CHAPTER III

RE-VISIONING AND RE-WRITING HISTORY:

SHASHI THAROOR’S THE GREAT INDIAN NOVEL

Shashi Tharoor’s first fictional attempt The Great Indian Novel, published in 1989, like Salman Rushdie’s novel Midnight’s Children focuses on the modern Indian History. The author has borrowed the plot and characters from one of the greatest epics of India, The Mahabharata. The Mahabharata was originally written in Sanskrit, and later translated into almost all the languages in India and Europe. It describes the struggle between the descendants of the great King Bharata for the possession of the Ganges Valley. It is believed that the first version of the epic must have existed as early as 500 B.C. Down the ages, subsequently, it incorporated within itself a great deal of folk material, which were literary, religious and didactic and grew into one of the longest epics in the world. The Great Indian Novel is set in an allegorical mode and The Mahabharata is used as a structural device to create the author’s version of India’s past. By re-visioning and re-writing history of India in this background, Shashi Tharoor has problematized the discourse itself.

In spite of the fact that the novel is set in the allegorical mould, the author does not specify so in the novel. However, he does provide some hints. According to him, the novel’s title is linked to the great
epic **Mahabharata**, his, “primary source of inspiration” (GIN:6). In the ‘Afterword’ to the novel, he elaborates on this: “Many of the characters, incidents and issues in this novel are based on people and events described in the great epic (...)” (GIN:419). In his essay *Myth, History and Fiction*, Tharoor acknowledges that the novel is “an attempt to retell the political history of 20th century India through a fictional recasting of events, episodes and characters from *The Mahabharata*”. (1991:30) Any reader who is familiar with the epic, can easily understand that the novel is a recasting of *The Mahabharata*. The opening and closing chapters of the novel strictly adhere to the events and episodes narrated in the opening and closing chapters of *The Mahabharata*.

That *The Mahabharata* exerts a great fascination for both the Indians and Westerners has been proved by the Indian T.V. serialization with more than one hundred half-hour episodes, and the ten-hour marathon stage version of the innovative British Playwright Peter Brook and the French scriptwriter Jean-Claude Carriere. Stories from *The Mahabharata* have been traditionally used by the writers in India as a structural frame for their narratives.

In this chapter, an attempt is made to investigate the various ways by which the author has attempted to retell the nation’s history through a fictional recasting of events, episodes and characters from the epic, *Mahabharata*, through the vein of satire, parody and allegory. This section also illustrates the novelist’s attempt to contest
the imperial-colonial historiography and other forms of nationalist historiography.

According to critics, like Aschroft all writings from the former colonies are post-colonial writings. So, *The Great Indian Novel* can also be called as a post-colonial novel. The primary aim of all post colonial writing is to create an independent identity, by way of decolonisation, retrieval and creation.

The dis/mantling, de/mystification and unmasking of European authority that has been an essential political and cultural strategy towards decolonisation and the retrieval or creation of an independent identity from the beginning persists as a prime impulse in all post-colonial literature. (Tiffin, 1988:71)

These post-colonial writers, in the process of creating an independent identity, have taken up the project of re-writing history through fiction. They use fiction as a vehicle to give a new perspective to their own histories which have been completely collapsed and dismantled by the erstwhile colonial masters and historians. “From the post-colonial perspective, then, history as such becomes either an ‘intolerable pile’ or a cultural absence, and post-colonial writing is full of strategies for transcending or going beyond history”. (Slemon, 1988:158). Critics like Michel Foucault, Hayden White and many others have been arguing that, history has always been ideologically and culturally bound. Contemporary Western theories of
history argue that, the past is always unknowable and the claim of a scientific historical account is the imposition of a particular perspective of history. Hence all historical account is the construction of language. As Bill Ascroft observes:

History, indeed temporality itself, is a construction of language and of culture and, ultimately, the site of a struggle for control, which post-colonial writing is in a particularly strategic position to engage. (2001:83)

In order to encounter the historical narratives, the very important tool used by post-colonial writers is language. In order to revise, re-appropriate, reinterpret and rewrite history, the language of satire, irony, parody and allegory becomes important. Since language has been an important weapon and companion of the empire, post-colonial writers like Salman Rushdie and Shashi Tharoor use the same weapon to write back to the empire. In order to provide a counter discourse, allegorical writing provides the post-colonial writer a means by which he is able to provide a positive imaginative reconstruction of reality.

Allegory becomes a site upon which post-colonial cultures seek to contest and subvert colonialist appropriation through the production of a literary, and specifically anti-imperialist, figurative opposition or textual counter-discourse. (Slemon, 1987:11)
These post-colonial allegorical writings not only contest and subvert the colonial discourses, but also change our perception of the received ideas of history, simultaneously redeeming and recuperating the past.

As Stephen Slemon argues, in recent times more allegorical writings are coming out of post-colonial cultures and for him all writings are allegorical. “And in recent times, allegory is considered the ultimate trope for discourse itself. So that all writing is deemed to be allegorical and all reading allegorical misreading”. (1988:156)

**The Great Indian Novel** set in the allegorical frame of *Mahabharata* retells the story of the fall of the British Empire in India and the emergence of Independent India under the leadership of Gangaji (Gandhi).

