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REINTERPRETATION OF MYTH AND HISTORY IN SHASHI THAROOR'S "THE GREAT INDIAN NOVEL"

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Abstract

Shashi Tharoor's *The Great Indian Novel* is a modern English novel that deals with the Indian myth Mahabharata that recites the freedom struggle in the history of modern India. The novel recreates the history of colonial and post-colonial India with real events and real characters from 20th century India. In this novel Tharoor retold mythological story as history of India. This research paper seeks to analyse how Tharoor's "The Great Indian Novel" reconstruct the history of India in a mythological story with real socio-political characters and events from 20th century and how Tharoor handles socio-political ideas in his novel.

Keywords: Colonial, Post-Colonial, Mythological, socio-political

Introduction

Shashi Tharoor's *The Great Indian Novel* goes back to the Pre-independence era with the scenes of 20th century Indian political movements. *The Great Indian Novel* is a wonderful title derived from the word Mahabharata, in Sanskrit "Maha" means 'great' and "Bharata" means "India". Personifying contemporary events in an ancient myth is mostly used in postmodern Indian English Fiction, started by Salman Rushdie in his work *Midnight's Children*, Tharoor enriched this method in his very first novel "The Great Indian Novel". According to Tharoor it is necessary to use myth and history to recreate the value of past reality and to develop knowledge about the Legends of The Indian Freedom struggle.

History and Myth

Historical writing is not the actual reality of the past, it is based on literature. Literature plays a

vital role in the presentation of historical events. Different interpretations of the same past historical events decide the social and political versions of that event. Tharoor showed his historical consciousness in the representation of Indian historical events like the partition of India and Pakistan in his work "The Great Indian Novel". Tharoor represented partition as metaphor to the past reality, according to Tharoor's view "Partition" is 'fractured perception of history'.

In 'The Great Indian Novel' Tharoor altered Indian history as mythical and democracy as caricature. Madhu Jain mentioned in his review, "Shashi Tharoor has taken the Mahabharata as a blueprint and filled it with a contemporary cast for his witty send-up of independent India. A sort of India revisited with the dramatis personae of the epic getting quite a bruising".

This novel objects modern myths of Indian independence and a narrative of democracy. Tharoor's creative knowledge lies-down on revealing how the methodology of the ancient epic can recreate modern India's political system. Tharoor collaborates the creativity of fiction and factual information to establish the historical figures like Gandhi, Nehru and Jinnah with their mythical counterparts. 'The Great Indian Novel ' is a reconstructed novel blending myth and history. Tharoor mocks the great national leaders like Gandhi and Nehru, Tharoor says that they are trapped in the local politics and forget their moral norms. He says that India has been decolonised by Indians after independence. Tharoor casts major characters as the binary opposite of tradition and modernity.

Ramayana and Mahabharata are the two great epics written by Rishi Valmiki. Religious texts like these two epics have influenced the great Indian civilization. In both these epics Rishi ved Vyas reflect the culture of the sub - continent people. Mahabharata reveals the rich civilization and a highly evolved society of the great and ancient land of Bharata. The Mahabharata establishes the intrinsic humanity which rejects the limitations created by caste, colour and language boundaries. Rajagopalachari, in his preface to the translation of the Mahabharata states, "Mahabharata is one of our noblest heritages..... It Strengthens the soul and drives home-as nothing else does – the vanity of ambition and the evil and futility of anger and hatred." (P3)

The Mahabharata is an epic tale portraying the Successional struggle for the throne of Hastinapur between pandavas and kauravas - two branches of heirs of Hastinapur kingdom. In this novel Tharoor identifies the story of developing Indian democracy as a struggle between groups and individuals closely related by their personal and political histories. In this novel, Tharoor recreated the epic Indian tale with narration of the history of twentieth century India. In this novel, Tharoor used digressional method of storytelling and made a conscious use of mythical events and situations to develop the effect of the contemporary scenario.

