Chapter III

RIOT: A SEARING EXAMINATION OF HINDU MUSLIM VIOLENCE IN CONTEMPORARY INDIA
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The world which seems,
To lie before us like a land of dreams,
So various, so beautiful, so new,
Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,
Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;
And we are here as on a darkling plain
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
Where ignorant armies clash by night."? (Mathew Dover Beach-7)

As Turton has argued, “One cannot think locally unless one already has an idea of a global context in which localities can co-exist. One cannot assert a right to local identity and self-determination except by appealing to some general principles. To make such a claim, then, it is also to assert global identity.” (Turton, ‘introduction’)

This chapter is an attempt to present the varied world of Shashi Tharoor that contains love, hate, violence endearing characters etc. Shashi Tharoor is the painter of the passion and pathology which challenges constantly. He is not so much interested in registering surface realities. As in the probing of inner truths lying under the surface level, his views remind of the last lines of Matthew Arnold’s Dover Beach.

India has always been a multi-racial, multi caste and multi lingual country and enormous atrocities have been prepared on the people under the guise of caste and religion. Analytically speaking communalism is actually a psycho logical human problem. In India the hostility is
mainly between religio-cultural communities. The problem of communalism has received elaborate treatment by indo Anglian novelist. It is one of the predominant thematic concerns of Indian English fiction. Now within Indian writing in English exists a new genre called partition narratives, which highlights the communalism of Hindus and Muslims? In Indian novels communal violence finds expression in heart rending descriptions as “Ghost Train” in Train to Pakistan and other tales of human misery. Communalism is a reality which is forced to face in India but which one wishes to forget. In India the communal conflicts is basically bi-cultural between Hindus and Muslims and results in gruesome spectacle of contemporary history and culture. It is true that there have been other forms of communalism, as with Sikhs and Christians. But the battle forces are drawn between Hindus on one hand and Muslims on the other. One of the great function of Indian English literature is to portray and reflect social reality.

Indo Anglian fiction also takes up the theme of political protest. In the early fiction the protest was aimed at alien rule, but recently the protest is aimed at communalism and fundamentalism between two communities. Each community has an organized life and unity and compromises of successive generation of individuals. India suffered a major setback on 6th December 1992, the black day when Babri Masjid was demolished by Hindu fundamentalists. The very integrity of the nation was threatened. The guiding principles of the Indian constitution were violated, a place of worship was deserted and handfuls of Hindu fundamentalists assumed the role of dictators. The self-appointed custodians who told Indians that only the Hindus owned Hindustan and Muslims and Christians whose religions came from foreign lands were termed tartars, have no right to live in Bharat. These fanatics on 6th December converted India into Bharat and took the nation back into the dark ages. The massacre and the genocide that followed the program of 6th December is captured by Tharoor in his novel Riot, a novel in which characteristics are related to identity from birth such as race,
religion language, cultural heritage, clan or tribal affiliations. Thus according to the views of Tharoor ethnicity is the mere dominant causality of bringing the conflict of the ethic dimensions, too many of these conflicts are striking. It may last be understood as conflict between aggregations or groups that share a collective view of themselves as laying distinctively different from other aggregations or groups because of their shared inherent characteristics. This according to him are the tensions that sometimes erupt in to violence in the post-colonial period stemming from conflicts between groups that were materially favored by the colonial power and those that were disadvantaged are all well known. Thus Tharoor’s quest for novelty continues in Riot, a love story set in recent troubled times of communal tensions in India. Here he adopts a mixed narrative mode telling the story through newspaper clippings, diaries, letters, interviews, journals, notebooks and scrapbooks.

Unlike his earlier novels, the novel Riot is not a satirical work. It is a book one can read in any order, though ideally one should read it from beginning to end. One can pick it up from any chapter, go back or forward to any other chapter and one will bring different level of awareness to the story.

Highlighting the conflicts in politics, Tharoor talks about the politicians of India who were responsible for Hindu- Muslim partition, what the status quo existed at that time and how it was handled at their advantage. The politicians exploit the mob psychology in the name of religion. As far as the shifting paradigms of power politics are concerned, the politics, instead of art of governing, has become the master art of miss-governance. The rule of law has been replaced by misrule by law and rule of lawlessness by rules and regulations. The state agencies meant to administer are being misused to mal-administer. The police excesses and bureaucratic ration have become the order of the day. The citizens’ apathy has gone down to such abysmal depths that citizens take the pathetic state of affairs as a way of life.
Novel for Tharoor, implies giving something new. A step ahead from *The Great Indian Novel*, he tries to capture the contemporary scenario with a kaleidoscopic vision from every angle. The beauty of the novel lies in the way the author points a very balanced picture of the views of the different communities. What really emerges is the conflict of communities rather than the conflict of religions. It is about the majority community, the Hindus trying to establish and reinforce their identity and the minority community, the Muslims, maintaining theirs. Each and every issue is politicized and it is the innocent victims like Priscilla who suffer.

