Challenging Religious Communalism With Theatre: Mahesh Dattani’s Final Solutions

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Challenging Religious Communalism With Theatre:
Mahesh Dattani’s *Final Solutions*

Sohini Pillai

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the
Prerequisite for Honors
in South Asia Studies

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INTRODUCTION

Like religion, theater seems sometimes to be on the way out, but it keeps coming back in unexpected disguises—some horrible, some wonderful.  
— Paul Woodruff, Philosophy & Classics Scholar.

In the first week of December in 1992, thirty-four year-old Indian playwright Mahesh Dattani was fully immersed in the rehearsals for the premiere of his fifth play, Final Solutions, at the Deccan Herald Theatre Festival in his hometown of Bangalore, India. Dattani was a veteran participant of the festival. His first two plays, When There’s a Will (1988) and Dance Like a Man (1989), had premiered there and received warm praise. It therefore came as a distressing shock the following week when the organizers told Dattani that Final Solutions could not be a part of the festival. The organizers were not concerned with Dattani’s abilities as a director, but with the subject matter of his play: religious communalism. Final Solutions, which tells the story of two young Muslim men seeking the protection of a Hindu family during a communal riot, explores the causes of religious conflict. The play’s central theme was an extremely sensitive topic given the events that were unfolding at this time in the city of Ayodhya in North India.

On December 6th, 1992 over three hundred thousand volunteers of the Hindu Right had torn down the Babri Masjid, a sixteenth century mosque built on the order of the Mughal Emperor Babur in Ayodhya. The Hindu Right claimed that the mosque had been built by first destroying a Hindu temple that marked the birthplace or janmabhoomi, of the Hindu deity Ram. The organizers of the Deccan Herald Theatre Festival expected that violent communal riots amongst India’s Hindu and Muslim populations would follow the demolition of the Babri Masjid. They therefore told Dattani that this was not the time to perform Final Solutions in their

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1 Throughout this thesis I have used the spelling “theatre” rather than the American-English spelling “theater” as this is how the term is spelled in South Asia. However when quoting American scholars such as Woodruff, I have retained their spelling of the term.
view (Dattani Interview 2010). The predictions of the organizers would prove to be right and in the following months, South Asia would explode with instances of communal violence in which seventeen hundred people would be killed and fifty-five hundred more injured (Ludden 2005, 1). In the city of Bombay alone, at least one thousand people would lose their lives (Tambiah 1997, 249). The organizers’ fears were not unfounded. Were they right however, in their decision to pull Final Solutions from the Deccan Herald Theatre Festival? Dattani argued that this would have been the perfect time to stage Final Solutions since the play is, in fact, a plea for religious tolerance (Dattani Interview 2010).

Dattani’s argument raises important questions regarding the potential of theatre to address sensitive issues such as religious communalism in a constructive manner. Dattani believes that theatre can have a positive social impact. Had Final Solutions premiered in a city like Bombay in December of 1992, could the play have influenced potential rioters to refrain from using violence and thus have prevented the bloodshed that would engulf the city? Does theatre have the potential to serve as a platform for raising awareness about this important social issue in South Asia? Can it help promote religious pluralism in South Asia? These are the questions I will explore in this thesis. Alongside these central questions, come a series of related questions. In order for a play to successfully tackle the issue of religious conflict, what specific themes need to be explored in the play? What is the relationship between theatrical events orchestrated by political parties and the medium of dramatic theatre in South Asia? Does a play examining religious communalism have to reach a certain type of audience in South Asia in order to have a social impact? Does the language in which a play is written influence the effectiveness of the play to address religious communalism in this region? Would film be a

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2 The city of Bombay has officially been known as “Mumbai” since 1995. However in this thesis I have chosen to refer to the city as “Bombay” as this was the name the city was known by in the early nineties- the historical time period much of my thesis focuses on.
better medium for spreading ideas of religious pluralism in South Asia?

Mahesh Dattani’s *Final Solutions* provides the optimal site at which to explore these questions regarding the potential of theatre to provide a platform for promoting pluralism. The play has been performed since 1993 in many different parts of India and the USA as well as in different South Asian languages. It has also generated substantial conversations among intellectuals, activists, theatre critics, and audiences.

*Final Solutions: The Play, Context, and Productions*

*Final Solutions* centers around the Gandhis, a middle-class Hindu family in Gujarat, who find themselves in a challenging predicament when two young Muslim men seek refuge in their home during a communal riot. The Gandhi family comprises of the secular Ramnik, his staunchly religious wife Aruna, his mother Hardika, who is a survivor of the partition of India and Pakistan, and his daughter Smita, a college student. The two Muslims who come to Ramnik’s home seeking protection are the liberal-minded Babban who prefers to go by “Bobby” and his childhood friend Javed, a misguided young man who is paid to start communal riots. The tensions that arise between these six characters in the course of a single night form the crux of the play. These tensions mirror the tensions and conflicts present outside the Gandhi home, which are conveyed through the use of a Greek-style chorus designated the “Mob/Chorus” which is Hindu at some points and Muslim at others. The theme of communal tension is given historical depth through flashbacks featuring Hardika at the age of fifteen in 1948. Her experiences in the aftermath of the partition surface in her memory at different points of the play. Thus, *Final Solutions* explores religious communalism in a multi-layered fashion.

The political climate of the *Ramjanmabhoomi* movement of the Hindu Right during which the play was written and first produced, adds yet another layer of significance to the play.
During the early nineties, Lal Kishanchand (L.K.) Advani, president of the Hindu nationalist political party, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), was championing for the demolition of the Babri Masjid with religious processions, known as Rath Yatras, which were essentially theatrical expressions of Hindu dominance. The context of these political Rath Yatras contributes to the resonances of Final Solutions because the communal riot that forms the background of the play is brought on by the disruption of a Rath Yatra while passing through a Muslim neighborhood.

Since its first production in 1993 directed by Dattani in Bangalore, Final Solutions has been performed throughout India’s urban cities. The play was performed that same year under the direction of Alyque Padamsee in Bombay, the major site for violence in the Babri Masjid aftermath. The memories of the riots were still fresh in the minds of the actors as well as the audience in the city. This production was also taken on tour to New Delhi and Kolkata. In 2005, Ashish Sen directed a unique production in Bangalore. Sen’s production involved members of the deaf community and thus stretched the meanings of Dattani’s original text by highlighting the theme of voicelessness. Other prominent performances of Final Solutions include productions by Bangalore Little Theatre Group in 1997, Madras Players in 1999, GASP Theatre Initiative in Bombay in 2005, and Roo-Ba-Roo Theatre Group in Chennai in 2008. Final Solutions has also been put on by colleges and universities across India, including a 2007 production directed by Dattani at Lady Sri Ram College in New Delhi which had an all-female cast. Beyond India, Final Solutions has been produced in the USA by South Asian theatre companies in cities such as Palo Alto, California, Houston, Texas, and Boise, Idaho. In addition to these performances of the play in the English original, the New Delhi-based social-activist Asmita Theatre Group has produced the Hindi-Urdu version (translated by Shahid Anwar in 1998) several times across India, hosting critical talk-back sessions with audiences after each performance.
The central theme and its layered treatment in *Final Solutions*, the socio-political context of the play’s early productions, its long history of performances in English and Hindi-Urdu, and the public attention it has drawn, make this play an immensely rich site to explore theatre’s potential to serve as a platform for advocating religious pluralism in South Asia. In this thesis, I will examine *Final Solutions* both as a literary work and as a successful piece of theatre in this capacity. Through a detailed analysis of the text, I will first pinpoint the specific aspects of Dattani’s play that make it a powerful tool for addressing religious communalism. I will also explore how political theatrical events, such as Advani’s *Rath Yatras*, influenced the writing of *Final Solutions*. I will then turn to an examination of its prominent productions, again paying particular attention to how the communal tensions incited by the *Ramjanmabhoomi* campaign impacted them. This examination will also include a discussion of the audience’s reactions to these performances.

I will next compare the Hindi-Urdu version of *Final Solutions* with the original English text. Here, I will explore the ramifications of the two languages for the play’s effectiveness. I will ask if a play like *Final Solutions* should be written in English, a language not understood by the majority of India’s population. Finally, I will compare the medium of theatre to the predominant medium of South Asian popular culture: film. I will consider whether a play like *Final Solutions* can have a social impact in a country dominated by the Hindi-Urdu film industry known as Bollywood. How does the play compare to films dealing with the same theme? I will explore this question by comparing the play to Mani Ratnam’s *Bombay* (1995), a film made in response to the Babri Masjid demolition and the Bombay riots. Through my examination of both literary and theatrical aspects of *Final Solutions*, I hope to throw light on the potential of theatre
to address the crucial social issue of communal violence in South Asia and contribute to the building of harmony in the region.

**Theatre: An Avenue for Addressing Social Issues**

Since the early twentieth century, theatre has served as a medium for commenting on social and political issues in different parts of the world. Some prominent examples include German theatre practitioner Bertolt Brecht’s *Mother Courage and Her Children* (1939), written in response to the rise of the Nazis in Germany, and Arthur Miller’s *The Crucible* (1952), an analogy for McCarthyism in America. In the past twenty-five years American playwrights have used their craft to combat the prejudices that threaten peace in their country. Acclaimed playwright August Wilson’s collection of ten plays “The Pittsburgh Cycle”, which includes iconic pieces such as *Fences* (1987) and *The Piano Lesson* (1990), addresses the different degrees of racism that America’s African American population has experienced in the past hundred years. In 1991, Tony Kushner premiered *Millennium Approaches*, the first half of his play *Angels in America: A Gay Fantasia on National Themes*. Set in the late eighties and early nineties, *Angels in America* tackles one of the most prominent forms of discrimination in America: homophobia. Recently, in his play *Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo* (2009), Rajiv Joseph commented on the devastating situation taking place in Iraq because of American occupation. All these American plays received critical acclaim and were finalists or winners of the Pulitzer Prize for Drama.

Similar plays have been written across the world. In 1986, the Junction Avenue Theatre Company created *Sophiatown*, a play that deals with issues of racism during Apartheid in South Africa through the story of the 1955 destruction of the mixed-race neighborhood, Sophiatown, which was located in-between two white suburbs (Hlongwane 2006). *The Murder of Isaac*
by Israeli playwright Motti Lerner delves into the ethnic and religious tensions between Palestinians and Israelis through a dramatization of the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak (‘Isaac’) Rabin. Ironically, the play has not yet been performed in Israel (Marks 2006). Irish playwright David Ireland’s *Everything Between Us* (2010) takes place in the Stormont’s Parliament Buildings on the first day of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission for Northern Ireland (Horwitz 2010). The play looks at issues of religious tolerance and political loyalties that currently plague Northern Ireland.

Reflecting on what an art form like theatre can provide in the aftermath of a national crisis such as a riot, theatre scholar Nadine Holdsworth writes in *Theatre & Nation*, “…as the newspaper articles fade from view, theatre, in its temporal distance from the moment of unrest, can act as a form of cultural witnessing, as an acknowledgement and a reminder that this national event happened at all, that there was enough strength of feeling for people to occupy public spaces, burn cats, throw stones and deface buildings” (Holdsworth 2010, 43). Holdsworth goes on to cite examples of plays that were written following major national riots such as Anna Deavere Smith’s *Fires in The Mirror: Crown Heights, Brooklyn and Other Identities* (1992), relating the 1991 riots in New York, Robin Soans’s *Mixed Up North* (2008), detailing the 2001 riots in Burnley, England, and Mohamed Rouabhi’s *Vive la France!* (2005), documenting the 2005 civil unrest in France. All three of these plays were sources for important discussions between citizens in America, England and France about the prejudices that were underlying these riots and the measures that could be taken to prevent similar occurrences in the future.

India also has a long history of political dramatic theatre. Some prominent examples of Indian political theatre include the traditional theatre forms of *Tamasha* (Maharashtra) and *Bhavai* (Gujarat) as well as the work of theatre companies such as the Jana Natya Manch in New
Delhi. However, apart from a few exceptions such as *Final Solutions*, political theatre has not been used in India as a medium to discuss the issue of religious communalism in recent years and the specific national crises connected to it. Why has theatre not been utilized as means for examining this issue in India? As shown in the above examples of plays from different parts of the world, theatre has been used to address important social ills and prejudices. In some cases, the plays have prompted vital conversations that can be used to combat social problems. Does theatre that addresses religious communalism in India have the potential to spark similar dialogues that could ultimately aide in promoting religious pluralism in the country?

**Methodology**

This thesis builds on an independent study project I conducted in the fall of 2010 during a semester abroad at the School for International Training: National Identity and the Arts Program in New Delhi. The project compared Mahesh Dattani’s *Final Solutions* with choreographer Tanusree Shankar’s pluralistic dance-drama creations. For my thesis, I decided to narrow my focus to *Final Solutions*.

The archival research at the Natya Shodh Sansthan (“Theatre Archive”) in Kolkata in November of 2010 provided me with important information on Mahesh Dattani and *Final Solutions* including original reviews of the productions, interviews, and video clips. Additionally, I have consulted books, journals, and newspapers through library research. The archival and library research has provided much of the background information to topics vital to this thesis such as the Ramjanmabhoomi campaign, the history of theatre in South Asia, and the Indian film industry. Textual analysis of Dattani’s original English text and the Hindi-Urdu version translated by Shahid Anwar has helped me explore the effectiveness of the script in different languages.
In addition to textual research, I also conducted an extensive amount of ethnographic research in Bombay and New Delhi. During November and December of 2010, I interviewed the playwright Mahesh Dattani, the Hindi-Urdu translator Shahid Anwar, and actors who have worked with Dattani including Joy Sengupta, Suchitra Pillai, Vivek Mansukhani, and Indu Ramchandani. Additionally, I had teleconferences with directors Alyque Padamsee and Ashish Sen. In January of 2012, I returned to New Delhi to conduct interviews with various members of Asmita Theatre Group including director Arvind Gaur and senior artists Shilpi Marwaha, Samina Sheikh, and Rashmi Singh. I have since conducted a teleconference with Jisha Menon, who was in the first production of the play. This ethnographic research has allowed me to understand the views of theatre artists regarding Final Solutions’ potential to promote religious harmony.

With regards to theories of theatre, I have found the book The Necessity of Theater (2008) by Philosophy and Classics scholar, Paul Woodruff, to be especially helpful. His argument that “people need theater” in order for human society to function is especially important in relation to the main question I seek to answer in this thesis.

Certain sections of Chapters One, Three, and Five have appeared in an unpublished research project, Using Drama and Dance to Drive Away the Demons: Modern Indian Theatre and Dance in the Context of Religious Pluralism (Pillai 2010). Portions of Chapter Two have been taken from my independent research project done in the summer of 2011 entitled Dharmic Serials and Documentaries: Examining Religious Communalism in India Through Media.

Chapter Outline

Each chapter of this thesis addresses a different aspect of Final Solutions that contributes to the play’s potential to address religious communalism. In Chapter One, I present the reader with a basic background to the history of theatre in South Asia and the history of communalism...
in the region and then situate Final Solutions within these histories. The context and events of the Ayodhya Dispute (the political controversy during which Final Solutions was written) are described in Chapter Two. Chapter Three discusses Mahesh Dattani’s background, his works, and the events that led him to write Final Solutions. In Chapter Four I provide an analysis of the play, paying particular attention to the set, characters, and themes. Actual productions of Final Solutions in India and the USA alongside the reactions of audience members are examined in Chapter Five. In Chapter Six I look at the production of the Hindi-Urdu version of Final Solutions directed by Arvind Gaur of Asmita Theatre Group— which in my view is the most successful production of the play. In Chapter Seven, the mediums of film and theatre in India and their abilities to address religious harmony are compared. The analysis of the text and productions of Final Solutions in these chapters highlights theatre’s potential to generate dialogue amongst diverse groups and promote religious pluralism in South Asia.
CHAPTER ONE

Drama, Politics, & Religion: Theatre and Communalism in South Asia

*Final Solutions* is situated within a long history of theatre in South Asia and it deals with religious communalism, a problem that has plagued the region for over a century. In this chapter, I will discuss the history of these two aspects that inform the play. I first define three genres of theatre that are helpful in understanding the play: ritual, dramatic theatre and theatrical events. I then give an account of the history of South Asian theatre and its intricate connection to religion. I also describe South Asia’s history of dramatic political theatre. Finally, I give a definition of the term “communalism” and explore the history of religious conflict in the subcontinent.

**Defining Theatre: Ritual, Dramatic Theatre, & Theatrical Events**

As noted in the Introduction, the thesis seeks to examine whether the medium of theatre, specifically theatre like *Final Solutions*, can make a difference in promoting ideas of pluralism. However, before attempting to answer this question, it is important to ask: To what genre of theatre does *Final Solutions* belong to? Is *Final Solutions* comparable to a play of the Western theatre tradition such as Henrik Ibsen’s *Hedda Gabler*? Since *Final Solutions* deals with issues of religion, is the play itself related to any religious theatrical traditions of South Asia? In order to determine what type of theatre *Final Solutions* is, a definition for theatre must be established.

In *The Necessity of Theater*, Woodruff defines theatre as “the art by which human beings make human action worth watching in a measured time and space” (Woodruff 2008, 39). Thus according to Woodruff, an American football game is an example of theatre as much as a production of Sophocles’ *Antigone*. Following this broad definition for theatre, I here identify and define three forms of theatre which are important in this thesis. These three types of theatre
are ritual, dramatic theatre, and theatrical events. While they share certain aspects, they are three distinctive forms of theatre.

Anthropologist Frank Vivelo defines ritual as follows: “Broadly conceived, any prescribed, stylized stereotypical way of performing some act. Narrowly, a single act of a religious performance” (Vivelo in Morgan and Brask 1988, 177). At first, with its performers and costumes, ritual appears to be quite similar to what I will discuss as dramatic theatre. Theatre scholars William Morgan and Per Brask note that, “Ritual involves portrayal and performance, often a performance space and performers. Ritual frequently includes the use of masks, makeup, costumes, dance, and music” (Morgan and Brask 1988, 177). Any production of Andrew Lloyd Webber’s musical *The Phantom of the Opera* would involve masks, makeup, costumes, dance, and music. Does that make it ritual? No, it does not. Ritual is intricately related to a religious or spiritual tradition. Often ritual is a means through which one can establish a connection with the divine. As French and African literature scholar John Conteh-Morgan points out, ritual’s “function is instrumental: to act on the gods and through them” (Conteh-Morgan 1994, 20). Examples include the trance possessions of *Chinogwi-kut, Sumangogu-kut*, and *Mugam* dancing performed by Shamans in Korea (Lee 1990) and the Theravada Buddhist *Pirit* recitation ceremonies performed by monks in Sri Lanka (Obeyesekere 1990).

In the table below, Richard Schechner identifies the distinction between ritual and what I describe as dramatic theatre, by pointing out that ritual is efficacy while dramatic theatre is entertainment (Schechner 1976, 207). Despite referencing religion and incorporating the ritual of worship into the story, *Final Solutions* does not fit this definition of ritual and is an example of dramatic theatre.
### Table: Efficacy (Ritual) vs. Entertainment (Dramatic Theatre)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Efficacy (Ritual)</th>
<th>Entertainment (Dramatic Theatre)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Results</td>
<td>Fun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Link to an absent Other</td>
<td>Only for those here</td>
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<tr>
<td>Abolishes time, symbolic time</td>
<td>Emphasizes now</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bring Other here</td>
<td>Audience is the Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performer possessed, in trance</td>
<td>Performer knows what he’s doing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audience participates</td>
<td>Audience watches</td>
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<tr>
<td>Audience believes</td>
<td>Audience appreciates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criticism is forbidden</td>
<td>Criticism in encouraged</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collective creativity</td>
<td>Individual creativity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Dramatic theatre is the form of theatre most people think of when they hear the word “theatre”. Famous examples of dramatic theatre include Euripides’s *Medea*, Shakespeare’s *King Lear*, Federico García Lorca’s *Blood Wedding*, and Lorraine Hansberry’s *A Raisin in the Sun*. I choose to call this form of theatre “dramatic theatre” in reference to the Greek term “drama”. Conteh-Morgan defines drama saying, “…that subspecies of theatre which since Aristotle’s *Poetics* has been characterized by a number of precise elements, namely role-playing, impersonation of human, animal, or mythical figures, and the mimetic rendition through sequence of physical actions … of an action that is complete” (Conteh-Morgan 1994, 14).

Furthermore, a play that would be an example of what I describe as dramatic theatre would involve at least the first four of the six key elements of tragic theatre that Aristotle identified in *Poetics*: action or plot, character, thought or idea, language or spoken dialogue, music, and spectacle (Hatcher 2000, 21). As Woodruff writes, “What we call “theater” in English happens on stage, where there are costumes and actors, and the actors are working from a script. They have an educated audience, who have been looking forward to seeing *Antigone* or *Macbeth* or *The Seagull*, and they have paid in advance for the experience” (Woodruff 2008, 25). The genre of dramatic theatre also creates a space for talk-back sessions following a performance.

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3 This table is a modified version of Schechner’s model of efficacy and entertainment (Schechner 1976, 207). The terms “ritual” and “dramatic theatre” are my own.
Theatre theorist Robert Cohen explains, “…theatres sometimes host talk-back sessions, during which actors and/or the playwright and director remain onstage after the show to answer questions from the audience, particularly when the play has social or political importance” (Cohen 2005, 57). The element of talk-back sessions, which is absent from the genres of ritual and theatrical events (discussed below), is the key to dramatic theatre’s potential to promote religious pluralism.

Theatrical events often share many elements with both ritual and dramatic theatre. Consider the example of Kanaval, or “Carnival”, which takes place annually in Haiti (Averill 1994). Similar to Mardi Gras in New Orleans or Carnaval in Brazil, Kanaval is a joyous processional parade and celebration that dominates the streets of cities in Haiti in January. Like both ritual and dramatic theatre, Kanaval is a performance. Elements of ritual and dramatic theatre such as costumes, dance, and music are seen in Kanaval. Followers of the Vodun religious tradition and Catholicism perform small religious ceremonies throughout the procession. Some audience members who are viewing the parade often join the procession and participate. During Kanaval short skits are often also performed.

However, despite involving religious ceremonies similar to ritual and featuring skits comparable to dramatic theatre, Kanaval is neither ritual nor dramatic theatre. Kanaval is a theatrical event. The fact that Kanaval is taking place on floats and is thus constantly moving, means that unlike both ritual and dramatic theatre, the performance does not have a designated performance space. Also the intention of the audience of Kanaval is not the same as the intention of an audience watching ritual or of an audience watching dramatic theatre. People attend and watch ritual and dramatic theatre for specific purposes. With a theatrical event, the performers often have no control over exactly who their audience will be. Audience members may
participate in *Kanaval* like ritual or they might sit down to enjoy the entertainment that *Kanaval* provides in a manner similar to dramatic theatre. A theatrical event is a combination of what Schechner calls “efficacy and entertainment”. Therefore a theatrical event is an entity separate from both ritual and dramatic theatre.