Political Leaders with Mythology:

The title 'The Great Indian Novel ' is inspired by the word Mahabharata, in Sanskrit 'Maha' means great and 'Bharata' means India. In this novel Tharoor created same atmospherics of Mahabharata with modern history, even the organisation of chapters also imitates the epic Mahabharata for example this novel had eighteen books as same as Mahabharata it symbolises the war between pandavas and kauravas lasted for eighteen days.

In the opening chapter "The Twice born Tale" Ved Vyas narrates the whole story to Ganapathi as same as Vyasa to Ganesh in the opening chapter of Mahabharata. *The Great Indian Novel* describes battle for the independence of Hastinapur under the characters like Maha guru Gangaji, his Mango March, blind nationalist, British Vicereine, Karna, Pandu and Priya Duryodhani. Here Tharoor symbolically picturises,

Gangaji as 'Mahatma Gandhi', Mango March as ' Salt March',

Blind nationalist as ' Jawaharlal Nehru',

British Vicereine as 'Lady Mountbatten', Karna as ' Mohammed Ali Jinnah', Pandu as 'Subhas Chandra Bose',

Priya Duryodhani as 'Indira Gandhi'.

In this novel, Bhishma from Mahabharata and Gandhi from Indian freedom fight jointly become the characters Mahaguru Gangaji or Ganga Datta. Tharoor compared these two characters because of their equal seriousness in their principles and intentional surrender of their claim to lower and administration of the country. Tharoor set up Gangaji's character as a sincere, selfless and successful politician.

In Mahabharata, Dhritarashtra and Pandu are the heirs to the throne of Hastinapur after Bhishma, likewise Nehru and Subhas were the contenders for leading the country after Gandhi in Indian political history. In this way Tharoor compares Nehru with Dhritarashtra and Subhas Chandra Bose with Pandu. It was Gangaji's bias against Pandu and blind favour towards Dhritarashtra that created the place for

Dhritarashtra in the Hastinapur political arena. It pictures Gandhi's unreasonable and blind bias in favour of Nehru.

Tharoor says that hunger for power is the main cause of the battle of kurukshetra. Tharoor introduces the character of Karna who was deprived of his rightful position because of his circumstances of birth but he fought for his rights and succeeded in setting up a new nation named Karnistan. Here Karna stands for Jinnah and Karnistan stands for Pakistan, this chapter speaks about the partition of India and Pakistan which happened on 14th August 1947, an event that influenced the future of two nations. It is recorded as 'The Partition' in Indian History, Tharoor views it as a fractured perception of history.

Tharoor narrated Gandhiji's characters as he is impossible to ignore and impossible to imitate but he was responsible for the partition of India. Tharoor does not say that Gangaji is the reason for partition but Gangaji's (Gandhiji) ideas and principles were the reason for separation of political leaders like Karna (Jinnah).

Tharoor describes Karna's disapproval of Gangaji in following words: "Karna was not much of a Muslim but he found Gangaji too much of a Hindu" (P.192). This novel illuminates the misfortune of India that it could not produce another leader like Gangaji, Dhritarashtra betrayed trust and faith of Gangaji as the leader of Kauravas, as soon as liberated India is born.

Recent Historiography

In this novel, Tharoor remarks on various popular incidents in the history of India. He portrayed some incidents which show the brutality of British, they are, Bibigarh massacre which refers to Jallianwala Bagh tragedy and Chaurasta event which refers to Chauri Chaura Incident. The portrayal of Jallianwala Bagh massacre by Tharoor shows his approval with Samuel P. Huntington's words, "The West won the world not by the superiority of its ideas or values or religion but rather by superiority in applying organized violence."

