



International Research Journal of Humanities, Language and Literature

ISSN: (2394-1642)

Impact Factor 6.959 Volume 8, Issue 7, July 2021

Association of Academic Researchers and Faculties (AARF)
Website-www.aarf.asia, Email : editor@aarf.asia , editoraarf@gmail.com

Depiction of History in Shashi Tharoor's Novels

Aradhna kamra
Assistant Professor of English,
Government Ripudaman College, Nabha.(punjab)

Abstract: -The present work is about the reflection of history in the novels of Shashi Tharoor. The work includes his two valuable novels such as *The Great Indian Novel*, *An Era of Darkness: The British Empire*. The research focuses on thematic focus of his work which reveals his sense of pride in Indian culture, heritage and history. *The Great Indian Novel* retells the political history of 20th century India which records political history of modern India on the structure of great Hindu epic the *Mahabharata*. In this research paper, I seek to focus on the new historical notion that reinterprets myth and history for reconstruction of the past reality. It also analyzes *An Era of Darkness: The British Empire in India* as a rejection of singularity of truth. Shashi Tharoor also comments on various popular and critical incidents in Indian history. It also deals with socio-literary perspective, History and Politics in an Indian Perspective, Problematic Pre-Independence History of India and Rewriting of Post-Independence History.

Key words:- Indian culture, heritage, history and postcolonial context.

Introduction: - Shashi Tharoor a prolific Indian writer and former U.N. diplomat has captured Indian past and changing realities of Indian social life in his fiction. His works deal with 'matter of India' by re-writing its past and re-interpreting it in various ways. The

matter of his creative outputs is India. Many Indian writers used myth and history in their creative writings to bring out greater truths and concealed meanings. Where myth strengthens the functionality of a literary piece, history justifies its authenticity. The reality of a literary work which lies within the imagination of the reader must also have the scope of transcending its historical position.

Murry Krieger rightly observed that “history itself must be seen, not as brute facts, but as subjects to the forms of the human discourse that creates it as meaningful for the rest of us. All empirical reality, including the raw materials for our formulations of history, is seen as oppressively outside us, a formless continuum that threatens our freedom to create the purposive and causal relations which convert these materials into the humanistic disciplines” (Murray: 1974). Now many contemporary writers write with an informed awareness and aim at re-defining their identity, evaluating their present, repositioning their past while asserting images of myth and history.

In 20th century several Indian writers consciously used history as a literary device in their creative writings. In Rohinton Mistry’s *A Fine Balance*, Manju Kapur’s *Difficult Daughter’s*, Kunal Basu’s *Opium Clerk* and Amitav Ghosh’s *The Shadow Lines*, for example, history reappears with a new meaning and an immediacy of appeal. They employed an ancient myth in a contemporary milieu and reinterpreted in terms of historical significance. Indian writers should not commit pen to writing until he has spent ten years of his mature life carefully brooding the Indian classics, learning the Indian tradition and absorbing the Indian history.

Aijaz Ahmed expresses a similar view when he says that “colonialism becomes a trans-historical thing always present and always in a process of dissolution in one part of

the world or another”(Ahmed: 1995).On the other hand Helen Tiffin says that “History may have “happened”somewhere, but it issues recorded as “event” as text. Since the history of post-colonial territories,was, until recently, largely a narrative constructed by the colonizer, its fictions and the languagesin which they are written, operate as means to cultural control”(Tiffin:1988,p173).

Tharoor writes in his“Afterword” issues in this novel are based on people and events described in the great epic... awork remain a perennial source of delight and inspiration to millions in India”(Tharoor:1989,p.419).That’swhy, it is necessary to interpret myth and history to reconstruct the value of past reality and todevelop modern sensibility about the great legends of the Indian freedom struggle.

