

Ideologies in Literature: Politics of Faith in Mahesh Dattani's *Final Solutions*

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Abstract: Ideologies determine the nature of art, literature and culture, which are the markers of identity of a community. The presence of too many ideologies in a society results in the creation of multiplicity of cultures. In a multicultural society, custodians of an ideology engage in debates on ideologies and such debates have been the focus of literatures. Thus, Comparative Ideologies aim to broaden one's perspectives and attempt to discover dominant trends in literature by virtue of comparison. This has resulted in the emergence of Comparative Literature. Mahesh Dattani (1958) an Indian playwright in English is well known for his contributions to the growth of contemporary theatre. His play *Final Solutions* (1992) relates the mistrust among the Hindus and the Muslims in the Post-Partition period in India. The Masked Chorus in the play, voices the anxieties and anguish of the two communities in the communal context. With the sense of guilt for the deeds in the past, the inheritors of the sorrows of Partition explore the possibilities for reconciliation. Evidently, misinterpreted understanding has been responsible for the eruption of communal violence in the country. The play highlights the continuity of hostilities due to conflicting ideologies from the days of Partition to the Present. Thus, the paper proposes to trace the arguments of the communal ideologies in literature with specific reference to the play.

Keywords: Comparative Ideologies & Literature, Politics of Faith.

An ideology is a set of ideas. It takes its shape from morals, mannerisms, and the sense of ethics practiced and propagated in a society. An ideology is shaped by the common expectations and actions, which becomes the collective vision of a group. Art, literature, politics and educational institutions reflect on the various ideologies in a society. When a dominant group adheres to a particular tendency, the ideology of the group attains its political presence and cultural shape. Ideologies become stronger with the emergence of social, cultural and political institutions. An ideology takes its shape from ethnic and historical factors, which mark the identity of a community. Thus, socio-political and cultural patterns promote the institutions to nourish an ideology. In the absence of such supportive institutions, ideologies are short lived. The intervention of the State and the non-state agencies in the societal behaviour shapes the ideologies of a society. In short, the State supports or discourages an ideology through its engagement with socio-political institutions. Thus, ideologies are political and societies tend to follow the principles of a popular ideology. Moreover, ideologies can be either aggressive or liberal. Liberal ideologies are based on the principles of tolerance and acceptance. An aggressive ideology suppresses other ideologies, and forces the other communities to accept and adhere to its

principles. Hence, communities tend to be conservative and antagonistic to other ideologies to preserve its identities. This aggressive behaviour results in conflicts and violence. Saints, philosophers, and political scientists have been constantly engaged in debates on religious dogmas. Creative writers have been writing on the arguments of certain ideologies in fictitious, historical and mythical settings. This has resulted in the creation of secular and ethnic writings. Thus, literature is inspired by the spirit of the age. It reflects on the ideologies, which are timeless and temporal in the past and in the present. The Greek, Roman and other civilizations have given shapes to political, social and religious ideologies and institutionalised the same in the form of educational, religious and socio-political institutions. However, Imperialism, Globalization, international migration, media and other influencing factors in the modern days have been contributing to the spread of ideologies. Consequently, predominance of an ideology results in the formation of certain pressure groups and political parties affiliated broadly to the philosophies of Conservatism, Nationalism, Fascism, Marxism, Communalism, Socialism, Catholicism, Liberalism, and Humanism. Often ideologies strengthen the political parties, and in turn, ideologies are strengthened. The exercise of power for a dominant group becomes easier with its socio-cultural, religious and political institutions. Thus, an agenda for Development is given a shape based on an ideology. The State and non-state actors behave like the custodians of an ideology and adopt popular strategies to achieve their goals. Several creative writers acquire ideas, themes and plots either from the present or from the annals of history. They give a literary form to their thought and imagination and uphold, reject and mock an ideology with their chosen settings and characters. The writers analyse anecdotes and invent fables to put forth a moral, which strengthens an ideology. The list of such literary works is always incomplete. Historical, political allegories, allegory of ideas, and satires are few examples. In allegories, abstract ideas are personified; the names of the characters, places and events are allegorical. The play *Final Solutions* (2000) could be read as an allegory of events in the Post Partition period and ideologies are examined in the form of arguments.