When I ask if theatre can make a difference in promoting ideas of religious pluralism in South Asia, the type of theatre I am referring to is dramatic theatre. *Final Solutions* is an example of dramatic theatre. However, certain productions of *Final Solutions*, such as the ones directed by Alyque Padamsee and Arvind Gaur, utilized different types of ritual performance such as the recitation of the *Azaan* (the Islamic call to prayer) and the singing of Hindu *bhajans* (devotional songs). More importantly, in the play’s climax the ritual of worship plays a crucial role. The disruption of a theatrical event, the *Rath Yatra*, causes the communal riot that brings together the six main characters. Furthermore, the background of the play is informed by the actual theatrical event of L.K. Advani’s *Rath Yatra* in 1991. Therefore, in order to understand the form, content, and background of *Final Solutions*, it is important to see the distinctions between dramatic theatre, ritual, and theatrical events.

**Dramatic Theatre and Religion in South Asia**

South Asia has a long history of dramatic theatre which has been inextricably linked to religion. Sanskrit Drama, the oldest form of South Asian theatre, can be traced back to the Vedic period of ancient South Asia. The art form combined theatre, dance and music in one medium. According to Indian theatre scholar Rakesh H. Solomon, the period of Sanskrit Drama lasted from 200 B.C.E to 1000 C.E (Solomon 2009, 13). Since Sanskrit was the language of the Indic religious texts, many Sanskrit dramas had religious themes. The plots for these plays often came directly from the two great Indian epics, *The Ramayana* and *The Mahabharata*. The *Natya*
Shastra, (“The Science of Drama”), the ancient treatise on theatre, dance, and music, written by the sage Bharata, as Solomon points out, is given by Bharata “the lofty and sacred status of the fifth Veda, the Natya Veda, literally the Theatre Veda” (Solomon 2009, 12). In fact, in the Natya Shastra, Bharata claims that the actual composer of the text is Brahma, the Hindu deity who is the creator of the universe, and thus theatre was created by Brahma himself (Bandyopadhyay 2006, 23). Therefore, in ancient India, religion and Sanskrit Drama had an intricate connection.

Like Sanskrit Drama, many types of regional folk theatre are also rooted in South Asian religions and some of these forms are just as old. Solomon classifies these regional theatre forms as Traditional Theatre (Solomon 2009, 12). Such examples of Traditional Theatre include Sankaradeva from Assam, Umapati from Bihar, Bhagavata Mela Natakas from Tamil Nadu, Yakshagana from Karnataka and Kathakali from Kerala (Kothari 1995, 84). The stories for many of these forms also come from sources of ancient Indic mythology. Traditional Theatre still thrives in various regions of South Asia and is highly attended. One of the most famous examples of this is the Ramlila, a theatre form that is performed every year in the month of October in cities across North India. The Ramlila tells the story of Ram, the hero of the epic The Ramayana, and for some Hindus attending a performance of the Ramlila is a powerful religious experience. As Schechner, explains, “Going to the Ramlila is an act of bhakti [“devotion”]… The food eaten during Ramlila is considered prasad (‘grace’)… Many go barefoot throughout Ramlila, as if the whole grounds were a temple” (Schechner 2006, 117). For many Hindus, Ramlila is not just a form of entertainment but a form of religious worship. With Sanskrit Drama and Traditional Theatre, South Asia has thus had a long history of dramatic theatre dealing with themes related to religion. Final Solutions is situated within this history. Although

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4 Compelling cases could be made for defining Ramlila as either ritual or dramatic theatre.
an example of Modern Theatre (described below), *Final Solutions*, like Sanskrit Drama and Traditional Theatre, has themes connected to religion.

The period of theatre in South Asia from 1800 C.E. to the present that Solomon defines as Modern Theatre (Solomon 2009, 13) does not have the strong connection to religion that Sanskrit Drama or Traditional Theatre have. Modern Theatre was highly influenced by the presence of the British in South Asia. According to theatre artist Salim Arif, many plays in South Asia today are highly “realistic” because of this influence (Arif Interview 2010). Some modern Indian plays do address issues of religion. For example, Rabindranath Tagore’s Bangla play *Achalayatan* (1911) comments on Hindu orthodoxies (Lal 2009) and Indira Parthasarathy’s Tamil play *Aurangazeb* (1974) relates the story of the Mughal emperor Aurangazeb who was intolerant of Hindus (Natwa Theatre 2010). There have been a number of Hindi plays written in recent years that deal with the partition of India and Pakistan such as Asghar Wajahat's *Jisne Lahore Nahin Dekha* (“The One Who Has Not Seen Lahore”, 1988), M.K. Raina’s *Karmanwali* (1994), and B. Gauri’s *Aur Kitne Tukde* (“How Many More Pieces”, 2001) (Menon 2006).

In Pakistan, playwright Shahid Nadeem has written a number of plays that deal with issues of religious communalism. These plays have been produced by Ajoka, a theatre company belonging to the Parallel Theatre Movement in Lahore and Islamabad. Some of Nadeem’s plays include *Burgavaganza* (2010), a commentary on the rights of Muslim women in Afghanistan and Pakistan, *Dushman* (“Enemy”, 2006), an adaptation of Henrik Ibsen’s *An Enemy of the People* in the context of Islamic Pakistan, *Dukh Durya* (“Ocean of Grief”, 2007), which deals with the conflict surrounding Kashmir, *Border Border* (2005), a play about three generations of a family that live on the India-Pakistan border, and *Dekh Tamasha Chalta Ban* (“Look at the Drama and Move On”, 1992), which examines religious intolerance in Pakistan (Ajoka Theatre).
Yet, as playwright Shahid Anwar points out, there are very few modern Indian plays that address contemporary issues of religious conflict (Anwar Interview 2010). When I asked stage actress Indu Ramchandani if there was an effort to address issues of religious conflict in Modern Theatre in India, she replied that today there is “a lot of suspicion in terms of inter-religious communication in theatre. They’ve avoided it. It’s really been meticulously avoided” (Ramchandani Interview 2010). However, Final Solutions is a clear exception to this, as it is a piece of Modern Theatre that deals with religious communalism.

**Political Theatre in South Asia**

Farley Richmond, Theatre and Asian Studies scholar, notes that political theatre has existed in South Asia since the time of Bharata’s The Natya Shastra (Richmond 1973, 318). Various versions of dramatic political theatre evolved in South Asia’s different regions. One prominent example is Bhavai theatre from Gujarat. The origins of Bhavai can be traced back to the late fourteenth century (Varadpande 1987, 173). Bhavai is at once a form of religious performance, entertainment, and social commentary. It is devoted to the Hindu goddess Amba. However, in the stories portrayed in a Bhavai performance, one often sees Muslim characters as well as Hindu ones. Bhavai is known for its satirical tone. As Indian theatre scholar Monohar Laxman Varadpande states, “Subtle social criticism laced with pungent humor is the specialty of Bhavai” (Varadpande 1987, 174). Bhavai began as a commentary on the injustices of the caste-system. Today, Bhavai is still used in Gujarat as a means to address social issues like rape and corruption (The Times of India 2009). Similar regional political theatre forms include Tamasha of Maharashtra and Therukoothu of Tamil Nadu.

Richmond asserts that modern political theatre in South Asia began during the struggle for independence from the British Empire with Dinabandhu Mitra’s Bangla play Nildarpana
(“The Mirror of Indigo”) in 1860 (Richmond 1973, 318). The play dramatized the mistreatment Bengali indigo planters faced at the hands of the British. In 1906, Prabhakar Khadilkar’s Marathi play Keechakvadha, used the lecherous character of Keechaka from the epic poem The Mahabharata as a metaphor for the treachery of Lord Curzon, Viceroy of India (Richmond 1973, 322). In 1943, the Indian People’s Theatre Association (IPTA) formed from under the Communist Party of India (Banfield and Crow 1996, 116). Although this theatre group focusing on social issues did not survive, many of its members such as Utpal Dutt (the founder of Little Theatre Group in Kolkata) and Safdar Hashmi (the founder of Jana Natya Manch in New Delhi) would go on to create political theatre companies that are still prominent in India today.

Modern Indian playwrights have covered a number of pressing social issues in their work. Urdu playwright Habib Tanvir tackled issues of poverty, prostitution, and human rights in his 1954 play Agra Bazar (Deshpande 2004). Girish Karnad’s Kanada play Tughlaq (1964), which told the story of the life of the Delhi sultan Muhammad bin Tughlaq, was an allegory for the hegemonic rule of Congress under Jawaharlal Nehru (Dharwadker 1995, 44). Marathi playwright Vijay Tendulkar’s Ghashiram Kotwal (1972) was his reaction to the rise of the Shiv Sena, a right-wing regional political party in Maharashtra (Awasthi and Schechner 1989). Yet the crucial political issue of religious communalism remains mostly untouched by the theatre artists of India. As Ramchandani noted when she informed me of popular themes for Indian theatre, “Sociopolitical, yes. Caste system, yes. All those related topics, yes. But religion? No one will touch it” (Ramchandani Interview 2010). Therefore, Final Solutions is an anomaly within the genre of political theatre in India.

Communalism: Religion and Politics

Unfortunately, while India is very well known for its rich history of theatre, the country
is also known for its history of religious conflict. In the context of South Asia, religious conflict is often referred to as “religious communalism”. While it may appear that the communalism present in South Asia is due to ideological differences between members of different religions, in reality, religious communalism emerges out of the political manipulation of social issues.

Political scientist Rasheeduddin Khan defines religious communalism as “an ideology of political allegiance to a religious group as a primary and decisive group in the polity, and for political action” (Khan 1994, 230). As historian Gyanendra Pandey points out, the British colonizers not only introduced the concept of communalism in South Asia, they also played a role in actually creating the immense religious communalism present in South Asia today by firmly categorizing South Asians as either Muslim or Hindu (Pandey 1990) through institutions such as the census in 1871 (Cohn 1987) and separate electorates in 1909 (Jalal 2000). Although the democratic process in England was based on the assumption that political interests lay with individuals, the British colonial institutions assumed that due to the “irreconcilable” differences amongst different groups in this part of the world, interests should lie with communities rather than individuals. Thus, in the eyes of the British, South Asians were members of communities first, and individuals, second. This emphasis put on community would eventually lead to the creation of political institutions that dominate India today such as vote-bank politics. As Arjun Appadurai states, “…exoticization and enumeration were complicated strands of a single colonial project and that in their interaction lies a crucial part of the explanation of group violence and communal terror in contemporary India” (Appadurai 1996, 115). Historian David Ludden comments that today “In India, communalism is based on the fundamental idea that Hindus and Muslims constitute totally separate communities in essential opposition to one another…It represents each collective identity as a community alive through all time, it enables
past memories and emotions to fill the present and each Hindu and Muslim to become a sentient vehicle of communal experience” (Ludden 2006, 12).

Ever since the partition of India and Pakistan in 1947, tension has been growing between many Hindu and Muslim communities in India. Historian Romila Thapar notes that since the partition, communalism in India has permeated “sensitive” aspects of everyday life (Thapar 1990, 5). Despite India’s secular government and long history of religious pluralism and tolerance, since 1947 there have been a number of violent conflicts between Hindus and Muslims. Yet, as I will show in the next chapter, the violence that followed the Babri Masjid demolition in 1992 was not the product of inevitable tensions between Hindus and Muslims, but the product of the politically-motivated theatrical events of the Hindu Right.

Muslims and Hindus are not the only victims of religious violence in India. In 1984, India’s Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, was assassinated by her two Sikh bodyguards in retaliation for her ordering the Indian Army to storm the Golden Temple in Amritsar to capture Sikh terrorists taking refuge there. Following the assassination, thousands of Sikhs were murdered throughout India, with the worst violence occurring in New Delhi. In 2008, Christians living in the state of Orissa were the targets of religious communalism instigated by Hindu nationalists. Approximately twenty-five people were killed, fourteen hundred homes were attacked, and over thirteen thousand people were forced to flee to refugee camps (Kumar and Timmons 2008).

In the past thirty years, tens of thousands of Indians have been attacked, raped, and murdered, in the name of religion. India thus has a long history of both theatre and communal violence. Using the power of theatre in the nation, Final Solutions is a plea for the end of communal violence in India, with one of the worst examples being the Ayodhya Dispute, to which I turn now.
CHAPTER TWO

The Ayodhya Dispute: The Political Climate Underlying Final Solutions

Before analyzing Final Solutions, it is necessary to examine the political events that unfolded during the time when Dattani was writing the play and during which the play was first performed: the Ramjanmabhoomi movement, the demolition of the Babri Masjid and the subsequent violence. This series of events was termed the “Ayodhya Dispute” by anthropologist Stanley Tambiah (Tambiah 1997).

Ram and Babur

The character of Ram is well-known as the hero of The Ramayana. Literally “The Journey of Ram”, The Ramayana is one of the two great epic poems of ancient India (the other being The Mahabharata), and is considered to be a sacred text by many Hindus. Traditionally, the epic is attributed to the sage Valmiki who is thought to have composed the story in Sanskrit sometime between the second century B.C.E and the second century C.E (Schechner 2006, 88). However, Valmiki’s Ramayana is by no means the only telling of the epic. There are hundreds of different versions of The Ramayana throughout not only India, but also Southeast Asia (Richman 1991, 7). Versions of The Ramayana are also found in the Jain and Buddhist religious traditions, showing that the epic is not restricted specifically to the world of Hindu mythology. Even amongst the Hindu tellings of The Ramayana, one version can contradict another.

With so many diverse and different descriptions of Ram in religious, literary, and historical sources, it is difficult to determine if the character of Ram was based on an actual historical figure (Davis 2005, 35). However, amongst many Hindus in India today there is a common belief that Ram was the seventh incarnation of the Hindu deity Vishnu, the preserver of the universe, and thus Ram is considered to be a deity. In The Ramayana, it is said that the city of Ayodhya
was the home of Ram’s glorious kingdom and the place of his birth. Ayodhya, located in the present-day state of Uttar Pradesh in North India, was invaded by Zahir Uddin Muhammad Babur in the sixteenth century.

Babur (1483-1530 C.E.) was the founder of South Asia’s most powerful Islamic empire: The Mughals. His descendants would include Akbar the Great, who is known today for his immense religious tolerance and patronage of the arts, and Shah Jahan, the creator of the Taj Mahal. In 1528 C.E. on Babur’s orders a mosque, known today as the Babri Masjid, was built by Mir Baqi in Ayodhya (Davis 2005, 34). In the 1940s during heated debates between Hindu and Muslim nationalists, Hindu groups began to claim that the Babri Masjid was built by first destroying a Hindu temple devoted to Ram. This temple was believed to have been built by the King Vikramaditya around 300 C.E on the location of Ram’s birthplace, or Ramjanmabhoomi, (Tambiah 1997, 246).5 Ironically, the “fact” that a Ram temple had once stood on the grounds of the Babri Masjid was initially propagated by the British colonizers (Davis 2005, 38).

The Ramjanmabhoomi Movement

Following the partition of India and Pakistan in 1947, the Babri Masjid was closed to both Muslims and Hindus by India’s government. The first major riots between Muslims and Hindus began in 1949 when militant Hindus placed images of Ram, his brother Lakshman and his wife Sita in the mosque (Hansen 1999, 149). What followed was the creation of the Ramjanmabhoomi movement. In 1950 the movement secured the right for Hindus to worship in the mosque once a year (Tambiah 1997, 247). Thirty-six years later, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) or “World Hindu Council”, a right-wing Hindu organization part of the Sangh Parivar (the cluster of organizations that make up the Hindu Right in India and the Indian Diaspora), managed to get

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5 As religion scholar Richard Davis notes, this fact is highly disputed and scholars such as Hans Bakker, S. Gopal and Koenraad Elst have written extensively on this (Davis 2005, 34).
the Faizabad District Court in Uttar Pradesh to open the mosque for Hindu worship year-round.

By 1989, the Ramjanmabhoomi movement had become political. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) or “Indian People’s Party”, (also a part of the Sangh Parivar) had become India’s third largest political party (Hansen 1999, 163). The BJP began to use the Ramjanmabhoomi movement as a means to mobilize the Hindu majority population against the Indian National Congress party, the nation’s dominant social-liberal political party, which was in power at the time. Under this pressure, the Congress government allowed the VHP to conduct a Ram Shila Pooja, a ritualistic ceremony in which Hindus from all over India contributed thousands of bricks blessed by Brahmin priests to the construction of a new temple dedicated for Ram. The bricks were collected by members of the VHP and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the volunteer organization of the Sangh Parivar (Hansen 1999, 162). Essentially, the Ram Shila Pooja was a massive display of what anthropologist Arvind Rajagopal calls theatrical “spectacle” that served to remind Muslims of the dominant presence of Hindus in India (Rajagopal 2001, 176).

**L.K. Advani’s Rath Yatra**

Perhaps the biggest manifestation of this theatricality was the use of Rath Yatra processions by the Hindu Right. Literally “chariot procession”, a Rath Yatra is a parade in the Hindu tradition in which the image of a deity is placed in a chariot and processed throughout a city or neighborhood. A Rath Yatra would be an example of the type of theatre I define in Chapter One as “Theatrical Events”. Famous examples of similar processions take place annually during the festivals of Durga Pooja in Kolkata and Ganesh Chaturthi in Bombay. Spectators on the streets often join these parades, with the number of people growing as the processions reach their final destinations. In September of 1985, Rath Yatras from twenty-five
different locations in North India to Ayodhya were organized by the Sangh Parivar. The most prominent *Rath Yatra* was the one started by L.K. Advani in September of 1990. As religion scholar Richard Davis (who was present at Advani’s *Rath Yatra*) explains, “Temple processions are explicitly concerned with ritual sovereignty, since the god is framed as a lord touring, displaying, and enforcing rule over his or her domain” (Davis 2005, 25). While Advani’s procession did not include a consecrated image of Ram or another Hindu deity, the itinerary of the *Rath Yatra* was clearly attempting to establish a very specific “Hindu” domain. Advani started his *Rath Yatra* at the Somnath temple in Gujarat (a temple that had been recurrently destroyed by various Islamic invaders starting with Mahmud of Ghazna in 1026 C.E. and re-built by Hindus, the most recent reconstruction taking place in 1950) and planned to end it at the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya. By planning to begin the procession in Somnath and end it in Ayodhya, Advani was reminding the Hindus of India not only how they had been “wronged” by Muslim invaders but also how they had regained their glory by reconstructing the temple at Somnath.

On October 9th, 1990, journalist Ranjan Gupta described the *Rath Yatra* procession:

> The chariot is, in fact, a Toyota van done up elaborately as the vehicle of Arjuna… who is reputed to have fought evil back in glorious mythical times. Mr. Advani, a shrewd politician, is frequently flanked by supporters dressed as Hindu warriors, carrying three-pointed spears and shouting the war cry “Har Har Mahadev”. Hindu flags with the BJP symbol flutter along the route as Mr. Advani’s chariot-van leads several other vehicles toward Ayodhya. The convoy is drawing thousands. Mr. Advani talks to them about the importance of Ram Rajya, the rule of Ram, and the importance of rebuilding the Ayodhya temple. He wins thunderous applause, and crowds run with his Toyota until they are left behind in clouds of dust. While the cavalcade is decidedly picturesque, it presents an alarming spectacle for non-Hindu Indians. (Gupta 1990)

Like the *Ram Shila Pooja*, Advani’s *Rath Yatra* was a theatrical expression of Hindu dominance. The fact that the Hindu Right was so reliant on the use of political dramatic spectacle to incite communal sentiments in the majority Hindu population shows that the violence that would occur surrounding the Ayodhya Dispute was not the product of inevitable ethnic tensions.
between Hindus and Muslims, but the product of the theatrical spectacle of the Hindu Right.

This theatrical spectacle gave Advani the power to propagate ideas. During the Rath Yatra, Advani began to assert the notion that Emperor Babur was comparable to Ravana, the villain of The Ramayana who kidnaps Ram’s wife Sita. Sanskrit scholar Sheldon Pollock states that what Advani did was not a new practice. Pollock asserts that since the early eleventh century, The Ramayana has been used as a political tool by rulers in an attempt to gain power, “I believe the text offers unique imaginative instruments-in fact, two linked instruments-whereby, on the one hand, a divine political order can be conceptualized, narrated, and historically rounded, and, on the other, a fully demonized Other can be categorized, counterposed, and condemned” (Pollock 1993, 264). The Ramayana and its central theme of good triumphing over evil could be used as a metaphor for the Sangh Parivar triumphing over whoever their enemy may be. Usually the enemy was India’s Muslim population.

During the Ramjanmabhumi movement, especially during Advani’s Rath Yatra, the Hindu Right claimed that like Ravana of The Ramayana, the Muslims in India were violent and dominating. The VHP asserted that Babur was a Muslim version of Ravana. Like Ravana, Babur was a tyrant from a foreign land who disrupted a time of peace (Hansen 1999, 177). Thus Advani’s Rath Yatra became a way for Hindus to right the wrongs that Babur, this historical Ravana, had committed when he ordered the construction of the Babri Masjid.

However, the Rath Yatra would never reach the Babri Masjid. In October of 1990, Advani was arrested in the state of Bihar before the Rath Yatra had completed its course (Doniger 2009, 663). Later in October of 1990, a group of kar sevaks (volunteers of the Sangh Parivar) stormed the Babri Masjid and placed a saffron flag on top of it. What followed were countless riots between other young kar sevaks and the police in Uttar Pradesh. In 1991, the BJP
had become the second largest political party in India and the dominant political party in Uttar Pradesh (Hansen 1999, 167). As Gupta predicted at the end of his report in October of 1990, “A modern battle for an ancient cause is about to begin” (Gupta 1990).

Despite the fact that the procession never reached Ayodhya, Advani’s Rath Yatra left a powerful impression of Hindu dominance on the minds of a large number of India’s citizens. The impact of Advani’s Rath Yatra on Final Solutions is evident. The communal riot that brings the characters of the play together starts when the chariot and the images of Hindu deities of a Rath Yatra are destroyed in a Muslim neighborhood. As I will show in the next chapter, Dattani based the Rath Yatra of Final Solutions on a specific Rath Yatra procession that was disrupted in Ahmedabad, Gujarat in 1985. Yet, as I will demonstrate in my discussion of the characters of the Mob/Chorus in Chapter Four, it is clear that Dattani’s procession was also inspired by Advani’s Rath Yatra. The theatrical event of the Rath Yatra procession plays a vital role in the dramatic theatre work Final Solutions. Without it, Javed and Bobby would have no reason to come to the Gandhis seeking protection.

The Demolition of the Babri Masjid and the Aftermath

On December 6th, 1992, Edward Gargan, wrote the following in a report for The New York Times from Ayodhya:

This morning's sun, a dollop of deep orange, rose over processions of young men, their heads swathed in saffron headbands, their necks wrapped in saffron scarves, marching, some in lockstep, toward this sacred city. Dawn brought with it, as well, the ceaseless call and response: "Jai Sri Ram, Jai Sri Ram!" -- "Hail Lord Ram, Hail Lord Ram!" This was the day decreed by India's Hindu fundamentalist leaders …when the faithful from around the country should assemble here to begin work on a massive temple to the god Ram…But the peaceful way the day began gave no hint of the violence to come -- the destruction of the mosque by Hindu militants. (Gargan 1992)

In the course of the day, the Babri Masjid, was physically torn down by three hundred thousand kar sevaks. Present were leaders from the BJP, the VHP, the RSS, the Bajrang Dal (the militant
Hindu youth group of the VHP), and the Shiv Sena Party. Following the demolition of the Babri Masjid, violence broke out across South Asia. Riots erupted throughout India in cities like New Delhi, Ahmedabad, Varanasi, and Jaipur (Tambiah 1997, 251). On December 8th, 1992, The New York Times reported that in Pakistan over thirty Hindu temples were attacked and that Air India offices in Lahore, Pakistan and Dhaka, Bangladesh were stormed and torched (The New York Times 1992). In Bangladesh, Hindu women were raped and hundreds of Hindu homes were destroyed (Minorities at Risk Project 2004). Even members of the South Asian diaspora retaliated with instances of arson being reported in the United Kingdom (Tambiah 1997, 251).

