



Historical Representation in Shashi Tharoor's Novels

Dr. V S Sankara Rao Chinnam

M. A. B. Ed., M. Phil., Ph. D., AP&TS SET

Associate Professor of English, St. Peter's Engineering College (Autonomous) Hyderabad

Email Id: drvssankarchinnam@gmail.com, Contact No: 08328396495

ABSTRACT: -

This work focuses on how history is reflected in Shashi Tharoor's novels. The work consists of his two important novels, namely *The Great Indian Novel* and *An Era of Darkness: The British Empire*. The study centers on the thematic emphasis of his artwork, demonstrating his deep pride in Indian culture, heritage, and history. *The Great Indian Novel* revisits the political events of 20th century India, mirroring the modern political history of India on the framework of the epic Hindu tale, the Mahabharata. In this study, I aim to explore the recent historical concept that reinterprets myth and history to reconstruct past events. It also interprets *An Era of Darkness: The British Empire* in India as a refusal of the idea of one singular truth. Shashi Tharoor also provides commentary on different significant and controversial events in Indian history. It also explores socio-literary perspective, history, and politics from an Indian viewpoint, addressing the controversial pre-independence history of India and the reevaluation of post-independence history.

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

Introduction: -

Indian fiction by Shashi Tharoor, a well-known Indian writer and former U.N. diplomat, portrays the history and evolving social landscape of India. He explores the 'matter of India' by revisiting its history and offering different interpretations. His creative outputs originate from India. Numerous Indian authors incorporated myth and history into their literary works to unveil deeper truths and hidden significances. Myth enhances the utility of a literary work, while history verifies its credibility. The essence of a book that exists in the mind of the reader should be able to go beyond its historical context. According to Murry Krieger, history should be viewed not just as raw facts, but as shaped by human discourse to give it meaning for all of us. "All tangible existence, such as the elements used to construct our understanding of history, is perceived as restrictive and disconnected from us, posing a challenge to our ability to shape meaningful relationships and narratives in the fields of humanities" (Murray, 1974). Today, numerous modern writers are writing with knowledge of their past and are attempting to redefine their sense of self, reflect on their current situation, revisit their history, and incorporate elements of myth and history into their works.

During the 20th century, many Indian authors deliberately incorporated history into their works of fiction. In novels like *A Fine Balance* by Rohinton Mistry, *Difficult Daughter* by Manju Kapur, *Opium Clerk* by Kunal Basu, and *The Shadow Lines* by Amitav Ghosh, history resurfaces with a fresh significance and a strong sense of relevance. They utilized a traditional legend in a modern setting and reinterpreted it through the lens of historical importance. Before Indian writers start writing, they should dedicate ten years of their adult life to studying Indian classics, understanding the Indian tradition, and immersing themselves in Indian history.

When he states that "colonialism becomes a trans-historical thing always present and always in a process of dissolution in one part of the world or another," Aijaz Ahmed (Ahmed, 1995) reflects a similar viewpoint. Helen Tiffin, on the other hand, asserts that "History may have "happened" someplace, but it's documented as a "textual event." The fictions of the past of post-colonial territories and the languages in which they are recorded serve as instruments of cultural control since, until recently, this history was mostly a myth created by the coloniser (Tiffin, 173).

Issues in this novel are based on persons and events mentioned in the ancient epic, according to Tharoor's "Afterword," which continues to be a source of inspiration and joy for millions of Indians. For this reason, interpreting myth and history is essential to rebuilding the significance of historical fact and cultivating a contemporary awareness of the big myths surrounding the Indian liberation movement.

Because literature mediates history, historical writing does not speak to the true reality of the past. The expression of social behaviours is greatly aided by literature. Ideology shapes society, which is then positioned in relation to culture, which shares many similarities with literary texts in terms of its never-ending play of signals and variances in interpretation. In her work, Anusha U. R. made the following observation: "In the postmodern society, history is problematic and its objectivity and veracity are questioned. Historians' divergent perspectives on the same historical events highlight the social and political norms that shape their distinct perceptions of the past (Anusha, 2015).

Through his depictions of the emergency, the partition, and other historical events, Tharoor demonstrated historical consciousness. He has used the division as a metaphor to recreate historical truth from the fragmented view of the past. History can only be validated by literary proof of the present regarding the veracity of the past. Numerous literary works have distinct settings thanks to the creative retelling and recasting of Indian history and mythology in a culturally hybrid context using cutting-edge literary techniques. Indian English literature now has a fresh orientation thanks to these trend-setter authors. In Tharoor's *The Great Indian Novel*, democracy is portrayed as a caricature and Indian history as fictional. "Shashi Tharoor has taken the Mahabharata as a blueprint and filled it with a contemporary cast for his witty send-up of independent India," wrote Madhu Jain in his review. Tharoor's originality is in his disclosure of how the ancient epic's technique might be used to replicate the contemporary Indian political system. The British Empire was a Dark Age. According to Tharoor, writing literature and creating history are intertwined processes. In order to distinguish historical personalities like Gandhi, Nehru, and Jinnah from their legendary equivalents, Tharoor blends the inventiveness of fiction with the erudition of real facts. By using this method, Tharoor communicates the possibility for fictional plausibility together with the impartiality of historical history. He contrasts the two stories to highlight history as a profoundly transformational discourse that is always subject to interpretation. The narratives of fiction and history are reopened by Tharoor's open-ended story, and the metaphorical description confirms the limitless possibilities of interpretation.