In *Riot*, a novel his nonfiction work on India; from Midnight to the Millennium manifests his conscious, earing attitude about his motherland. Every aspect, which he has expressed in this non-fiction, work, comes alive in fancy. In *Riot*, a novel, Tharoor has discussed the power hungry. Tharoor knows, he has written a novel of ideas. The book is about the construction of ideality and memory, memory of a history, which is never really on history, just different perspectives in the past. The immense complexities are created when one are introduced in to someone else’s story. It is not important what one shares but one can never ignore what is different. Religious hatred is the book’s central event. How one hate and why, have one build things up in one’s minds to justify the hatred , the moment one gets behind collectively, one has a problem. Group hatred makes people forget the individual and demonizes the whole collectives. Jealousy and bitterness of revenge keep the story on the crest of an emotional wave. The power hungry hawkish politicians with their hellish and fiendish power politics stratagems are flirt and prostitute with religion for their personal and political gains. The self-style religious can also pamper these political hucksters and tricksters without giving second thought to the irreparable damages being caused to the state, society and humanity. This unholy nexus is considerably responsible for the problem of communalism sow the seeds of hatred and hostility in the name of religion. It not only derails all the processes of nation building, but also puts the unity and integrity of the nation in jeopardy, denigrating the
national prestige, trampling down the centuries old interaction, exchange, cooperation, accommodation and adjustment. Moreover, the religious institutions lose their sanctity. The Mandirs and Masjids become pathways to parliament and assemblies. The unconscionable use of religion as a tool of exploitation makes India virtually a wounded civilization. It dismantles the resilience and strength of Indian unity and integrity and creates innumerable ugly divisions, cleavages and fissures in lace at rich and variegated diversities and pluralities. But, one, instead of learning lessons from the past repeat them with more vehemence. Hence, chaos, disorder, violence and riots take permanent place in the society. This sordid and squalid state of affairs has made India to appear god forsaken land. To rebuild and establish 'Ram Rajya' is impossible. There is no sign of any progress. But the thousands of people become the victim of the soil of Ayodhya. Lakshman’s poem *How to Sleep at Night*—advice to the world’s politicians bitterly attacks the contemporary politicians. There is no doubt that in some parts of the world contemporary civil conflicts has an ethnic cast to it. The question is how pervasive that cast is, and whether it is possible to both recognize and look beyond ethnicity to other forms of violent confrontation in the world.

The novel was published particularly when Indian writing in English was gaining a lot of attention and the ‘Hindutwa’ was struggling to realize its identity. This struggle for reclaiming identity provoked communal riots all over the country resulting on to senseless killing. Amidst this highly volatile and violent spectrum of the contemporary period, Tharoor dared to publish his novel dealing with a highly controversial issue, this novel was published with two different covers; the one for Indian which had a picture of riot on it whereas the other one of the western countries has a joy with a subtitle riot; a love story the novelist obviously had two different sets of audience for the same story. He also reveals the east-west encounter through a love story, albeit a tragic one, which results in the death of Priscilla – the American. The background of the Taj for riot also evokes images of the Moghul dynastic rule in India
whereas the cover page that depicts an actual riot serves to the reading audience of the negativity of hate. Tharoor also takes on the social commentator when he creates awareness of the plight, oppression, suppression and atrocities and women in India.

India was witnessing the growing communalism in politics and also its consequences when the novel was published. More over this novel is also concerned about the increasing riot between the Hindu and Muslim communities, Tharoor cuts out a pathetic figure of mother land, which is experiencing a struggle of reclaiming an identity on the contrary the world is heading towards globalization.

*Riot, A novel narrates the story of an American Volunteer Priscilla Hart*

The story further takes a new look when laxman succumbs to the pressure of this father-daughter relationship and its agitations, he facts to there at kotli for their last rust which proves fatal for Priscilla. Surprisingly the man, who loved her extremely washes his hands off the affair when Katherine Hart questions him, she fails to understand why her daughter was there in that out of the way place. Laxman, confirming his affair with her, utters the words, over worked, overweight and married which she had read in Priscilla’s letter again. But She facts to understand why he refuses to accept his relationship with the daughter, Kishan Datraj (2001) in his article praises Tharoor’s craft of characterization.

Tharoor captures the personality of the district magistrate well and his keenness, willingness to slog and desire to do well. He also captures the other side of the man laxman is personal and moral coward and his denial of Priscilla to her mother would be breath taking if one can actually know character like this.

Priscilla’s death comes as a blow to laxman’s retching soul. This last meet was necessary for she has something to tell laxman, probably which would have changed his mind that, she was carrying his child. It was gaunder who helped laxman to hide his identity by suppressing Priscilla’s scrapbook and his postmortem report. Priscilla’s murder mystery is left
unsolved. The arrow of suspicion points out towards a number of characters. It could be Ali, who swear to kill her or it could also be those responsible for the riot or then the swami. Katherine Hart strives a lot to resolve this mystery but leaves, in a typical Indian way, to destiny, fate or Karma. Laxman blames it on ‘Communal Passion’, the embassy considers this as a coincidence and states that she must have been in the wrong place at the wrong time. On a larger scale Priscilla symbolically represents the munificent western helping hand eager to improve the social conditions in India. To a certain extent this can also be considered as a western influence working for a better prospect. In this sense this helping hand is crushed in the recurrently occurring communal frenzy. Laxman in this sense represents the bureaucracy which fails to form a cordial relationship with this western influence. Priscilla explores the social conditions of India and at the same time questions the validity of the age old traditions followed in India. Marriage institution is fully exposed by its futility. The social service centers are more remembered for their inefficiency rather than their work. In a very symbolic way this helping hand is devastatingly killed in an age old ‘Kotli’. Kotli in a sense symbolically represents India, a state of decay glimpses of glorious past with a mirror pitted black with age in places’ haunted and full of myths and legends. Her task in this complex land remains unfulfilled.

Rudyard with Katherine Hart revisit India after a span of 12 years the only way to overcome their grief over their daughter’s violent death is to confront it. Rudyard Hart came to India as a marketing director to ravine the sale of Coca-Cola in the year 1977, when the country was still in the state of emergency proclaimed by the prime minister in mid-1975. Rudyard exposes the emergency and post emergency era. His mere missionaries and who has been to India named after Rudyard Kipling grown up with an abiding dream of visiting India. His service in the multinational corporation, Coca-Cola offers him a chance to fulfil his dream. He arrives in India in early January when… the Government was making all the right noises about opening up the economy to foreign investment. He came to India to win it with his coke.
He thought that with a new strategy he could definitely increase the sale of Coca-Cola. He has a conservative estimate of a coke for a week, per middle class Indian, which he thought is not impossible. His colleague kisan Mehta makes him aware of a law passed recently – FERA, Foreign Exchange Regulation Act, which governs the activities of the companies involved in international trade. Under the provision of this law, the foreign companies do the business in India have to reapprove their registration. This is considered ‘…. Just another bureaucratic requirement in a country obsessed with forms and procedures they applied for it. While their case was pending an anti-coke wave emerged in the country. In a bizarre attack coke was accused of ‘looting the country’ destroying the health of Indians. George Fernandez opposed it vehemently for he thought clean drinking water is more essential than coke. To add more to the troubles of coke Mrs. Gandhi declares election and was defeated.