However, while most of these occurrences stopped within a week, the city of Bombay became the site of immense religious communalism for the next four months with three separate waves of violence. Much of the rioting was instigated by the Shiv Sena Party. Although the conventional understanding of communal violence is that only poor, lower class people participate in it, in the case of Bombay, violence was widespread in lower-class communities as well as middle-class ones (Engineer 1993). During this time around forty thousand people (mostly Muslims) were forced to flee the city (BBC 2012). The violence ended with a series of bombings on March 12th, 1993 organized by crime lord Dawood Ibrahim. In these bombings over three hundred people lost their lives (Mehta 2004, 40). Overall, at least a thousand people died in Bombay. It was during these most heated years of the Ayodhya Dispute (1990-1993) when Dattani was writing Final Solutions and during which the play was first performed.

Ten years after the demolition of the Babri Masjid, on the morning of February 27th, 2002, a train carrying a group of Hindus who were allegedly returning from a Ramjanmabhoomi pilgrimage to Ayodhya was supposedly attacked and set on fire by a Muslim mob in Godhra in the state of Gujarat. Fifty-nine people, mostly women and children, were killed (Dugger 2002).
By the end of the day, violent rioting had broken out throughout the state. In the communal violence that continued for more than two months, at least two thousand people (again mostly Muslims, as was the case in Bombay in 1992 and 1993) were murdered (Sundar 2002). Countless more were raped, robbed, and dismembered. It soon became clear that the BJP (which has been in power in Gujarat since 1995) and the VHP were complicit in the carnage that had taken place. As Celia Dugger of *The New York Times* reports, a senior police official in Gujarat stated, “This was not a riot. It was a state-sponsored pogrom” (Dugger 2002). Again, this demonstrates how this communal violence was not the result of inevitable ethnic conflict but rather the result of the political antics of the Hindu Right.

The destruction of the Babri Masjid and the subsequent violence, especially in Bombay and Gujarat, remain some of the most catastrophic incidents of communal violence in South Asia in the past twenty years, claiming the lives of at least nineteen hundred people and injuring more than fifty-eight hundred others (Sundar 2002, BBC 2005, Ludden 2005). *Final Solutions* was supposed to premiere in Bangalore during the first week of December in 1992 in which twelve hundred Indians lost their lives. In Karnataka (the state of which Bangalore is the capitol), seventy-three people were killed (Jaffrelot 1998, 463). There is no way of knowing if the play could have stopped these deaths in Karnataka. However, what is clear is that *Final Solutions* creates awareness and generates dialogue among diverse groups of people. Directors of the play have taken advantage of this. In 1993 the play was performed in Bombay when the horrific riots caused by the mosque’s destruction were still fresh in the minds of many of the play’s audience members. Performances that have occurred after the Gujarat violence of 2002 bring a new layer of meaning to the play’s text. The importance of studying the potential of *Final Solutions* to address religious communalism in the context of the Ayodhya Dispute is thus apparent.
CHAPTER THREE

The Playwright & The Play:
Mahesh Dattani and *Final Solutions*

Mahesh Dattani is one of India’s most popular playwrights. For the past twenty-four years, he has been pushing the boundaries of Indian theatre by creating pieces that deal with social issues such as homophobia, gender discrimination, and child molestation. Thus, it is not surprising that a play that handles religious communalism in such a sensitive manner comes from Dattani. In this chapter I will provide a brief overview of Dattani’s background and his works, and describe what led him to write *Final Solutions.*

**Mahesh Dattani: A Brief Biography**

Dattani was born on August 7th, 1958 in Bangalore, India to Hindu parents from the Gujarati Lohana community. Growing up, Dattani spoke Gujarati at home with his family. Dattani’s childhood education, however, was in an English medium school (Katayal 1999). Dattani describes his first experience with the theatre saying, “When I was 12, my father took me to see a Gujarati play in Bangalore. I was attracted to the magical world of theatre with its loud make-up and bright costumes” (Dattani in Biswas 2008). Despite this attraction, Dattani had no plans to seek a career in theatre. At St. Joseph’s College of Arts and Science in Bangalore, he studied History, Economics and Political Science and later received a graduate degree in Marketing and Advertising Management (Haldar 2008, 25). Dattani’s first job was as an advertising copywriter. He later helped his father run their family printing-machinery business (Ancheri 2009). Yet he would soon find that he could not escape the magnetism of the theatre.

While at St. Joseph’s, Dattani joined the Bangalore Little Theatre Group and started to participate in theatre workshops, direct plays, and act. In 1984, he formed his own English-language theatre company: Playpen (Nair 2001). Under Dattani’s direction, the company
performed many Greek tragedies and modern classics. However, Dattani could not find many good Indian plays written in English. He explains the predicament saying, “I was exposed to the works of Shakespeare, Dickens, and other Western European literature while studying in a Christian missionary school in India. But sadly, there were no such stories about contemporary India or about the vibrant Indian community in the English language and this made me think. I wanted more plays written primarily in English for Indian audiences” (Dattani in Ali 2005). With this goal in mind, Dattani wrote his first full-length play *When There’s A Will*, a dark comedy revolving around the will of a deceased business tycoon, in 1988 and has since gone on to write a number of critically acclaimed screen, stage and radio plays (Nair 2001).

In addition to being a playwright, he is involved in many other aspects of the performing arts. As mentioned above, Dattani has been a director and an actor since his days as a member of the Bangalore Little Theatre Group. He has performed in at least two of his own plays, and usually directs the first production of any play he writes. Dattani has also trained in both Ballet and the Indian classical dance form *Bharatanatyam*. With such a diverse theatrical background and career, instead of being called a “playwright”, “director” or “performer” Dattani prefers the all-encompassing label of “dramatist” (Katayal 1999). When asked where his theatrical passions truly lay, Dattani responded, “I guess it’s all momentary. A bit like when you are eating bhel puri [a popular savory Bombay street snack], you enjoy it more if you are not thinking of chocolate mousse! So I am passionate about it all, but seriously all my interests seem to feed my primary interest of seeing my works on stage” (Dattani in Chandra 2009).

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6 The exception to this is Lillete Dubey, who directed the first productions of *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai* (1998), *Thirty Days in September* (2001), and *Brief Candle* (2009).
Dattani’s Plays

The majority of Dattani’s works deal with social issues. *Tara* (1990), the story of conjoined twins Tara (a girl) and Chandan (a boy), deals with issues of gender discrimination, in particular, the preferential treatment male children are given over their female counterparts. *Dance Like A Man* (1989) also addresses gender discrimination but in a rather different way. The play, centers on a married couple, Ratna and Jairaj, who were both classical *Bharatanatyam* dancers in their youth, and the jealousies that developed between them at that time and that are now resurfacing as the couple are training their daughter Lata for her debut performance. *Dance Like A Man* had done extremely well and as actress Suchitra Pillai, who has played the role of Lata/Young Ratna, explains, “We have performed it [*Dance Like A Man*] all across the world, wherever we have done it everyone has absolutely loved the play, not only the way we are doing it, or the way Lillette [Lillette Dubey] has put it together, but the writing, and how easy it is to … understand what is going on even if it’s about Indian classical dancers” (Pillai Interview 2010). I was fortunate to see the three hundred and seventy-fifth production of the show in New Delhi, and from the reaction of the audience to the play, which included both Indians and foreigners, I could see how accessible Dattani’s plays are to English-speaking people from any background. Knowledge of *Bharatanatyam* was not necessary to enjoy the play.

Homophobia is another issue that is very prevalent in Dattani’s work. Dattani’s stage play *Bravely Fought the Queen* (1991), and his radio play, *Do the Needful* (1997) feature homosexual or transgender characters. *Seven Steps Around The Fire* (1999) specifically addresses the role that *hijras* (Indian eunuchs) play in society and the troubles they face in their daily lives. *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai* (1998) deals almost entirely with homosexual characters. Actor Joy Sengupta, who was in the first production of *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai*, notes that the play
“was the first of its kind. That really moved into the bedroom and drawing room of the characters who were homosexual and showed them in their day-to-day life like you would see a heterosexual household, or a heterosexual life, or a heterosexual partner, or a heterosexual family” (Sengupta Interview 2010). Prior to On a Muggy Night in Mumbai, no Indian playwright had depicted gay or lesbian characters in such a sensitive manner.

Dattani has also been commissioned by different organizations to write various plays. In 2000, RAHI (Recovering and Healing from Incest), a support group for women survivors of incest and child molestation that is based in New Delhi, requested Dattani to write a play on child sexual abuse. The result was the play Thirty Days in September, which was met with tremendous response. Lillette Dubey, the original director of Thirty Days in September, describes the audience’s reactions saying, “After every performance, women have come backstage with their own traumatic stories writ large on their faces, grateful for the catharsis the play offers” (Dubey 2010, 5). When I asked Dattani why so many of his plays address social issues, he replied, “To me as a playwright, my recurring theme is the individual’s place in their society, do they prefer to be on the edge or do they want to be in the center? And where does society place them? It’s that conflict which excites me as a playwright” (Dattani Interview 2010).

The Birth of Final Solutions

Since Dattani had just addressed the important social issues of gender discrimination and homophobia in his plays, it would appear that Dattani’s social consciousness led him to address the contemporary social issue of religious communalism in 1991. However, unlike gender discrimination and homophobia, which Dattani had been exposed to in his career as a Bharatanatyam dancer, religious conflict was an issue that didn’t affect him directly. Dattani sees religion as his “cultural heritage” due to the fact that his parents were very religious people.
Although Dattani enjoys visiting temples and has images of the Hindu deity Ganesha hanging on the walls of his apartment, which he sees as “good-luck mascots”, he does not consider himself to be a religious Hindu (Dattani Interview 2010). Apart from not being religious, Dattani had never been discriminated against because of his religion. *Final Solutions* was not Dattani’s idea but the idea of the celebrated Indian advertising and theatre personality, Alyque Padamsee, who had great faith in Dattani’s abilities to address social conflicts through the medium of theatre.

Dattani asserts that *Final Solutions* would never have come into existence if it weren’t for Padamsee (Dattani Interview 2010). Padamsee was one of the guiding figures of Dattani’s early theatrical career. He explains what drew him to Dattani’s work, “I had been looking for a playwright I could work with for a long time, but all of them wrote literary plays. Mahesh was the first modern playwright writing about issues in contemporary India in which the dialogue sparkled” (Padamsee in Ancheri 2009). Padamsee went on to direct Dattani’s play *Tara* and by doing so, Padamsee made Dattani a well-known name in the Indian theatre world. Furthermore, Padamsee was the one who convinced Dattani to leave his father’s business and commit to a career in theatre (Ancheri 2009). Dattani claims that, “He [Padamsee] gave me the courage to call myself a professional playwright and director” (Dattani 2000, xiii).

In October 1991, when Padamsee had just finished directing *Tara* in Bombay, he asked Dattani if he would consider writing a play about religious communalism. Padamsee was fascinated by the current debates surrounding the Babri Masjid controversy and thought the situation would make an excellent play. Dattani, on the other hand, was not interested. He remembers thinking that the topic “really didn’t excite me or inspire me at that point” (Dattani Interview 2010). Padamsee then decided to try another tactic and organized an improvisation with the acting students of his wife Pearl. Padamsee gave the actors a scenario in which two
Muslims are running away from a riot and seek refuge in a Hindu household. The story for this scene came directly from a newspaper article about communal riots in Ahmedabad, Gujarat that Padamsee had read in 1969 and had saved since then (Padamsee Interview 2010). After seeing the improvisation, which was over an hour long, Dattani felt that what he saw was “explosive” and realized that this topic had tremendous dramatic potential (Dattani Interview 2010).7

The play took Dattani over a year to research and write. For his research Dattani consulted books such as Freedom at Midnight (1975) by Larry Collins and Dominique Lapierre (Lankesh 1995), but he also conducted a number of interviews with survivors of recent communal riots in Gujarat and Karnataka (Dattani Interview 2010). One of the riots that Dattani researched that particularly caught his attention was the 1985 Rath Yatra riot in Ahmedabad, Gujarat. This would become the inspiration for the riot that brings Javed and Bobby to the Gandhi family in Final Solutions. The actual 1985 Rath Yatra riot broke out on June 20th:

Indian soldiers opened fire today to disperse Moslems throwing rocks at a Hindu religious procession in Ahmedabad, killing seven people and wounding 20. As many as 30,000 Hindus defied a ban on public assembly and paraded through the streets. Moslems hurled bricks and stones at them from housetops, and the Hindus retaliated by setting fire to Moslem shops and homes. The procession, called Rath Yatra, or Parade of the Chariot, was held in honor of Lord Jugannath [the deity Krishna]. (The New York Times 1985)

A BBC report added, “The "Rath Yatra" festival today coincided with Id al-Fitr, which marks the end of the month-long fasting by Muslims” (BBC 1985). The Associated Press noted that this communal riot was in the wake of a wave of violence in Ahmedabad, “At least 176 people have died in Ahmedabad and other towns of Gujarat since students launched a statewide protest three months ago against a controversial government plan to increase quotas for socially backward castes in government employment and colleges” (Reid 1985).

7 Many of Dattani’s works since Final Solutions have addressed issues of religion in India. Do the Needful (1997) tells the story of a Hindu girl being forced into an arranged marriage by her parents because of her romantic involvement with a Muslim boy, The Swami and Winston (2000) deals with the politics of the Hindu Right, and Clearing the Rubble (2002) addresses the discrimination Muslims faced after the Gujarat earthquake of 2001.
In the past fifty years, the state of Gujarat, and in particular, the city of Ahmedabad, has been a center for religious violence in India. In the 1969 riots in Ahmedabad (the subject matter of the article that Padamsee used for the improvisation that inspired *Final Solutions*) at least twenty-five hundred people were killed (Srivastava 2002). More than two thousand people were murdered in the Gujarat violence in 2002 (Sundar 2002). Dattani, a Gujarati himself, explains his reasoning behind setting *Final Solutions* in Gujarat:

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

After Dattani finished an initial copy of the script, Padamsee organized another improvisation with actors in Bombay and Dattani edited the play based on the suggestions that came up during the process (Padamsee Interview 2010). By December of 1992, the play was complete and in rehearsals for its premiere performance at the Deccan Herald Theatre Festival in Bangalore. However, religious communalism, the social issue that Dattani was trying to address with *Final Solutions*, would prevent the play’s premiere that year. The play would not have a life on stage until seven months later.
CHAPTER FOUR

Final Solutions: A Textual Analysis

The Story

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

What sets the action of the play in motion is the recent destruction of the chariot and images of Hindu deities of a Rath Yatra festival while traveling through a Muslim neighborhood of the city. Rioting has broken out in Amargaon and thus a curfew has been imposed on the city. The local Hindu and Muslim communities, represented by the Mob/Chorus, are shown blaming each other for the riots. The communal violence between these groups brings back Hardika’s memories of the partition and her life as a new bride in 1948. Her memories are expressed throughout the play through the character of Daksha who is shown reading from her diary. The Gandhi family is safe within their home and although Smita is worried for the safety of her Muslim friend, Tasneem Ahmed, the family is having a relatively peaceful evening. This tranquility is disrupted when Bobby and Javed, two young Muslim men, arrive at their doorstop.
begging to be let inside. The Mob/Chorus, who have donned their Hindu masks, are after Bobby and Javed and threatening to kill them. Despite the objections of Hardika and the deeply religious Aruna, Ramnik opens the door of his home thus protecting the young Muslims. The interactions that occur between the Gandhis and Bobby and Javed throughout the course of the night form the crux of the play.

Hardika still harbors resentment against Muslims due to the events that had occurred in her life following the partition and thus protests against Bobby and Javed’s presence in her home. Through the character of Daksha, the audience is able to slowly see the two factors that are the source of the adult Hardika’s animosity towards all Muslims. The first was the murder of her father in her hometown of Hussainabad, which became a part of Pakistan during the partition. The second reason is the physical and mental abuse she had to endure when her husband Hari and her in-laws found out about her friendship with her Muslim neighbor Zarine. Her son Ramnik is a secular Hindu and much more hospitable to the boys. However the audience later learns that Ramnik’s kindness is partly driven by the guilt he feels over running the business his father acquired by cheating Zarine’s family after the partition. Ramnik’s wife Aruna is a deeply devout woman who feels extremely uncomfortable with Muslims sitting in her home and drinking water from her glasses. She believes that their touch is polluting.

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

The struggle of these six different characters to get through one night under the same roof creates a tense yet dynamic situation. Family members turn on family members and friends turn on friends. Alliances are formed between characters and then promptly broken. The play reaches its climax in the early hours of the morning when Bobby enters the Gandhi family pooja (prayer) room and picks up the image of the deity Krishna to Aruna’s great distress. The Mob/Chorus in both Hindu and Muslim masks begin to pound the floor in rhythm. Bobby proclaims that he is touching God and nothing is happening to him. Upon seeing Aruna’s horror he tells her “if we understand and believe in one another, nothing can be destroyed”. He then turns to Hardika and states, “And if you are willing to forget, I am willing to tolerate” (pp. 63). Bobby and Javed exit and join the Mob/Chorus on the ramp. After they leave, Ramnik tells Hardika that her husband and her father in-law destroyed her friend Zarine’s family business. Upon hearing this Hardika realizes that the real reason why her in-laws forbade her friendship with Zarine was not because Zarine was a Muslim, but because they were trying to cover up their own crime. Crushed, Hardika asks Ramnik why he didn’t tell her this earlier. Ramnik claims he did not want her to have to live with the guilt. Hardika then asks “Do you think- do think those boys will ever come back?” Ramnik replies, “If you call them they will come. But then again- if it’s too late-they may not” (pp. 64). They play ends with the image of Javed and Bobby standing amongst the members of the masked Mob/Chorus.

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8 All quotes from Final Solutions come from the edition published by Pencraft International in 2009.
The Set

The set of *Final Solutions* as envisioned and described in detail by Dattani contributes greatly to the central themes of the play. As mentioned above, the play is divided into three physical spaces: the realm of the Mob/Chorus which is located on a crescent-shaped ramp, the home of the Gandhi family which exists within the confines of the ramp, and Daksha’s room in 1948 which is positioned on an upper level of the Gandhi house. While some of the scenes take place in Daksha’s room and on the ramp, the majority of the play’s action takes place within the Gandhi home. Daksha’s room and the ramp are not just separate areas of the set, they are also representations of the forces that are constantly on the minds of the play’s six main characters.

The ramp surrounding the Gandhi home represents the constant presence of the Mob/Chorus, which threatens the lives of Bobby and Javed. The Gandhi home as a venue represents a protected space. However, while the Gandhis and their visitors may be safe from the violence within the house, the ramp and the Mob/Chorus’s placement on it refuses to let the main characters forget the circumstances that have forced them together. Just as the ramp reminds the central characters of the Rath Yatra riot, Daksha’s room reminds the audience of the partition of India and Pakistan and the fact that although the partition took place over sixty years ago, it still plays a major role in the religious communalism present in South Asia today.

The Gandhi’s home itself is actually very simple, described by Dattani as having “…*just wooden blocks for furniture*”. Yet Dattani does note, “*However, upstage, perhaps on an elevation, is a detailed kitchen and pooja room*” (pp.7). The kitchen and *pooja* room will serve as the two sections of the Gandhi home that most emphasize the differences and barriers between the Muslim and Hindu characters. These are the two rooms that Aruna believes are in the most danger of Javed and Bobby’s “polluting” touch. The barriers between the characters will be
broken, first when Ramnik offers Javed and Bobby water and milk, and then again in the climax of the play when Bobby picks up the image of Krishna and enters Aruna’s sacred ritual space. Dattani’s vision for the set of *Final Solutions* enables his audiences to focus their attention on the pivotal moments and central themes of the play.

**The Characters and Themes:**

Paul Woodruff, who’s definition of theatre was established in Chapter One, notes the following about characters: “The people who are most worth watching satisfy two conditions: they are active as agents, and they are able to engage our emotions” (Woodruff 2008, 95). The characters Dattani has created not only satisfy these two conditions, they also personify the central themes of *Final Solutions*. These carefully-crafted characters and themes have the power to spark critical conversations and dialogues amongst audience members in talk-back sessions.

Daksha/Hardika illustrates the role that the partition of India and Pakistan plays in the religious communalism persisting in South Asia today. Along with Javed, she also exemplifies the play’s prominent theme of memory and the role of memory in contemporary religious conflict in South Asia. Javed is the character that is the easiest for audiences to judge due to his profession as a hired rioter, yet he is also arguably the most likeable character in the play. This dichotomy within a single character, forces audience members to think about what the real reasons (or excuses) for a person to participate in religious communalism are.

With Ramnik and Aruna, Dattani questions what it means to be “secular” and what it means to be “religious”. Smita and Bobby represent a younger generation of Indians who are running away from their religion and religious identities. The Mob/Chorus vocalizes the sentiments of prejudice and discrimination that were commonly heard during the *Ramjanmabhoomi* campaign, and Dattani’s writing of *Final Solutions*. The presence of the
Mob/Chorus also tackles a question that has been underlying religious communalism in South Asia since the days of the British Raj: What is more important— one’s identity as an individual or one’s identity as a member of religious community?

**Daksha/Hardika: The Partition and Memory**

The narrative of the character of Daksha/Hardika represents the partition of India and Pakistan in 1947, which is perhaps the greatest source of tension between South Asia’s Hindu and Muslims populations. As Tarun Saint writes in *Witnessing Partition: Memory, History, and Fiction*, “The partition of India, one of the most traumatic and disruptive events of the twentieth century, ushered in an era of uncertainty and dislocation, following widespread collective violence, rape, arson and the displacement of millions of refuges across South Asia” (Saint 2010, 1). As mentioned earlier, Alyque Padamsee commissioned Dattani to write a play that would speak to the communal violence that was consuming India in the early nineties. However, Dattani “felt that so much of it [communalism] goes back in time” (Dattani Interview 2010) and thus he decided to create the character of Daksha/Hardika.

Although *Final Solutions* was written forty-five years after the partition, the events of the world’s most massive human displacement in the twentieth century remain alive in the memory of many South Asians. During the research process, Dattani recalls meeting a young Punjabi woman who invited him to her home to meet her grandmother. The elderly woman was, as Dattani describes her, “a very nice lady and a very polite lady”, yet she could not allow herself to forgive Muslims because of what she had been through during the events of the partition in Punjab, which was one of the worst areas for communal violence. Dattani says that due to the women’s tragic experiences, he could sympathize with her nature of prejudice (Dattani Interview 2010). Like this Punjabi grandmother, the character of Daksha/Hardika had a traumatic
experience during the partition.