Reconstructed, *The Great Indian Novel* is a work that combines history and mythology. As part of his new storytelling approach and the development of a new political archetype, Tharoor makes fun of the leaders of the country. Shashi Tharoor treated the great leaders like Gandhi and Nehru with complete disdain in this instance. He disapproved of brilliant leaders who betrayed their own principles, became mired in local politics, and forgot their moral obligations. He begins by narrating India's traumatic colonisation past and then on to discuss Indians' ongoing battles to free their country.

The history of India is deeply ingrained in the book. The novel's depiction of a colonial episode, the Bibigarh slaughter, alludes to the Jalianwala Bagh disaster in Indian history and highlights the hideous brutality of the British. Similar episodes in the novel include the "Chaurasta" event, often referred to as the Chauri Chaura incident, the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi by Nathu Ram Godse, the illicit connection between the Viceroy and Lady Mountbatten, the emergency incident, and the most significant incident involving the monarch of Kashmir. The women in his bed demanded that Maharaja Vyabichar Sing sign the Kashmir pact, which he did. Most historians concur that Nehru was the one who delayed the contract's signature, not the Maharaja, as depicted by Tharoor in his fictitious historical account. While Pakistani soldiers advanced into Kashmir, Indian Prime Minister Nehru held the wazir for three days in Delhi. It was only when Sheikh Abdullah was named chief minister of Kashmir by the Maharaja that Nehru consented to assist Kashmir.

The Indian people held Nehru in the lowest regard for his decision to visit the United Nations. The work by Tharoor stands out as a superb illustration of how British colonialism endures even in a democratic and liberated India. His fiction makes it clear that, although foreign powers had exploited the nation before to August 15, 1947, she was subjected to suffering at the hands of her own ruler following independence. That's the reason Nathu Ram Godse, the novel's "Shikhandi," killed him. It demonstrates that Nathu Ram assassinated Gandhiji because he believed Mahatma had deceived both the country and himself.

In addition to expressing his own motivations for murdering Gangaji, Tharoor's Shikhandi mirrored the reasoning for Gandhi's assassination by Nathu Ram Godse. Gandhi was seen by Nathu Ram as being unfair for pressuring the Indian government to pay Pakistan fifty-five crores of rupees during the partition, which Pakistan then used to assault India in Kashmir. With the money, Pakistan bought weapons to combat Indian soldiers. It's possible that Godse did not approve of Gandhi's fast, and many Hindus started to question his political acumen. Furthermore, under the Nehru administration, the Hindu-Muslim dispute expanded from a localised issue to an international one, and it remains a persistent one to this day. Therefore, Tharoor proposes that Gangaji, who throughout his life advocated for Hindu-Muslim reconciliation, unfortunately ended up being accountable for the escalation of sectarian hostilities between Muslims and Hindus. Dr. Dhar notes that it is a little strange that someone who spent his whole life fighting for Hindu-Muslim unity should be held accountable for promoting Muslim separatism; yet, Tharoor's interpretation of Gangaji and that of numerous other historians also suggests as much. He attempted to reimagine several historical events using his creative creativity.

Even now, there is still a great deal of societal unrest and a shattered view of these occurrences. He attempted to reduce the tensions stemming from past historical consumption through reinterpretation. Additionally, he attempted to reorient people from their idealised, beautiful past to the raw reality of contemporary existence. For the sake of society's overall wellbeing, certain painful historical incidents have to be cleared up and rebuilt from a fresh angle. In an effort to highlight the historical turmoil between two religions and the tale of a cross-cultural love affair, Tharoor has gone to great lengths.

A Dark Age for the British Empire Shashi Tharoor also offers commentary on a range of well-known and significant historical events in India. The novel's depiction of a colonial episode, the Bibigarh slaughter, alludes to the Jalianwala Bagh disaster in Indian history and highlights the hideous brutality of the British. Tharoor's account of the Jalianwala Bagh massacre demonstrates his agreement with proponents of the theory that "the West won the world not by the superiority of its ideas, values, or religion but rather by superiority in applying organized violence," such as Samuel P. Huntington.

Similar episodes in the novel include the "Chaurasta" event, often referred to as the Chauri Chaura incident, the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi by Nathu Ram Godse, the illicit connection between the Viceroy and Lady Mountbatten, the emergency incident, and the most significant incident involving the monarch of Kashmir.