“Tharoor’s novel is consciously counter-discursive in its reproduction of history through a Hindu lens, reversing the historical gaze by putting the reader in the place of the Indian consumer of a dominant but culturally alien discourse”. (Ascroft, 2001:106)

The novel being set in the princely state of Hastinapur, soon to be annexed by the British, is narrated by Ved Vyas, the narrator-protagonist to his stenographer Ganapathi. The novel tells, “of past, present and future, of existence and passing, of efflorescence and decay, of death and rebirth; of what is, of what was, and of what
should have been" (GIN:18). The novel covers a long time span, beginning with the stepping in of Mahatma Gandhi (Gangaji) into the Indian political scene during the British Raj and ends with the fall of Janatha Government (after the Emergency) and the re-election of Mrs. Indira Gandhi's (Priya Duryodhani) as Prime Minister by the Congress party in 1982. Though there is no mention of any dates in the entire novel, the novelist has narrated almost all the important historical events from India’s pre-and post Independent era. The entire narrative which moves at two levels is a blending of the ancient history, (Mahabharata) and Ved Vyas's 18 chapters of the Modern Indian History. The reader is expected to move at both the levels and carefully percolate the history of India, which is buried as a sub-text. By giving birth to a contemporary history text from an ancient history text, the author tries to establish the fact that history cannot be ignored.

The novel begins with an agreement between the narrator and his scribe. The narrator who wants every word to be written down, has to cope with the demanding scribe, who can handle any complex assignment. So the important question is how much of the work is the narrator’s or the scribe’s. Thus the entire narration is problematized. This duality becomes a crucial factor in the novel. Likewise even at the beginning of the novel, the author clearly establishes the fact that, he is attempting a re-visioning of history. This becomes clear when Ved Vyas rejects the notion of the Western countries, that India is an underdeveloped country. He challenges
them to get back to the history of India, and they will understand that India is, "a highly developed one in an advanced state of decay" (GIN:17). The primary objective of the novelist is to contradict this misperception by re-writing history.

The narrator Ved Vyas, not only narrates, but is the main witness and a direct participant in the historical events. Thus it makes possible for him to provide a first hand version of the events, which in turn provides for some objectivity to the narrative. Therefore the novel ceases to be an ordinary fiction that deals with history; instead it is transformed into a historiographic meta-fiction. The novelist has used history as a base to re-write the past through humour, irony, parody, allegory and objectivity.

**ALLEGORY OF NAMES**

In order to suit the novelist’s historical narrative, every prominent character of *The Mahabharata* is allegorized. Every important character of the epic represents some famous political personality, who commanded great prominence among the Indian masses, and they were the ones who played a vital role in India’s Independence and partition. One of the important strategies in allegory is the function of naming.

One brilliant strategy in this reversal lies in the function of naming. By naming those people who played the major parts in contemporary Indian history according to the names of
The Mahabharata, history itself is ‘known’ in a different way. (Ascroft, 2001:108)

The historical characters allegorized are: Gangaji (Mahatma Gandhi); Dhritarashtra (Nehru); Priya Duryodhani (Mrs. Indira Gandhi); Pandu (Subhash Chandra Bose); Karna (Mohamed Ali Jinnah); Vidur (Sardar Vallabhai Patel); Drona (Jaya Prakash Narayan); Kanika Menon (Krishna Menon); Shishu Pal (Lal Bahadur Shastri); Azharuddin Shaik (Shaik Abdullah); Ashvathama (Chandra Shekar). The four great institutions of democracy are also represented by the characters from Mahabharata. The Pandava brothers, Arjun represents the Press, Bhim represents Army, Nakul represents bureaucracy and Sahadev represents diplomatic services. The primary objective of these institutions/characters is to safeguard the greatest institution of India, the democracy which is represented by Draupadi Mokrasi or D Mokrasi-Democracy.