Before she was married, Daksha lived with her parents in the town of Hussainabad in Sindh. During the partition, Daksha was forced to leave Hussainabad with her mother after a Muslim mob vandalized her ancestral home and her father was killed. In the final act of Final Solutions, Hardika angrily describes her father’s murder to Javed and Bobby, “He was beaten up on the streets! While we were waiting for him at home to take us away from the hell, he was dying on the streets!” (pp.61). The murder of Hardika’s father has obviously contributed to her prejudice against all Muslims. However, it is interesting to note that in the play’s first few minutes, Daksha does not refer to the death of her father while describing the partition. In fact, according to Daksha the most traumatic experience she endured during the partition was the destruction of her record collection, “A stone hit our gramophone table. Krishna chose to destroy what I loved most. My entire collection of records broken. Lying about like pieces of glass. Shamshad Begum, Noor Jehan, Suraiya. The songs of love that I had learnt to sing with. Those beautiful voices. Cracked…” (pp.9). This symbolic “cracking” of her records not only represents the cracking of Daksha’s world, but the literal cracking of India and Pakistan in the partition. The destruction of the records of three Muslim singers is what Daksha chooses to describe in her diary, a place where she records her most intimate thoughts. This indicates that her father’s death is not the only reason why the present-day Hardika resents Muslims.

In my interview with Dattani, he informed me that apart from the partition, he had another source of inspiration for the character of Daksha:

An inspiration was my mother because during my research I asked her, because at that time I hadn’t thought about this sort of time shift, and I said “What was it like, did you have Muslim friends in school?” And she thought about it and then she came up with this, “Ah you know there was this Khoja girl and she was very fair, beautiful girl” and I remember we used to keep friends over so I said, “Did you go over to her place or did she visit here?” She said “No! That was not possible!” You know, they were friends in
school, but her parents didn’t allow her to visit her and she never came over to their place, and I said “Didn’t you want to go?” Then she said no, “Because they eat all those dirty things” (Dattani Interview 2010)

This Khoja (an ethnic community of Shia Muslims) girl was clearly the inspiration for the character of Zarine. In the play, Daksha, who has only just started living with her husband Hari and his family when she is introduced to the audience, is desperate for a confidante other than her in-laws or her diary. Daksha dislikes her new family who has changed her name to Hardika to reflect her husband Hari’s name. She finds Hari stupid. Her mother in-law, whom she has nicknamed “Gaju” (short for “Gajanand” a name for the elephant-headed deity Ganesha) because of her elephant-like mannerisms, frustrates her. “Gaju’s” long bathing and prayer rituals irritate the sensible Daksha. Daksha is also annoyed with her insensitive father in-law whom she calls “Wagh” (“tiger”).

The one kindred spirit Daksha finds in Amargoon is the sixteen year-old Zarine, a Muslim girl who lives in Daksha’s neighborhood. Zarine is beautiful, witty, and most importantly, like Daksha, she is a die-hard fan of the iconic singer Noor Jehan. This shared love of music becomes the basis of Daksha and Zarine’s friendship. The fact that Muslims killed her father does not stop Daksha from reaching out to Zarine. Unlike Hari, “Gaju”, and “Wagh”, Zarine genuinely cares about Daksha and thus Daksha feels a special fondness for her. This is reflected by the fact that Daksha refers to Zarine and her female relatives as her “friends” and to her own in-laws as “creatures” (pp.17). With this Dattani suggests that one’s humanity is determined by one’s actions, not one’s religion. When Daksha finds out that Zarine’s father, whose sweet store was destroyed in a fire, is looking for a job at “Wagh’s” mill, she confides in her diary that she hopes her father in-law will find the heart to help. Later Daksha even asks Hari why “Wagh” can’t offer Zarine’s father a loan to re-start his business. Daksha is clearly invested
Therefore when Zarine lashes out against Daksha in a moment of anger, this moment hurts Daksha much more than it would have if Hari or “Wagh” had been the perpetrator. One day Daksha sneaks out of her home with her maid Kanta to see Zarine. Upon reaching Zarine’s home, Zarine sarcastically asks Daksha to sit at the table and eat with her family, knowing very well that Daksha would not do such a thing. However, out of her love for her friend, Daksha sits at the table and silently watches Zarine and her sisters and mother eat. Being a strict vegetarian, Daksha feels repulsed seeing Zarine consume meat and vomits on the table. Daksha reaches out to Zarine hoping she will help her but Zarine backs away in disgust. Kanta enters and takes Daksha out of the house while Zarine angrily calls “Are you happy?” after her. Daksha then tells the audience that Kanta told her that “Wagh” and Hari had offered to purchase Zarine’s father’s store but he had refused saying the price was too low. Daksha, feeling betrayed and humiliated, then states, “What wretched people. All this fuss over a small matter. I hate people with false pride. As if it was their birthright to ask for more than they deserve. Such wretched people! Horrible people!” (pp.60). Daksha’s irritation with Zarine escalates when Hari physically beats her and then locks her in her room when he finds out from Kanta that she was “eating” with Zarine and her family. As scholar of English literature Anjali Multani notes, “The anguish and bitterness and pain of the last encounter with Zarine makes an abiding impression on Daksha/Hardika. Henceforth, and for the most part of her life, Hardika stays trapped and cocooned in her blinding prejudice against Zarine and her community” (Multani 2009, 75).

The adult Hardika’s hatred for Muslims is primarily fueled by Zarine’s “betrayal”. Even though Hardika claims her father’s murder in Hussainabad is the reason why she can’t tolerate Muslims, the audience soon sees that this is not the only reason. Towards the end of the play
Hardika gets into an argument with Javed. After she blames “his people” for the murder of her father, he retorts, “You blame us for what happened fifty years ago. Today if something happens to my sister can I blame you?” to which Hardika replies, “What happens to your sister doesn’t concern me!” Javed questions her saying, “It doesn’t concern you?” Hardika explodes, “She deserves it! Your sister deserves it! Zarine deserves…”. Hardika then catches herself and asks Javed, “What did you say your sister’s name was?” He tells her that his sister’s name is Tasneem to which Hardika replies, “Oh. I thought it was Zarine” (pp.60-61). With this slipup, it is apparent that Hardika’s fury rests with Zarine, not Muslims in general.

Tragically, had Hardika known the context of Zarine’s anger, her hateful prejudice towards Muslims could have been prevented. Hari and “Wagh” were the ones who had burned Zarine’s father shop in the first place. They had done this because they wanted a shop of their own and because they had heard that Zarine’s father was thinking of starting a mill like their own. When Daksha visited Zarine’s home, she was unaware of this fact but Zarine wasn’t, hence Zarine’s cruel treatment of Daksha. Hari had beaten Daksha after going to Zarine’s home, not because she had “eaten” with Muslims, but because he was afraid that she would find out about his actions. Sadly, by the time Hardika learns the truth, it is too late for her to makes amends with Zarine. However, Dattani offers the audience a ray of hope with Hardika’s final line “Do you think- do think those boys will ever come back?” (pp.64), suggesting that Hardika wishes to apologize for the way she treated Bobby and Javed, her first step towards tolerance.

With the character of Daksha/Hardika, Dattani not only acknowledges the role the partition plays in relation to religious communalism in South Asia today, he also suggests that the very nature of religious conflict in India is much more complicated than Muslims and Hindus simply hating each other due to ideological differences.
Javed: The Complexity of Communalism

Of the six main characters in *Final Solutions*, Javed Ahmed, a high school drop-out who was thrown out of his home by his father and who now works as a hoodlum hired to start communal riots, seems the easiest to judge. When Ramnik Gandhi finds out Javed’s profession, he immediately assumes that Javed does it for the money. He angrily asks Javed, “How much did they pay you?” to which Javed replies, “Thousands! I got thousands, lakhs for doing it! Are you satisfied? That’s what you want to hear!”. Ramnik disgustedly replies, “And to think I offered you a job! All for money- in the name of a cause!” (pp.39). However, the audience soon learns that this is not the case. As Bobby tells Ramnik later, “He didn’t do it for the money. They didn’t hire him. He volunteered” (pp.40). The fact that Javed volunteered to be a hired rioter then gives the audience the impression that Javed is what many people would call a Muslim fundamentalist. Religion historians R. Scott Appleby and Martin Marty define fundamentalism saying, “It manifests itself as a strategy or set of strategies, by which beleaguered believers attempt to preserve their distinctive identity as a people or group. Feeling this identity to be a risk in the contemporary era, these believers fortify it by a selective retrieval of doctrines, beliefs, and practices from a sacred past” (Appleby and Marty 1997, 3). Today the stereotype of an Islamic fundamentalist is a women-hating, turban-wearing, bearded male suicide bomber who is engaging in *jihad* (an Arabic term many Americans believe to mean “Holy War” but in reality actually means “striving or struggling in the way of God” (Kimball in Burek 2001)). However, does Javed fit into the definition as stated by Appleby and Marty or into the prejudiced stereotype described above?

It is clear that Javed is trying to “preserve a distinctive identity” for Muslims and that he does feel “this identity to be a risk in the contemporary era”. In the first act of the play when
Bobby and Javed are confronted by the Hindu Mob/Chorus, a member of the Mob/Chorus finds a handkerchief Bobby uses to cover his head during prayer. The member places the handkerchief on Bobby’s head. At the same time, a second member of the Mob/Chorus finds Javed’s prayer cap (which unlike the handkerchief is a clear marker of the Muslim religious identity). The stage directions read, “Chorus 1 takes the cap and covers Javed’s face with it. Javed deliberately wears it on his head with dignity, whereas Bobby has removed his handkerchief” (pp.20). Unlike Bobby whom Javed describes as “busy trying to forget his faith” (pp.45), he has great pride in his identity as a Muslim man. Instead of making an excuse like Bobby, Javed wears his prayer cap proudly. At that moment, he is ready to die in order to preserve his identity. Javed even admits to having been ready to engage in jihad as he rode the bus to Amargaon to start riots at the Rath Yatra. He describes it saying, “‘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’. On the bus there were dozens of them. And I told them I was prepared. Everyone approved. We were one. United. I felt really proud” (pp.46).

Even with this immense pride in his identity as a Muslim and despite being taken up by the fervor and passion of a cause, Javed does not come across as a fundamentalist in the play. Javed is not proud of his identity as a hired hoodlum. This is apparent in the scene where his profession as a rioter is first revealed to the audience. At the end of the play’s second act upon hearing that Javed is looking for a job, Ramnik offers Javed one in is his sari shop. Ramnik tells Javed he would be very happy if he took the job. Smita angrily interrupts her father and tells him not to give Javed a job. Javed quickly guesses that his sister Tasneem must have told Smita about his profession. He begs her not to talk about his job in Ramnik’s presence but Smita ignores him and states that Javed’s job is the reason why his father threw him out the his house. Frustrated
with Smita, Javed tells her, “Say it! I don’t care!” Smita then turns to her father and tells him, “They hire him! They hire such people!” When Ramnik asks “Who?” Smita replies, “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!”

There is a pause. The stage directions state, “Javed moves towards Smita”. Instead of making a move to physically harm Smita, as one might expect, the stage directions read that, “He starts sobbing and sits down” Javed turns to Smita and tells her, “You betrayed her [Tasneem] after all…you promised her you wouldn’t tell…she told you only because you promised…she was so sure you wouldn’t…Traitor!” (pp.36). Bobby then tells Smita that he had almost won Javed over and convinced him to give up his profession. Distressed to learn this, Smita runs out of the room. Javed begins to physically hurt himself by pounding his forehead with his fist. Here the audience does not see a violent fundamentalist but a vulnerable, troubled young man. Javed is not a terrorist nor is he an Islamic fundamentalist. He is a misguided youth who has been driven to his violent career due to a traumatic childhood experience.

In the final act of Final Solutions, while Javed is outside taking a walk, Bobby tells Ramnik that he and Javed have been friends since childhood. He describes Javed as a child saying, “He loved playing hero with the neighborhood boys. And he was. A minor incident changed all that” (pp.41). One day Javed and Bobby were playing cricket with a group of friends. The mailman who was running behind schedule asked Javed to deliver a letter to a Hindu man. When Javed opened the gate to the man’s home, the man roughly ordered Javed to leave the letter on the wall. The frightened Javed did so. The man then come out of his home and proceeded to wipe everything that Javed had touched with his hands: the letter, the wall and even the gate. The mailman noticed this and laughed it off saying, “Take no notice…That man is
slightly cracked”. However as Bobby describes it, Javed was not able to ignore this because of the sound he then heard coming from the Hindu man’s house:

We all heard a prayer bell, ringing continuously. Not loud. But distinct. The neighbor had been praying for quite a while, but none of us had ever noticed the bell before. We’d heard the bell so often every day of our lives that it didn’t mean anything. It was a part of the sounds of the wind and the birds and the tongas. It didn’t mean anything. You don’t single out such things and hear them, isolated from the rest of the din. But at that moment…we all heard only the bell.

The Hindu man had increased his *poojas* to purify the items of his house that Javed had “polluted” with his “Muslim” touch. In this moment, the sound of the prayer bell reminded Javed that he was different from the Hindu man. Javed realized that he’s the minority. A sound that he used to take for granted now constantly reminds him that he is a Muslim, a separate entity from the Hindu majority population. Bobby goes on to say that the day after this incident (which Dattani based on a story he had heard during his research), Javed dropped pieces of meat and bones into the Hindu man’s yard. The Hindu man was furious and crying. Bobby states, “I didn’t speak to Javed for many days after that. I was frightened of him. For months, whenever we played cricket and heard the bell, we remembered this incident and we avoided looking at Javed. And for Javed, he was, in his own eyes, no longer the neighborhood hero” (pp.42).

For the rest of his life, Javed will remain haunted by the sound of a prayer bell. During the attack on the *Rath Yatra*, Javed describes another incident involving a prayer bell, “I moved to the chariot, pushing people away. And I saw him. I saw the poojari [a Hindu priest] *ringing a bell!* There was chaos all around. I saw the poojari’s frightened face as he turned away. And- and I was in a carnival again on that giant wheel, screaming with pleasure” (pp.48). Javed describes himself advancing on the priest and raising the knife in his arm, ready to murder the *poojari*. However, Javed was not able to bring himself to kill the priest and another rioter did the job for him. Bobby then pulled Javed away from the riot. A belief in the idea that Hindus must be killed
in order for Islam in India to survive did not cause Javed to try and stab the poojari. The sound of the prayer bell that caused Javed to re-live the cricket match incident and the powerful memory it brought back did. Just as the memory of Zarine’s betrayal contributes to Hardika’s resentment towards Muslims, the memory of the cricket match contributes to Javed’s violent impulses and anger against Hindus.

In a powerful monologue in the play’s third act, Javed describes what goes through his mind every time he participates in a riot:

I had permission to do exactly what I had been asked not to do all my life! Raise my voice in protest. To shout and scream like a child on the giant wheel in a carnival. The first screams are of pleasure. Of sensing an unusual freedom. And then- it becomes nightmarish as your world is way below you and you are moving away from it- and suddenly you come crashing down, down and you want to get off. But you can’t. You don’t want it anymore. It is the same feeling repeated over and over again. You scream with pain and horror, but there is no one listening to you. Everyone is alone in their cycles of joy and terror. The feelings come faster and faster till they confuse you with the blur created by their speed. You get nauseous and you cry to yourself, ‘Why I am here? What am I doing here?’ The joy ride gets over and you get off. And you are never sure again. (pp.45)

The audience is able to see that Javed takes no pleasure or pride in his profession. Had Javed really been ready to kill Hindus in the name of Islam, he would not have experienced such immense feelings of fear and nausea. Also, the men Javed works with are obviously not the devout Muslims they claim to be. Javed tells Ramnik that prior to the Rath Yatra riot, he and the other rioters had all gotten drunk. The consumption of alcohol is forbidden in Islam. Javed realizes that his fellow rioters are clearly not defending Islam if they are encouraging each other to drink alcohol. Yet Javed still goes along with them because as he goes on to say, “I actually felt that that is where I belonged” (pp.46). A sense of unity and camaraderie is a major reason why Javed participates in these riots. Again this suggests the complexity of Javed’s career as rioter. As literature scholar Santwana Haldar notes in Final Solutions: A Critical Study:
Javed’s experience brings out the agony of the persons who are misled. In the beginning they are swayed by some great feelings of fighting to save their faith and after some days those apparently great feelings turn out to be cheap sentiments. And then, they begin to hate themselves as Javed does. But after some days they are somehow forced to do the same job, as they are unable to come back to the mainstream. (Haldar 2008, 123)

As mentioned earlier, Javed is the easiest character in Final Solutions to judge. However, he is also the most likeable and complex character in the play. Javed is an onion whose layers of complexity are peeled back by Bobby as he tells the Gandhi family about Javed’s past. Although audience members want to hate him because of his career and his actions, they find themselves sympathizing with him because of his past and even liking him due to his personality. Dattani has created a witty and appealing character with Javed. As Bobby describes him, Javed was “The hero. Smart and cocksure” (pp.41). Throughout the play, Javed’s wry sense of humor provides the audience with moments of relief from an otherwise heavy piece of theatre. For example, when Ramnik expresses surprise over the fact that Javed still visits his sister Tasneem even though he no longer lives with his parents, Javed replies, “I can still love my sister. We do love our brothers and sisters you know!” (pp.31). When Bobby later remarks that the Hindu mob has left the Gandhi’s home, Javed takes a jab at the fact that Ramnik thought he was only a rioter for the money and states, “Maybe they aren’t being paid overtime” (pp.45). In the final scene of the play when Hardika asks Bobby and Javed why they haven’t considered moving to Pakistan, Javed responds, “I prefer Dubai” (pp. 60). These little moments remind the audience that Javed is not a cold-blooded killer, but a young man who is able to poke fun at himself and others.

Javed is also portrayed as being quite caring and tender. In the final act of the play, the audience learns that Javed and Bobby did not “accidentally” end up at the Gandhi’s doorstep. Javed wanted to talk to Smita. Javed then reveals to the audience that Bobby and Smita had had romantic feelings for each other in the past. Javed wants to make sure that those feelings are
gone before Bobby marries his sister Tasneem. As he states, “To me my sister’s happiness means more than anything else” (pp.56). Javed clearly cares deeply about Tasneem. Javed is shown to also care about others who are not as close to him. Even though Aruna treated him so rudely and was ready to throw him to the Hindu mob, Javed respects her and her beliefs. He thanks her for her hospitality and apologizes to her when he is rude. When Smita tells him to fill a water vessel that is used to wash the family image of Krishna, Javed hesitates, “I don’t think we should fool around with that” (pp.57). Javed knows that this would upset Aruna and although he has the opportunity to “pollute” her pooja as he did after the cricket match in his childhood, he doesn’t. As he tells her, “We are not very different. You and me. We both feel pride” (pp.54).

At the end of Final Solutions, the audience knows that Javed will always retain his pride in his religion and his culture, however the audience also knows that Javed has changed. He will not return to his profession as a hired rioter. In the beginning of Act Three, Javed doubts himself and asks Bobby, “Have I- changed?” to which Bobby replies, “Why do you doubt it?” (pp.37). Bobby later reaffirms this to Ramnik when he tells him, “He has changed. Believe me, he has changed” (pp.41). After Ramnik hears the story of the cricket match and Javed’s account of the Rath Yatra riot he tells Javed, “You are brave. Not everyone can get off. For some of us it is not even possible to escape” (pp.48). Javed has indeed escaped. He may not take a job in Ramnik’s shop, but he will not return to the gangs. Just as he did with Hardika, Dattani shows his audience with the character of Javed that religious communalism is based on the demons of the past. When one comes to terms with his or her past, one has the potential to change and to move on with their life. In the final scene of the play, Javed stiffens upon hearing Aruna ring a bell while performing her daily morning pooja to Krishna. However, unlike the incident with the poojari, Javed is able to control his emotions and impulses when he hears the bell. Javed has changed.
Ramnik & Aruna: Secularism and Religion

Ramnik and Aruna Gandhi, the parents of Smita, symbolize the two ends of the spectrum of Hindu religiosity. Ramnik, the owner of a small sari store, who sees himself as secular, is at one end. As he tells his wife Aruna, “All religions are one. The ways to God are many” (pp.49). Although Ramnik is Hindu, he does not participate in the elaborate prayer rituals his wife and daughter perform every morning and night. Ramnik seems to have no problem with Muslims. When he speaks to Noor Ahmed, Javed and Tasneem’s father, on the telephone to assure him that Tasneem is safe, he invites Mr. Ahmed to come and visit the family the next time he is in Amargaon. Ramnik’s father, Hari, and his grandparents, who refused to let Daksha visit Zarine’s home, would surely have never allowed this. When Javed and Bobby seek refuge from the Hindu mob, Ramnik opens his door to them. When the infuriated Hindu mob brands him a traitor and demands that he hand over the two young Muslim men, Ramnik retorts “There is nothing you can take from here without killing me first!” (pp.23). Ramnik is clearly willing to risk his life for the lives of two people he has never even met. The fact that Javed and Bobby are Muslim and that he is Hindu makes no difference to him. After the boys are safely in his home, he asks Aruna to bring them water and tells them that they can spend the night until the danger has passed. Ramnik clearly goes out of his way to make sure that the boys are comfortable. In this part of the world, where “Atithi Devo Bhavah”, or “a guest is equal to God”, this behavior is considered perfectly normal. Yet there is something desperate and urgent about Ramnik’s hospitality.

The first hint the audience gets of this is when in Act One Ramnik has just let Bobby and Javed into the home and the mob is threatening to kill the Gandhi family. When the terrified Aruna tries to open the door to let the mob take Javed and Bobby, Ramnik “pushes her aside roughly” and states, “I have to protect them! I need to protect them!” (pp.24). Later when Bobby
informs the Gandhis that he and Javed are in Amargaon because Javed is looking for a job, Ramnik offers Javed a job working in front of the showroom of his sari shop. He tells Javed, “What do you say? 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- Take the job. Please” (pp.35). Even after Smita informs him that Javed is actually a hired rioter, the one who is hired “to throw the first stone”, Ramnik tells Javed he can still have the job if he promises to change his ways. He later tells Aruna “Oh! Why can’t he take the job and be done with it!” (pp.55).

The reason why Ramnik is so intent on Javed taking the job is revealed in the final moments of the play when he expresses how guilty he feels for what his grandfather and father did to Zarine’s family in 1948.

It’s their shop. It’s the same burnt up shop we bought from them, at half it’s value. And we burnt. Your husband. My father. And his father. They had it burnt in the name of communal hatred. Because we wanted a shop. And also they learnt- 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. (pp. 64)

Ramnik has carried the burden of the fact that the business he runs was not obtained in a fair or honest manner. The current prosperity and well-being of the Gandhi family was brought about by bringing poverty and despair to another family. Ramnik cannot live with this guilt and he thus tries to compensate for the crimes of his father and grandfather by offering Javed a job in the sari store. In Ramnik’s eyes, the shop belongs to Javed and Bobby. With his generous display of tolerance and hospitality towards the boys, Ramnik is clearly a character Dattani wants his characters to emulate. However, just as Dattani shows his audience that the nature of prejudice can be incredibly complex with the characters of Daksha/Hardika and Javed, he is also indicating that harmony and tolerance are not so simple either.
Aruna is the polar opposite of Ramnik. She is an incredibly pious and devout woman. Her faith is her life. For her, religion equals protection. Every morning and night she offers prayers to the family deity of Krishna and reads from the *Bhagavad Gita* with her daughter Smita. When Ramnik remarks to her, “Nobody is asking you to pray all day”, she retorts “Who do you think is protecting this house?” (pp.15). The Hindu tradition has provided Aruna with security since she was a young girl. As she tells Smita, “I have always taken pride in my religion… I was so happy knowing that I was protected. I grew up listening to stories of our gods and how they slew the demons to protect the good people of their land” (pp.51). Since her religion is what makes Aruna feel happy and safe, she takes the utmost care to perform each ritual perfectly. This includes not allowing the materials for her *poojas* to be polluted by anything from lizards to Muslims.