Then he describes about the Kashmir Incident, he says that the Kashmir agreement was signed by Maharaja Vyabhichar Singh on the demand of women in his bed but historians say that it was Nehru who delayed in signing of the contract, when they seek help from the Indian government to give them military support Nehru agreed only after the appointment of Sheikh Abdullah as chief minister of Kashmir. According to Tharoor in the Kashmir incident, Nehru acted according to the suggestions given by Viceroy and had taken irrational decisions for which India has to pay to the present day. Tharoor ironically says that before independence, the country was oppressed by aliens but after independence she was suffering at the hands of her own leaders. Tharoor applauded Gangaji, who had nonviolently shaken the British but became weak in preventing partition of the subcontinent. This is why Gandhiji (Gangaji) was killed by Nathu Ram Godse. Godse killed Gandhiji because Mahatma cheated the nation. In this novel the character named 'Shikhandi' stands for Godse. Shikhandi is actually Amba in epic, she changed her sex and name to kill Gangaji for his blender to withdraw from the political scene of partition and she killed him. Godse recognized Gandhi was unjust in forcing the Indian government to give fifty-five crores to

Pakistan at the time of partition, Pakistan spent that money in buying weapons to fight against Indian forces in Kashmir. In Nehru's period the communal problems between Hindu - Muslim became an international problem and even now we are facing the same problem. He ironically says that Gangaji (Gandhiji) was the man who stood for Hindu - Muslim unity throughout his life became responsible for communal problems between Hindus and Muslims.

Dr. Dhar commented that, "It is somewhat ironic that a person who fought all his life for Hindu-Muslim unity has to be made responsible for encouraging Muslim separatism, but this is implicit in Tharoor's understanding of Gangaji and of several historians too." Tharoor through his reinterpretation has tried to reduce the unnecessary tensions based on earlier history. For the better health of the society some historical incidents should be reconstructed with a new perspective.

Reinterpretation of Myth and History:

The epical, narrative method of this novel shows another noteworthy characteristic of post-colonial writings. History plays a vital role in postmodern Indian English fictions both as a context and as reality. This novel blends both myth and history into a narrative fiction which makes this work a masterpiece. This novel is a first person narrative, Ved Vyas dictator of this story appears timeless. He says about his legs as "my ageless legs", it shows the indicative writing style of the author. Myth is based on one's beliefs and faith not on scientific truth. In our present life we cannot get answers to many problems but mythical stories like the epic Mahabharata will solve our problems. Mahabharata is considered as a guardian of mankind. Re interpretation of myth and history will transform the perspective of modern life. Re interpretation of myth and history is a significant aspect of this novel. Revaluation of Indian myth and colonial history with a new perspective should help to reduce the problems created by communal riots. For example still we are facing Kashmir problem, Hindu – Muslim opposition and separatists movements in North-India.

Social and Political ideologies:

To make an impression that the entire story happens in colonised India the Britishers are introduced into this story. Ganga Datta or Gangaji introduced as a principled character, only by his modest appeal the British Government approved the marriage between Satyavati and king Shantanu (Gangaji's father), here Gangaji is correlated to Gandhiji. Gangaji transformed himself into a sage, he puts his efforts to eradicate class distinction and he questions the 'Varna dharma'.

"Problem is, he is now going further. Preaching a Lot of damn nonsense about equality and justice And what have you. And you tell me he cleans His own toilet, instead of letting his damn bhisti Do it" (P.33).

Through these words of Churchill Tharoor portrays the transformation of Gangaji from a normal man to humane. Gangaji threatened the British Government by speaking about "Swaraj"(self-

rule) and "Pan Indian Nationalism". Queen Victoria opened the doors of the ICS (Indian Civil Service) to the natives. Tharoor marks this as an important upgrade in the administration field.

In this novel the kauravas party refers to India's congress party. Here the blind patriarch Dhritarashtra referred to Nehru and daughter of Dhritarashtra Priya Duryodhani referred to Indira Gandhi. In five Pandavas, Yudhishtir symbolises India's political traditional,

Bhim refers armed forces, Arjun refers press,

Nakul refers administration,

Sahadev refers to diplomatic services and Draupadi represents Indian democracy.

