. Sometimes, the diary assumes the form of interior monologue -- spontaneity struggling with propriety like the ink coming out too thick from the discarded fountain pen, smudging the emotions and the words, some times the controlling intellect of the chronicler striking off the irrelevant details (“There is no need to be that honest”, FS, 166)--, yet the diary remains a close confidante sharing the lonely girl’s innermost feelings. The narrative consists of the written words and the unwritten recollections, physical facts as well as psychological realities, private experiences and public dimensions. One adheres to it as a testimony to truth like Aruna (“She will tell her what happened to her”, FS, 172), some challenge its authenticity like Ramnik (“Baa does not know. Or she pretends she does not know everything”, FS, 172), and the meanings hidden between the lines remain open ended.

The play opens with the delirious young girl’s fifty-six line long address to the “dear diary” recording the turbulent time. The narrative of national independence loses coherence and a monolithic structure emerges as it gets interspersed with the colonization of a young girl by both post and neo-colonial forces, by implication an extension of the larger society. An open mind capable of being angry at the lack of liberality of her own freedom fighter father in regard to his attitude towards the Muslim community -- “my friends’ fathers” (FS, 167) -- (“They had let loose the dogs”, FS, 167), gets contaminated and channelized in the similar flow of thought with the elemental fear of being

exterminated by the inhuman forces released from the mutual hatred between the communities: "I knew that I was thinking the same, like my father" (FS, 167). The scared girl of fourteen, maturing into an old woman recollects and recoils as she cannot get rid of the fearful hatred even after the change of status from the potential victim and victimized to potential benefactor: "...those two boys running away who frightened me...Asking for help makes them feel they are lower than us" (FS, 172). What she fears most is the "wretched pride" (FS, 172) in their eyes.

A subtle form of the colonizing of a married woman obviating any identity other than her husband's and a counteraction is evident in the subsequent narrative. It works through the process of renaming: Daksha is renamed as Hardika to match with Hari while Daksha renames her in-laws, such as, her mother-in-law as Gaju (abbreviation of "Gajanand", the elephant) for her bulky body and grand bathing, her father-in-law as Wagh, the tiger, for his snoring. The act of writing becomes a means of resistance as she creates a private space for herself -- a space where she enjoys an independent identity: she retains her original name, throws away her "pallav" (veil), calls her husband by his own name Hari and even, declares "...my lord and master has the brains of a silly goat" (FS, 175). She wishes desperately to live a life outside her home through Hari recounting the stories in his college. She tries her best to retrieve Hari's decision to leave the college, "There must be someone who is thinking about the country's future" (FS, 196). It is the diary which bears witness that the girl of fifteen still retained a sensitive mind independent of the communal hatred enough to be exhilarated at the possibility of befriending a Muslim girl Zarine and her family, even though she could not remember

the “unmentionable” (*FS*, 175) things , probably beef, they used to sell in the market without disgust.

Any kind of artistic pursuit or love for it was stigmatized as an act of transgression of the boundary of a “proper” domestic womanhood so far as to prohibit Daksha to hum a song to her husband behind the closed door. This is a domestic replication of shattering of the dream to sing, of a girl of fifteen (“I can never be a singer, like Noor Jehan” (*FS*, 166), by silencing her in a manner the mob violently shatters her gramophone during the communal riot just after independence. However, this zeal for the song becomes an important bonding between two girls of the same age group from different religions. The ghost of past memory haunts the old woman continually as here she is again brutally shaken: the betrayal felt by the young girl (“Oh God! Why do I have to suffer? I just wanted them to be my friends”, *FS*, 223) ruins the faith of the old woman forever.

The slow but steady process of injecting the venom of communalism could be traced to Daksha’s narrative as she is informed by her husband that “all the bad people have left for Pakistan” (*FS*, 196). Still she was clever enough to interpret her father-in-law’s patronage of the “sants” (the spiritual healers) as a way of proving himself “somebody” (*FS*, 197) rather than any sign of devotion and feeling. But she fails as she starts believing in his concern about the financial loss Zarine and her family must have been undergoing following the disaster fell upon their house, and gets incorporated in the history of hatred.