Aruna is deeply prejudiced against Muslims. When Javed and Bobby come to her doorstep seeking shelter, along with Hardika she tells Ramnik not to let the boys inside. Following this when Ramnik ignores her and the Hindu mob is now claiming that they will kill the Gandhis if they do not hand over the two Muslims, Aruna moves to open the door. However, Aruna is not doing this because she hates Muslims like her mother in-law apparently does. Aruna opens the door because she is terrified for the lives of her family. The nature of Aruna’s prejudice is of a very different nature from that of her mother in-law. Aruna, unlike Hardika, has not had a traumatic experience involving Muslims. Aruna is prejudiced against Muslims because she honestly sees their religion as contaminating to her faith. She explains this to Smita:

God knows, I don’t want all this violence. How can I when I wont even harm a goat or a chicken? But to throw everything away just like that? Doesn’t it mean anything to you? For how many generations we have preserved our sanskar [culture] because we believe it is the truth! It is the way shown to us by our saints. We must know no other path. And I will not have it all perish to accommodate someone else’s faith. I have enough faith and pride to see that it doesn’t happen. I shall uphold what I believe is the truth. (pp.50)
Aruna’s prejudices may be due to a lack of education or blind faith. Nonetheless, Aruna legitimately believes that if a Muslim fills the water vessels she uses to bathe her image of Krishna, something awful could happen. Thus when Bobby picks up the Krishna at the end of the play, her world is literally shaken. Aruna’s final line of the play, “Oh! Is there nothing left that is sacred in this world?” (pp.63) shows how upset Bobby’s actions have made her. However, the fact that Aruna saw nothing happen to Bobby or the image of Krishna gives the audience hope that she may one day be able to realize that Islam does not contaminate the Hindu tradition.

**Smita & Bobby: Religion as Identity**

Smita and Babban are the play’s most similar characters and perhaps this is the reason why the two once had romantic feelings for each other. Smita is a member of the majority Hindu population and Bobby a member of the Muslim minority. However despite differences in their religious backgrounds, Smita and Bobby are equally conflicted by their religious identities.

Smita, who has been taking part in Hindu religious rituals alongside her mother for her entire life, realizes just how stifling these practices have been when Javed and Bobby arrive at her home. In a scene towards the end of the play, Javed offers to fill a bucket with drinking water for Aruna. Aruna doesn’t respond and Javed quickly realizes what he has said and apologizes. Aruna responds, “We don’t allow anyone to fill our drinking water. No outsiders” and an embarrassed Smita says, “Mummy please!” Aruna tells her, “We bathe our god with it Smita. It has to be pure. It must not be contaminated” to which Smita replies, “You are making it worse by explaining” (pp.49). Shortly after this, Smita pulls her mother aside and begins to argue with her. Smita accuses her mother of being close-minded while Aruna accuses her daughter of not being proud of her religious inheritance and adds that if Smita criticizes her own religion she will be prejudiced. Smita responds saying:
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. Alright, so we are both prejudiced, so what do you want to do? (pp.51)

Smita is trying to run away from her religion because her mother has been shoving religious rituals down her throat since she was a child. As Smita begs Aruna, “Ever since I was small you have been at me to go to temple, make garlands, listen to you reading from the Gita. I love you Mummy, that’s why I did it. I listened to you and obeyed you…Maybe I should have told you earlier, but I’m telling you now, I can’t bear it! Please don’t burden me any more! I can’t take it!” (pp.53). Perhaps if Smita had come to her religion on her own, instead of being introduced to it by her mother, she would feel a deeper connection to her religious identity. However, the repetitive rituals that Aruna has forced on Smita have prevented her from identifying with the Hindu religious tradition.

Bobby also struggles with his religious identity, yet while Smita feels that her identity as a Hindu stifles her, Bobby thinks his identity as a Muslim harms him. Throughout the play, Bobby is shown to be hiding his religious background. When the Hindu mob find the handkerchief Bobby uses to cover his head with during prayer and place it on him, Bobby tells them, “I- wear it because of the heat. It…it isn’t good for me. The sun is too hot for me, that’s why I…” (pp.20). Unlike Javed who wears his prayer cap with pride thus affirming his identity as a Muslim, Bobby quickly takes his handkerchief off. Bobby knows how the Hindu mob will treat him if they find out that he is a Muslim and he is afraid of being treated in such a manner.

Not only does Bobby try to mask his religious identity as a Muslim by altering his physical appearance, he masks his identity by changing his name as well. When Ramnik hears
Bobby’s name he remarks, “Bobby. This is an unusual name for a …” to which Bobby replies, “My name is Babban” Ramnik then notes, “But your friends in college called you Bobby” Bobby responds, “My friends in college called me baboon instead of Babban” Ramnik laughs and says, “So you prefer Bobby to baboon” Bobby smiles and tells him “Yes. Maybe now that I am out of college, I might change it back to Babban” (pp. 33). At first, Bobby’s reasoning for the nickname seems reasonable. No one likes being teased. However, the audience soon learns that Bobby changed his name not to avoid being teased but to avoid being labeled as a Muslim.

After Bobby tells Ramnik the story of Javed and the cricket match Ramnik asks him if he felt as angry as Javed when he heard the Hindu man ring his prayer bell. Bobby tells Ramnik that he did and Ramnik asks him why then he didn’t also throw meat in the man’s yard. Bobby answers him saying, “That’s because I was ashamed of being myself. He wasn’t.” Ramnik replies, “Ashamed?” Bobby responds, “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” (pp.42).

In my interview with Dattani, he told me that he sees himself most in the character of Bobby in his approach to “sitting on the fence” when it comes to issues of religious identity (Dattani Interview 2010). Most of Bobby’s actions in the play are in order to help Javed rather than help himself. When Bobby pulled Javed away from the Rath Yatra riot, he wasn’t doing it for himself but for Javed. Bobby is partly responsible for helping to change Javed. However, at the end of the play it is unclear if Bobby himself will change. His rejection of religion is not as clear as Smita’s. As he tells her, “I never could express my feelings as well as you do. Maybe my religion oppressed me far more” (pp.53). It is true that Bobby performs the central action of the play’s climax (picking up the Gandhi family image of Krishna). However, once again Bobby
only does this because he sees how uncomfortable Javed is when Aruna rings her prayer bell. Dattani’s choice to leave the fate of Bobby uncertain, reminds the audience that the solutions to religious prejudice and discrimination can’t always be found in a single night.

**The Mob/Chorus: The Individual Versus The Community**

A fascinating aspect of Dattani’s script is the fact that the word “Muslim” is only used twice by the play’s characters (pp.11 & 33) while the word “Hindu” is only used once (pp.51). Instead of “Hindu” and Muslim”, the characters often use the words “them” and “us”. This relates to the idea of the “Other” as defined by the German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and in more recent times by the literary theorist Edward Said. During his background research, Dattani found a certain term being used by many of the victims of riots he interviewed:

They always talked about “the mob”. It wasn’t like Muslims were saying that “the Hindus were doing this” and Hindus weren’t saying, “The Muslims did this”. “The mob, there was violence on this streets” and things like that. Then, that’s when I thought that it would be nice to see that as a mob first, not as a Hindu or a Muslim, and I thought it would be nice to give them a choral element because what they mean as a mob, whether it’s the paranoia of the Hindus or the paranoia of the Muslims, it could only come out through a stylistic means. I felt I needed a style, a stylistic convention, and that’s how I thought of the chorus, though I call them a “Mob/Chorus. So it’s a mob at times and it’s a chorus at times. (Dattani Interview 2010)

A convention of dramatic theatre that has existed since the days of ancient Greek drama is that of the chorus. Describing the role the chorus plays in Greek tragedies, literature scholar Rebecca Bushnell writes, “The chorus exists both in and outside of the action: they participate in the drama at the same time that they comment on it, from the perspectives of both the mythic past and contemporary Athenian values” (Bushnell 2008, 36). Throughout the play Dattani’s Mob/Chorus is doing exactly what Bushnell describes.

As the Hindu mob and the Muslim mob, the Mob/Chorus participates in the drama by physically threatening the lives of the six central characters. Much of the dialogue of the
Mob/Chorus when they are violent, in particular that of the Hindu mob, is reminiscent of the messages that the Hindu Right was conveying during the Ramjanmabhoomi campaign. At other points in the play, the Mob/Chorus takes on the roles of the Hindu and Muslim communities of Amargaon and comments on the onset of religious communalism in their town. This commentary addresses a question which South Asians have been grappling with for over two hundred years: What is more important— one’s identity as an individual or one’s identity as a member of a religious community?

The first exchange of the Mob/Chorus illustrates their dual purpose of being a mob inciting religious communalism and a chorus commenting on the rise of religious discrimination.

The dialogue of the five Mob/Chorus Members in their Hindu masks is as follows:

**Chorus 1:** The processions has passed through these lanes  
Every year  
For forty years!

**Chorus 2:** How dare they?

**Chorus 1,2,3:** For forty years our chariot has moved through their mohallas [“neighborhoods”].

**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!

**Chorus 4:** Why should they?
Chorus 5: It could have been an accident.

Chorus 2: The stone that hit our God was no accident!

Chorus 3: The knife that slit the poojari’s stomach was no accident!

Chorus 4,5: Why should they?

It could have been an accident.

(Chorus 4 and 5 continue to question, ‘Why should they?’, ‘Why would they?’, ‘It could have been an accident’, while Chorus 1 mutters ‘No accident, no accident…’, while Chorus 2 and 3 continue, ‘The stone that hit our God was no accident, the knife that slit the poojari’s stomach was no accident’. Soon they overlap and are saying it together. Chorus 1,2 and 3 build their parts to a crescendo. And they all finish together on the word ‘accident’.)

Chorus 1: Send…them…back.

Chorus 4: Send them back?

Chorus 2: Drive…them…out.

Chorus 5: Drive them out?

Chorus 3: Kill the sons of swine!

(They repeat their lines till they overlap. Chorus 4 and 5 get more aggressive till their questions become statements. By the end of it, they are an unruly mob crying out for blood.) (pp. 10-11)

In the beginning of this scene it is clear that the first three members of the Mob/Chorus are acting more like a mob than a chorus. Their lines are eerily similar to the chants and statements one would hear members of the Sangh Parivar saying during the Ramjanmabhoomi movement. Chorus Members 1, 2 and 3 articulate one of the central arguments of the Ramjanmabhoomi campaign that India has always been a land of Hindus and that Muslims are foreigners who invaded India in the past. During the rise of the Hindu Right in the eighties and early nineties, the works of past proponents of Hindu Nationalism such as Swami Dayananda Saraswati and M.S. Golwalkar were being heavily used.

One of these proponents was Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, the Hindu nationalist
responsible for coining the term *Hindutva*, describing an ideology that championed not only the Hindu religion, but also the Hindu “race”. Savarkar claimed, “…we Hindus are bound together…by the tie of love we bear to a common fatherland and by the common blood that courses through our veins and keeps our hearts throbbing and our affections warm” (Savarkar in Jaffrelot 2007, 94). Savarkar also pointed out that Muslims love a different Holy Land than Hindus do and with the exceptions of those Hindus who converted to Islam, India’s Muslims are the descendants of those who had different blood from the Hindus. During his *Rath Yatra*, L.K. Advani often repeated these *Hindutva* ideas of Savarkar. He emphasized the fact that Babur (and essentially all of India’s Muslims) belonged to a foreign race and religion. The blood that ran through Babur’s veins was not the same blood that ran through the veins of Ram. This sentiment is repeated by the first three Mob/Chorus Members as they state, “This is our land! How dare they? It is in their blood! It is in their blood to destroy!” Also the blame the Hindu mob is placing on the Muslims for destroying their chariot and images echoes the blame Advani placed on Babur for destroying the supposed Ram temple in Ayodhya. Just as the Hindu mob states they will “Drive them [Muslims] out” and “Kill the sons of swine!”, during the *Rath Yatra* Advani would lead chants crying, “This poison ivy spreading in our garden, we’ll crush underfoot!” (*Ram Ke Naam* 1993).

The Hindu mob continues to repeat messages spread by the Hindu Right during the *Ramjanmabhoomi* movement throughout the play. In the scene in which the Hindu mob is demanding the lives of Javed and Bobby, members of the Mob/Chorus repeatedly call Ramnik a “traitor” for sheltering the two Muslims. The concept that Hindus who did not support the building of a Ram temple in Ayodhya and who were sympathetic to Muslims were “traitors” was utilized heavily by the Hindu Right. As documented in the film *Ram Ke Naam* by Anand
Patwardhan, Advani stated, “Traitors Beware!” at various points during his Rath Yatra. In his film, Patwardhan asks a kar sevak in the Bajrang Dal who will he fight in order to build temple for Ram. The man responds, “Some Muslims and some of our own Hindus who try and create obstacles for us and for the Hindu cause” (Ram Ke Naam 1993).

In Act Three, the Hindu mob claims, “Our future is threatened…Our bellowing pales in comparison to the whisper of a pseudo-secularist who is in league with the people who brought shame to our land! Half-hearted, half-baked, with no knowledge of his land’s greatness. He is still a threat” (pp.52). During his Rath Yatra, Advani often warned spectators about the dangers of the pseudo-secularist. In December of 1992, Advani stated, “Unfortunately, for four decades now, in the name of secularism politicians have been wanting the nation to disown its essential personality. For the left inclined, secularism has become a euphemism to cloak their intense allergy to religion and more particularly, to Hinduism. It is this attitude which the BJP classifies as pseudo-secularism. This attitude is wrong and unscientific” (Advani in Jaffrelot 2007, 292).

Again, Dattani is reflecting these Sangh Parivar sentiments in the dialogue of his Mob/Chorus.

Dattani also has his Muslim mob respond to the ideas the Hindu Right was propagating at the time. In the first scene where the audience is introduced to the Muslim mob, the first three members state, “They say we razed their temples yesterday. That we broke their chariot today. That we’ll bomb their streets tomorrow” (pp.13). Here Dattani is capturing the frustration and anger India’s Muslim community must have felt when they were targeted by the theatrical events of the Ramjanmabhoomi campaign, especially L.K. Advani’s Rath Yatra. However, when the Mob/Chorus wear their Muslims masks, they rarely become as aggressive as they do when they don their Hindu masks. In the scenes involving the Muslim Mob/Chorus, the members are often asking the audience questions such as:
Should we be swallowed up? Till they cannot recognize us? Should we meld into anonymity so they cannot hound us? Lose ourselves in a shapeless mass? Should we? Can we? …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 our hands? Is there anyone more unsure, more insecure than us? Oh what a curse it is to be less in number! (pp.37 & 48)

Therefore, the Muslim Mob/Chorus appears to be more of a chorus than a mob. One common criticism of the play is that the Muslim Mob/Chorus is more passive and meek than the Hindu one and that Dattani was biased toward the Muslim minority. Dattani, who doesn’t feel that this is the case in his play, points out, “Any minority is persecuted and you need to show that” (Dattani Interview 2010).

As I noted in Chapter One, through colonial institutions like the census and separate electorates the British created the notion that in South Asia interests should lie with communities rather than individuals. South Asians soon began to see themselves as members of communities first, and individuals, second. Dattani explores this idea through the choral element of the Mob/Chorus. Returning to the scene when the audience first sees the Mob/Chorus in their Hindu masks, Chorus Members 4 and 5, unlike the first three members of the Mob/Chorus, do not immediately blame Muslims for the destruction of their Rath Yatra. They speculate that the incident could have been an accident. Here, Chorus Members 4 and 5 are clearly individuals. However, as they listen to the words of Chorus Members 1, 2, and 3, they slowly begin to assume the beliefs and ideas of their community. By the end of the scene, Chorus Members 4 and 5 are no longer doubting the guilt of the Muslim community. As the stage directions read, “Chorus 4 and 5 get more aggressive till their questions become statements. By the end of it, they are an unruly mob crying out for blood” (pp.11). Chorus Members 4 and 5 are indistinguishable from Chorus Members 1, 2 and 3. The audience sees them as members of the Hindu mob, not two Hindus who were sympathetic to Muslims. This process is replicated throughout Final
Solutions. In the first scene where the audience is introduced to the Muslim mob, the first four members become increasingly upset with being blamed for destroying the Rath Yatra. At the end of the scene they angrily declare, “Let them send us back” Chorus Member 5 meekly asks, “Where?” (pp.13). The other members do not respond but merely stare at Chorus Member 5. Ultimately, the voice of Chorus Member 5 is drowned out by the voices of the other Chorus Members. Again, the voice of the community is heard, not the voice of an individual.

This notion is broken in the play’s final image. Javed and Bobby leave the Gandhi home and join the Mob/Chorus on the ramp. The Mob/Chorus are masked, but Javed and Bobby are not. While it may seem alarming that Javed and Bobby are standing amongst the Mob/Chorus since some audience members may interpret this as Javed and Bobby becoming members of the mob, this final image is actually one of hope. If Ramnik, Smita, Aruna or Hardika were to see Javed and Bobby standing in a crowd of Muslims they would not see them as just Muslims. They would see them as individuals whom they have come to know and even care about. The audience also no longer sees Javed and Bobby as just Muslims, but as individuals.

The characters and themes developed by Dattani, such as the role of memory with Hardika and Javed, and the tensions between the individual and the community as represented by the Mob/Chorus, forces audiences to seriously think about these different issues within the topic of religious communalism. Talk-back sessions held after performances offer audience members a space to discuss these issues. The next two chapters will discuss how different directors have been able to draw out these different characters and themes in performance, and how audience members have reacted to them in the talk-back sessions following these performances.
CHAPTER FIVE

From Bombay to Palo Alto: *Final Solutions in Performance*

In 1998, Mahesh Dattani made history by becoming the first English-language playwright to win the Sahitya Akademi Award, the highest literary honor a writer in Indian can achieve. The work Dattani received the award for was a collection entitled *Final Solutions and Other Plays*. The bestowment of this prestigious award indicates that the Indian literary community regards Dattani as one of the nation’s best playwrights. However, just because the members of India’s National Academy of Letters like a play’s text, does not necessarily mean that audience members will be as receptive to a theatrical production of the play. As Woodruff notes, although “Literary critics have for generations pleased themselves by taking theater to be a little more than the enactment of literary texts”, theatre is not simply literature (Woodruff 2009, 43). Theatre is performance. In order to evaluate the potential of *Final Solutions* to relieve religious tensions, an examination of actual productions of the play is necessary.

I will first examine the two most prominent productions of the English-version of the play: the first production in Bangalore in 1993 directed by Dattani, and the production of the play directed by Alyque Padamsee in Bombay that same year. Along with analyzing the actual productions, I will also explore the reactions of audience members and critics. I will then briefly look at the play’s performance in Bangalore directed by Ashish Sen in 2005, which had a unique approach to the presentation of the Mob/Chorus. In addition to these productions in India, I will examine two productions of the play performed in the USA, and discuss my own experience of directing a sequence of scenes from the play with an American cast.
The Original Vision: Mahesh Dattani’s Production

As described in the Introduction, Dattani was ready to premiere Final Solutions at the Deccan Herald Theatre Festival in Bangalore in December of 1992, when the Babri Masjid was destroyed. Following the demolition of the mosque, Dattani was contacted by festival organizers.

The festival organizers called me over to their office and said that, “We’ve been through your play and now is not the right time to do it” My point was this is precisely the time to do it because it’s really a plea for tolerance and all the more reason to do it because it’s relevant! I remember this lady saying “Oh, why don’t you just do a comedy like everyone else?” I said, “No, I’m going to do this play or nothing at all” And they decided, “Fine that’s your choice”, and it was stricken off the program. (Dattani Interview 2010)

Dattani pleaded with the organizers to reconsider their decision, but his pleas were ignored. Infuriated, Dattani took “a very proactive stand” and contacted the press, who were “only too happy” to take up a story against the Deccan Herald (one of the leading English-language newspapers in Karnataka), and the situation received a large amount of news coverage (Dattani Interview 2010). Yet despite this, the play wouldn’t be performed for another seven months.

Looking back, Dattani has come to understand why the Deccan Herald may have banned his play from their festival. Almost exactly six years before the demolition of the Babri Masjid, on December 7th, 1986, the Deccan Herald published a short story entitled Mohammad the Idiot. Although, as South Asian literature scholar C.M. Naim points out, “The story was about a half-witted boy named Muhammad and had nothing to do with the Prophet; it had in fact caused no trouble when it first appeared in the original Kannada” (Naim 2005), many Muslims in Bangalore took offense and rioting broke out in the state of Karnataka. Five thousand Muslims attempted to burn down the Deccan Herald office and within one day, fifty people had been injured and four were killed (The New York Times 1986). The New York Times reported that due to the rioting, “The entire police force was mobilized, state reserves were called in, and a ban was imposed on gatherings or carrying arms for five days” (The New York Times 1986). The
riot continued for several days with the death toll reaching seventeen people (Bose 1986).

Reflecting on this, Dattani told me that the publication of this short story “had created a whole lot of tension and it was a damaging thing so I think they [the Deccan Herald] were just a little wary of that happening again”. While Dattani has come to accept the reason why the Deccan Herald Theatre Festival prevented him from showing *Final Solutions*, unfortunately his relationship with the festival has been permanently “spoiled” (Dattani Interview 2010).

Following this situation with the festival, Alyque Padamsee suggested a few edits that Dattani could make that would help *Final Solutions* pass the censors, such as changing the location of the play from Ahmedabad to the fictional Amargaon, Javed’s hometown of Jamnagar to the fictional Jaynagar, the Muslim and Hindu masks of the Mob/Chorus to “Meek” and “Hard” masks, and eliminating any profanity in the dialogue. Padamsee was an immense help with getting *Final Solutions* back on its feet. Dattani notes that although Padamsee “with all his wisdom, managed to get it past through the censors”, even with an advertising legend like Padamsee who “attracts all the big sponsors, this was one play which none of his sponsors were willing to buy”. Not deterred by this, Padamsee invested his own personal savings into the play and “made it possible for *Final Solutions* to have a life on stage” (Dattani Interview 2010).

With the same cast with which he intended to premiere the play at the Deccan Herald Theatre Festival, Dattani got to work on his revised production of *Final Solutions*. He invited his student Preetam Koilpillai to play the role of Bobby and to co-direct the production (Matthan 2008). Dattani described the process of directing *Final Solutions* as “very interesting”:

> I remember there was some interesting discussions with the actors especially with Daksha/Hardika and the relationship between Aruna and Smitha, also it brought up a tremendous amount of discussion. I really enjoyed the first production, because I feel like I discovered a lot about the play I’d written and researched for over a year, because the actors brought in their own insights, I thought it was quite... a revelation as to how powerful it could be with actors. I was quite pleased with that. (Dattani Interview 2010)
Jisha Menon, the actress who played the role of Daksha and who is now a scholar of Postcolonial Theory and Performance Studies working on a project entitled, *Bordering on Drama: Community and Nation in Postcolonial India*, describes her experience in the production saying, “It was really a pivotal moment for me because it’s what got me thinking about performance and its relationship to history and its relationship to secular polity”. Apart from starting her on a path of academic scholarship, Menon adds that the production “was also a way for me to think about what was happening in the country at large, because that event, the Babri Masjid demolition, was really a crucial and transformative event” (Menon Interview 2012).