A collation government where in Mr. George Fernandez, was the minister for industry replaced congress government. Rudyard remembers him not as minister for industry but as a minister against industry. Coke was the first to receive trouble for, it was asked to release its secret formula to the authorities as the price for its business in India when coke refuses, their long pending application under tedious 29th of FERA was rejected and they are asked to quit India. This political controversy, surprises Rudyard that in country in spite of hundreds of unresolved problems, the members of parliament devoted their time in attacking Coca-Cola. This is a great blow to Rudyard who comes all the way long dragging his fanatic, just to fulfill his aspirations. He tries the professional strategies to solve the deadlock. It is a struggle to vindicate his decision to be there in India. Every often, from lawyers proves futile to convince the Indian bureaucracy, Rudyard found ‘The professional challenge soon line turned out to be a hopeless one (P-33), The professional dream shatters, it also destroys his home, his affair with his secretary Nandini is the cause, India for this western entrepreneur, in every sense is a disaster, a hopeless land, which shattered all his dreams leaving him desolate. He returns, to
confront the third blow, that the country has given him, the death of his dear daughter, Priscilla. He has anticipated a T.V. crew, rush of reporters, but to his disappointment he finds no extra fuss. The ruined western entrepreneur, sets himself on the path of salvation in sojourn apologizes his wife. This journey foe him is some sort of enlightenment. He confesses to Katherine that in his previous visit to India he takes what he thought was important. I took what I could and left and now India has taken from me the human being who mattered most to me in the world. (R- 263)

Through the novel one can witness him slowly collapsing, bit-by-bit changing himself from a professional to the humanitarian. A country, which has shattered his aspiration, helps him to emerge triumphantly as a human being. He is accomplished by Randy Diggs, South Asia correspondent of the New York journal, from Delhi to Jalilgarh. Next to laxman and Priscilla stands digs, is once again an example of onomastic, for he literary digs up every aspect of Indian identity, and leaves nothing unturned. A true western reporter which is more interested in Indians than Priscilla, interviews everyone, laxman, Gurinders, Ram Chandra Gupta, Mohd Sarwar exposes the bureaucratic attitude, the Hindu dogmas and the Muslims sentiments. The New York journal has picked up this sensational issue and ask digs to probe into the matter for greater details. Randy, along with Rudyard and Katherine visits zalilgarh, and gets accommodated in a public works department guest house. He is not reprised with the heat, the dust, the flies, the shift and the crowds you name it. Zalilgarh has it. Every horrific western cliché about India turns out to be true here (R-17).

It is from Rudyard, we come to know every detail about Priscilla’s past. He interviews the district magistrate, the superintendent of police, and the spokesmen of two communities, the Hindus and Muslims. He first meets the district magistrate, laxman to know about the circumstances, which were responsible for Priscilla’s death. He initially assumes that the communal riots are responsible for this tragedy. This increases his curiosity about these
communal riots. Through their discussion emerges an image of India with all its political, historical, social clouts.

Through digs discussion with laxman and garuvinder we are introduced to the regular image of the country. The bureaucratic limitations too are exposed moreover what surprises us is the behavior of the police force in handling these riots. Mohd. Sarwar in his meeting with laxman realistically remarks, what kind of country are we creating when the police response to a riot simply sources the seeds of the next one? (R- 258)

Laxman considers this communal frenzy an ‘assault on the political value of secular India. His disclose with digs exposes the duplicity of the state government except west Bengal all other states proclaimed their secularism but did nothing to ban this procession, ultimately leading to set ablaze bloody confrontation. As an administrator, he finds himself helpless, left only to control this frenzied mob moving, shouting instigating slogans. In spite of his warnings to the Hindu activists, the riot breaks out and -----‘we are left with the bodies, the burned and destroyed homes, the legacy of hate and mistrust’ (R-238)

Despite his poetic attitude of ‘Think of nothing, and then you will be able to sleep,’ this stephanian IAS Officer is not ready to accept his job only as passport to power, privilege, and clout and life time security. He stands apart, a bit different from a majority of IAS who are there for the service of self and not for serving the country. This bureaucrat too, is disturbed by the corruption, the political interference and the everlasting threat of transfer. This idealist IAS is not alike others who only make money but do not serve the country. He abides by his principles, Gurinder is in this service for the personal reason. His past, which he reveals in a discussion with Randy Diggs, reminds us of an orgy of slaughter, looting and bloody reverence against the Sikh community in the capital after Indira Gandhi’s death. It is for his parents he opted this job, and also because it provides him a decent salary, social status with buggers saluting me left and right’. An incident changed his attitude towards his job, his
community was held responsible for the prime minister’s death. This set ablaze aware of anger, revenge against this community the capital. It is a well-organized riot with the mob having a list of shops and houses owned by Sikhs. …… Sikhs neighborhood were destroyed, families butchered homes torched (R-194)

In this bloody murderous revenge Gurinder lost his ten year old nephew, his sister son – Navjyot. He along with his father was burned alive in their ambassador car by a mob. Gurinder wanted to resign from his services for he could not bear to serve this system which took three days to control the riots.

The next prime minister justifies whatever had happened by saying that when a nightly tree falls, the earth shakes. This disturbed Gurinder a lot for he thought….. That all my training, all my faith in the country and its bloody institution, had been futile. (P-196)

His Father stopped him from resigning to ensure that no other family should endure what they experienced so with zeal to put out these violent flame engulfing the innocent, Gurinder maintains silence. A superintendent of Police, with a practical approach to life Gurinder considers his department as the last bastion of civility and order in our racked and torn society and whole heartedly accepts the corruption, reality and inefficiency assailing in this profession. He finds himself helpless along with laxman, for he could not control this raising flood leaving behind corpses and ruins.