Historical writing does not refer to the actual reality of the past because history mediates through literature. Literature plays an important role in the articulation of social practices.Society is a product of ideology and situated in relation with culture which issimilar to theliterary text in its endless play of signs and difference in meaning. Anusha U. R, commented in her article that “History in the postmodern world is problimatizes and its truth and objectivityare called into question. Different interpretations of the same historical events byhistorians reveal the social and political codes that decide their versions of the past”(Anusha: 2015).

Tharoorrevealed historical consciousness in his representation of the partition, the emergency and otherhistorical events. He has represented partition as a metaphor to reconstruction of the past realityfrom the fractured perception of history. The truth of the past can be verified in history only byrelaying upon literary evidence of the present.The imaginative re-telling and re-casting of Indianhistory and mythology in a culturally

hybrid environment with innovative literary technique giving many literary works to different settings. These trend setter writers have given a new direction to Indian English writing.

The Great Indian Novel, Tharoor recast Indian history as mythical and democracy as Caricature. Madhu Jain remarked 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” (Tharoor: 1989). Tharoor’s creativity lies in revealing how the methodology of the ancient epic can replay the political system of modern India.

An Era of Darkness: The British Empire. Tharoor implicates that the process of history making are not separate from literature making. Tharoor combines the creativity of fiction and the scholarship of factual information to identify the historical figures like Gandhi, Nehru and Jinnah with their mythological counterparts. In employing such technique, Tharoor imparts the objectivity of factual history with potential for fictional probability. He juxtaposes the two narratives to foreground history as highly transformative discourse ever open to reinterpretation. Tharoor’s open ended narrative re-opens the narratives of the fiction and history and the metaphorical description affirms the endless possibilities of meaning.

The Great Indian Novel is a reconstructed text blending myth and history. Tharoor’s mockery to the national leaders is a part of his new narrative technique and evolution of new political archetype. The great leaders like Gandhi and Nehru received here a total disregard at the hand of Shashi Tharoor. He rejected the great leader being disloyal to themselves, who trapped in the local politics and forget the ethical norms from

their moral commitment. He tells India's story of bitter colonization experience and continues to the struggles of Indians to decolonize it.

The novel is deep rooted in Indian history. He depicted colonial incident which focuses the grotesque brutality of the British in the novel is Bibigarh massacre referred to the Jalianwala Bagh tragedy in the Indian history. The similar incidents in the novel are 'Chaurasta' event, actually known as the Chauri Chaura incident, Nathu Ram Godse killed Mahatma Gandhi, illegitimate relationship with Viceroy's wife lady Mountbatten, emergency incident and most critical incident of Kashmir's king. The Maharaja Vyabhichar Sing signed the contract of Kashmir agreement simply on the demand of the women in his bed. Historians generally believe that instead of the Maharaja, as shown by Tharoor in his fictionalized historical story, it was Nehru who caused delay in the signing of the contract. Nehru, the prime minister of India, kept the wazir waiting in Delhi for three days, while Pakistan's forces moved into Kashmir. Nehru agreed to help Kashmir only after the Maharaja appointed Sheikh Abdullah as the chief minister of Kashmir.

Nehru had decided to go to the U. N. O., a decision that earned him the utter disdain of the people of India. Tharoor's novel emerges as an outstanding exemplification of the persistence of British colonialism, in the liberated and free India. His fiction explicitly reveals that while before 15th August, 1947, the country was exploited by aliens, after independence she was forced to suffer at the hands of her own leader. That's why he was murdered by Nathu Ram Godse, represented as 'Shikhandi' in the novel. It shows that Nathu Ram killed Gandhiji because he felt that mahatma cheated him and the nation.

Tharoor's Shikhandi not only expressed his personal reasons for killing Gangaji but also echoed those of Nathu Ram Godse's Gandhi's assassination. Nathu Ram

perceived Gandhi to be unjust in forcing the Indian government to give fifty five crores of rupees to Pakistan at a time of partition which returned with invaded India in Kashmir. Pakistan purchased weapon with that money for fighting Indian forces. Perhaps Gandhi's fast is not accepted by Godse and many Hindus had begun to doubt the wisdom of Gandhi's dabbling of politics. Further, question of Hindu-Muslim not only communal but became international in the period of Nehru and even today we are facing same everlasting problem. Thus Tharoor suggests that Gangaji, who stood for Hindu-Muslim unity throughout his life, ironically became responsible for the augmentation of the communal tensions between Hindu and Muslims. Dr. Dhar observes it is somewhat ironical 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. Thus many historical incidents he tried to reinterpret with his own imaginative genius.