Menon’s experience of performing in *Final Solutions* highlights the play’s potential to contribute to secular polity. As detailed in Chapter Four, the character of Daksha is a representation of the role the partition plays in contemporary religious communalism in South Asia. By playing Daksha, Menon was able to see the continuing impact the partition had on events that were then engulfing India, such as the Ramjanmabhoomi campaign and the destruction of the Babri Masjid. Menon’s comments suggest that *Final Solutions* offers actors as well as audience members the chance to understand the impact of the partition on current instances of religious violence.

The play premiered at the Guru Nanak Bhavan in Bangalore on July 10th, 1993. The day after the show’s dress rehearsal, Padamsee came down to Bangalore and gave a talk about the recent communal violence that had occurred in Bombay and how prejudice stems from a “fear of what is different” (Sundarji 1993). Some audiences had a hard time processing the theme of religious communalism. Dattani remembers audience members gasping and being shocked at a scene in the play in which Bobby picks up the image of the deity Krishna. He recalls one audience member sitting next to him during a show, saying, “He’s going to break it, he’s going to break it!” with the expectation that Bobby was going to destroy the image of Krishna. Another
audience member told him that if Dattani wasn’t Hindu and he had made Bobby do something to the image of Krishna in his script, “they [Hindus] would have chopped off my head” (Dattani Interview 2010).

Some critics disliked Dattani’s “delicate” handling of his Muslim characters, and “the fact that Hindus are shown as aggressive goons and Muslims a frightened lot” (Lankesh 1993). Interestingly, Dattani did not hear this criticism from any of his Muslim audience members.

There were people from the Muslim community who came, who normally don’t go to the theatre, who were there for the first performance and they were just interested in meeting the actor who played Javed [Rahul Matthan], and couldn’t believe he wasn’t Muslim! And they kept asking, “How did you know all this?”. And when there was the second show, there was a huge section of the audience where members of the Muslim community had come in. And with a line like where she [Hardika] said, “Why don’t you go back to Pakistan?” and he [Javed] says, “I prefer Dubai”, there was this huge applause. So it was in a sense, giving voice to something, which hadn’t got a voice, so I can understand now in hindsight why some people might feel it is minority appeasement or something, but I don’t. I can honestly say, “I don’t think that I’ve been biased”. (Dattani Interview 2010)

Overall, the play received mostly positive reviews from critics. Journalist Gauri Lankesh praised the production saying, “Flitting back and forth over four decades through Daksha and depicting present-day doubts and fears through the other characters and the chorus, Dattani’s play is intense in its presentation” (Lankesh 1993).

**In the Aftermath of the Bombay Riots: Alyque Padamsee’s Production**

In December of 1993, Alyque Padamsee was finally given the opportunity to direct the play that he had commissioned in October of 1991. However, much had changed in the two years since Padamsee had organized the hour-long improvisation that had inspired Dattani to write *Final Solutions*. Following the demolition of the Babri Masjid, Bombay exploded with violence. The rioting in Bombay lasted for four months and at least one thousand people lost their lives. What was unique about the Bombay Riots was the fact that despite the conventional
understanding that communal violence is restricted to the poorer classes, in Bombay members of lower-class communities as well as middle-class ones were victimizers and victims.

Many of the people involved in Padamsee’s production of the play had a personal experience with the violence (Padamsee Interview 2010). Peter Fernandez, Padamsee’s personal assistant, sheltered a Muslim friend in his home during the riots. Another member of the cast had to leave his home because the police could not guarantee his protection there (Sundarji 1993). Padamsee himself was involved in a citizen’s group to re-build Bombay (Ramchandani 1993) and Dattani remembers Padamsee showing him completely demolished areas of Dharavi, South Asia’s largest slum (Dattani Interview 2010). To ensure the mental health of the cast, psychoanalyst Udayan Patel was present during the rehearsals to aide the cast in discussing the psychological process (Ramchandani 1993). Despite the challenges of dealing with issues that directly impacted the lives of his cast and production team, Padamsee never backed away from the project, calling Final Solutions “an attempt to understand the nature of prejudice” and stating that, “Creating awareness is important. All of us have been shaken deeply by the riots, but there is little we are willing to do about it. I now consider it more important that my plays spread a social message” (Padamsee in Acharyya 1994).

Padamsee’s approach to directing Final Solutions represents how the play can be used as a tool for social activism. It should be noted that the idea for Final Solutions did not come from Dattani but from Padamsee, who wanted to direct a play that addressed the rising religious fundamentalism he witnessed in the late eighties. After the Bombay riots in 1992 and 1993, Padamsee was given the opportunity to use Final Solutions as a method of helping both his production team and his audience members cope with and understand the violence that had overtaken their city. In his production, Padamsee was able to emphasize the themes of Dattani’s
script that explore the psychology and complexities of religious conflict, and in turn this allowed his cast and audiences to reflect on their own recent experiences with the violence in Bombay.

Although Padamsee had been involved with Dattani’s original production of *Final Solutions*, his own production was quite different. The main difference was Padamsee’s choice to emphasize the choral element of the Mob/Chorus through the use of ritual. While the Mob/Chorus as envisioned by Dattani was more natural and raw, Padamsee’s Mob/Chorus was highly “stylized” (Dattani Interview 2010) and “polished” (Menon Interview 2012). I had the opportunity to watch a video clip of the rehearsal process of Padamsee’s production from the *Doordarshan* documentary series: *Theatre Directors at Work*. Instead of having the members wear different masks to differentiate when they were Hindu and when they were Muslim, as described in Dattani’s script, Padamsee had the Mob/Chorus wear saffron robes when they were Hindu and white robes when they were Muslim. From this clip, it was very clear to me that Padamsee was taking an extremely stylistic and ritualistic approach to the Mob/Chorus.

For the choreography of the physical movements of the Mob/Chorus, Padamsee hired Jhelum Paranjape, an *Odissi* dance exponent based in Bombay (Padamsee Interview 2010). The movements Paranjape created for the Mob/Chorus corresponded to their dialogue, which in turn resembled Hindu or Islamic forms of ritual. The way in which the Hindu Mob/Chorus spoke resembled the chanting of Sanskrit *slokas* (prayer verses) or the singing of *bhajans* (devotional songs) while the recitation of the Muslim Mob/Chorus’s dialogue invoked the experience of hearing the *muezzin’s Azaan* (call to prayer) or listening to a *qawwali* (Sufi devotional music) performance. By using ritual to convey the dialogue Dattani had written for the Mob/Chorus, Padamsee heightened the intensity of this group of characters. Padamsee gave his Mob/Chorus a very strong religious quality that Dattani’s dialogue alone cannot convey. The dialogue of
Padamsee’s Mob/Chorus was reminiscent of the speech and chanting of religious and spiritual leaders such as *poojaris* and *imams* rather than the angry ranting of a mob looking for blood. Padamsee also chose to have Chorus 5, the member of the Mob/Chorus who usually questions the reasoning of the mob and whose voice is then drowned out by the other members, to be played by Gayatri Iyer, a woman. The Mob/Chorus as described by Dattani is male. With Iyer’s inclusion in the Mob/Chorus, Padamsee seemed to be suggesting that women also play an important role in religious communalism in South Asia even though they remain subservient to their male counterparts.

After an apparently difficult opening night at the Tara Theatre on December 11th, 1993 (Ramchandani 1993), Padamsee’s *Final Solutions* opened in Bombay and was then taken on tour to Kolkata and New Delhi. Overall, Padamsee’s production was well-received by critics. Many elements of the production were praised such as the sparse stage setting (Katiyar 1993), the powerful lighting design (Ramchandani 1993) and performances by Vivin Matthews (Chorus 1), Gayatri Iyer (Chorus 5), Ayesha Dharker (Daksha), and Pinky Rao (Aruna) (Merchant 1993 and The Telegraph 1994). Some critics praised Padamsee’s unique vision for the play. Prabhakar Waingankar of *The Free Press Journal* noted, “The director has given the play a meaning greater than the writer perhaps intended” (Waingankar 1994).

The production received its fair share of criticism as well. Dharani Ghosh of *The Statesman* wrote that Dattani and Padamsee were obviously not aware of their surroundings in Bombay otherwise “they would not have packaged this perennial tragedy like a consumer product with aerobic style dancing and even a boy-meets-girl romance” (Ghosh 1994). Like the critics in Bangalore, many critics of Padamsee’s production thought it was biased towards Muslims. Vikram Sundarji of *Business Standard* observed that the Muslim Mob/Chorus was
“meek and reflective” while their Hindu counterparts were “aggressive and goonish”. He added, “There is no doubt that Padamsee sees Final Solutions as being part of a social marketing campaign against the advocates of Hindutva” (Sundarji 1993). The drama critic at The Statesman claimed, “A likely point of criticism would be that it is one-sided on account of the focus on majority communalism” (The Statesman 1994).

Yet despite these criticisms, most critics pointed out that the play should be commended for “addressing sensitive issues” (The Telegraph 1994) and “forcing audiences to think” (Balram 1994). As Waingankar noted, “These types of plays which address relevant, contemporary issues are rare and should be welcomed” (Waingankar 1994). Even Keval Arora of The Pioneer who found “the narratives of Aruna and Smita irritating”, and the Mob/Chorus “dissatisfying” because they were “artistic when they should have been ugly”, wrote that a play like this “should be valued” (Arora 1994). Almost all of the reviews of Padamsee’s production that I have read recognize the need for theatre that tackles the issue of religious conflict in South Asia. As Romesh Chander of The Hindu wrote, “Here is a play relevant to the times we are living in and for its message and production values should be taken around the country by corporate sponsors or those in authority claiming to fight the demons of communal hatred” (Chander 1994).

Following each performance Padamsee invited the audience to talk-back sessions with the cast and production crew. After one performance at Wilson College in Bombay, the talk-back session lasted for an hour and a half (The Statesman 1995). Padamsee remembers some of the talk-backs being heated arguments while others were thoughtful discussions (Padamsee Interview 2010). As with Dattani’s production in Bangalore, some audience members were skeptical about watching a play that addressed religious conflict. When Vivek Mansukhani, an actor and director who has worked with Dattani, saw Padamsee’s production of Final Solutions
for the first time he admits “that it came as a bit of a shock” for him since the destruction of the Babri Masjid and the Bombay riots were still very fresh in his mind. Mansukhani also remembers the audience “being very divided” and that some audience members “could not stomach the issue” (Mansukhani Interview 2010). Others, however, fully embraced the production. After one performance in Bombay at which Dattani was present, a young man came up to him and said, “My name is Bobby. But my real name is Babban. And after seeing this play I’m going to change it back to Babban.” After relating this story to me Dattani noted, “Those are the moments that you feel like you have made a difference” (Dattani Interview 2010).

**A New Level to the Mob/Chorus: Ashish Sen’s Production**

In the spring of 2005, Ashish Sen, a friend of Dattani who has both acted in and directed Dattani’s plays in the past, directed a production of *Final Solutions* in Bangalore. One of the initial triggers that made Sen want to direct the play was the violence that had occurred in February of 2002 in Gujarat, a mere three years earlier. Sen’s production was quite unique due to the fact that it involved members of Bangalore’s deaf community in the Mob/Chorus, as well as “able-bodied” people. Sen had previously used the play in workshops he had done with the hearing impaired and he points out that *Final Solutions* “deals with marginalized groups like the deaf” (Sen Interview 2010). By having deaf actors in the Mob/Chorus, Sen also highlighted the fact that in religious communalism there are always people, both victims and victimizers, whose voices are never heard. Recently many South Asian writers, such as Urvashi Butalia who brought to light the stories of women and *Dalits* (those who belong to the “untouchable caste”) during the partition and Suketu Mehta who interviewed members of the Shiv Sena responsible for murdering Muslims during the Bombay riots, have attempted to retrieve the voices of religious
conflict that are often ignored. Sen was able to physically represent the unheard voices of religious communalism with the deaf members of his Mob/Chorus.

Apart from the content of the play and its issues of “voice” and “voicelessness” that relates to the experiences of the deaf, Sen also adds that “working with the deaf in particular makes for a particularly exciting kind of theatrical expression because … sign language and mime becomes a very powerful and potent force by which to articulate” (Sen Interview 2010). The production was a collaboration between Sen and the NGO VOICES. VOICES describes their mission saying, “VOICES has worked with rural and urban poor, people with disabilities, street children and developed communication mechanisms to help them improve their lives” (Kappan 2005). Thus with his production of Final Solutions, Sen was not only giving deaf actors a chance to act on stage, but also ensuring their future and welfare. The production received a positive and supportive reaction from the audience members and the production went on to do several additional shows. Dattani considers this performance of Final Solutions to be one of the most significant productions of the play (Dattani Interview 2010).

**Final Solutions Overseas: Productions in the USA**

Like other famous Dattani plays such as Dance Like A Man, Tara, and Bravely Fought the Queen, Final Solutions has been produced outside of India. In 2008, a production was undertaken by Naatak, an Indian theatre and film group in Palo Alto, California that produces plays and films in English, Hindi, and Tamil (Naatak 2008). Naatak’s production, which was directed by Harish Sunderam Agastya, heightened many of the play’s pivotal moments through the use of a scrim (a transparent screen) behind which members of the Mob/Chorus would create different tableaus. For example, in the scene when Bobby describes the cricket incident from Javed’s youth, the Mob/Chorus enacted the memory behind the scrim. This technique was also
used for Javed’s description of the poojari’s death. The scrim would also be lit in either saffron or green depending on whether the Mob/Chorus was Hindu or Muslim. Agastya who found that Dattani’s original script was “non-committal on sensitive issues” re-wrote parts of it to reflect recent instances of religious communalism such as the 2002 violence in Gujarat (Kothiyal 2008).

That same year, the East Indian Follies Theatre Company put on Final Solutions in Boise, Idaho. The production featured powerful original music using a unique range of instruments including the East African djembe and the Indian tabla and was composed for the production by TSJ Music Studio in Chennai, India (TSJ 2009). Not all the audience members enjoyed the production however, with one American theatre reviewer noting “Sadly, I don't think I can recommend Final Solutions for my average reader here. It may be appreciated more by the Indian community in Boise, but for me it was a bit hard to get through” (Boise Arts 2008).

Interestingly, productions of Final Solutions have not only been met with skepticism from Americans, but from South Asian Americans as well. During my interview with Dattani, he told me about a young director from a South Asian theatre company in Washington D.C who contacted him about directing a production of Final Solutions:

She was very keen to do Final Solutions and we talked and she had lengthy conversations with me over the phone, and she had started auditioning and all that. During the auditions, obviously most of her cast were Hindus, and they walked out. And these are people one assumes that having been brought up in America and who understand the sensitivity of prejudice, being black, brown or whatever you are. I found that very strange because that has never happened here in India. I would have imagined they have a better understanding of how prejudice works and how stupid it is! And she called and she was literally in tears, and she said, “There is no way I can possibly do the play without actors!” (Dattani Interview 2010)

This case of the theatre company in Washington D.C. and the comments of the American theatre critic in Boise, bring up an important question: Can a play like Final Solutions be fully understood and appreciated by audience members who are not South Asian? The actors who
walked out of the auditions for *Final Solutions* in D.C. may have realized that most American audience members would not have the background necessary to understand the specific historical context of the play. A knowledge of the events of the partition, an understanding of the importance of the religious community versus the individual in South Asia, and a general background of the Hindu religious tradition and Islam are necessary for an audience member who wants to objectively watch a production of *Final Solutions*.

I gave a copy of *Final Solutions* to the director of Theatre Studies at my college, who is an extremely well-read Irish-American woman. While she enjoyed reading the script, parts of it left her confused. For example, she was unsure of what was happening in the scene in which Daksha describes how she was sickened by watching Zarine and her family eat. Dattani never explicitly states what Zarine and her family is eating. He assumes that his Indian audiences know that virtually all Indian Muslim families are non-vegetarian and that as an upper-caste Hindu Gujarati woman, Daksha is a strict vegetarian. However, my professor was not aware of these facts and thus the scene was lost on her.

In May of 2012, I will be directing a short sequence of scenes from *Final Solutions* to a group of students and professors at Wellesley College to illustrate the dramatic potential the play has to address religious conflict. Apart from one student from Bombay, my cast is made up entirely of non-South Asian Americans. However, I believe my cast members will be able to perform the play as well as a South Asian American cast. I have been providing my cast, with dramaturgical materials to help them understand the complex content of the play. So far, my directing experience has been a very positive one, with my actors enthusiastically trying to understand and portray these complex characters to the best of their abilities.
As a dramaturge, I believe that *Final Solutions* can be made accessible to American audiences. Right before the performance in May, I will provide my audience members with a brief history of religious communalism in South Asia. If I were to direct a full production of the play in the USA, I would certainly create a dramaturgical display for the theatre’s lobby as well as a detailed program note with photographs of the Babri Masjid demolition and recent instances of communal rioting in South Asia, a timeline of religious communalism, and a glossary of the Hindi and Gujarati words in the play. I believe that *Final Solutions* has the potential to be understood and enjoyed by non-South Asian audiences as long as the proper context and background is provided by the production’s director or dramaturge. This in turn could create awareness amongst foreign audiences about religious communalism in South Asia.

This survey of productions in India and America, as well as my own experience directing the play, shows that *Final Solutions* has had a strong impact on production members, critics, and most importantly, audiences. This power that *Final Solutions* has on audience members, as seen in talk-back sessions like the ones done by Padamsee and Arvind Gaur (discussed in the next chapter), makes the play an effective tool for dialogue about religious communalism.
CHAPTER SIX

What’s In A Language?: Final Solutions in Hindi-Urdu

As shown in the previous chapter, Final Solutions is a powerful theatrical experience that has moved both critics and audience members. However, are the theatre critics and the English-speaking members of the upper-middle class who attended the productions directed by Dattani and Padamsee the type of people a play like Final Solutions should be shown to? In this chapter I will discuss the types of audiences that the English version of Final Solutions does and does not reach. I will also suggest the importance and power that the Hindi-Urdu version of the play (translated by Shahid Anwar) and its production directed by Arvind Gaur have to positively influence the people of India to actively participate in religious pluralism.

English: The Right Language for Final Solutions?

Dattani’s dialogue is clearly one of the strongest aspects of Final Solutions. As Arun Katiyar of India Today, noted, certain lines in the play like “Have you ever thought of going to Pakistan?” were heard every day on the streets of Bombay during the riots of 1992 and 1993 (Katiyar 1993). Also as theatre artist Vivek Mansukhani points out, Dattani writes in the type of English that Indians actually speak (Mansukhani Interview 2010).

However, Final Solutions has been criticized for being in English. In Gauri Lankesh’s review of the initial production in Bangalore she observed, “But there is one drawback with Final Solutions. It is in English. Therefore, the people it will reach are those who are already aware of much of what the play has to say” (Lankesh 1993). Some critics who thoroughly disliked the play, such as Dharani Ghosh, attributed the play’s faults to the fact that it was written in English, “Only in English-language theatre, which never cares to examine the Indian reality, can religious rites be so easily dismissed” (Ghosh 1994). Shahid Anwar, the celebrated
Indian playwright who translated the play into Hindi/Urdu, told me that the play does not make sense in English because “communal estrangement has never been a problem for the English-speaking community of India” (Anwar Interview 2010).

Are these points brought up by Lankesh, Ghosh and Anwar valid? Lankesh’s point about English-speaking people already being aware of the message of Final Solutions is ridiculous. Although English does go hand-in-hand with higher education in India, the ability to speak English does not correlate with a realization of the sensitivities of religious communalism. Ghosh who described the play as “a triviality pointing to the essential lack of seriousness on the part of Padamsee and Dattani” claims that English theatre doesn’t examine the Indian reality. What Ghosh fails to realize is that English-language theatre is a legitimate part of Indian theatre. As Dattani points out, English “is an Indian language … and [English theatre] is as relevant as any other language theatre in India. It’s restricted to urban cities because that’s where English is spoken, but then all language text-based theatre is restricted to a region where the language is spoken” (Dattani Interview 2010).

Anwar makes the point that the people who speak English as their main language in India (presumably the upper-middle class) are not the ones affected by religious conflict in South Asia. As I have noted, the common assumption about religious communalism in South Asia is that it takes place amongst the poor, lower classes. Yet this was not the case in the 1992 and 1993 Bombay riots, where members of the middle-class participated in the violence as well. With Final Solutions Dattani acknowledges the fact that the middle-class is not immune to religious conflict. As actor Joy Sengupta points out, “While there were plays being done about religion and communalism in India [prior to Final Solutions] … it was mostly focusing on the common man, the man in the streets. But Mahesh’s play dealt with a middle class household’s reaction to
the prejudices, which we don’t like to accept. Mostly we try to cover it up but Mahesh focuses on that” (Sengupta Interview 2010).

Yet, while Lankesh, Ghosh and Anwar’s points can be disputed, it cannot be ignored that the majority of the people in India would be unable to understand the English version of *Final Solutions*. An article in *The Washington Times* points out, “India has more than 100 million English speakers, not taking into account others who can converse in English but are unable to read or write in English” (Jaitly 2011). However, India’s population is over one billion people (CIA 2012). In English, *Final Solutions* is accessible to less than ten percent of the population.

Fortunately, *Final Solutions* has been translated into other South Asian languages. A Kannada version of the play translated by G.K. Govind Rao was performed by the Vedike Foundation theatre group under the direction of Ritwik Simha in Bangalore in 1995 (Meena 1996). In 2008, students of the Mudra Institute of Communications Ahmedabad in Gujarat put on a Gujarati version of the play entitled *Khalish* (“Inner Tension”) as part of their annual theatre festival *Sankalp* (Joshi 2008). In 2011, Gyan Singh translated *Final Solutions* into Dogri, the language of Jammu and Kashmir. This version called *Aakhri Hal* was directed by Ravinder Sharma of Santoosh Theatre and performed in Jammu (Gupta 2011). It should be noted that all three of these versions of *Final Solutions* were translated into the languages of regions that have been ravaged by communal riots and violence in the past thirty years. The significance of *Final Solutions* being performed in parts of India that have been torn apart by events like the riots surrounding the publication of the short story “Mohammed the Idiot” in 1986, the ethnic cleansing of Kashmiri pandits in 1989 and 1990, and the Gujarat violence of 2002, is evident. The memories of these horrific events are still alive in these regions of India, and by performing
vernacular versions of the play in these places, theatre artists are creating critical opportunities for discussion and reflection.

