

A GREAT INDIAN NOVEL BY SHASHI THAROOR, A PASAGE TO MAHABARATHA

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ABSTRACT

ShashiTharoor's title, *The Great Indian Novel* (1989) is perhaps derived from the concept of "*The Great American Novel*" Philip Roth uses this Concept and given it as his title for his novel published in 1973 While Philip Roth take the American pastime, baseball, as him background, such as ShashiTharoor's "*The Great Indian Novel*" distinctly relates to the ancient epic "*The Mahabharata*. In Sanskrit '*Maha*' means '*Great*' and '*Bharata*' means '*India*' Thus The Mahabharata is a great Indian Story.

Keywords: *Concept, Distinctly, Ancient, Mahabharata.*

INTRODUCTION

ShashiTharoor's *The Great Indian Novel* is not only an ambitious novel but a complex work of art If is an entertaining and occasionally movingback that will certainly repay the time of anyone interested in and moderately knowledgeable about two some what disparate subjects, *The Mahabharata and the history of modern India, which are so clearly and pointedly intertwined in this remarkable book.*

Hence The Mahabharata is the great story of the Indian race, The *Bharatas*, The *Ancestors* of present day Indians. The last world of the title also deserves a brief comment. If indeed the next can be read as belonging to the polymorphous genre of fiction, it is novel also in so far as it offers new and one way add contemporarymaterial, about the story of India as told through the ancient epic.

The visible text is that of Indian history from the birth of the nationalist movement under the *British Raj* to the situation of the country after the assassination of *Indira Gandhi*, which is, roughly speaking, the last century of Indian History. So it is essentially a vision of New India that

comes to mind as the reader goes through the four hundred or so pages of the narrative of the novel which is constructed as an epic dictated by an aged politician and poet, VedVyasa, to a scribe Ganpathi.

ShashiTharoor-VedVyasa in *The Great Indian Novel* narrate to Ganpathi, his script-writer, in pretentious jocular, garrulous, and perky manner the story of Modern India. He not only transforms the ancient myth into pre-Independence and post-Independence politics but also transforms the contemporary political history into a myth of some kind or other.

ShashiTharoor established his name in post Modern English literature with the publication of "The Great Indian Novel" in 1989. The story narrated in the novel is more or less a political commentary on the history of India since the advent of Gandhi. Characters in this political novel bear the names of characters from Mahabharata, *Gandhi* is *Gangaji*, *Dhritarashtra* is *Jawaharlal Nehru*, and *Priya* is *Indira Priyadarshini*.

The story begins with Gandhi or Gangaji and moves to the days of Jawaharlal Nehru as the prime Minister of India, and then to LalBahadurShastri and Indira Priyadarshini. The novel ends with the days of National Emergency and the Emergence of Janata party, its grand alliance, success in the polls and its defeat later on.

In this novel every significant individual in the Indian freedom struggle and Post Independence political arena from Gandhi and Jinnah to Lord Mountbatten, Indira Gandhi, and Morarji Desai is cleverly represented by a more or less appropriate Character from the ancient epic. While this historic actions interactions are made to conform to the poem's well known episode ShashiTharoor's "Fiction recasting" of the epic sets up a perspective which connects not only its narrative but also the underlying nations of history, fiction and narrativisation, with ancient and resilient Indian traditions. It is though such a return to indigenous traditions that the novel poses a significant post colonial challenge to the dominant eastern paradigms of narrative in fiction and historiography. Its narrative strategy allows ShashiTharoor to suggest in indigenous cultural, traditions and myths, an alternative, to the western paradigm of narrative with a beginning, middle and end.

The Great Indian Novel is a large sprawling novel with a loose, episodic structure. It is modeled on the ancient epic of Vyasa, the Mahabharata, in terms of both structure and issues. The novel is divided into eighteen books which are skillfully planned as parallels to the cantos of Vyasa's epic.

The books are given titles which parody well-known literary works on India by British and Indian authors and display the intersexuality of the novel. There are chapters entitled. The dual with the crown: *A Raj Quarlet* and "*the powers of Silence*" which recall the raj fiction of Paul Scott. The Chapter named Passage through Indian is a fitting reply to E.M Foresters famous novel "*A passage to India*". While the Bungle Book which narrates the tyrannical rule of Indira Gandhi, reminds one of Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book*, *The For Power Villain* is reminiscent of M.MKaye's *The Far Pavilions*.