Even today the perception of these incidents is totally fractured and cause of communal turmoil in the society. Through reinterpretation, he tried to less down the tensions based on earlier consumption of the history. He also tried to fetch the people from their imaginative glorious past to the current nude realities of the modern life. Some bitter historical incident should be purified and reconstruct with new perspective for the better health of the society. Tharoor has taken pains in doing his best at pointing out the situation and the history of unrest existing between two-religions and a love story of cross- cultural beings.

An Era of Darkness: The British Empire Shashi Tharoor also comments on various popular and critical incidents in Indian history. He depicted colonial incident which focuses the grotesque brutality of the British in the novel is Bibigarh massacre

referred to the Jalianwala Bagh tragedy in the Indian history. The description of Jalianwala Bagh massacre by Tharoor shows his agreement with the likes of Samuel P. Huntington, who believe that “the West won the world not by the superiority of its ideas or values or religion but rather by superiority in applying organized violence.”

The similar incidents in the novel are ‘Chaurasta’ event, actually known as the Chauri Chaura incident, Nathu Ram Godse killed Mahatma Gandhi, illegitimate relationship with Viceroy’s wife lady Mountbatten, emergency incident and most critical incident of Kashmir’s king. The Maharaja Vyabhisar Sing signed the contract of Kashmir agreement simply on the demand of the women in his bed. Historians generally believe that instead of the Maharaja, as shown by Tharoor in his fictionalized historical story, it was Nehru who caused delay in the signing of the contract.

According to them, as soon as the Pakistani forces attacked Kashmir, the Maharaja had sent his wazir to Delhi, requesting the Indian government to give military support to Kashmir, against the Pakistan’s, while in return Kashmir would join to India. Nehru, the prime minister of India, kept the wazir waiting in Delhi for three days, while Pakistan’s forces moved into Kashmir. Nehru agreed to help Kashmir only after the Maharaja appointed Sheikh Abdullah as the chief minister of Kashmir. Moreover when the Indian Army was steadily and successfully pushing back the enemy, a ceasefire was announced by the United Nations.

Nehru had decided to go to the U. N. O., a decision that earned him the utter disdain of the people of India. In the narrative, Tharoor suggests that Nehru had acted in accordance with the suggestion of the Vicereine, and had taken an absurd decision for which India has to pay to the present day.

Tharoor's novel emerges as an outstanding exemplification of the persistence of British colonialism, in the liberated and free India. His fiction explicitly reveals that while before 15th August, 1947, the country was exploited by aliens, after independence she was forced to suffer at the hands of her own leader. Tharoor's much praised hero Gangaji, who had non-violently shaken mighty British Empire but became weak to use the same weapon to prevent partition of the subcontinent. That's why he was murdered by Nathu Ram Godse, represented as 'Shikhandi' in the novel. Shikhandi, who is actually Amba in epic, changed sex and name killed Gangaji for his mistake to withdraw from political scene of partition.

The novels show that Nathu Ram killed Gandhi because he felt that Mahatma cheated him and the nation. Tharoor's Shikhandi not only expressed his personal reasons for killing Gangaji but also echoed those of Nathu Ram Godse's Gandhi's assassination. Nathu Ram perceived Gandhi to be unjust in forcing the Indian government to give fifty five crores of rupees to Pakistan at a time of partition which returned with invaded India in Kashmir. Pakistan purchased weapon with that money for fighting Indian forces. Perhaps Gandhi's fast is not accepted by Godse and many Hindus had begun to doubt the wisdom of Gandhi's dabbling of politics.