The most powerful translation of *Final Solutions* is the one in Hindi-Urdu translated by Shahid Anwar and frequently performed by Asmita Theatre Group under the direction of Arvind Gaur. Apart from some small differences in vocabulary, Hindi and Urdu are essentially the same spoken language written in two different scripts. Hindi is written in the Sanskrit-based Devanagari script, while the script for Urdu is Perso-Arabic based. Indian film scholar Rachel Dwyer explains the reason why these “almost identical” languages have come to be seen as two different languages, “The separation of Hindi and Urdu from the mid nineteenth century on is due in part to political reasons, with Urdu becoming seen as a ‘Muslim language’ due to its association with Muslim courts and its close ties with Persian language and literature” (Dwyer 2006, 103). Today, Hindi is one of the official languages of India, while Urdu is an official language of Pakistan. 9 Collectively, Hindi-Urdu, also known as “Hindustani”, is spoken by almost five hundred million people across the world (BBC 2011).

**The Power of Shahid Anwar’s Hindi-Urdu Translation**

In 1994, Shahid Anwar saw Alyque Padamsee’s production of *Final Solutions* when it came to New Delhi and although he thought that Padmasee had chosen the right play to do in terms of the subject matter, he thought the play itself was in the “wrong language” (Anwar Interview 2010). Esteemed director and political activist Arvind Gaur had also seen Padamsee’s production and was keen on directing the play in Hindi-Urdu. Gaur approached Dattani and suggested Anwar, who is a member of Gaur’s theatre company Asmita Theatre Group, as the translator. Dattani was a bit hesitant at first as the play covered “a touchy subject” and insisted

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9 It is interesting to note that India and Pakistan share the same second official language: English.
on hearing the translation when it was complete. (Dattani Interview 2010). Anwar was very careful to make sure that the play’s humor, intensity, and characters remained “intact” and true to Dattani’s original script (Anwar Interview 2010). When Dattani read Anwar’s product he was very pleased, “One of the reviews said that the Hindi production was far more powerful, and you know what, I think they had a point there because when I read the translation I was very, very impressed” (Dattani Interview 2010).

Anwar has rendered a beautiful translation of Final Solutions. Dattani’s story sounds more realistic and natural in Hindi-Urdu than it does in English. This is clearly seen with the characters of the Mob/Chorus. As noted in Chapter Four, the dialogue of the Mob/Chorus echoes the slogans and accusations of the Hindu Right during the Ramjanmabhoomi campaign. It is evident that Dattani’s script was influenced by the words he was hearing from politicians like L.K. Advani. However, the people involved in this movement were not speaking English, but Hindi-Urdu. Dattani had to translate the threats of the Sangh Parivar from Hindi-Urdu into English for his original script. By doing this, he diluted the power of the Hindu Right’s original statements. For example, when the audience first sees the Hindu Mob/Chorus, the third member of the Mob/Chorus shouts, “Kill the sons of swine!” (pp.11). “Sūr kī aulād” (“son of a pig”) is a commonly heard insult in Hindi-Urdu that is particularly offensive to Muslims who consider pork to be an unclean substance. However, in English this insult sounds strange. The line “Kill the sons of swine!” only works in the English version because most Indian audience members realize that it is a translation of the popular Hindi-Urdu swear. With the Hindu-Urdu version of the script, this problem is eliminated. In Anwar’s translation, the third member of the Mob/Chorus declares, “Mār dālo sūr kī aulādo ko!”- a line one could expect to hear from an angry Hindu mob. Another point that must be considered, is that while it is believable that the
Gandhis, Javed, and Bobby would converse with each other in English, under no circumstances would members of a mob speak to each other, or threaten people in English. The fact that the Mob/Chorus is speaking in English could distract and prevent audience members from fully immersing themselves in the world of the play.

There is one element of Anwar’s translation that Dattani appreciates in particular. He told me that he “quite liked” Anwar’s “choice of language because the Gujarati Hindu family spoke Hindi and the Muslims spoke Hindustani with a touch of Urdu, so there were a lot of nuances that came about that were obviously not in the English version” (Dattani Interview 2010). Rashmi Singh, a member of Asmita who has played the roles of Aruna, Smita, and Hardika in different productions of *Final Solutions*, agrees with Dattani, “There are differences between words [in the play]: Hindi words and Urdu words”. She notes that since the Mob/Chorus of Asmita’s production does not use the Hindu and Muslim masks described in Dattani’s script, the only way you can tell whether the Mob/Chorus is Hindu or Muslim is through their dialogue (Singh Interview 2012).

Interestingly, when I mentioned this to Anwar, he denied having made the Gandhi family speak in Hindi and Bobby and Javed speak in Urdu.

Theatre is the language of the spoken voice. So when we speak you cannot tell when I am speaking in Hindi and when I am speaking in Urdu. Linguistically, Hindi has the same area which Urdu does, basically North India. A Hindu family in Lucknow, speaks the same language which a Muslim family in Lucknow speaks! A Hindu family in Delhi speaks the same language which a Muslim family in Delhi does, so we cannot differentiate. One cannot make any communal differentiation as far as language is concerned. (Anwar Interview 2010)

He went on to tell me that while Aruna speaks, “with a certain Hindu-ized speech”, none of the language used by his other characters correlate to their religious identities. He noted that Smita and Javed speak the same language, “I didn’t make any differentiation” (Anwar Interview 2010).
A careful examination of Anwar’s translation shows that both Dattani and Anwar’s claims are valid. In scenes where the topic of discussion is religion, the Gandhi family clearly speaks a Sanskrit-based Hindi, while their Muslim guests speak Urdu. However, in scenes not involving religion, the characters are essentially speaking the same language. The same is true of the Mob/Chorus. In the scene where Javed is describing the night before the Rath Yatra he uses Urdu words like “mazhab” (“religion”) and “pāk” (“purity”) because the religious context of the situation calls for these clearly religious words. It would be inaccurate for Javed to use the Hindi “dharm” instead of the Urdu “mazhab” or “pavitra” instead of “pāk”, since the words “dharm” and “pavitra” are based in Sanskrit and have a clear Hindu connotation. Similarly, in the scene where Aruna is explaining to Smita why the Hindu religious tradition gives her a sense of security, she uses the word “rākshas” (“demons”) when describing the stories she heard as a child. Aruna would never use the word “shaitān” (“devil”) in this scene as the term has a strictly Islamic context. The word “rākshas” on the other hand is found in many ancient stories associated with the Hindu religious tradition.

This use of Hindi and Urdu words in religious contexts adds layers of nuances to the text that couldn’t have been achieved in the English version. For example, in the first scene involving the Muslim Mob/Chorus, the second member comments on the Hindu community saying, “Their God now prostrates before us” (pp.13). In this scene Anwar translates “God” as “Bhagavān” and “prostrates” as “sajdā”. “Bhagavān” is the Sanskrit word for “God” or “Supreme Being” while “sajdā” is an Arabic word referring to the position of prostration Muslims assume five times a day while praying to Allah. Therefore, Anwar’s translation brings two new layers of meaning to Dattani’s original line. Anwar has essentially translated the line in a way as if to say “Their
Hindu God now bows before us in a manner as if he were praying to Allah”. Dattani could never have achieved these nuances in his original English script.

However, in scenes in which the characters are not discussing religion, no difference can be seen in the language of the characters belonging to different religious traditions. Smita, Javed, and Bobby all speak a very similar form of Hindi-Urdu mixed with a sprinkling of English, reflecting their middle-class background. When Daksha describes Zarine speaking, Zarine’s words are in the same language as Daksha’s. The pure language of hatred that comes of out of the mouths of the Hindu Mob/Chorus can be heard from the Muslim Mob/Chorus as well. If the audience were to close their eyes and hear a member of the Mob/Chorus declare “Unkī himmat kaise huī?” (“How dare they?”), they would have no idea if it were a member of the Hindu Mob/Chorus or the Muslim one speaking. With this, Anwar has proven that the language of hatred and fear is universal.

Apart from rendering a more powerful version of *Final Solutions* for the stage, Anwar has also made the play more accessible to the Indian population. Approximately forty percent of India’s population speaks Hindi-Urdu (Government of India 2001). Anwar’s translation of *Final Solutions* takes the play out of the limited realm of upper-middle class English theatre in urban cities. In Hindi-Urdu, the play can be viewed by people in all corners of India. Director Arvind Gaur has realized this potential and actively used the play as a tool for social change.

**Theatre as a Source of Dialogue: Arvind Gaur’s Production**

In 1998, rehearsals for *Final Solutions* began at the Asmita Theatre Group in New Delhi. Founded in 1993 by Arvind Gaur, Asmita Theatre Group has been described by *TimeOut Delhi* as “Delhi’s most prolific theatre group” (Gupta 2008). Asmita performs traditional examples of dramatic theatre on a proscenium stage, like a Hindi-Urdu version of Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting*
For Godot, as well as street plays— one of South Asia’s most popular forms of political theatre. Gaur describes these two forms of theatre that Asmita performs saying, “In street plays we go to the audience. In the proscenium, the audience comes to us. The difference is in the craft and not the content” (Gaur in Nair 2008). Asmita prides itself in engaging in “socially and politically relevant theatre” (Gupta 2008). The plays performed by Asmita cover a range of social issues such as “caste issues, feudalism, domestic violence, crimes of state, politics of power, child molestation, social discrimination, social marginalization, and racism” (Asmita Theatre Group). Thus a play like Final Solutions fits right into their repertoire.

Anwar was very involved in the rehearsal process of Asmita’s initial production of Final Solutions. He would attend Asmita’s rehearsals and often after the rehearsals were over, he would take the cast to his library at his home and give them suggestions on books dealing with religious conflict in South Asia to read. Anwar was also responsible for an exercise that helped many of the cast members better understand their characters, “I did an experiment which was very interesting. I gave this suggestion to Arvind, that all your cast who are Muslims, they should stay with a Hindu family for two or three days, and all of the cast who are not Muslims: they should stay with Muslim families. And it worked!” (Anwar Interview 2010). Gaur’s vision for the production was very simple with minimal sets and properties “to accentuate the internal conflicts and the subtext of the play” (Gaur 1998). The only set pieces are Daksha’s desk, a table, and a couple of chairs or blocks. This allows Gaur’s production of Final Solutions to be performed not just in any auditorium in India, but in any open space with room for these set pieces and the cast. Although Asmita has only performed Final Solutions on a traditional proscenium stage, the production has the potential to be performed in non-traditional spaces such as a park in a city or in a field next to a village.
Like Alyque Padamsee and Ashish Sen, Gaur has also handled the Mob/Chorus in a unique manner. Unlike Dattani’s original text, which calls for five members of the Mob/Chorus, Gaur’s production has a Mob/Chorus of up to forty people. Including the seven main characters, this means that there can be up to fifty people on stage at a time during the production. Shilpi Marwaha, who has played the role of Smita and who to date has been the only female member of Asmita to perform in the Mob/Chorus, describes being in Gaur’s Mob/Chorus as very “intense” and physically-demanding as members of the Mob/Chorus at times physically attack and fight each other (Marwaha Interview 2012). Also, like Padamsee, Gaur has utilized Islamic and Hindu ritual theatre with his Mob/Chorus. In one sequence the Mob/Chorus starts reciting the Takbir, “Allah Hu Akbar” (“God is Great”) and transitions into chanting the Omkara (a Hindu mantra or chant). Gaur has the Mob/Chorus constantly on stage. While the action in the Gandhi home and the flashbacks to Daksha’s life take place downstage, the Mob/Chorus remains positioned upstage (Gaur Interview 2012). Gaur describes his approach to the Mob/Chorus:

I have attempted to experiment with the chorus. It has been used in a style, which I would like to call 'realistic stylization'. The chorus represents the conflicts of the characters. Thus the chorus is a sense is the psycho-physical representation of the characters and also provides the audience with the visual images of the characters' conflicts. There is no stereotyped use of the characterization of the chorus because communalism has no face, it is an attitude and thus it becomes an image of the characters. (Gaur 1998)

Samina Sheikh, who has played the roles of Hardika, Daksha, and Smita, believes that the Mob/Chorus is one the strongest elements of Gaur’s production (Sheikh Interview 2012). Singh adds that she feels that the performance of the Mob/Chorus always enhances her own performance, “If the chorus is strong, then automatically the performances by the main characters will also be strong” (Singh Interview 2012). Marwaha notes, “At times the audience was spellbound with the chorus” (Marwaha Interview 2012).
Gaur’s production of *Final Solutions* has been extremely well-received by both critics and audience members alike. Nikhat Kazmi of *The Times of India* called the production, “Intense, topical, artistically mounted” and noted that “under Arvind Gaur’s competent direction, [the production] managed to retain the philosophical importance of the text, without losing out on the visual appeal” (Kazmi 1998). Theatre critic for *The Hindu* Romesh Chander praised the production writing, “What a beautiful play, beautifully translated, and beautifully directed. *Final Solutions* is a demanding play and the cast as a whole tries its best. The response was overwhelming, particularly from the younger generation. The message had gone down well. The play holds a mirror to the society we live in” (Chander 1998). Some reviews such as the one in *The Statesman*, compared Gaur’s production to the one directed by Alyque Padamsee, “Asmita can take justifiable pride in maintaining its tradition of socially relevant theatre. The Asmita production scored over Padamsee’s English original in that the powerful dialogue came across as more realistic and authentic” (George 1998).

While Shahid Anwar, who is a Muslim, was criticized by some critics for “making” *Final Solutions* sympathetic towards Muslims, (when in reality all he did was translate what Dattani had written) (Anwar Interview 2010), Gaur’s production did not receive as much criticism as Dattani and Padamsee’s productions did for being biased against the Hindu majority. As Smita Nirula of *The Pioneer* wrote, “The feeling of a pro-Muslim or a pro-Hindu bias was happily not there” (Nirula 1998).

When I asked her about audience reactions to *Final Solutions*, Shilpi Marwaha told me, “Actually the play starts only after the play ends” (Marwaha Interview 2012). After every performance, Gaur hosts a talk-back session with his audience members and production team. As he told me, “This is not just a play for me! It’s an awareness performance program” (Gaur
Interview 2012). Nirula, who stayed back for a talk-back discussion, described the experience:

The director invited the audience to stay after the play and conduct a dialogue with the team. Some of the responses from the audience were humbling. Two elderly gentlemen felt that they had given them something to reflect upon and had proved that there was hope for the future. Babban's last line “If you are willing to forget, I am willing to tolerate” gave them food for thought. When asked about biases, the audience was quite clear in its response: “The production is balanced” (Nirula 1998).

Some of these sessions have lasted over two hours (Marwaha Interview 2012). Both Rashmi Singh and Samina Sheikh describe these discussions as very positive experiences. Singh, who calls the play as a “very good platform” to express issues of religious communalism, claims that while some of the reactions are “mixed”, they are never negative. She notes that “this play does not create conflict, this play makes you think” (Singh Interview 2012). Marwaha believes that the only way to successfully eliminate religious communalism is through dialogue. For her, Final Solutions is an ideal tool with which to start these critical conversations.

Its time to change the perceptions from here. The audience comes forward, they share a lot of experiences, they’re very positive towards the play, and sometimes they accept their mistakes. They agree with it, because we’re not favoring any community, we’re just giving you the whole scenario, it’s for you to decide. There are people who just don’t want to change their perceptions. We do not fight with them because that’s not the solution. They’re already very aggressive about the situation, “You people don’t know what you’re talking about”, “How can you tell us Hindus are good?”, “How can you tell us Muslims are good?” But through discussions and debates in a positive way we try and get them to understand, and they with time, will change their perceptions. (Marwaha Interview 2012)

These discussions are where the potential of Final Solutions to promote religious pluralism is fully realized. As shown in Chapter Four, the themes that Dattani has drawn out in his script, such as the ideas of memory and the partition, and the dichotomy of the community versus the individual, are vital concepts that illustrate contemporary religious conflict in South Asia. However, what is the use of displaying these concepts without discussing them? Simply reading or watching the play is not enough. As a play, Final Solutions is a piece of art. Yet this
play was not born out of an artistic impulse of Dattani. It was commissioned by Alyque Padamsee, who was disturbed by the growing Ramjanmabhoomi campaign in the late eighties and early nineties. As a commissioned play, Final Solutions was destined to go beyond being a piece of art or a source of entertainment. Final Solutions was created as a tool with which to fight religious communalism. This play is meant to be debated and discussed.

Like Padamsee, Gaur realized Final Solutions’ potential as a starting point for dialogue about religious conflict. The talk-back session can start with a comment as simple as, “I liked Javed”. Gaur and the members of Asmita then have the opportunity to build on this comment with a question like, “Did you like Javed because you felt like you could relate to him?” In Chapter Four, I connected each character of the play to a specific theme relating to the larger issue of religious communalism. A comment about any one of these characters has the potential to start a detailed and intense dialogue. As Woodruff writes, “In the theater you are in a community of watchers” (Woodruff 2008, 17). The experience of dramatic theatre establishes camaraderie amongst audience members that allows them to feel comfortable sharing their responses to the performance with each other. These talk-back sessions give audience members a chance to reflect on the heavy, and often frightening, ideas to which they have just been exposed. Discussing an intense play like Final Solutions can be a cathartic experience for an audience member. The production team and actors also have much to gain from these sessions. An audience member may share a personal experience with communalism that actors could incorporate into their next performance, making the production even more powerful. These sessions also establish the members of Asmita and their audience members as equals capable of having constructive conversations. Just as every performance of a play is a unique experience, each talk-back session will be a unique experience as well, with new questions and insights from
audience members. Gaur has taken advantage of this fact by performing *Final Solutions* as often as possible since 1998.

Asmita has done over two hundred and fifty productions of *Final Solutions* in the past fourteen years (Gaur Interview 2012). The play has been performed across India, in Punjab (Amritsar), Rajasthan (Jaipur and Jodhpur), Andhra Pradesh (Hyderabad), Chhattisgarh (Raipur), Jammu and Kashmir, Madhya Pradesh, Utter Pradesh, and Assam (Gaur and Singh Interviews 2012). Gaur explains that in different regions of India, the play elicits different responses. Gaur remembers that during one show in Jammu, “the auditorium was filled with tension” as a high-profile murder related to religious communalism had just taken place. Yet in spite this, Gaur remembers a positive discussion after the play. Asmita has also performed *Final Solutions* at a number of colleges and universities in New Delhi including the National School of Drama, Jawaharlal Nehru University, and Delhi University. Gaur believes that *Final Solutions* works extremely well at colleges because the play represents the religious identity crisis of India’s youth through the characters of Javed and Smita (Gaur Interview 2012).

With *Final Solutions*, Gaur and Asmita have been able to kindle critical discussions about religious conflict throughout India. Hundreds of Indians have been exposed to Dattani’s powerful story because of the work of Asmita. However, this process has not been an easy one. As Marwaha told me, “It is very difficult to put up a play like this in India because people can fight over it, it can be banned” (Marwaha Interview 2012). In fact, Asmita Theatre Group was “banned” by the government for two years and Gaur was forced to travel to different auditoriums in New Delhi and beg them to let Asmita perform there (Marwaha Interview 2012). Anwar remembers in some of the first performances of *Final Solutions* in 1998, members of the BJP
would come and try to interrupt the play (Anwar Interview 2010). For reasons like this, Marwaha notes that Gaur is very brave to continue putting on this play (Marwaha Interview 2012).

Asmita also faces trouble as it tries to sustain itself financially in a world where the Hindi theatre scene is dominated by comedies rather than socio-political plays (Gupta 2008). Funding has always been an issue for Asmita and Gaur as Nandini Nair of *The Hindu* explains, “For six years, his group rehearsed on the terrace of a flat in Shankar Market. After that for a few years, they practiced under a peepal tree in Raja Rammohan Roy building. They now work out of a building near Shri Ram Centre. The monthly rent of Rs. 20,000 is covered by the theatre group itself” (Nair 2008). Marwaha described Asmita’s financial situation to me saying, “We have no funds. Day to day we have to figure out how to move forward” (Marwaha Interview 2012). However despite these immense difficulties, Gaur and Asmita continue to push on and perform social and political plays including *Final Solutions*.

Of all the productions of *Final Solutions* discussed in this thesis, Asmita’s Hindi-Urdu production has clearly been the most successful in terms of raising awareness about religious communalism in India. From the reviews of the production shared earlier, it is apparent that Gaur’s production was very strong overall. His abilities as a director are the reasons why there have been over two hundred and fifty productions in almost every corner of India. In fact, Gaur’s production is so powerful that it has been performed in parts of India where people don’t understand Hindi-Urdu, “We have gone into different places, at times we have performed at places where people don’t understand Hindi and we’re performing in Hindi! But still we got through the message of the play!” (Marwaha Interview 2012).

Hindi-Urdu greatly increases the accessibility of the play in India. Yet, the language of Gaur’s production is not the only reason why the production is a successful tool to combat
religious communalism with. The fact that Asmita’s Final Solutions was translated into Hindi-Urdu would make no difference if the production itself was not effective. The strength of a production and the strength of the play itself are as important as the language. As Shilpi Marwaha told me, “This play actually has a very good potential in each and every language, its not about Hindi or English, its about the content of the play” (Marwaha Interview 2012).

The true key to the success of Asmita’s Final Solutions is the dedication of Arvind Gaur and his theatre company. Gaur and Asmita do not perform theatre to make money or to entertain. For them, theatre is a means with which to educate and create awareness. I am not suggesting that the aim of the productions by Dattani and Padamsee were to make a profit or to entertain. Yet there is a difference between these directors and Gaur. Gaur is clearly a social activist, while Dattani and Padamsee, are artists. For fourteen years, Gaur has continued to produce Final Solutions every year. Although Dattani directed the play recently in 2007 at Lady Sri Ram College for Women in New Delhi and Padamsee took his Bombay production to Kolkata and New Delhi in 1994, neither director has come close to taking their productions to as many places in India, or to performing it as many times as Gaur has done with Asmita. Dattani and Padamsee are artists; they are inspired by new concepts every day and they want to create as much new and different art as possible. Like Dattani and Padamsee, Gaur also directs new plays every year. However, unlike Dattani and Padamsee, he maintains a repertoire of plays and continues to direct old plays as well as new ones in order to expose his audiences to crucial social issues.

Gaur describes Final Solutions as a “very, very relevant, very contemporary play and laments the fact that religious communalism is alive in every part of India. Recent instances of religious violence such as the 2002 Gujarat riots and the 2008 attacks on the Taj and Oberoi Hotels illustrate the importance of the talk-back sessions after each Asmita production of Final Solutions.
Solutions. Padamsee should be commended for implementing talk-back sessions after his 1993-1994 production of the play in the aftermath of the Babri Masjid demolition and the devastating riots in Bombay. These sessions gave Padamsee’s actors, production team and audience members the chance to reflect on these recent distressing events in a safe space. However, as journalist Soutik Biswas notes, since 1993 the city of Bombay always seems to be bleeding from the wounds of religious conflict (Biswas 2011). Bombay could have greatly benefitted from a performance of Padamsee’s Final Solutions in 2008. By continuing to perform Final Solutions, Gaur and Asmita have been able to see the changing nature of religious communalism over time and the impact of their repeated productions in these talk-back sessions with their audiences.