The play *Final Solutions* (2000) was written in 1991, before the rise of communal riots in Bombay. The riots were sparked by the destruction of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya. The play has achieved a unique distinction of being realistic with its innovative dramatic devices like the use of masks and Chorus to reflect on the contemporary social conditions. The playwright attempts to bring out the politics of faith through the arguments of the Chorus. Hostility and religious intolerance are the subjects of arguments. Through the arguments, ideologies are compared, conflicts are brought out and possibilities for reconciliation of the two communities are explored. The play is an illustration of competing ideologies. The playwright is aware of the sensibilities of the two communities. Flashback technique brings out the influences of the past on the present and resultant crisis in human relationships. The

playwright brilliantly brings out the hypocrisies in social behaviour. Moreover, the author attempts to prove that the lenses of communalism, which guide us in all our actions, must be discarded at the earliest to pave the way for peace and harmony. The play is set in the late 1940s. When the play begins, the chariot is broken, and the priest is attacked. This reminds us of the situation in 1990s in India when a prominent leader of a political party undertook Rathayatra throughout the country to garner the support of the people to rebuild the Ram Temple at Ayodhya. Thus, the situation is allegorical. Daksha the young bride of fifteen recollects the sweet memories of Independence and sad tales of Partition. Hardhika and Daksha are the same person. Hardhika is Daksha but grown old and opens the same diary. Since Hardhika is haunted by the memories of the holocaust, she is unable to sleep. Daksha's diary serves as a memoir of the events that occurred after Partition. The joys of independence are short lived. Daksha recollects that her father was unhappy about the fate of the country after Independence. The words of animosity expressed by her father, always linger in her ears. After the Partition, she misses out the songs of Noor Jahan. Hostility between the Hindus and Muslims has grown to such an extent that the communities have become intolerant towards singers from other communities. She seeks friendship with Zarine to listen to the songs sung by Noor Jahan. She was discouraged. She develops a feeling of hatred towards Muslims. The rioters attacked Daksha's house in Hussainabad and her father was killed. She blames Muslims for his death. Hardhika realises that even after forty years of Independence, things have not changed for the better. Many misconceptions are crystallised in the minds of the people. The Partition of India is evidence to simmering communal disharmony and hostility. The masks are symbolic of the hypocrisies in the social behaviour of the people. The Chorus in the play reminds us of the elders of a village in the Greek tragedies. However, the Chorus in *Final Solutions* (2000) is a mob of people voicing the anxieties and aspirations of a community. The arguments of the mob supported by the Chorus also. The Chorus expresses anger and antagonism, which are the products of intolerance. The Hindu mob resents the reality of Muslims residing in India.

CHORUS 1. (Pounding with sticks). Send...them...back. | Pause.

CHORUS 4. (Questioning) send them back?

CHORUS 2. (Pounding with his stick) Drive...them...out. | Pause.

CHORUS 5. (Questioning) Drive them out? (Dattani, p. 07).

The mobs justify the need for violence. Javed and Bobby, the two Muslim boys suddenly enter the house of Ramnik Gandhi. The boys seek refuge from the mob. Smitha, the daughter of Ramnik Gandhi is familiar with the boys. It is in the house of Ramnik Gandhi, the politics of faith is revealed. The mob with its Muslim masks, asserts itself and questions the Hindus,

CHORUS ALL: We are neither idol-makers nor breakers!

CHORUS 3. They say we razed their temples yesterday.

CHORUS 2. That we broke their chariots today.

CHORUS 1. That we will bomb their streets tomorrow”
(p. 10).

The chorus with the Hindu masks is confident that since Muslims are a minority, no harm can be expected from them. The Hindu mob reveals its agenda. It wants to teach the Muslims a lesson and tame them, so that they can live in peace. Further, Javed reveals the reasons for his enrolment in communal activities. Aruna, Smitha's mother who voices the majoritarian views, believes that the boys do not have the Right to criticise the Hindus, because, a Hindu family is protecting the two boys from the mob. However, her beliefs are constantly questioned and rejected by her husband and daughter. Aruna declares that her ways, customs are different, but all are equal, and she respects all religions. On the contrary, she is a pseudo-secular woman. She resents her husband when he treats the two boys generously and offers a job to Javed in the shop. The play illustrates that the State is indifferent to communal activities. When Ramnik Gandhi attempts to call the policemen, the young boys are confident that the policemen will never come to his rescue. It is revealed by the boys in the course of the conversation that they reached the house of Ramnik Gandhi in the vehicles of the police. Ramnik Gandhi is critical of the police system. He questions the rationality of imposing curfew in the town when mobs have a deeper desire for revenge,

CHORUS 1. Of what use is this curfew? (To Chorus 3.) When there is unrest in our minds! Have we to let them insult us? To close our eyes while they stab us?” (p. 30).

The boys conclude that communal leaders are responsible for inciting violence. The Chorus with the masks of Muslims points out the challenges in preserving the identities of the community whose existence is threatened by the actions of a major community.