He narrates the post-riot scenario to the local MLA with his supporters pressurizing him to release the arrested members of his community. Even his department by framing the weakest charges help to release the culprits. Gurinder tries to control this riot, but also works as a cosines keeper of laxman, it is he who advises Geetha to adopt necessary steps to keep her house intact. He supports laxman in every turbulent period. He stops laxman from quitting his job for the sake of Priscilla, in a candid manner he advices not to confuse ‘wedding well’ with ‘wedding well’ gurinder stands contrary to the poetic laxman who is more a man of
words and phrases of English literature. Gurinder defends him and also using the Indian dialect with all sorts of Punjabi examples, his friend from the pole while shadow of Priscilla. Laxman, a man of ideas and gurinder a man of action, both find themselves helpless in a frenzy where everything is senseless providing both ideas and action useless.

With the help of these two characters and their interaction of Randy, Tharoor explores and exposes the bureaucratic limitations and also contradictions and helplessness prevailing in the departments. Through them, we are made familiar with the steps adapted rather that proving successful solutions, turn out to be fertile grounds for a new one, in a synoptic manner Tharoor exposes the failures of the administrative system in solving the problems from the past of 50 years. The recurrence of communal riots clearly indicates the social disharmony; it is this disharmony which Tharoor is concerned about rising through his protagonist. Tharoor lashes against the prevailing venality political interference and the inefficiency of the system to provide a satisfactory solution. This conversations with Ram Charan Gupta Hindu spokesman and with Mohd. Sarwar a Muslim intellectual open up a vista of the changing scenario in the existing communally harmonious secular India. This characters articulate their suppressed feelings justifying their ideologists. For the Hindus this is attempt to reclaim their identity which is in endangered under the name of secularism. Muslims feel betrayed when they find themselves in the communities confront each other on various occasions resulting into outbursts of riots. The insurgence of communal riots in India is considered as an assault on the image of communally harmonious secular India. The novel Riot is a hostile outburst of the evoked in which the members of one group indiscriminately attack the person or property of the members of another group reverberations of the riots are clearly visibly in the society affecting it to an irredeemable extent. Riot, when deliberately inflicted on a particular community makes it more visible and distinct in a society where previously not noticed. This occasional outburst clearly indicates that some thing somewhere is going wrong in the society.
If \textit{Riot}: A novel would have been devoted of characters, it would have ended up as a document, drafting the disastrous upheaval in the Hindu Muslim partnership. The span that Tharoor prefers to trace starts with the pre-independence Hindu-Muslim unity and ends up with riots related to the Ramjanamabhoomi Babri masjid issues, widening the rift between these two communities. It was the unity of these two communities, which plays a vital role in securing freedom for India. Amidst these backdrop develops the story of riot.

It is through Mohd. Sarwar, a historian, that Shashi Tharoor express the views of Muslim community and their dream image of a secular India. Amidst these sheelapoojan agitations, Mohd. Sarwar recites the speech of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad which he has delivered as the president of the Indian national congress at Ramgarh in 1940. He considers their speech as the greatest testament of the faith of religious Muslim in united India. This speech voiced the sentiments of every Muslim and assets India as the homeland. “I am proud of being an Indian. I am part of that indivisible unity that is Indian nationality. I am indispensable to this noble edifice. Without me this splendid structure of India is incomplete. I am an essential element, which has gone to build India.” (R-108)

The freedom struggle, which asserts the feeling of Indians, leads in terms of national entity avoid of imaging of the formation of Pakistan, but along with freedom came the partitions, which shattered this national entity. The entire Muslim community is held responsible for this with his entire defence. Mohd. Sarwar rather than considering his community responsible for partition, accuses them who motivated this two nation theory.

…….Muslim didn’t partition the country- The British did, the Muslim league did, and the congress party did (R-111) with partition, even the altogether view about Muslims change the Muslims hanged, the Muslims who affirmed Islam’s, claim on this soil and has been residing in India from the part eleven centuries, spreading the message of human equality, after partition suffered discrimination, none, they are strangers owe loyalty to a different religion
Once an indispensable part is none apart people, who are very much eager to dispense with this discriminating attitude gives rise to a question which halts this intellectual Muslims, he finds himself displaced, ........ “Where do Indian Muslims like fit in? I have spent my, life thinking of myself as a part of “us”. Now their Indians, respectable Indians, Indians winning votes who say that I am really “them” (R-114)

What hurts this Muslim protagonist is that he is force do suffer for what he is not responsible it is revenge taken on him for what his ancestors had done in the past. He suffers the humiliation of being thrown away from the main stream, which generates insecure feeling in him. In this light he visualizes a change in the dominant ethos of the country, in the attitudes, the ongoing agitations of Ramshila Poojan is for him a presage, of history repeating itself ........

The Hindutva brigade is busy trying to invent a new past for the nations fabricating historical wrongs they meant to right, dredging up “evidence” of Muslims malfiance and misappropriation of national glory. They are making us into a large scale Pakistan; they are vindicating the two nation theory (R-67). The intensity of this insecurity fear increased when the Bhartiya Janta party and Hindutva alias raises the Mandir-Masjid issue. It is a Communal movement which is motivated politically to reap the benefits of Hindu vote Tharoor exposes the communalization of politics and paints a serial picture of the consequences of this. The Hindus are provoked by rendering him of the humiliation suffered in the past-and also in the present under the disguise of secularism. This Sheela Poojan agitation in a way tries to ignite the spark in this community ending in Bloody senseless and destruction rather than creating an identity.