The author's debt to Salman Rushidi is tacitly acknowledged in entitling a chapter 'Midnight's parent's' the novel synchronises the epic narrative of the Mahabharata and the twentieth century political history of India. It covers the period of Indian history from the advent of Mahatma Gandhi as the undisputed leader of the freedom struggle against the British Raj to the emergency rule of Indira Gandhi, highlighting reroute some landmark events like the Champaran Satyagraha, the Jallianwala Bagh Massacre, the salt March the Quit Indian Movement, the partition of India and its Independence, the country's war, with Pakistan and China, the birth of Bangladesh and the dismemberment of the Land of the pure the horror of Emergency and its aftermath.

The shape and sequential drift of the novel is dictated by the epic narrative of the Mahabharata which provides Tharoor fictional reconstruction of national history *The Great Indian Novel* centres on themes and concerns which one finds at the core of the epic narrative power politics, schisms, conspiracy, and personality clashes leading to fratricidal war, institutional structures, and individuals as well as collective Dharma.

Through a creative use of the mythic setting, Tharoor builds up an order where present are inextricably entwined. Instead of using two separate time-frames -one for the epic age and the other the modern he fuses them into one presenting events, episodes and character from the 'Mahabharata' an contemporaneous with the present one thus finds a simultaneous description of the ancient and modern reality, each mirroring the other and modifying the reader's perceptions of both.

Tharoor uses the allegorical mode in which the story of the Mahabharata becomes a structuring device to create an individual and highly subjective subversive version of Indian's past and offers an incisive commentary on the political events and personalities of twentieth century India. Since the novel is based on the Mahabharata, it would not be out of place to give a brief of the epic.

The Mahabharata contains about 40,000 Verses of eight and eleven syllables each, although this Verses as divided into stanzas of four verses each. The books are of very unequal length, varying from a few hundred to several thousand stanzas and there is also or a supplementary book- the- Harivansha of 16,000 stanzas. If the legends be reconstructed historically with aid of the puranic lists of kings they show that a real historical background is reflected in the mass of myths

Shashi Tharoor's Literary career

Tharoor is an acclaimed writer, having authored 18 bestselling works of fiction and nonfiction since 1981 which are centered on India and its history culture, films, politics, society foreign policy, and more related themes. He is also the author of Hundreds of Columns and articles in Publications such as the *New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *Newsweek*, and *The Times of India*.

Shashi Tharoor appeared on the Indian Literary horizon in 1982 with the publication of his novel *Arundhati*. The novel received wide acclaim from the readers and critics. It is considered as a trend-setting novel as it deals with the political situation which naturally demands a writer's involvement with the political and not politics.

He was a contributing editor *Newsweek International* for two years. From 2010 to 2012 he wrote a column in the *Asian Age*, *Deccan Chronicle* and for most of 2012 until his appointment as minister, a column in *Mail Today* he also written an internationally syndicated monthly column for *Project Syndicate*, he also wrote regular columns for the *Indian Express*, *The Hindu* and *The Times of India*.

Tharoor has written numerous books in English. Tharoor has been a columnist in each of India's three best-known English-language newspapers, most recently for the *Hindu* and in a weekly column, "Shashi on Sunday" in the *Times of India*. Following his resignation as minister of state for external Affairs, he began a fortnightly column on foreign policy issued in *Deccan Chronicle*.

Previously he was a columnist for the *Gentleman Magazine* and *The Indian Express* newspaper, as well as a frequent contributor to *Newsweek International* and *The International Herald Tribune*. His op-eds and book reviews have appeared in the *Washington Post*, *The New York Times* and *The Los Angeles Times*, amongst other papers His monthly column, "India Reawakening", distributed by *Project Syndicate*, appears in 80 newspapers around the world.

Tharoor began writing at the age of 6, and his first published story appeared in the Sunday edition of the Free Press Journal, in Mumbai at age 10 His World War 2 adventure novel operations Bellows, inspired by the biggest books, was serialized in the junior statesman starting a week before his 11th birthday.

Each of his books has been a bestseller in India. The Great Indian novel in its 42nd edition, and a Silver Jubilee special edition was issued on the book's 25th anniversary, September 2014, by Viking Penguin India. The Elephant, the tiger and the cellphone has also undergone cited ShashiTharoor's book India from midnight to the millennium in his speech to the Indian parliament in 2000.

Tharoor has lectured widely on India, and is often quoted for his observations, including, "India is not a people keep calling it, an underdeveloped country, but rather, in the context of his history and cultural heritage, a highly developed one in an advanced state of decay". He also coined a comparison of India's "thali" to the American "melting pot": If America is a melting pot, then to me India is a thali-a selection of sumptuous dishes in different bowls. Each tastes different, and does not necessarily mix with the next, but they belong together on the same plate, and they complement each other in making the meal a satisfying repast.

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