CHORUS1. What must we do? To become more acceptable? Must we lose our identity? Is that what they want? Must we tolerate more? Does our future lie in their hands? Is there anyone unsure, more secure than us? Oh, what curse it is to be less in number!” (p. 54).

The arguments and counter arguments culminate in self-realisation in the minds of the characters in the play. The boys overcome the sense of hatred, express generosity and become tolerant towards the other community. Finally, Ramnik Gandhi is able to reveal the secret behind the destruction of the shop owned by Zarine's father. He confesses that his father burnt the shop only to possess it at a half price. Ramnik wants to overcome the guiltiness by offering a job to Javed. Thus, falsehood behind his liberal views is revealed. The boys accept the glasses of water though Aruna is hesitant to offer them. Bobby concludes that Tolerance is a virtue and communal differences are artificial constructs. He recollects that everything was normal with Javed until he suffered a humiliation from an upper caste Hindu. Javed narrates how he was brought to Amargoan from Jeevnagar to incite violence in the city. Ramnik and Javed agree that peace is hidden in the armpits of the majority. Miscreants and communal forces, create havoc in the lives of the minor communities. Communal forces hire the youth for inciting violence and disharmony for

political gains. Thus, Smitha acknowledges that minorities are the victims of the brutal acts of a majority. "SMITHA: You are the victims and we, the offenders!" (p.38). The play reveals that though there are many opportunities for establishing harmony and possibilities for reconciliation, human minds are blocked. Men and women are unwilling to shed ego and antagonism accumulated from the bitter experiences of so many years. Thus, Chorus in the Third Act observes that assimilation is impossible. CHORUS 1: A drop of oil cannot merge with an ocean of milk. One reality cannot accept another reality" (p. 40). This has resulted in the heightened feelings of mistrust and insecurity. The actions of a major community make a minority feel insecure. Mistrust and ill-treatment provoke the members of the minorities to assert their positions. Thus, Faith is politicised because of the power it wields in the hands of the majority. People tend to be communal and conservative. This breeds hegemony and animosity in the minds of the people who consider themselves as the custodians of an ideology and the Faith. Bobby recollects that Javed turned himself against the Hindus when he was made to realise his minority status. The humiliation enraged him to act against the Hindus. Thus, the acts of insult and provocation result in violence.

RAMNIK (angrily) now you are provoking me! How dare you blame your violence?

On other people? It is in you! You have violence in your mind. Your life is based on violence. Your faith is based... (Stops, but it is too late.)" (p. 43).

Javed confesses that it is a terrible feeling to be disillusioned. He was swayed by the cheap sentiments about the motherland and the desire to fight to save his Faith. He recollects that he reassured himself with the fantasies of persecution and engaged in the acts of communal violence. It is evident from the concluding lines of the play that faith in the philosophy of co-existence and reconciliation is an inevitable solution to the problems of communal disharmony. The hope for harmony and reconciliation is expressed in Smitha's desire to help the boys and accept them as fellow human beings. She confesses that she had a desire to marry Babbon. Nevertheless, she ignored her desire, because of communal differences. Now, her understanding of the oneness of all religions is so strong that she declines to accept the prejudices of Communalism from her mother. Thus, Bobby demonstrates that Tolerance is a greater virtue. Though Aruna declares that all religions are one, she acts as a preserver of her Faith. However, "Only the ways to God are many" (p. 55). She condemns her husband when he fails to uphold the values of his religion. She believes that her path is the path of truth. Through this, the playwright emphasises the need for Humanism, because Humanity is the greatest religion of all religions. Bobby at the end of the play argues that tolerance and respect for other religions is the strongest fragrance in the world! The Chorus is unhappy about pseudo-secularists who do not promote peace and prosperity. Hence, the blame-

game of the communalists continues to unsettle the issues of Race, Religion and Gender. The playwright employs allegorical imageries to illustrate the nature of divisive politics. Thus, the play could be considered as an allegory of ideas. However, it is evident that the playwright is more engaged in evaluating the hegemony of the Hindu community over the Muslims by questioning their beliefs and practices. Thus, the analogy of ideas is documented. The playwright portrays the conflicting ideologies through the arguments of the Chorus. Finally, one must note that, in the absence of Democratic and liberal institutions, fundamentalists and fascists assume the power and frame the agenda for further destruction and disharmony. However, an ideology must be reasonable, and should promote social harmony and lead the communities in a multi-cultural society towards the creation of a welfare state. Thus, allegories, fables, parables, exemplum and proverbs have enriched literature by accommodating different ideologies in various genres. The writers signify the contemporary social and political conditions and such works are the basis for human understanding and comparative analogies.

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