Ram Charan Gupta the Hindu Protagonist with his Hindu ideologies make the reader familiar with the intense zeal of Hindutva. For him, it’s essential for the Hindu to awake, if India is to be illuminated. He alike his leaders, constantly rewinds the Hindus about the invasions and destruction caused by Muslim rules so as to provoke them. Gupta considers that the demolition of temples in the past is a deliberately adapted imperial strategy to demoralize
and humiliate the Hindus, it is all done with an intention to subjugate the Hindus he also holds this sect responsible for the partition of ‘his motherland’ for him this is ‘his motherland whereas Muslims as intruders owe their loyalty to some distant land and align religion they are more loyal to a foreign religion, Islam then to India pretending in state that they are all descended from, countries that is Arabic or Persia or Samarkand fine if that is so, let them go back to their places. Why do they stay here if they will not assimilate in to our country? (R-54)

What disturbs Gupta more is the pampering of this community done under the name of secularism. As a part of this pampering only he finds that privileges are bestowed by providing financial aid to visit haj and the government subsidies for the Muslim educational institution. But what troubles him most is that they have even managed special status for the only Muslim majority state we have Kashmir. Do you know a Hindu from anywhere else in the country cannot buy a piece of land in Kashmir? And worst of all these Muslims are out bleeding the Hindus. (R-55) Powerful novel-set in and around a riot in India in 1989-about love hate, cultural collision, religious fanaticism, the ownership of hatred the impossibility of knowing the truth by the award-winning author of *The Great Indian Novel*, Who killed twenty-four-year-old Priscilla Hart? And why would anyone want to murder this highly motivated, idealistic American student who had come to India to volunteer in women's health programs? Had her work make a killer out of an enraged husband? Or was her death the result of a xenophobic attack as she involved in an indiscriminate love affair that had spun out of control? Had a disgruntled, deeply jealous colleague been pushed at the edge? Or was she simply the innocent victim of a riot that had exploded in that fateful year of 1989 between Hindus and Muslims a long awaited new novel. Shashi Tharoor, the acclaimed author of *The Great Indian Novel* and *Show Business*, whom the Independent London called “one of the finest novelists writing in English today,” once again triumphs. Experimenting masterfully with narrative chronicles the mystery of Priscilla Hart's death through the often contradictory accounts of a dozen or more
characters, all of who hate their own versions of the events surrounding her killing. Like his two previous novels, Riot probes and reveals the richness of India is at once about love, hate, cultural collision, the ownership of history, religious fanaticism, and the impossibility of knowing the truth root, style, and characterization, Shashi Tharoor's latest novel is a brilliant tour de force.

Shashi Tharoor’s Riot, confirms that he strives for novelty in his fiction. Novelty was a prominent feature of his very first novel, The Great Indian Novel is about Indira Gandhi's usurpation of civil rights during the emergency. Tharoor perceived similarity between the situation during the Emergency and the situation in the Indian epic the Mahabharata and telescoped the two situations, turning a great epic in to a novel which, according to one reviewer, was "century-striding." Tharoor's second novel, Show Business, was about the appearances and realities of its titular profession, and it too was remarkable for its novelty of setting. The work was presented as a screenplay and as such, the narrative encompassed the celluloid world in all its aspects: staging, set design, scripts, music, makeup-room gossip, bedroom scenes, et cetera. Jonathan Loe of London's Sunday Times called it "a literary coup."

Tharoor's quest for novelty continues in Riot, a love story set in recent troubled times of communal tensions in India. Here he adopts a mixed narrative mode, telling the story through newspaper clippings, diaries, interviews, journals, notebook, and scrapbooks as such, the tone of the narrative is continually shifting, as is the point of view. But technical innovations apart, Tharoor presents his characters with sensitivity and understanding, adeptly bringing out the complications of a multicultural society. Priscilla Hart, a doctoral candidate at New York University, comes to India to conduct field research at Zalilgarh, a town in Uttar Pradesh. She also volunteers her time to a population-control program run by an American group called HELP-US. Having been deeply touched by the dreadful plight of Indian women, she is wholly committed to the cause of their empowerment. She gets stucked with the district magistrate,
Laxman, and they meet regularly at a derelict ruin called Kotli. The place which has a room with a window opening on to a river and setting sun, where the two of them sit. Secure in the enormous authority of the district magistrate, they watch the river and the sunset, exchange endearments; and finally make love, and it is all very idyllic. But soon the shadows of Laxman's wife and daughter and the concerns of his job and his friend, the superintendent of police at Zalilgarh, begin to impinge on the relationship. Priscilla wants Laxman to marry her, but Laxman dithers. Frustrated, she prepares to return to America. In the meantime, killings and riots break out at Zalilgarh over the Ramjanmabhumi issue, before her departure, Priscilla visits Kotli again, only to be stabbed to death by unknown assailants. Her parents arrive at Zalilgarh seeking information about her demise. They meet with the people Priscilla knew, but all they can ascertain are different versions of the event and guesses as to the identities of the possible killers. Mrs. Hart finds a letter in which Priscilla had mentioned that she loved someone. She wants to know from Laxman who this man was, but Laxman feigns innocence. The betrayal comes, as a stab in the gut.

The search for Priscilla's killers runs parallel with the search for clues to the deaths of two locals that sparked the riot, and also with a search for the historical facts about the Ramjanmabhoomi-Babri issue. All are in vain, however, for in a multicultural and pluralist society, such things as truth are necessarily pluralistic as the novel makes very clear. Set against self-righteousness and communal violence, Riot acquires a poignancy that is sure to move critics and readers alike.