Further, question of Hindu-Muslim not only communal but became international in the period of Nehru and even today we are facing same everlasting problem. Thus Tharoor suggests that Gangaji, who stood for Hindu-Muslim unity throughout his life, ironically became responsible for the augmentation of the communal tensions between Hindu and Muslims. Commenting on Tharoor's comprehension and depiction of Mahatma Gandhi's role in colonial India, Dr. Dhar observes, "It is somewhat ironical 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" (Dhar:1999, p 221.)

Thus many historical incidents he tried to reinterpret with his own imaginative genius. Even today the perception of these incidents is totally fractured and cause of communal turmoil in the society. Through reinterpretation, he tried to less down the tensions based on earlier consumption of the history. He also tried to fetch the people from their imaginative glorious past to the current nude realities of the modern life. Some bitter historical incident should be purified and reconstruct with new perspective for the better health of the society.

Conclusion: -The article has thus elaborated various ways used by Tharoor to record his version of twentieth century India in *The Great Indian Novel* and *An Era of Darkness: The British Empire*. The paper has discussed thematic focus and history of his works. All of Tharoor's works reveal his vision of India and sense of Indianness. They reveal his sense of pride in Indian culture, heritage and history. It analyzes *The Great Indian Novel* which seeks to reclaim "for Indians the story of India's experience with foreign rule and its nationalist reassertion, including the triumphs and disappointments of freedom" on the structure of the epic the *Mahabharata*. *Riot* narrates the history of the period which has led to Ram Janambhoomi and Babri Masjid conflict. The novel analyzes fictional as well as historical event from various perspectives. Both the novels not only narrate history of India in fictional terms but also discard dominant Western notion of historical discourses.

Works Cited:

1. Ahmed, Aijaz. "The Politics of Literary Postcoloniality," *Race and Class* 36.3(1995).

2. Anusha U. R, “*Playing With History and Fiction: Language as Medium*” The Indian Review of World Literature in English Vol. 11 No. 2 July, 2015
3. Dhar, “*T.N. History-Fiction Interface in English Novel.*” New Delhi: Prestige, 1999. 221.
4. Ghosh, Tapan.K. (2008). Shashi Tharoor’s The Great Indian Novel – A Critical Study, New Delhi: Asia Book Club.
5. Iyengar, K.R.S. (1982). Indian Writing in English, New Delhi: Sterling Publication.
6. Munshi,K.M. preface, *Mahabharata* by C. Rajagopalchari, (Bombay: BhartiyaVidyaBhavan, 1978) 2.
7. Mukherjee, Meenakshi. 1971. *The Twice Born Fiction*. New Delhi: Arnold-Heinemann. C. Rajagopalchari,*Mahabharata*(Bombay: BhartiyaVidyaBhavan, 1978) 4.
8. Patil, Geeta. M. (2007). The Heart belongs to India, Shashi Tharoor, his vision and art, NewDelhi: Creative Books.
9. Krieger, Murray, “*Fiction, History and Empirical Reality,*” Critical Inquiry Dec. 1974. P.353-54.
10. Sharma, Diksha. “*Shashi Tharoor’s Novels: A Postcolonial and Postmodern Perspective.*”B.R. Publishing Corporation Delhi, 2013.
11. Shekhar, Sudhendu (2004). History and Fiction, New Delhi: Prestige Books, Page No. 9 – 117.
12. Stephen Slemon,“*Post-Colonial Allegory and the Transformation of History,*” Journal of Commonwealth Literature,23:1(1988).
13. Tiffin, Helen. “*Post-Colonialism, Post-Modernism and the Rehabilitation of Post-Colonial History,*” Journal of Commonwealth Literature, 23:1(1988). P. 173.
14. Tharoor, Shashi. The Great Indian Novel, New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1989.

15. -----, *An Era of Darkness: The British Empire in India*. Aleph Book Company, 2016.
16. Young, Robert. "*Post-colonialism: A very Short Introduction*" (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999) 221.