

## NAVIGATING THE INTERLINKS BETWEEN POLITICS AND HISTORY IN THE NOVELS OF SHASHI THAROOR

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### Abstract:

*Shashi Tharoor shows his deep concern for history and politics in his world of writings. He believes that politics and history teach us a lot and the mistakes and blunders committed in the past should be avoided and not repeated in the present as it would corrupt the future of the nation. He gives history and politics a high place in his novels because he devotes most of his creative energies to interpret history and its multiple political dimensions and its manifestations specially in his novels. He believes that history has its multiple interpretations as per the situations and conditions. But it does not mean that they are true for all times as a universal fact. He takes up the revelation of history in The Great Indian novel as a serious argument and copes it with political history and its consequences of Indian freedom struggle. Show Business marks the intermingling of Indian movie world with political culture of the country. His Riot is an interpretation of history as a main theme coped with communal unrest and political situations and characters. Tharoor's realistic and grave portrayal of national politics and history is an argumentative and evaluative affair in all his novels.*

*This paper aims to study the interlinks between history and politics in Shashi Tharoor's novels and his evaluation with national history and political culture of India. The researcher has applied an analytical research methodology to dig out Tharoor's connotations with Indian history and politics. His views about the wide gap between mythology and history, fact and fiction and politics and cinema has been also taken seriously by the researcher.*

**Keywords:** analytical, myth, political, history, icon, modeled, fabric, colonial rule, allegorical, portrayals

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### Introduction:

Shashi Tharoor cleverly finds the gap between myth and history and strongly believes that a proper interpretation and practical application of history play very significant role in the overall development of the nation, But misinterpretation and misuse of history breed misguided politics and nation has to pay a huge price for it in demolishing the political and communal fabric of a country. This serious concerns are prominently seen in all his three novels.

*The Great Indian Novel* is a political discourse of India that borrows the story from the ancient classic, the *Mahabharata*. The novel satirizes modern political set up and derives its inspiration from the mythical past of India. Here the mythical characters of the epic are given a new recognition as the historical and political figures. The novel presents two different times

from the very beginning one is mythical time and historical time on the other. Tharoor has shown his serious concern about the history and political fabric of modern India. The novel as a mocking tale of Indian political history tracing the last ninety years of India. The major part of the novel is set in the colonial period. These are many incidents and episodes which show the development of the characters and they are all drawn from India's political past. The novel depicts the historical Dandi March and hunger strike initiated and headed by Mahatma Gandhi. Tharoor's Gangadutta or Bhishma is modeled on the towering figure of national political icon Gandhi. Tharoor has covered the great story of 'great India' into 18 books like the *Mahabharata*.

In *The Great Indian Novel* Tharoor has interpreted Indian historical episodes and political events in his irreverent and evaluative tone. The novel is replete with many several references which reveal the colonial unrest and injustice done to the native. He narrates the half starved bellied poor Indians :

"There was starvation in Motihari, not just because the land did not produce enough for its tillers to eat, but because it could not under the colonialist's laws, be entirely devoted to keeping them alive." (Tharoor, *The Great Indian Novel* 50)

This satanic clutches of colonization lays bare the plights and pangs of victimized people during colonial rule. The rejection of Karna being a low caste person by Draupadi in the epic as well as Karna's alienation from the Congress Party also reveals the repressive role of long standing caste system in Indian politics giving no place for the Shudras or other lower castes. Tharoor's portrayal of Bibighar Massacre or Hastinapur Massacre is a representation of the cold blooded slaughtering of thousands of unarmed people in Jalianwallah Bagh Massacre as a political hierarchy and was the gravest episode in Indian history. Tharoor narrates the rift between the Hindus and the Muslims before and after partition. The scenes of violence after partition are very seriously narrated out by Tharoor. Karna, Dhritrashtra, Priya Duryodhani Pandu, Bhishma and Draupadi are allegorical portrayals of political figures of Jinnah, Nehru, Indira Gandhi, Subhaschandra Bose, Mahatma Gandhi and democracy reinventing Indian history on a broad canvass. Tharoor has seriously dealt with the episode of partition and its aftermath. He has narrated the political rift between leaders and several historical incidents which led to partition. Nehru and Jinnah are held responsible for partition and Tharoor asserts that these two leaders fought more for their egos and personal ambitions than the welfare of nation. Thus, interpretation of history and political evaluation is the main crux in the novel.

In *Show Business*, Tharoor shifts his attention from history to cinema and political obsessions of actors. Tharoor presents the inter connections between history of Indian cinema and politics. Tharoor boldly speaks about the degeneration of values in politics after few decades of Indian freedom presenting Kulbhushan Banjara, a freedom fighter turned politician. He opines that after independence politics gave birth to some self-centered and selfish politicians who developed colonized mind set and perpetuated the exploitation of the native Indians. Tharoor has expressed this grave aspect of Indian political situation through few political characters. Here he openly criticizes the political ambitions of actors and their entry in politics giving the history of some actors turned politicians and their political failures. He reminds us of emergency and political chaos in the country.