The novel tries to access and dig in to Priscilla Hart’s character (the protagonist of Riot by Shashi Tharoor) from the perspective of existentialism and feminism, In other words, this novel tries to do an in depth study of Priscilla Hart’s doings and thinking with reference to the beliefs of existentialists and also feminism. The novel is full of instances and conversations which seem to mark her belief in these theories to a fairly significant degree. Nonetheless, she is
different from several major woman characters of other novels in the sense that whereas other woman character has been found fighting for the self only, Priscilla Hart’s fights for masses too especially for those women and even men who suffer a lot because of their ignorance or compulsions of financial instability or a set of prevalent social beliefs. The decision to explore her character from this viewpoint has been taken as surprisingly no critics or reviewers seem to have studied her extensively from these perspectives. Shashi Tharoor is thus known as a major voice in contemporary literature. He has been appreciated for the freshness of ideas, stylistic novelties, and unrestrained experimentation in narrative technique in *Riot*. Besides, he has also been commended highly to bring in the rhetoric of different types of conflicts and also his great sense of nationalism. Nonetheless, it is somewhat surprising that critics or reviewers have not looked at Priscilla Hart's character from the perspective of her constant battle for gaining her identity as well as helping lots of other women who have not got any clear identities of their own even towards the end of 20th century. There is a lot of strength in women that doesn't come out naturally, it has to be forced out of them. It could be circumstances or a change in lifestyle. Here one may bring in some basic tenets of existentialism, that highlights the risk, the vividness of human reality and admits that the human being is thrown into the world in which pain, frustration, sickness, contempt, malice and death dominates. The fundamental idea of this school of thought is the study of being. It stresses the fact that a human being has no essence if she does not think/work for her/his existence. She has liberty to choose and decide and therefore to make or mark herself/himself. In fact if she allows herself/himself to be carried away by the dictates and necessity of the society, s/he is bound to suffer endlessly. Herein lies the difference between a thing and a being. Things are only what they are. But the human being is what s/he can be. S/he can add flavor and essences her/his life in due course of time. The human being is free to chase and drive her/his dreams home. In addition. Existentialists believe that a human being is free to do whatever he/she pleases. Taking this view as a crucial point, the attempt had
been made to find if Priscilla Hart lives a totally authentic life pursuing her dreams and ambitions. Further, it may also be investigated if she strongly raises her voice for women's autonomy, liberty and rights and freedom as normally an individualist feminist does or as a radical feminist she often hammers for a social change by making them free from their previously determined narrow gender roles. “It might also be interesting to discover it” Priscilla Hart as a cultural feminist suggests to embrace women's ways in spite of their having biological and psychological differences from men.

Here it may not be out of place to define the beliefs and roles of a cultural, radical and libertarian (individualist) feminist as formulated by Kathy Henry (2007). Cultural feminists accept the biological & psychological differences between sexes. However they feel that the differences can be bridged to a great extent by embracing women's natural ways i.e. their ways of living and doing things. Libertarian (individualist) feminists promote women's rights, autonomy, liberty interests and issues and therefore, naturally campaign on issues such as reproductive rights, violence within domestic partnership, discrimination and sexual violence. A radical Feminist attempts to challenge patriarchy, stereotyping, sexual objectification and oppression. In fact it is difficult to consider them as completely separate entities because at times they have been found to overlap to elaborate, some issues, like sexual violence are of common interest for both libertarian and radical feminists. Priscilla a 24 year-old American volunteer working for an NGO, 'Help-Us.' She was involved in developing awareness among women about population control. She has come to India because of her father's job when she is only fifteen and has tasted the various realities of India, like the poor and abject condition of the lower class, the bazaars, the cinemas, the mosques and the temples. She has engaged herself in selfless services, such as reading for blind children and helping them living in orphanages.

Priscilla returns to India after nine years and starts working on a population control program me in Zalilgarh. A district in UP. She gets moved with the condition of Zalilgarh with
broken and dusty roads, cow dung on sidewalks and rusted tin shades, walls full of betel leaves stains and poor people clad in dirty dhotis. All these make her task difficult as she is going to work in the midst of people who are not enlightened in a big way. She tries to wake up those ladies who have not woken up or who do not want to wake up on their own. She does not find anything changing as women are still so submissive that they cannot raise a question even for their welfare rather they submit to the demand of their men folk and accept any number of pregnancies happily. In her scrapbook (on 25 Dec, 1989), Priscilla, as a radical and individualist feminist, writes in a verse form:

“Here I have come to do a good. It’s true: So simple a task in so complex a land. I wheel my bicycle into their habits. Tell them what's right, what can be done. And how to do it. They listen to me, so ignorant, so knowing… They go back in their little huts. Roll out the chapattis for dinner Serve their men first, eat what is left. …and then submit unprotected to the heaving thrusts of their protectors, Abuser, masters. One more baby comes, to wallow in misery with the rest.”(R-15)

The task that she has undertaken is truly a difficult one. Rather than getting depressed, this idealistic and determined lady prays to God to give her strength and wisdom to change and make a difference to these poor and ignorant women. Her task is not so easy because religion, age-old traditions and the male's ego intervene in achieving her objective. Further, she also accepts that these women folk are so talented, so knowing, yet so weak to stand up and fight against the prison house of their tradition and society in limiting their family and thus providing their children a quality life and preserving their health too. She tries to win their confidence by persuading them to stop undesirable children but she has to pay a price for this by suffering the wrath of Fatima Bi’s husband who calls her a foreigner and threatens to kill her as she is thought to be responsible for the abortion of Fatima Bi's eighth child. She feels confused as to why they
are after her life when she is trying to uplift their condition by showing the way of living with dignity and happiness. This comes up as a great conflict in any developing nation where normally one is not ready to take into account another's perspective, where one does not wants to change, where one does not wish to stand and ask questions regarding his better future. This could be perceived as a socio-cultural clash in constructing and performing individualistic identity.

As a radical feminist she questions the authenticity of patriarchal society where a woman still suffers domestic violence in spite of sacrificing a lot for her family:

She (Fatima Bi) lives with her husband and seven kids in a two room flat, cooks in the corner of one of the rooms on an open stove,... washes their clothes at a public tap, and suffers the demands and the blows of her husband, to judge by a visibly bruised cheek.

Besides, still in this modern age, Ali, Fatima Bi's husband, keeps on shouting- "I decide how my wife conducts her life!" (R-160). Nevertheless- Priscilla firmly believes, "it was his wife's right to have as much information as she needed to decide how to conduct her life" (R-160).