If subalternity is situational, the history of the family exercises and validates the hetero-patriarchal domination by subjugating women until they begin to participate in its perpetuation and acquires a position of an agent. Daksha is informed that her in-laws exhibited a rare piece of liberalism in offering a job to Zarine's father in their shop after the latter's shop got burnt down, but it was rejected on account of lower salary. Though disheartened at the loss of possibility of playing the "shethani", she cherishes an attitude of love mixed with gratefulness from her cherished idol Zarine. Daksha is smoked out of her hole of fantasy by the rude and humiliating behaviour she receives instead--which, she interprets to be a consequence of Zarin's false ego -- followed by the treatment of being physically hit and locked up by her husband and losing her honour in her family forever. She is however promoted to the position of the mainstream consequent upon her incorporation into the narrative of minority discourse propagated by her family. In the same manner, Aruna suffers as a subaltern by her husband's constant disgust with her standing with the upholders of communal sanctity and superiority. Interestingly, he does never try to enlighten her, rather he enjoys a sadistic pleasure by proving his wife inferior in understanding, which turns out to be a way of re-negotiating with his own sense of shame at the doing of his fore-fathers and his own inability to come out of the prejudice in spite of all his superior knowledge ("Your life is based on violence", *FS*, 198). Smita also, in her turn, suffers a marginalized position for being actually and unconditionally a proper liberal human being. She is torn between her lack of belief in all the elaborate rituals her mother compels her to perform and which she performs only out of love for her and her own capability of free thought process -- somehow akin to her father --, which she cannot exhibit in fear of cornering her mother as it would strengthen Ramnik's

camp. She feels suffocated and assumes a diminutive status within home which she shakes off once outside home: “Maybe we should all run away from home like Javed. For five minutes every day” (*FS*, 219).

Thus, the mechanism of subsuming and the simultaneous attempt to resist appears to be a recurrent motif in the play. Past shapes the present and present relocates the past and brings in new potentials for future: “It represents flux of contemporaneity, the constant efforts to come to terms with history and vice versa” (Banerjee, 280).

The Mob

The technical excellence of Dattani reaches the high watermark with his use of the classical device of the chorus so effectively in modern contexts -- synonymous with the mob -- in the present play. Unlike the classic united self, here is the unstable, fractured and incoherent self although any potential rupture or dissenting voice gets drowned by the louder voice of the mainstream/majority. The stage direction shows how the individuality is obliterated by the faceless mass identity represented by masks instead of any unique entity acted out by a player. The sticks, upon which the masks are set, might be a modern equivalence for the scepter – a symbol for hegemonic control, a phallic sign of masculinity and instrument of violence against the violators. The mob thus is present as a mechanical, gigantic, thoughtless force instrumented to institute violence by the chorus’ vacillating preference for Hindu or Moslem cause indicated by their wearing respective masks otherwise donned in black.

A reference to the mob hysteria is found in the diary of Daksha, a girl of fifteen, recording her impression of the euphoria that followed the independence: “And they are rushing out and screaming and shouting and fighting” (*FS*, 166). The euphoria was channelised yet in another way leading to the blood bath of the riot of 1947. The violent mob shattering the house of Daksha in 1947 was now getting prepared for a fresh hunt after fifty years of independence.

The traditional function of the chorus to provide the background information necessary to set the play in motion is given an added dimension. We come to know that the ratha was stoned and the pujari was stabbed to death while passing through a Muslim populated gully. However, what is more important is the stylized manifestation of the process by which the event gets interpreted and interacted with, and influences the interpersonal relation. The presuppositions upon which is founded our attitude and behaviour come to the surface with the provocations: “This is our land” (*FS*, 168). The binary between “we” and “they” and the knowledge that it is the outsiders who are enjoying the privilege of living in “our” territory gets encoded in the apparently neutral innocent behaviour. The demands come to “send them back” (*FS*, 169), to “drive them out” (*FS*, 169); and the doubt exhibited by the chorus 4 and 5 -- dramatically presenting the statement in interrogative mode --, gets overlapped and overwhelmed by the conviction stated firmly by chorus 1, 2 and 3. Any attempt to probe into the matter (“For forty years our chariot has moved through their mohallas... Why did they today?” *FS*, 168) is thwarted by the imposition of decided criminality suggested by the hint of transgression: “How dare they?” (*FS*, 168) In the same vein, any possibility of

misinterpretation is overthrown by the conviction in the contrary that calls for a suitable revenge.