Tharoor puts the imposition of Duryodhani's 'siege' as a reference to Indira Gandhi's state of emergency from 1975 to 1977. Tharoor Portrayed Priya Duryodhani as a self-made woman with firm conviction. Pandavas are controlled by Guru Jayaprakash Drona, here Jaya prakash Drona referred to Jayaprakash Narayana.

"While some of our historical-scientific claims (To have discovered the secret of nuclear fission In the fourth century A.D., for instance) are justly Challenged by western scholars, no one questions In fact that our ancestors were the first to Conceive of the zero. Before that mathematicians, From Arabs to the Chinese, left a blank space in their calculations, it too Indians to realize that Even nothing can be something" (P.216).

Through these words of Drona Tharoor shows the greatness of Indian culture and tradition. At last viscount Drewpad - the British official transferred the power to Indian Government on 15th august 1947 and at the same time Karnistan (Pakistan) was divided from India. Before the independence Dhritarashtra head of kauravas falls into an illegal affair with Lady Drewpad. Tharoor says that there is a premature baby between Dhritarashtra and Lady Drewpad named Draupadi Mokras (a personification of Indian democracy). Tharoor emphasises that India got freedom because of the affair between Dhritarashtra and Lady Drewpad not by the efforts of Gangaji. Dhritarashtra and his

daughter Priya successfully created a modern industrial revolution in India. After Dhritarashtra Shishupal (Lal Bahadur Shastri) was selected as the prime minister but later Priya Duryodhani replaced him.

Priya's reign is aptly titled 'reign of error' because the unity and morality of the Kaurava party was destroyed by her leadership. In the fourth general election kauravas party closely lost all the seats in all over the country but regained the power. Because of Priya's disrespectful act towards Yudhishtir leads him to resign. Yudhishtir referred to Moraji Desai.

Drona represented the Janata party and started preaching new civil disobedience against the rule of Prime Minister Priya. Yudhishtir started working with Drona. In Drona's home state the president rule is imposed known as 'siege'. The poor suffered in the hands of police and the displaced from their home in the name of slum clearance campaign.

Suddenly Priya suspends the siege and calls for a general election. Tharoor calls this election as "great Indian tamasha". Booths are captured, voters are oppressed by assault and sometimes shot. It is like the battle of kurukshetra. But the results are against Priya and Janata Front defeated her. Yudhishtir is selected as prime Minister. Now Draupadi (Indian democracy) has become healthy. But the majority of Janata party's MP's back- stop the prime minister and joined hands with Priya again Priya gained the power, so the Government finally fell.

"If you begin an examination by avoiding the most difficult question it raised it is that very question that will eventually guarantee your failure" (P.582).

Conclusion

Tharoor's *The Great Indian Novel* is an intellectual literary art. In conclusion, it can be said that Tharoor's *The Great Indian Novel* An excellent postcolonial text on the use of postmodern techniques reverse, distortion, parody and paste. Brave interlude, parody, satire and selected, this masterpiece of Indian writing in English manifests

itself in Indian politics Systems, brilliantly legendary by its author. In which meaning and absurdity conflict The Mahabharata is reviewed and resolved directly. In both novels the analogy 'meaning by writing' is conveyed by their narrators. Save the country by any immediate personal action is the completion and the object Must be accomplished by looking for dads. Search for missing roots defined by one culture or religion but supported by many, many references. The 'hole' of hope or despair must be filled by a different structure of Enlightenment. The rigidity of old beliefs must be abandoned for the benefit of diversity. Many roots and ideas. Thus the new myth and its search for meaning are viewed from a cosmological point of view. The perspective of Hinduism is supported by other traditions and their many references. Images are an appeal to pluralism, tolerance and change. Unilateral strict adherence to wholeness of opinion, prejudice, and principles Tradition. All the basic human qualities are emphasized because they unite people's Dictatorship ideologies and the final facts that separate them. It is hoped that the most important community of "Eternal India", "recovering from the cycle" will finally emerge Crowds of people. This research paper analyzes Tharoor's *The Great Indian Novel* in Post-colonial perspective. The novel explores Indian mythology and postcolonial images and personalities.

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