The strength of the production, the use of talk-back sessions, and the commitment to perform the play in every part of India where Hindi-Urdu is spoken make Asmita’s Final Solutions an optimal tool with which to promote religious pluralism. As long as religious communalism exists in South Asia, pieces of theatre like Final Solutions, such as the productions of the play directed by Gaur, maintain their importance. At the end of our interview I asked Gaur, “So you’ll keep on doing this play?” Gaur immediately responded, “Yes, we have to! We have no other choice!” He then paused for a moment, gave me a sad smile and repeated quietly, “We have no other choice” (Gaur Interview 2012).
CHAPTER SEVEN

The Right Medium?: Theatre in a Film-Dominated Society

While my research focuses on the potential role theatre in South Asia can play in tackling issues of religious communalism, it is important to consider other forms of media in South Asia that share this potential. South Asia has a tremendous history and tradition of theatre. However, it has an equally impressive legacy of cinema. As anthropologist Tejaswini Ganti notes, “Feature films are produced in approximately 20 languages in India and there are multiple film industries whose total output makes India the largest feature film-producing country in the world” (Ganti 2004, 3). In this chapter I will discuss how “Bollywood” and masala films have recently addressed religious conflict in South Asia by using romance, the backdrop of the partition of India and Pakistan, and current sources of religious communalism in South Asia. I will also look at the success these films have had in the Indian Box Office. I will then examine the 1995 film Bombay by Mani Ratnam, which is set during the Ayodhya Dispute. Bombay was released two years after Final Solutions and covers many of the same themes. Is a film like Bombay a better tool to combat religious communalism with than a play like Final Solutions?

“Bollywood” and Masala Films

Perhaps the most famous aspect of the South Asian film world is what is known today as “Bollywood”. Ganti defines this term saying, ““Bollywood” -a tongue-in-cheek term created by the English language press in India in the late 1970s- has now become the dominant global term to refer to the prolific and box-office oriented Hindi language film industry located in Bombay” (Ganti 2004, 2). As Rachel Dwyer points out, the word “Bollywood” has also become synonymous with a certain genre of Hindi-Urdu language films known as masala films (Dwyer 2005, 6), which provide audiences with a mixture of comedy, romance, tragedy, and action.
Television producer and author, Nasreen Kabir, describes masala films by saying “…the term comes from the idea that, like a curry cooked with different spices, or masala, the Hindi film offers a variety of flavors” (Kabir 2001, 1). However these types of masala films are not restricted only to Hindi-Urdu language cinema. Many of the movies that come out of the film industries of Chennai and Hyderabad in South India are quite similar to the lavish masala films that come out of Bombay. As Ganti states, ““Bollywood” has become a shorthand reference not only to a specific industry, but also to a specific style of filmmaking” (Ganti 2004, 3). Thus there are certain films that were made in South Asian languages other than Hindi-Urdu, such as Mani Ratnam’s Tamil movie Bombay, which I would still classify as a masala “Bollywood” film.

Cinemas are described by the popular Indian film critic, Chidananda Das Gupta, as being “the temples of modern India” (Das Gupta in Mishra 2002, 1). In India, it is estimated that twelve million people attend the cinema every day (Kabir 2001, 1). With this large viewership, it would appear that film would be the ideal medium with which to introduce ideas of religious pluralism to the Indian people. Yet, are the masala “Bollywood” films that dominate the Indian film industry the best way to spread ideas of religious harmony? A typical masala film usually features a pair of star-crossed lovers, a notoriously evil villain, countless elaborate colorful costumes, action-packed fight scenes, an extremely melodramatic storyline, and an endless number of upbeat song-and-dance sequences all crammed into three hours. Can these types of films actually influence audience members to adopt practices of religious tolerance?

**Masala Films That Have Addressed Religious Conflict**

Just as there is an intricate connection between religion and theatre in South Asia, religion plays a crucial role in South Asian cinema as well. As Dwyer states in her book *Filming the Gods: Religion and Indian Cinema*, “The films [of Indian cinema] do not just show literal
representations of religions (Hinduism, Islam), religious communities and beliefs, but also are
grounded in wider concerns of customs and society that can be said to be religious, however
loosely” (Dwyer 2006, 3). Dwyer defines four genres of films in India cinema in which religion
plays an important role: 1) the mythological genre, 2) the devotional genre, 3) the Islamicate or
the “Muslims social” genre, and 4) “social” or “masala” genre (Dwyer 2006). In the past twenty
years, a number of films in this fourth genre of movies that Dwyer has established have been
released that address issues of religious communalism in South Asia. Unlike other South Asian
films like Deepa Mehta’s 1947: Earth (1998), Aparna Sen’s Mr. and Mrs. Iyer (2002), Shoaib
Mansoor’s Khuda Kay Liye (“For God’s Sake”, 2007) and Nandita Das’ Firaaq
(“Separation/Quest”, 2008) which would be considered part of South Asia’s “Art Cinema” or
“Parallel Cinema”, the movies I will discuss all belong to the popular masala film genre.

As mentioned earlier, a common element of masala films is a pair of star-crossed lovers: a
couple who cannot be together for some reasons such as economic disparity or familial disputes.
In recent years, a popular barrier between the hero and the heroine of the masala film has been
differences in religion. In these movies, the two lovers of different religious backgrounds are
often persecuted or disowned by their parents and communities, but ultimately their love
(usually) prevails. These films show audiences that love can be stronger than hate when it comes
to religion. It is interesting to note that even Dattani employs this approach in Final Solutions
with the characters of Smita and Bobby.

Some of these films such as Kurbaan (“Sacrifice”, 2009) are set in contemporary times
while others such as Josh (“Frenzy”, 2000) and Zubeida (2001) take place during pivotal
moments of India’s history. Jodhaa-Akbar (2008) depicts the historical romance between the
great Mughal emperor Akbar and his Rajput wife, Princess Jodhaabai. The film reminds its
audience of the time when religious harmony was prevalent throughout South Asia and when a Muslim emperor could make a Hindu princess his empress and still be loved by his people. One of the most successful of these *masala* films depicting an inter-religious romance is the film *Veer-Zaara* (2003) directed by the legendary Yash Chopra, depicting a romance between an Indian Sikh man and a Pakistani Muslim woman. The film seemed to have a positive effect on its audiences as Dwyer points out, “…*Veer-Zaara* swept all the awards for the year and Yash Chopra was invited to a lunch with the visiting President of Pakistan, General Musharraf, where the band played music from the film” (Dwyer 2006, 129).

Some of these *masala* love stories have been set against the backdrop of the partition of India and Pakistan. *Gadar- Ek Prem Katha* (“Mutiny- A Love Story”, 2001), which tells the story of Sikh truck driver who saves the life of and falls in love with a wealthy Muslim girl, is one of the most successful Bollywood films of all time. As Dwyer points out, “…in the Punjab…24-hour screenings were held to accommodate the enormous crowds (Dwyer 2005, 94). *Pinjar* (“Skeleton”, 2003) focuses on Puro, a Hindu girl who is kidnapped by Rashid, a Muslim man, over a familial dispute. Puro eventually falls in love with Rashid, who ends up helping shelter her family from Muslim rioters during the partition. However, not all *masala* films that address religious communalism do so by featuring an inter-religious couple. The extremely controversial *Hey Ram!* (2000) relates the tale of Saket Ram, a Tamil Hindu archeologist whose Bengali Hindu wife is raped and murdered during the partition in Kolkata. Shaken by this experience, Ram joins the RSS and begins to blame Mahatma Gandhi’s policies of religious pluralism for the death of his wife. However, when the life of his old Muslim friend Amjad Khan is threatened, Ram abandons the Hindu Right and seeks forgiveness from Gandhi.

It is clear from these examples that makers of masala movies are making an attempt to deal with issues of communal conflict in their films. However, the question remains: how are South Asians responding to these films? *Mission Kashmir, Josh, The Hero: Love Story of a Spy, Main Hoon Na, Fanaa, Rang De Basanti, Chak De! India, Jodhaa-Akbar, New York,* and *My Name is Khan,* were all in the top ten highest-grossing films list of the box office during the year they were released (Box Office India 2012). *Gadar- Ek Prem Katha* and *Veer-Zaara* were both the number one films in the years they were released. Clearly people in South Asia are watching and enjoying these masala films that address religious conflict. Yet does this make the masala film genre a better medium than theatre for addressing religious conflict? In order to answer this question, I would like to examine the film *Bombay* (1995).

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\(^\text{10}\) It should be noted that *Mausam* did not perform well at the box office, possibly because it tried to cram in too many instances of religious communalism into a single movie.
Mani Ratnam’s *Bombay: A Cinematic Response to the Ayodhya Dispute*

*Bombay* was directed by the acclaimed South Indian film director, Mani Ratnam, who has made films in Kannada, Tamil, Telegu, Malayalam, and Hindi-Urdu. The movie was filmed in Tamil but dubbed in Hindi-Urdu and Telegu. *Bombay* tells the story of Shekhar Narayan Pillai, a Hindu journalist, and Shaila Bano Ahmed, a Muslim schoolgirl, who meet and fall in love in their village in Tamil Nadu in the late eighties. After being ostracized by their parents, Shekhar and Shaila Bano move to Bombay, where they get married and soon have twin sons: Kabir Narayan and Kamal Basheer. Eventually the couple’s parents overcome their prejudices and come and live with their children and grandchildren in Bombay. Yet just as the family begins to repair their relationship, the Babri Masjid is demolished and religious violence breaks out in Bombay. Having been raised in both the Hindu religious tradition and Islam, Kabir and Kamal find themselves the targets of religious violence by both Muslim and Hindu rioters. During a riot in their neighborhood, the twin’s grandparents are killed when their house is set on fire and the twins are separated from their parents. Devastated, Shekhar and Shaila Bano search the city for their children. In the final scene of the film, in an attempt to stop a riot Shekhar grabs a container of kerosene, pours it over himself, and demands that a group of Hindu rioters burn him alive. Rioters on both sides come to their senses and the crowd disperses. Kabir and Kamal appear on screen and run into the arms of their parents. Although it deals with very serious subject matter, *Bombay* still has all the makings of a *masala* film with elaborate sets and costumes, and spontaneous song-and-dance numbers.

Like *Final Solutions*, *Bombay* makes an effort to explore the underlying reasons for religious communalism. An example of this is seen in a scene where Shekhar’s father Narayan visits Basheer, Shaila Bano’s father, a brick maker, with an order for bricks inscribed with the
name of Ram. Hearing this, Basheer violently lunges at Narayan. Narayan defends himself by claiming that these bricks are for the *Ram Shila Pooja* and he is purchasing a brick for every Hindu family in the village. Out of context, this scene appears to be a classic case of Hindus hating Muslims. However the underlying reason for this incident of violence is the fact that the Shekhar has just eloped with Shaila Bano. Yes, Narayan wants to participate in the *Ram Shila Pooja*. But what he really wants is to take the opportunity to take a jab at the father of the woman for whom his son abandoned his family. This scene suggests that there are often contributing factors to communal violence such as local tensions.

The film also displays processions similar to Advani’s *Rath Yatra* and shows a Hindu nationalist party called the Shakti Samaj, which clearly represents the Shiv Sena. While many think the film is not perfect (some believe that the film is biased towards Hindus (Dwyer 2005, 53) and others think that it is anti-Islamic (Vasudevan 2011, 198)), the film was extremely progressive for its time. As film scholar Ravi Vasudevan points out about the depiction of the Sangh Parivar in the movie, “This fearsome image of the Hindu Right is a most extraordinary one, a landmark perhaps in the history of popular film narrative in India” (Vasudevan 2011, 191). Like *Final Solutions*, *Bombay* has the strong themes and characters that have the power to influence an audience in a positive manner. Unfortunately, just like *Final Solutions*, *Bombay* also faced threats of censorship. The official Indian Censor Boards “made many cuts, including references to the high number of Muslim deaths, images of the police shooting Muslims, and actual footage of the mosque being demolished” (Dwyer 2005, 53). In Bombay, Bal Thackeray, founder and chief of the Shiv Sena Party, took offense with some of the
dialogues of the character that was clearly based on him. Ratnam agreed to Thackeray’s demands and the offending dialogues were cut from the film (Engineer 1995).  

**Film Versus Theatre**

As Dwyer notes, “…issues… of inter-communal relations [in India] are still highly sensitive” (Dwyer 2006, 130). Anything that has the potential to incite religious conflict in India is subject to censorship. Even though *masala* films have the potential to reach more people than theatre does, the medium of film is in greater danger of being censored than theatre. Parallel cinema films like *Mr. and Mrs. Iyer* and documentaries like Anand Patwardhan’s *Ram Ke Naam* (1992) that address religious communalism are under constant scrutiny by the Central Board of Film Certification in India. As shown with *Bombay*, even *masala* films are in danger of censorship when it comes to issues of religious conflict. It is true that Dattani along with Padamsee made edits to *Final Solutions* to get it past the Indian censors for its first performance in Bangalore. However, these were minor changes and many of them were reversed when the play was published. Had *Final Solutions* been a film, without a doubt many scenes, especially ones involving the Mob/Chorus, would have been censored and possibly cut from the film.

During my interview with Dattani, I asked him if he thought *Final Solutions* could be made into a film. Dattani, who has made two films *Mango Soufflé* (based on *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai*) and the original film *Morning Raga*, did admit, “I had toyed with the idea actually, with a lot of major re-writing, yeah it’s possible because I feel with film its very easy to juxtapose images, you can move from past to present, and use it for dramatic irony, that’s the strength of cinema, so I think it is possible…with a bit of careful thought”. There are some

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11 It is interesting to note that following this, the film was screened for a group of Muslim local municipal leaders. These leaders, like Thackeray, were upset with certain aspects of the film, however when a group of these leaders approached the Chief Minister Manohar Joshi with these concerns, the film was only postponed for a week. (Engineer 1995).
elements of *Final Solutions* that would lend themselves well to film, such as the flashbacks to Hardika’s life as Daksha. However, there are also elements of the play that would be lost on screen. For example, Dattani noted with regret that if *Final Solutions* were made into a film, “I think the Mob/Chorus would have to be diluted a bit” (Dattani Interview 2010). The Mob/Chorus, which has been used quite powerfully in productions by Padamsee, Sen, and Gaur, is one of the strongest aspects of Dattani’s script. A film version of *Final Solutions* would not be as strong with a watered-down Mob/Chorus. Also the strength of the set as envisioned by Dattani with the layers of the Mob/Chorus on their ramp and Daksha in her room in 1948 that are always imposed on the home of the Gandhis on stage, would be absent in a film.

Furthermore, there is one quality of theatre that is missing from film: the experience of live performance. As Woodruff notes, “In theatre, the arts of watching and of being watched are intertwined, and each affects the other…no two audiences are the same, so no two performances can be precisely the same…The interaction between actors and audience builds a tension that energizes a live performance. Theatre calls on its double art to build this tension, but the art of film does nothing like this” (Woodruff 2009, 43). As mentioned in earlier chapters, the talk-back sessions the actors and production members of the Padamsee and Gaur productions of *Final Solutions* had with their audiences were transformative. If the play were a film, a Muslim in the audience wouldn’t have the chance to speak to the actor who played Javed after a performance and confess that she too had a traumatic childhood experience that has made her cling tighter to her faith. A *masala* film may bring to light vital issues of religious communalism to mass audiences, but it does not provide the same medium as theatre does for its audience members and production members to engage in dialogue about these issues.
CONCLUSION

The title of Dattani’s play is a reference to the euphemistic term “Die Endlösung” (“Final Solution”) that the Nazis used to call their plan to exterminate the Jewish population of Europe. Padamsee clearly saw a connection between the ideologies of the Nazis and the Hindu Right stating in his director’s note, “Who was responsible for the humiliating state in Germany after World War I? Blame it on the Jews! They had siphoned off all the money! Who is responsible for us becoming a third-rate nation? Get rid of the minorities and Ram Rajya [Rule of Ram] will return!” (Padamsee 2000). Yet the title “Final Solutions” is more than a reminder of the worst genocide based on religious identity that the world has seen in the past hundred years. The title makes audience members ask themselves, “Are there solutions to religious communalism?”

Ajay Balram noted in his review of Padamsee’s production, “The play says there are no easy final solutions” (Balram 1994). As demonstrated in the play itself, issues of religious conflict cannot be solved in a single night. However, while characters like Javed, Aruna, and Hardika may not overcome their prejudices within the course of the play, by the play’s conclusion, the audience can see that these characters have clearly started on the path of tolerance and understanding. By being forced to spend the night together, Javed, Hardika, Aruna, Ramnik, Bobby, and Smita, have taken the first step towards religious pluralism: dialogue. Scholar of Comparative Religion and founder of The Pluralism Project at Harvard University, Diana Eck asserts that, “pluralism is based on dialogue”. She explains this saying:

The language of pluralism is that of dialogue and encounter, give and take, criticism and self-criticism. Dialogue means both speaking and listening, and that process reveals both common understandings and real differences. Dialogue does not mean everyone at the “table” will agree with one another. Pluralism involves the commitment to being at the table -- with one’s commitments. (Eck 2006)
All six of the main characters in *Final Solutions* undergo a transformation in the course of the play through the process of dialogue. Javed may not be able to completely trust Hindus at the end of the play, yet the audience sees him begin to respect them as he spends more and more time with the Gandhis. As he tells Aruna, “We are not very different. You and me. We both feel pride” (pp. 54). By sharing with his mother the past actions of their family, Ramnik enables Hardika to begin a crucial process of reflection and forgiveness. Javed and Bobby’s mere presence allows Smita to express her true feelings about her religious upbringing to her mother. The theatrical event of the *Rath Yatra*, which forms the background of the play, led to immense violence in the Gandhi’s hometown of Amargaon. However, as the play progresses, the audience can see that it has also created a critical opportunity for dialogue between the play’s characters.

Just as the experience of spending the night together forces the Gandhis and their guests to engage in dialogue, *Final Solutions* forces audience members to discuss the realities of religious communalism. In this thesis two central factors that make *Final Solutions* an optimal source for dialogue about religious conflict have been discussed. The first is the content of the play. As described in Chapter Three, Dattani created *Final Solutions* during the most heated time of the *Ramjanmabhoomi* movement. This enabled him to incorporate the discourse and language of the Hindu Right into his play (specifically with the characters of the Mob/Chorus), thus creating an eminently relevant piece of theatre. Twenty years after its creation, *Final Solutions* still remains relevant in South Asia as occurrences of religious violence continue to take place every year. The story that Dattani tells could easily be set in 1992, 2002, or 2012.

As shown in Chapter Four, the themes woven into this story such as the impact of the partition, the role of memory, the different notions of religious identity, and the tensions between the individual and the community, are all vital concepts that must be addressed when discussing
religious communalism in South Asia. The productions directed by Padamsee, Sen, and Gaur discussed in Chapters Five and Six, have shown how different directors can bring out new layers of meaning to the original text. The treatments of these themes by different productions have caused audiences to reflect on them in new ways. The analysis of Anwar’s Hindi-Urdu translation demonstrated that the dialogue of the characters in Hindi-Urdu was more realistic and believable than the English version, and this heightened these themes even further. At times, it may be uncomfortable or difficult for audience members to think about the themes in Final Solutions, however this process of reflection is necessary. India Today’s Madhu Trehan recently interviewed Dattani while at a discourse with the Dalai Lama. She believes that Dattani and the Dalai Lama do the same work and that only their methods are different.

Mahesh’s plays do not make you feel good. They take you to a place where you question your own attitudes and perceptions, which may be embedded in your subconscious, but none the less, influence how you function in your daily life. Would you believe that is also the alerted consciousness of three days of teachings from the Dalai Lama? Every word you utter, every act that may seem so casual and unthinking to you, must be thought through, weighed and then expressed or acted on (or not). Mahesh’s plays give the same message using a different tool. The difference is – the Dalai Lama uses altruism and compassion to change the world. Mahesh’s plays expose the raw, hideous side. But both make you think and work on yourself to change. (Trehan 2012)

The second factor that makes this play an effective source of dialogue is the medium of Final Solutions itself: dramatic theatre. In Chapter One, I described South Asia’s remarkable history of dramatic theatre, including the sub-continent’s tremendous history of political theatre. Dramatic theatre is a familiar medium to the people of South Asia and its popularity is expanding every day. As shown in Chapter Six, companies like Asmita Theatre Group are making theatre more affordable and accessible to the Indian population. These kinds of theatre companies can take the play to hundreds of different venues across India.
Theatre may never be able to take the place of film in India as the most popular form of public culture. However, as discussed in Chapter Seven, unlike film, theatre allows for talk-back sessions following performances where audience members can immediately discuss and reflect upon what they have just seen with the production’s director and actors. As much as they may try, Bollywood superstar Shah Rukh Khan and director Karan Johar will never be able to discuss the themes of My Name is Khan with all their audience members. It is in talk-back sessions (especially in the ones after the Hindi-Urdu version of the play) that the seeds of communal harmony and religious pluralism are sown through dialogue. As Gaur explains, “Theatre addresses many issues directly and creates a space for dialogues and debates on the issue, where people can raise questions and have their world views challenged” (Gaur in Halabol 2012).

February 27th, 2012 marked the ten-year anniversary of the burning of the Sabarmati Express in Godhra, Gujarat. Later this year, December 6th will mark the twenty-year anniversary of the demolition of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya. These events were the catalysts of two of the worst cases of communal violence South Asia has seen since in the past twenty years. Yet, despite the number of years that have passed since these events, have the victims been able to move on with their lives? Soutik Biswas asked this in his recent article “Has Gujarat Moved On?” He noted that Gujarat’s Muslims “have moved on in their own small, meaningful ways” such as improving Muslim education in the state, citing that “In 2002, there were 200 Muslim educational trusts in Gujarat. Now, there are more than 800” (Biswas 2012). However, the memories of the violence remain alive in the minds of the victims. As Noorjehan Abdul Hamid Dewan, a survivor of the violence in Gujarat, reflects, “How can people forget the riots and move ahead? People don't forget. They simply remain quiet in fear” (Dewan in Biswas 2012).
Theatre doesn’t allow audience members to remain silent. Throughout this thesis, I have referenced philosophy scholar Paul Woodruff and his work *The Necessity of Theater*. The title of Woodruff’s book brings into focus the significance of theatre. Theatre is an intrinsic and necessary element of human culture. Woodruff asserts that along with language and religion, theatre is one of the three basic cultural needs of human society. He writes, “Theater is everywhere in human culture, as widely practiced as religion” (Woodruff 2008, 11). Woodruff’s words hold especially true for the South Asian context. Just as every region of South Asia has its own unique languages and religious practices, each region also has its own specific tradition of dramatic theatre. With theatre being as inherent a component of South Asian culture as religion or language, it is an ideal medium for the promotion of religious pluralism.

Apart from being an essential element of human culture, theatre also has the power to create a platform for dialogue. An effective production of a play like *Final Solutions* provokes, disturbs, angers, shames, questions, and inspires an audience to speak out. As Woodruff writes, “Theater is immediate, its actions are present to participants and audience” (Woodruff 2008, 17). It is also “the art by which human beings make human action worth watching in a measured time and space” (Woodruff 2008, 39). Theatre is the collaboration and community of those being watched (the participants) and those who watch (the audience). The experience of theatre binds its participants and audience in a way that no other art form can. Although temporary, the connection that is established between these two groups of people during a performance is powerful. If the participants and the audience of a performance are able to meet and interact in a talk-back session following a performance, the bond between them is further cemented. And it is in these discussions that theatre artists and audience members often strive to find the final solutions to religious communalism.
APPENDIX

Photographs From Productions of *Final Solutions*

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![Figure Three](image3)
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Image Credits:

Gaur, Arvind. “Mahesh Dattani’s Final Solutions Directed by Arvind Gaur at SRC.”


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