The wounded pride leading to the rage of the Hindu mob is paralleled by the tone of mockery and disrespect for the other by the Muslim chorus: “Doesn’t their God have a warranty? We are neither idol makers nor breakers” (*FS*, 171). While the shocking surprise at being targeted in general as responsible for the offence leads to wrath in chorus one, two, three and four, in chorus five it breeds pain. In the same manner, the angry declamation of the former group, “Let them send us back” (*FS*, 171), is counterpoised by the latter’s helpless anxiety – “where?” (*FS*, 171) The next point where the chorus picks up, it wears the Hindu masks and demands that “they” should go back to “their land”, because “their hearts belong there” (*FS*, 176). The weak apology offered by the meek “minority” represented by chorus five alone (“They are few. They can’t do much harm”, *FS*, 176) is ruled out by the joined forces of the rest: “Time will tell who they are. Whether they mean harm” (*FS*, 176). The chorus, as a Muslim mob, takes up the challenge – “We are few! But we are strong!” (*FS*, 179)–, and their threatening confidence is interspersed by the pleading of helpless individuals (“Please don’t throw us out!” *FS*, 179).

The mob assumes their real identity as the plunderer when it becomes faceless - - symbolically putting off all masks -- and snatches away the watch and other possessions of the two passers by; and it is only afterwards that they gradually wear the mask of Hindus discovering the prayer cap and the knotted handkerchief which identify their prey as Muslims. The predicament of the individual following the revelation of identity as well

as the individual's attempt to obscure it is countered on a public level by the chorus' determination to uphold its existence in face of anonymity.

At the same time, the lack of real stability and fluidity of identity they assume, during their threat to Ramnik Gandhi for betraying his own community and echoing Javed's sentiment, and changing masks on ritual level, emphasizes the becoming as different from being. Javed's declaring himself to be part of the mob doing the same thing on different streets and the constant presence of the two boys on stage corroborates the connection. The presentation of the chorus may be called "realistic stylization," since, as noted down by Arvind Gaur, they are "psycho-physical representation of the characters and also provides the audience with the visual images of the characters' conflicts", since "communalism has no face, it is an attitude and thus it becomes an image of the characters" (Quoted in Datta, 265). When reflecting the character's attitude, the group assumes the role of the chorus, while it represents its own, it becomes the mob. The Chorus acts both as the oppressed and the oppressor.

The Problematics of Communalism

"Communalism being the worst form of materialism divorced from being anything that is sacred and oriented towards worldly wealth and power, can truly be combated by a higher form of the sacred that combines the secular ideal of human equality, democratic awareness, identification with the suffering, alleviation of poverty ... and belief in the holiness of all forms of life..." (Satchidananda, quoted in Manjushree, 208).

The play may be read as an exploration of some areas of our experience which are potential sites for the workings of neo-colonial forces -- a legacy that was inherited by the post-colonial India-- and have been internalized by us so far and intricately fabricated in the collective unconscious.

The impact of the fear psychosis works in varying degrees in case of various characters in the play according to their being positioned in different situations leading to misinterpretations of facts and events. The horrible consequences of the independence which was immediately followed by the communal riots, could be gauged by the experience of millions like Daksha, a girl of fourteen who lost her father --, for whom independence becomes nothing more than “a most terrible thing [that] happened to our country” (*FS*, 166). A terrifying sense of imminent danger converts a sensible mind nourished by fellow feelings into a believer of the creed of separatism. The disgusted distrust towards the other community exhibited by Hardika and Aruna is replicated by Tasnim’s parents. The grateful acknowledgement of the kind gesture shown by Ramnik of giving unasked relief to them concerning their daughter, turns instantaneously into ungracious discourtesy recognizing their well-wisher to be a Hindu (“You weren’t cut off. He disconnected while you were talking to him” (*FS*, 171). It is the same sense of insecurity that makes Tasnim so panicky and Smita so concerned that they fail to analyze the situation and react to the throwing of a soda bottle at the hostel of Muslim girls . The panic spreads rumor and initiates counter attacks and this is how the things get started.

