

## FACTUALISM AND FICTIONALISM IN SHASHI THAROOR'S WORKS

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### ABSTRACT

*Shashi Tharoor (1956) has gained a unique position in the field of Indian Writing in English as his novels focus on contemporary social issues. His novels mostly focus on contemporary social and political issues that affect the common man. His works spin around the social evils concurrent in society as obstacles for the growth of the nation. He portrays how the clashes between two religions groups results in a riot in which a number of innocent lives become the prey. By presenting voices from both the Hindu and the Muslim communities, he tries to prove how history is misled by personal favours. The purpose of this article is to present factualism and fictionalism of Shashi Tharoor's works.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Communal Violence, Secularism, Mob Mentality, History, Social Reform*

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### INTRODUCTION

Shashi Tharoor is a leading Indian author who defies any branding as he is a journalist as well as novelist; partial historian cum political writer. Such a writer would not confine his writings to any genre as his creativity breaks all the boundaries to manifest in one or other forms. Being a journalist is not that much hard as their pen mostly deals with factual details that are mostly political in nature, though other facts or not difficult to find. Likewise, Tharoor, as a novelist has written couple of novels that are not only interesting but also touch the murky details of the Indian political scenario.

His work, *The Elephant, The Tiger and The Cell Phone* is a fine one that has lots of factual details, it is a book where many articles of Shashi Tharoor has been compiled for easy reading. It is natural that articles are published in newspapers, but very few eyes glance through it as the author himself would not stick to any one newspaper for long. So, he himself has taken the genuine effort to bring out all his articles in the form of book. The book covers almost all fields right from politics to cricket including the aspects of communalism, casteism and even 'thali'.

The purpose of this article is to showcase the inner strings of Indian Culture to the outer world. Being a journalist is not that much hard as the facts are already available and it is enough for the author to arrange his ideas and words in an acceptable form. There is no need for him to squeeze the imaginary part of his brain. But the case of fiction is different. As a fictional writer, lots of imaginary work has to be done by the author and along with the imaginary part he also has to work on with the individuality of the work and has to cross check if the same plot has been taken up by anyone else. In "INDIA: From Mid night to the Millennium", the writer is neither a novelist nor a historian nor a political scientist, nor a journalist. This is a work where

Shashi Tharoor projects himself as a Jack of all arts as he touches the surface of all aspects of Indian culture without any fictionality in it.

Interestingly, he begins the work almost like a historian recounting the days of Indian Independence when the country attained independence in the year 1947 August 15 and there after reaching the 50<sup>th</sup> year of Independence in the year 1997. As a factual writer, he cherishes the glorious day for he feels that it is a great thing for the nation. He also delves on certain pertinent questions relating to India in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. He recalls the past, twenty one year ago, when he was a youth and had just completed his college education when a leading Indian national newspaper summoned him to work on an article on the Indian Independence.

Ironically, it was a time when the emergency was declared and there was a press censorship met in India. He confides that the hard earned freedom was in peril and he himself was in a confused state of mind and had to start his article in a cynical mode trading the contemporary citizen for their fadedness and worn out mentality. He mentioned the usage of bombastic words that were a bit over worked but still it had its desired impact on the readers. Thus beginning of the work showed the passion and the zeal of the young writer who was hardly 19 or 20 years old then. It also shows his journalistic mind set.

Tharoor tries to expand his literary ambit to the utmost level in the above mentioned book as politics predominates in the first phase of the book. He deals with geographical nature of the Indian sub-continent and there after touches the outlines of the Indian Independence history and its subsequent consequences resulting in the death of Mahatma Gandhi. Gradually, his work moves on to the two disastrous assassinations of Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi, which had a terrible impact on the Indian political and social spectrum. He also looks back at the times of Nehru and his daughter Indira who ruled India with an iron hand. Generally, the evolution of Congress is dealt with in the work. Lot of factual details pertaining to the Indian unity and diversity finds place in the work. The red splashes of communal frenzy and its impact on the secular fabric of the nation were also dealt in this work. The aspects of reservation, economic growth, agricultural revolution and poverty, the 21<sup>st</sup> century India and the future of the nation were recorded by the author. All the details mentioned above shows the factual face of the author and the journalistic instinct of the writer finds face through this book. It shows the right facts and in a way tries to simplify the complicated issues that had been happening in the country for these many years.