In *Show Business* using cinema as powerful metaphor to deal with Indian Socio-Political conditions, Tharoor has drawn his protagonist Ashok Banjara after the millennium

star and icon of Indian cinema, Amitabh Bachchan. The entire novel is narrated by Tharoor as a collection of past memories and experiences of the film star. He initiates the famous Bofors Case and related financial scandals where Indian politicians and actor Amitabh Bacchan were caught up. His real life political opponent in election, Hemvatinandan Bahuguna is portrayed by Tharoor as Sugriva Sharma in the novel. Tharoor pungently lashes out the of criminalization of politics party politics, cast calculations and corrupt Indian Bureaucracy in . He underlines the loss of ideal politics of Mahatma Gandhi and Nehru, only a few decades after the end of colonialism. "Just like the heroes of our national movement, the men inspired by the Mahatma." (Tharoor, Show Business 121) Tharoor has brought every single politician and leader of free India to the centre. He also expresses a pathetic fall of the country's democratic set up which has reduced to an electoral game of victory and defeat. Through the portrayal of Guru he exposes how Indian politicians lack foresightedness and realism. It demonstrates how superstition is governing and dominating Indian politics.

Tharoor's third novel *Riot* is another reinvention of history representing Indian politics on communal lines. The novel is replete with the past events in the religious and political life of the nation. The whole novel is set in the year 1989, the year bears a significant mark in the history of India. This was the time when the whole nation was stirred with the construction of Ram Temple at Ayodhya. Tharoor has captured the facts of history to make the novel more vivid, lively and dynamic. He has used Priscilla as a mouthpiece to brief the reader on the colonial rule, partition, emergency and the burning issues in socio-political realities in India.

The main plot of the novel is built on two basic elements one is political and the other is historical. social and cultural. The first issue is the growing communalism as a product of partition in politics which has resulted into Ram Janmabhoomi. Babri Masjid conflict in 1990's. The other issue that emerges from history is the place of women in Indian society. Here, Tharoor faithfully portrays the confused post colonial situation and the anarchic conditions in the present day society. Through the portrayal of Sikh Police Officer, Gurinder Singh Tharoor reminds us of the Hindu-Sikh riots all over India in 1984 as "an orgy of slaughter of arson, of looting."

In *Riot* Tharoor reinterprets the legacy of history as a reference point for the present situation. Here he attempts not only to solve the mystery of Priscilla's cold blooded murder, but also tries to uncover the various neglected facts in Indian history. In the novel, Professor Sarwar is crafted on the actual historian Shahid Amin of Delhi University, as an expression of secular Muslims of India. Tharoor believes that historical periods are not unified entities. One of the characters in *Riot*, Professor Mohammad Sarwar asks :

But who owns India's history? Are there my history and his history about my history? This is many ways, what this whole Ram Janmabhoomi agitation is about - about the reclaiming of history by those who feel that were, of point, written out of the script. But can they write a new history without doing violence to the inheritors of the old"? (Tharoor, Riot 110)

Moreover, every character in the novel illustrates the aspects of Indian history through their arguments and views. This helps Tharoor to portray and perceive a single event of Priscilla's death from various angles. The social conditions of India are presented through Priscilla and her mother Katherine. Her father Rudyard Hart, as a former Senior Marketing Executive with Coca Cola explores the history of industrial facet of the country. Randy Diggs

probes into the political and religious past of India. Ramcharan Gupta articulates the Hindu Ideology in the history and Prof. Sarwar revives the Muslim's past. Laxman as a District Magistrate and SP. Gurinder Singh are the custodians of the secular democratic fabric of the country which does not make discrimination in terms of caste, creed, colour, language, region and religion. In short, *Riot* is a political novel revealing the ownership of Indian history.

While delineating historical and political characters Tharoor shows his great finesse in employing autobiographies in his novels. He prominently devotes his writing energies to deal with political discourse of the nation. *The Great Indian Novel* is full to the brim with his illustrations of past political leaders like Gandhi, Nehru, Subhashchandra Bose, Sardar Patel, Mohammad Ali Jinnah, Maulana Azad, Lal Bahadur Shastri, Indira Gandhi and the like. They are all presented by Tharoor in his own unique style rarely seen in Indian English writing after R.K Narayan. The novel portrays his deep concern for past political icons, their experiences, their timeless contribution and details of various episodes from their public and private life. Autobiographies and important life events of the past leaders have been profoundly used by Tharoor to develop his themes and imprint his thoughts

In his *Show Business* he has minutely observed the personal and private life of Amitabh to portray his hero in the novel. At every step we are reminded of the events, occasions, public and personal experience of the great actor. His struggle to settle in industry, his overnight success, his married life, his scandalous affairs with his co-stars and other women, his political fall, his severe accident on the set of the movie *Coolie* are drawn by Tharoor in disguise of Ashok Banjara in the novel. He provides each and every detail about the actor's personal and public life, as an actor, as an individual and as a politician. He also shares the memoirs and memories of legendary actors turned politicians like Sunil Dutt, N. T. Rama Rao, Rajesh Khanna, Shatrughan Sinha, Vinod Khanna and the legendary actors like Dilipkumar, Dev Anand, Ajit and so on. Thus autobiographical descriptions and delineations are centre to Tharoor's all three fictions.

### Conclusion:

Speaking in a nut shell we can state that Tharoor employs the autobiographical details, important events and occasions in life of late political icons, actors, singers, visionaries and freedom fighters in Indian history, politics and cinema to give impetus to his writing genius and bring liveliness in his novels. His all three novels are political novels and are stuffed with his scholarly analysis and illustrations of the past great leaders and eminent figures who have made and unmade India. His tone is sometimes irreverent, sometimes deviating and sometimes subversive. But his treatment to politics is evaluative and introspective in all his novels. Tharoor's evaluative and introspective tone about India's history as a post modern writer makes his novels a mature work of art.

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