The manipulated indifference of the state is finely manifested by the inaction of the police: the police do not come at the call of the matron of the Muslim girls’ hostel;

they don't answer the phone of Aruna. The disbelief in the assurance of protection from the authority ("They will lock us up! Not them" (*FS*, 180) breeds law breakers. The dubious nature of its function is underscored by the information that Javed and Bobby were brought to street by their vans.

The theme of communalism is played on fine concord as the private and public sphere interact and intersect sometimes in unison sometimes discordantly. The helpless pleading of the individual with a bloodthirsty mob at their heel, "Please don't throw us out!" (*FS*, 179), is sandwiched between the proud declamation of challenge thrown by the Muslim chorus, "They want to throw us out!" (*FS*, 179), and the spiteful demand of a murderous crowd, "Throw them out!" (*FS*, 180). The humanism of the determined individual Ramnik fights both the self-protective measures of the panicked Aruna and the violence of the crowd maddened with hatred and sadistic pleasure of torment. Each of the party claims an exclusive access to the regime of truth: Aruna suspects that "They must have done something wrong" (*FS*, 180), while the mob bases the validity of their identity by expelling the other from it: "They who are wrong. Since we are right. And they oppose us" (*FS*, 181). The weakness of the conviction is however exposed only to be of conjectures born out of insecurity as well as the zeal of centrality, forwarded to prove the "rightness" of the action: "Set an example. Stop them. Before they do harm. Tame them. Before their passions inflame" (*FS*, 181).

Anxiety builds around the dialectic of "we" and "they" on a subtler level. Both Aruna and Hardika react sharply at the idea of being leveled as "all the same" (*FS*, 183) though they themselves forget to mention their levelers as individuals instead of as a

mass entity -- “they”. The same consciousness that makes Javed and Ramnik confident about the safety of the protectors even after being called “traitors” (181) and threatened to be killed, makes the former apologetic at calling their chasers bastard in front of their protector who risks his life and reputation for them, “Those are your own people” (*FS*, 191). The privilege and the pride to which the benefactor is entitled, is lightly touched in Daksha’s elation at the news that Zarine’s father came to ask for job to her father-in-law since it would enable her to play the “shethani” (rich mistress) and demand friendship, gratitude and right to listen to Noor Jehan.

The play exposes how the manifest violence of the performance of riots has its root deep in the innocent attitude and behaviour of the harmless common mass nourishing and validating the violence, mutual sense of insecurity and distrust, terror and extermination. The well-meaning, “samaskari” (with commendable household values) housewife is aghast at the possibility of actually offering water in her house to the two Muslim boys and is shocked at it being accepted. Aruna’s behaviour is quite in consonance with the “purity/pollution syndrome” of “Brahminical Hinduism”: she “demonizes her (religious) Other, although she cannot think of killing the tiniest creature in real life or of being disrespectful to any other faith” (Sengupta, “Of Race/Religion...”, 226). Ramnik also confesses his inability to belong less, because of any secular make up of mind, more because, it connects him with shameful memory of his family history. The disgust of the conservative apart, the liberalism of the civilized also turns out to be indifference to dumping humility: Ramnik’s insistence to give them food and shelter to reluctant Aruna when the receivers are in no position to refuse them, adds to greater humiliation. Bobby appeals almost in tears “Well, I didn’t want to create an awkward

situation where we wouldn't be served water..." (FS, 185). Ramnik's gesture also manifests power both in exerting order and instituting violence and exhibiting the pride of being the benefactor protecting and forgiving the arrogance: "It must feel good. Being the majority" (FS, 192) The pride of protection is exposed yet in another way, protecting the victim from the victimizer's "own" people.

Ruptures and discontinuities run parallel to the homogenous groups. Javed is thrown out of his house for his alignment with antisocial elements hiring thousands like him to create trouble. The communal betrayal of which Ramnik is accused, and which makes him "traitor" is replicated in micro level as Smita, in a fit of excitement betrays Tasnim's confidence about her brother and earns the name of "traitor". Hardika cannot identify herself with the Hindu mob in spite of her personal prejudice and spite for the Muslim boys under their roof in particular and the community in general: "Where were our own people when we needed them?" (FS, 191) Bobby admits his uneasiness with his identity, not because he doubts its basic tenets but it makes him different, and he changes his name Babban into Bobby only to obscure his Muslim identity — "I could become superior by not belonging" (FS, 201). Smita as well as Bobby claims a space for their identity, a right not to be categorized, and a choice of an alternative which is denied by their immediate religious guardians.