A journalist need not just deal with the facts but should also take a view regarding an issue. Tharoor performs the task with perfection. For instance, regarding the communal frenzy that grasps the country at times, he comes out clearly in support of secularism. He uses his own familial background in pushing the view that “Hindus” in general should not be a fanatic. He decries the expression “Hindu fanaticism” and tries to project the importance of respecting and accepting other’s religious beliefs, being a journalist helps a writer to ground himself in the social problems and as an intellect can always advocate the right solution to the burning problems. It may not give instant solution but still the ideas will slowly get disseminated to the distant minds. It is an undeniable fact that only the intellectuals decide the course of a nation and it is enough if the author like Shashi Tharoor enlightened the society’s intellectuals, for they can very well transform the society.

But the novel *Riot* shows the fictional face of the author. It is again a work that deals with social issues but in an imaginary way. The novel has Priscilla Hart – an American – as the protagonist, who lands in India as a student to do her research in the field of population control. In the course of her research, she falls in love with one man named Lakshman, the district magistrate of a backward town Zalilgarh. Both of them become so intimate that their evenings are usually spent

in the outskirts of the town in a dilapidated building. Their relationship also become a sort of sexual one and their frequent togetherness makes Lakshman's friends like Gurinder Singh to warn and admonish the District Magistrate. Suddenly, a communal issue burgeons into a full-fledged riot where people from both the communities are killed and maimed. Priscilla is one more victim whose death reverberates throughout the world especially in the United States of America.

The novel deals with a social issue but it does not show the sufferings of the multitudes. Instead, the work focuses more on the minds of the characters. Imagination is fertile throughout the work and it reveals the fictional capabilities of the author. The novel is unlike the traditional works and here too the imagination performs a wonderful act. Instead of the conventional narrative pattern the author employs letters and interviews to take forward the story. Thus, the research would focus on the fictional aspects and the fictional capabilities of the author.

Thus representing different themes and diverse colonial/postcolonial perspectives through his stand-in, rather quintessential characters, Shashi Tharoor gives a postmodern portrayal of the postcolonial scenario in his novels. Tharoor consciously utilises the variety of myths and archetypes to give meaning to the social, political and cultural milieu of India. Both history and myth, lend a novel dimensions to the over determining of the literary text, in modernist and postmodernist trends. The novel shares a variety of literary devices such as irony, satire, force and parody to enrich its literariness and heighten the literary worth. In this connection Tharoor (tharoor.in) comments:

The re-written text consists in allegorical operations. It is written in terms of some master code or ultimately determining instance', the particular master code exerted for the purpose is its 'transcendental signified'. The text has to blurt out its master code and thereby several its metaphysical moorings and ideological underpinnings. The text projects the various notions of unity and coherence of consciousness. It always presupposes a concept of unconscious. It affects this process through some mechanism of mystification, repression in terms of which it would make sense to seek a more fundamental interpretive code. The act of demystification falls within texts the ambit of hermeneutics of negative kind. (76)

He, thus, uncovers before the readers the venomous ideas and contemptuous of the outfits operating in the shifting domain of religion and politics. The single greatest contribution of India to world civilisation is to demonstrate that there is nothing antithetical between diversity and nationhood. As Shashi Tharoor mentions with pride: "I write of India with multiple truths and multiple realities, an idea that is greater than the sum of its parts" (46). In his opinion, the future of India depends on enlarged freedom for the multi-racial and the poly-cultural, in the world of shifting, decaying and emerging power centers. Thus the paper tries to bring out the elements that determine the fictional and factual works. There cannot be a better author than Shashi Tharoor, for he is the only one who performs with his journalist duties and fictional duties with perfection.

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