The women in his bed demanded that Maharaja Vyabichar Sing sign the Kashmir pact, which he did. Most historians concur that Nehru was the one who delayed the contract's signature, not the Maharaja, as depicted by Tharoor in his fictitious historical account. They said that the Maharaja had despatched his wazir to Delhi as soon as the Pakistani army had attacked Kashmir, asking the Indian government to defend Kashmir militarily against Pakistan in exchange for Kashmir joining India. While Pakistani soldiers were moving into Kashmir, Indian Prime Minister Nehru kept the wazir waiting in Delhi for three days. It was only until the Maharaja named Sheikh Abdullah the chief minister of Kashmir that Nehru consented to assist Kashmir.

In addition, a truce was declared by the UN when the Indian Army was effectively and slowly driving the enemy back. The Indian people held Nehru in the lowest regard for his decision to visit the United Nations. In the story, Tharoor makes the claim that Nehru followed the Vicereine's advice and made a ridiculous choice for which India is still paying the price today. The work by Tharoor stands out as a superb illustration of how British colonialism endures even in a democratic and liberated India. His fiction makes it clear that, although foreign powers had exploited the nation before to August 15, 1947, she was subjected to suffering at the hands of her own ruler following independence.

The highly acclaimed hero of Tharoor, Gangaji, had used nonviolent means to subdue the powerful British Empire, but he later used the same weapon to save the subcontinent from being divided. That is the reason Nathu Ram Godse, who is referred to in the book as "Shikhandi," killed him. Shikhandi—who in the epic is actually Amba—changed his sex and killed Gangaji for his error in leaving the political arena during the division. The novels demonstrate that Nathu Ram assassinated Gandhiji because he believed Mahatma had deceived both the country and himself. In addition to expressing the grounds behind Tharoor's personal execution of Gangaji, Shikhandi also mirrored the reasons behind the assassination of Gandhi by Nathu Ram Godse. Gandhi was seen by Nathu Ram as being unfair for pressuring the Indian government to grant Pakistan fifty-five crore rupees during the partition, when Pakistan attacked India in Kashmir. With the money, Pakistan bought weapons to combat Indian soldiers. It's possible that Godse did not approve of Gandhi's fast, and many Hindus started to question his political acumen.

Furthermore, under the Nehru administration, the Hindu-Muslim dispute expanded from a localised issue to an international one, and it remains a persistent one to this day. Therefore, Tharoor proposes that Gangaji, who throughout his life advocated for Hindu-Muslim reconciliation, unfortunately ended up being accountable for the escalation of sectarian hostilities between Muslims and Hindus. Dr. Dhar comments, "It is somewhat ironical that a person who fought 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." regarding Tharoor's understanding of and portrayal of Mahatma Gandhi's role in colonial India (Dhar, 221).

He so attempted to apply his own creative creativity to reinterpret several historical events. Even now, society's perspective of these tragedies is completely shattered and leads to social unrest. He attempted, by reinterpretation, to mitigate the tensions stemming from past historical consumption. He also made an effort to bring people back from their idealised, magnificent past and into the raw reality of contemporary existence. For the sake of the betterment of society, some painful historical incidents ought to be cleansed and rebuilt from a fresh angle.

Conclusion: -

Hence, the essay has expounded upon the several methodologies employed by Tharoor to document his interpretation of India in the 20th century in *The Great Indian Novel* and *An Era of Darkness: The British Empire*. The theme emphasis and the background of his works have been covered in the paper. Tharoor's perspective of India and sense of Indianness are evident in all of his writings. They demonstrate his pride in Indian history, culture, and ancestry. Using the framework of the epic Mahabharata, it examines *The Great Indian Novel*, which aims to recover "for Indians the story of India's experience with foreign rule and its nationalist reassertion, including the triumphs and disappointments of freedom". Riot tells the narrative of the time leading up to the dispute between the Babri Mosque and Ram Janambhoomi. The book examines real and imaginary events from a number of angles. In addition to telling fictitious accounts of Indian history, both works challenge popular Western conceptions of historical discourse.

Works Cited:

1. 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
2. Dhar, "*T.N. History-Fiction Interface in English Novel.*" New Delhi: Prestige, 1999.
3. Ghosh, Tapan.K. Shashi Tharoor's *The Great Indian Novel – A Critical Study*, New Delhi: Asia Book Club. 2008.
4. Iyengar, K.R.S. *Indian Writing in English*, New Delhi: Sterling Publication 1982.
5. Munshi, K.M. preface, *Mahabharata* by C. Rajagopalchari, (Bombay: Bhartiya Vidya Bhavan, 1978.
6. Patil, Geeta. M. *The Heart belongs to India*, Shashi Tharoor, his vision and art, New Delhi: Creative Books 2007.
7. Sharma, Diksha. "*Shashi Tharoor's Novels: A Postcolonial and Postmodern Perspective.*" B.R. Publishing Corporation Delhi, 2013.
8. Shekhar, Sudhendu. *History and Fiction*, New Delhi: Prestige Books, 2004.
9. Stephen Slemon, "*Post-Colonial Allegory and the Transformation of History,*" *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 1988.
10. Tharoor, Shashi. *The Great Indian Novel*, New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1989.
11. -----, *An Era of Darkness: The British Empire in India*. Aleph Book Company, 2016.