Dattani, however, makes the assurance of belonging problematic as the ages of alienation and feelings of otherness find voice. Though cornered, Javed takes pride in his own creed even at the cost of risking safety. While Bobby is hesitant to give away his own identity and denies the knot of the handkerchief to the searching crowd, Javed wears

his prayer cap with dignity in front of the murderous chorus. It is he who points out to their protectors that they are protecting them from the violence of their own people. Over sensitive, he takes a wrong cue to Ramnik's statement about his meeting his sister and blurts out at the prejudice against his community of being the lovers of their own brothers and sisters, and puts a blaming finger on a counter prejudice: "We do love our own blood. Unlike you who treat your own like shit which can't be touched" (*FS*, 190).

The master stroke of the playwright comes with the highly charged moments in which the identity/position of the liberal protector and the orthodox conservative, the offender and the victim, the violence-monger and the peace-loving common man interchange and are exposed to be constructed and reconstructed at the slightest provocation. The apparently absurd attempt of shifting the responsibility of throwing the first stone at the neutral ordinary being is re-examined. At the slightest provocation, the civilized host, protecting the refugees from the angry mob and providing shelter and food ignoring the family pressure, even offering job ignoring the unknown possibility of betrayal from a person thrown out by his own family, blurts out: "Your life is based on violence. Your religion is..." (*FS*, 198). Infuriated with self exposure and recognition of an undesirable identity, he becomes violent and slaps Javed at the face. Mask of tolerance falls off. Another story fits into the scheme: a lively teenage boy, the hero among the neighbourhood children, is requested by the postman to drop a letter. The house owner commands to put it down on the wall, wipes the letter before touching it, the wall and the gate, and thus, changes the world for the boy for ever: "We all heard a prayer bell, ringing continuously. Not loud. But distinct" (*FS*, 200). Fallen in his own eyes, the

cornered boy -- turned to himself and “my faith” to take pride in --, throws meat and bones in his courtyard and finally the stone at the chariot starting the violent riot.

With a fine irony, Javed meets his mirror image rather in Aruna, firm in her belief, rigid in her prejudice, solid and invincible in her faith and proudly convinced in the impossibility of existence of any other “truth” than her own: “If they cannot respect it, they must learn to tolerate it” (*FS*, 210).

However, all arguments apart, the play touches real emotional chords like anxiety, insecurity, pain, betrayal, shame as well as love in describing the inception of the communal riot. In spite of Javed’s claim to belong to the mob, and pride in upholding his religion and working for its cause, he finds himself alone in his own world of memory and fear. Intoxicated by something to turn back upon with pride and a panacea for all the bruises and burns, he used to attend the meetings propagating and injecting the dreams of “mother land and fighting to save our faith and how we should get four of theirs for every one of ours” (*FS*, 205). The dozes were sufficient to bring him to the city, to make him play the fighter fighting for the cause of his “own” people. He throws the stone supplied by someone in a trance. He is even supplied with a knife by that invisible anonymous hand holding him. The pleasure and intoxication born out of pain and wounded sentiment and humiliation are gone and the root cause returns: “crashing down” (*FS*, 208). He cries helplessly like a child innocent of all the evils dumped upon him by his own orthodoxy and other’s opportunism: the knife let off. However, the knife is taken up by another under control of his/her own cycle of pain, fear and anxiety and the “pujari” (priest) is stabbed.

Hardika also finds a way to come out of her private cycle of joy and fear. Daksha was so happy to find an excuse to go to Zarine's house and enjoy the cordial and friendly reception which she found there while, all of a sudden, her happiness and dreams are crushed down, and independence and respect are lost in a moment when she is invited to their table and offered food with the specific purpose to insult her. Unable to bear the smell, she throws up and Zarine, her dream peer, screams at her furiously. As a consequence, Daksha is locked up as a punishment, her movement is restricted, she is hit by her husband, loses respect in her husband's eyes for ever, and most importantly she gets incorporated in the narrative -- Zarin's father asked for more salary than he deserves from Wah and rejected the benevolent offer. And it is their "wretched pride" (*FS*, 172) that made them mistreat her so cruelly and humiliatingly spoiling her life for ever. She lives with the memory for so many years until now the hateful secret is exposed. The veil of darkness of ignorance lifted, Hardika calls for the two boys: "If you call them they will come. But then again -- if it's too late -- they may not" (*FS*, 226).