Priscilla does not want to lose any chance in campaigning on issues of universal interests- like women's right to autonomy, pregnancy and education:

“I want to change the lives of these women, the choices they believe they have. I want to see them one day... standing around the well discussing their own lives and hopes and dreams. Want to hear them not say, "My husband, he wants lots of children." But rather, I will decide when I am ready for a child. “I want them instead of planning to arrange their teenage daughter's marriage, to insist on sending her to high school. I want all this from them and that’s why I am here in India”. (R-170)
Priscilla very boldly tries to bring these rights home in Zalilgarh which is still a sleeping
town unaware of any new thinking; she writes:

“I see myself as trying to make women aware of their reproductive rights,
not just to control population but to give them a sense of their rights as a whole,
their rights as women. Being forced to have babies is just one form of
oppression, of subjugation by men..... I want to help these women understand
that control of their bodies is a rights issue, it's health issue and if they can
improve their health and assert their rights, they will have a real future, and they
will give their daughters a real future” (R- 171).

The American version of the novel has been subtitled "A Love Story" as this is really a
sensual, stormy, ill-fated romance between Priscilla Hart, the American family planning
counselor and V. Lakshman (nicknamed Lucky), an older married government official posted as
the District Magistrate. The two different titles of the same novel seem to echo a conflict
between two diverse approaches in constructing and performing social identities of men and
women in terms of their interpersonal relationship. Shashi Tharoor also expresses somewhat

American readers looking for a love story find the novel about the construction of
identity, the nature of truth and the ownership of history. Indian readers expecting a novel about
the dangers of communalism discover a tale of another kind of passion. In fact, the novel is
superbly rich with a lot of magical descriptions of cross-cultural love and really deserves to earn
*Riot* its subtitle as a love story, though a tragic one. This tragic love story makes Priscilla
emerge as a robust, individualist feminist. Lakshman seems stuck in a loveless marriage though
he is deeply attached to his daughter. Naturally, in spite of getting true love and a very high
degree of physical satisfaction, he vacillates between sacrificing his career and family for an
American girl. She considers even her first encounter with him a very romantic one...there was
something about his voice that reached out and drew me in, something that was both inviting and yet reassuring. It was a voice like a warm embrace, a voice that was seductive, (R- 19)

Though she is aware of the fact that he is already married and has a daughter, she falls in love with him and very soon starts enjoying all the moments spent with him. The novel is replete with lots of very detailed sensual encounters which Lakshman is also very fond of. He develops his interest to the extent of deserting his wife and leaving for the USA with Priscilla, but the age-old tradition and his love for his daughter, for his country and for his job slop him from taking an extreme step of stepping out of marriage and start a completely new relationship publicly. Priscilla finds it difficult to accept Lakshman's decision in favour of his family and social convenience ignoring her deep love for and commitment to him and naturally as a libertarian (individualist) feminist she bursts out stressing the legitimacy of emotional love over physical love:

“I love you with all my heart and soul, but I don't want a relationship with a man who doesn't feel the same way as I do. I want a man who loves me and a relationship where I can rely on the fact that he loves me. Not my body, not my embrace, me.” (R-207)

“You're so good at understanding everyone else's claims on you your families, your daughter's, your jobs. Do I have a claim on you, Lucky? Am I a just convenient outlet for your passion, your escape from humdrum reality?” (R-207)

Priscilla undertakes several existential issues, like the conflict between the existential need and social expectations. Lakshman, though deeply in love with Priscilla Hart, refuses to go with her as he finds it difficult to ignore his social and ethical values inculcated in him from his early childhood. Conversely, for Priscilla, her reeling of love is her whole existence. Naturally, she feels cheated and gives vent to her anger very strongly: I have given up the carefully
circumscribed order of my life, with its assumptions, its compromises, its predictabilities. I've
given up the sense a Brahmin strives all his life to attain, the sense of being anchored to the
world. Loving you, I'm adrift. Everything around me is turbulence. I don't know whether I'll sail
to a new and sunny paradise with you or crash foundering on the rocks, (R- 216) perhaps falling
in love is a luxury for Lakshman, whereas Priscilla considers it as risking her whole life.
Meaning for her and she utters the following to Lakshman: 'I don't care about your
background... I love you' (R- 89). In fact, several topics that are normally taken as taboos, like
extramarital affairs etc. in Indian culture, do not even cause Priscilla to raise her eyebrow. To
illustrate, she perceives sex as a means of expressing love to the man she loves. So she is totally
unfazed by the fact that she has already enjoyed several dates and sexual encounters with
Lakshman.

Further, Priscilla questions the very foundation of the traditional Indian marriage system
where the elders of the family map out and arrange the marriage of their grown up adult
children. She is unable to swallow this marriage as the lifetime commitment between a boy and
a girl. She is more shocked to accept this kind of marriage in the case of Lakshman who is
highly educated and quite liberal in his philosophy of life. Even Lakshman is not very happy
with this kind of marriage, as he does not find an intellectual compatibility with his wife. He
finds a great level of compatibility with Priscilla but he does not feel bold enough to come out
of the niche of traditional marriage and declare to the whole world that she is better, more
fulfilling and satisfying match for him. In this situation, she finds herself just an instrument to
keep him in good humor and mood without getting any mileage in his life. At times she feels
pity on him and labels him as 'Mr Right in the wrong place at the wrong time' (R- 69). This
highly significant comment reflects how the construction of social identities in inter-personal
relationship is at its odds, in Indian and Western cultures. Naturally, he is helpless to challenge
the marriage imposed upon him by society and this leads to the estrangement in their
relationship, though she, as a radical feminist, highlights even a man's predicament in Indian selling:

... “I saw so much Lucky, a good man in bad marriage, someone capable of love who had no opportunity to love until I came along, a man who had not seen his own happiness fully until he met me, With me I think he realized for the first time that he hadn't truly known love in his life and that he could find happiness, loving and being loved happiness, of course, at a price. A price that in the end he was not prepared - with his upbringing, his sense of his You haven't taken a risk in this relationship at all. But I have. It was my risk to take, to fall in love with a married man, and I did. I am crying as I write this. But I don't want you to feel sorry for me. I want your love, not your pity.” (R-207)

A woman who's available at your convenience, two evenings a week - you don't have to give up anything. Your work, your social life, your family, your official commitments. You have it all, including me (R-214-15).