Ramnik's obsessive liberalism and hateful mockery of Aruna's prejudice and intolerance is also exposed to be motivated by another private cycle of shameful memory. He knew that it was his forefathers who burnt the shop of their Muslim neighbours -- assured of the support of their community --, to obliterate their business rival in name of communal cause and acquired the shop at half its price: "...it wasn't that those people hated you. It wasn't false pride or arrogance. ...It was anger" (*FS*, 226).

The Idol

In the present play, the idol of Lord Krishna plays a vital architectonic role. It becomes a potential site for contestation of conflicting forces endowing it with multiple layers of significations. With the progression of the play, it transcends its symbolic significance and acquires greater representational value.

A passing reference is made to the idol of Krishna as Daksha recollects the terrifying day at Hussainabad, with the blood-cuddling crowd throwing stones at her house in her father's absence, and her mother clinging to the idol praying for his safety. The impact of extreme fear and helplessness breeds contrary reactions: it strengthens all the more the faith of the firm believer (her mother) and turns the impressionable teenage girl into an atheist who finds the idol "a painted doll. A doll no different from the ones I used to play with and think it was a real person" (*FS*, 167). Yet, well-trained in the age-old belief system, the newly converted blaspheme recognizes the breaking of the gramophone -- "what I loved most" (*FS*, 167) -- in the next moment as an apt visitation of god's wrath and the fear -- if not respect -- is restored: "Krishna slapping me in the face..." (*FS*, 167). The idol and the faith it inspires becomes a site for conflict between Ramnik and Aruna, and Smita becomes the apple of discord. Aruna's obsession with pujapath and the elaborate care she takes of the lord who "will protect us" (*FS*, 174) is countered by the anxiety of Ramnik exhibited through exaggerated blasphemy: "Who do you think is creating all the trouble?" (*FS*, 173)

A moment of relief and grace comes when the three youngsters – Smita, at last relieved of the burden of prejudice of her mother, Bobby, confessing his own escapism, and Javed, coming out of his nightmare of humiliation --, joke and splash water, purifying the torpid ambience with a life-affirming promise. The play climaxes with Bobby holding the tiny idol of Lord Krishna which he shows to the world in general and Javed in particular: the tolerance and love emanating from the religion itself which gets contaminated by “our trivial pride”. The idol sits comfortably and gracefully on his palm enjoying the “warmth” of a human being who knows this much that “I don’t believe in Him but He believes in me” (*FS*, 224). Overpowering the pounding sticks and violent threats, Bobby’s voice reverberates: “You cannot remove my smell with sandal paste and attars and fragrant flowers because it belongs to a human being who believes, tolerates, and respects what other human beings believe. That is the strongest fragrance in the world” (*FS*, 225).

Conclusion:

Georg Brandes once observed: “What shows a literature to be a living thing today is the fact of its subjecting problems to debate” (quoted in Datta, 264). The stylized presentation of the discourse of communalism and the attempt to conjecture its solution in the play highlights the reverberated echo of mutual accusation and distrust, replicating one another – the Otherized entity turns out to be the projection of the self itself. Hence, the solution lies not in the stricture of exclusion and inclusion, but in acceptance of the variety and multiplicity.

Conveyance of a message of tolerance apart, the play succeeds in exposing the rather unacknowledged corners of our banal everyday normalcy – “The more powerful community’s delusion of self-innocence, sustained often by popular religiosity, can thus seriously weaken the foundation of a plural society. This is in fact true of any religious-cultural community since scriptures and myths as veritable texts of a people’s history may partly be a metonymic articulation of its actual or fantasized sovereignty over its Other. Moreover, what the holy books *actually* mean is also contingent on the varying interpretations of the religious authority and is therefore guided by its ‘innocent’ interests” (Sengupta, “Of Race/Religion...”, 226).