Here Priscilla appears to be negotiating for a reconstruction and performance of a new identity of Lakshman which needs to be fair and just in his mutual relationship with her even if it is at odds with his own socio-cultural milieu. One can also witness her helplessness in not approaching Lakshman whenever she feels like approaching him as he is a senior civil servant and therefore cannot express even her feelings as per her convenience: Do you know what it’s like to have a man you can't speak to when you need him? To feel the ache of needing you and knowing you're beyond reach? To not be able to acknowledge you in public, not to go out openly together, not to be able to see you across a crowded room and know that we belong together.(R- 216)

To an existentialist, she may appear to be a weak character, as she lives in a predetermined world; she is not free to realize her goals and to translate her dreams into
realities. Existentialists observe that a human being is free to do whatever he pleases. But this is not true always. A human being, to a large extent, is the outcome of his/her own sociocultural ethos. Her/his being in the world is something she/he had no choice or little choice over. In the case of Priscilla there are situations where she does not have any control. For instance, she falls in love with a senior and married bureaucrat as she has been interacting with him regularly on various issues related to her project in India. If we take the other perspective of the story, Priscilla wants the man in spite of all odds. Such as in spite of his married status and being a proud father of a daughter. All these details simply do not carry any responsibilities, his inability to escape from Indian society, (R-241) this also brings to the surface some of the so-called social taboos, like sex for discussion in a very bold way as sex also plays a vital role in bringing this civil servant closer to the foreign researcher. Geetha, Lakshman's wife, has a different attitude towards sex. She just takes it as a routine chore where she does not want to initiate or welcome it in any way; she just wants to remain a passive partner. Patil (2007:83) also feels she (Geetha) is born to endure it rather than enjoy it. On the other hand, Priscilla enjoys every moment of it as sex is a great festivity and celebration for her. Therefore to achieve a heightened sense of pleasure, She initiates it, welcomes it and looks forward to every other step with a great expectation and fulfillment. Priscilla's these viewpoints about sex bring Lakshman closer to her but ultimately his social face wins over his personal and existential faces and he decides to end the relationship. All these details point to the fact that Indian characters have not been able to construct such identities which could give a front seat to the emotional aspect of inter-personal relationship rather than to a social institution, like marriage. Priscilla cannot swallow his decision to stick to the same loveless marriage:

“Here I am, on Independence Day, wanting to give up my independence for him, knowing he has to win his own independence first. I can't believe he's even hesitating to leave loveless marriage he hates for the woman he says he loves.” (R-199)
Priscilla is always lost because of his double standards and feels that perhaps it is a part of Indian culture. She finds even Holy Scripture supporting her point and sounds like a great radical feminist:

Learned something interesting about the Hindu God, Ram the one all fuss is about these days, Seems that when he brought his wife back from Lanka and became king, the gossips in the kingdom were whispering that after so many months in Ravan's captivity, she could not possibly be chaste anymore. So to stop the tongues wagging, he subjugated her to agni-pariksha, a public ordeal by fire. To prove her innocence, she walked through unscathed, a certified pure woman, and (R-63) she further continues to stop the gossip for a while, but before long the old rumors surfaced again. It was beginning to affect Ram's credibility as king. So, he spoke to her about it. What could she do? She willed the earth to open up, literally and swallowed her. That was the end of the gossip. Ram lost the woman he had warred to win back, but he ruled on as a wise and beloved king:

“What the hell does this say about India? Appearances are more potent than truths. Loyalty is all one way from the woman to the man. And when society stacks up all the odds against a woman, she'd better not count on the man's support. She has no way out than to end her own life.” (R- 63)

Thus, she is full of regret for having an affair with the civil servant: "And I am in love with an Indian, I must be crazy."(R- 63). Naturally, these observations speak volumes about women’s status in India even towards the end of 20th century.

Related to the dichotomy of standards in Indian society is the dichotomy between the scientific facts and public opinion which is the result of the compulsions of socio-cultural ideologies. She is shocked to find that even now ordinary people believe that a lady is responsible for the birth of a girl or a boy not the gentleman. Besides, on occasions, her value is decided by the fact if she has been able to deliver a male child in the family. Priscilla brings
forward Sundari's case. Sundari is rebuked often by her mother-in-law for not delivering a male child. Implicitly, a girl child is a curse and a boy is considered, more often, a boon. Sundari, who is brought to hospital with 75% burns and in her feeble voice, narrates the circumstances leading to the severe burns. She could not bring the expected dowry from her parents. Besides, she is accused of carrying a female child in her womb. So the result is that her own husband and mother-in-law set her on fire. Through Sundari, Tharoor experiences the trauma and pangs of the evil of dowry. Kadambari calls it our major concern: That is the real issue, for women in India. Not population control, but violence against women, in our own homes, appears justified in saying that 'his (Tharoor's) writing records a seismograph of pressures and tremors that our society is facing at the moment.'

In summing up, it may be observed that Priscilla Hart tries to assert as an existentialist and analyze social constructions of gender and sexuality and highlight gender inequality, gender politics, and power relations in great length. To achieve her objectives, she has been found to campaign on issues such as reproductive rights, domestic violence, discrimination, stereotyping and oppression of various types and degrees. Further, she often seems to cross boundaries based on social class, culture and religion. So, supposedly, she appears a very robust feminist changing her tones between a radical and individualist (libertarian) feminist depending on the issues and situations. Finally, what sounds great about her feminism is her constantly stressing the fact that these deprived and less-privileged women have the right to enough information to make informed choices about their social and personal lives which could be seen as her plea for Indian women and also men to construct and perform new identities in new lights which are more democratic and fairer.

Thus in \textit{Riot} Tharoor seeks to examine the most vital issues of our day on a small canvas. It is dedicated to all those people who feel ashamed to be Indian and grudges against Indian cultural and social values. The novel raises issue beyond the specificities of time, place
and culture to illuminate larger questions: Who are we? By what do we define ourselves? What do we hate? Why do we hate? Each character in the novel according to Tharoor raises these complicated questions and it is for the reader to find the answers because the questions concern each one of us.