THE TECHNIQUE OF PARODY

Apart from allegory another important technique used by the novelist is parody. The Great Indian Novel, which narrates the great freedom struggle, is a parody of the epic Mahabharata which narrates the great epic battle of India between the Pandavas and the Kauravas. The central figure of the novel, Gangaji/Bhishma is a parody of Gandhi, who serves as a link between the past and the present,
“reading vedas and Tolstoy with equal involvement, studying the immutable laws of Manu and the eccentric philosophy of Ruskin.” (GIN:25) He is also projected as a shrewd political operator who is obsessed with his own enema as with his country's freedom struggle. Dhritarashtra, who is portrayed as snobbish and Anglophile, is blind to the realities around him; “He had the blind man's gift of seeing the world not as it was, but as he wanted it to be” (GIN:85) He is none other than Nehru. Pandu who is a parody of Subhash Chandra Bose, is presented ironically, but not without sympathy. He is one who could have changed the history of India, if only he had not been betrayed both at home and by foreign powers. Karna, a parody of Jinnah with his foppish and aristocratic airs, who conceals his lowly origins, is the most interesting character in the novel. In order to form a parallel between the mythical Karna and the modern Karna, the author narrates the details of his birth, the cause for his alienation from the Congress Party, which lead him to quit and join the Muslim League. Yudhistir, the eldest of the Pandavas, is a parody of Morarji Desai, whose fads are ruthlessly exposed, especially about his message to the people on the utility of auto-urine therapy. Priya Duryodhini is a parody of Mrs. Indira Gandhi who is portrayed as some one who is the main cause for all the evils of modern India. The original version is disrupted, in *Mahabharata* Dhritarashtra has hundred sons, but in the modern version of Tharoor, Dhritarashtra has only one daughter Duryodhini, who is equal to the hundred sons.
Apart from the important characters, some of the episodes of Mahabharata are modified and rewritten, in order to parody some of the important political events in the post-Independence India. The defeat of Hidimba by Bhim is a parody for the liberation of Goa from the Portuguese rule; by modifying the original wrestling match of Bhim versus Bakasura as Sahadeva versus Bakasura, the sad and humiliating defeat of Indian army at the hands of Chinese army is parodied. The tearing off of the body of Jarasandha into two by Bhim in the dream of Ved Vyas symbolises the dismembering of Pakistan and the creation of Bangladesh, by the Indian Army in 1971.

PARODY OF TITLES

Apart from parodying the characters and episodes, the titles of the chapters in the novels parody some of the famous literary works. The eighteen books of The Great Indian Novel are planned as parallels to the 18 chapters of the Bhagwat Gita and the 18 books of Mahabharata. The titles chosen parody some of the well-known literary works published during the colonial rule. Some of the titles belong to Paul Scott, E.M. Forster and Rudyard Kipling, whose works were written from a colonial perspective, and who always projected a misperception of India in their works. The chapters titled, “The Duel with the Crown”, “A Raj Quartet”, and “The Power of Silence” remind us of the works of Paul Scott who is also the Lieutenant Governor Scott with “a soft spot for the uppity natives” (GIN:63). The chapter titled, “Passages through India”, and the British resident
Maurice Forster, just down from Cambridge who “Seems to, ah, prefer tutoring young boys to performing his more routine secretarial duties” (GIN:62) is a dig at E.M. Forster’s sexual preferences. Rudyard Kipling who is presented as the archetype of the imperialist: “Colonel Rudyard of the Fifth Baluch”, is the typical colonial army officer, who orders his soldiers to fire on an unarmed crowd in the Bibigarh Garden Massacre (Jallianwala Bagh). There are chapters titled, “The Bungle Book” and “The Man who could Not Be King” refers to Pakistan politics and Pandu. “Him-Or, The Far Power Villain” reminds us of M.M. Kaye’s best-seller “The Far Pavilions”. Salman Rushdie is also acknowledged in the novel through the chapter titled Midnight’s Parents (Midnight’s Children). The chapter titled “The Rigged Veda” subverts the Rig Veda which refers to the elections and Indian politics with violence and corruption.

The primary objective of the author is to uphold the concept of Dharma. This is the reason why some of the virtuous characters are subjected to satire. Further, the author also exposes the hypocrisy of the political personalities of pre and post Independent India who have been deciding the fate of India. Apart from his parodies and allegories, the author has also sketched the triumphs and tragedies of the freedom movement and the post independent India.

this novel displays the full panoply of historical strategies in its narrative. It never slackens its own narrative, satirical and inter-textual modes. It is a story within which certain
truths may contest the dominant but it is, in Indian fashion, a story which must bear the marks of its own invention. (Ashcroft, 2001:107)

These literary techniques not only help the author in challenging the imperials in their own language, but also in re-writing experiences and truths effectively. Thus the aim of the novelist is to expose the authorities who attempted to subvert history.

**HISTORY-VED VYAS’S [THAROOR’S] PERSPECTIVE**

In *The Great Indian Novel*, the narrator Ved Vyas opposes the Western Colonial history and narrates the story of India’s pre-independence and post-independence history. The narrative decentres the colonizers history and foregrounds Indians and Indian systems. The narrative constantly draws attention to the fictional nature of history and engages the readers in the fiction making process, and tries to establish that every perception in history has hundred alternative views. Hence, for Tharoor, history is always imperfect and incomplete, because omissions consciously and unconsciously are inevitable.

... for every tale I have told you, every perception I have conveyed, there are a hundred equally valid alternatives I have omitted and of which you are unaware. I make no apologies for this. This is my story of the India I know, with its biases, selections, omissions, distortions all mine.
But you cannot derive your cosmogony from a single birth, Ganapathi. Every Indian must for ever carry with him, in his head and heart, his own history of India (GIN:373).

Further, the narrative tries to establish that no historian can claim to have given a complete picture of any history and this is also true with Indian history.

The trouble with telling a tale on an epic scale is that sometimes you neglect the characters in the foreground as you admire the broad sweep of the landscape you are painting, just as the overall picture fades occasionally from sight when you focus closely on the smudgy details of individual impressions (GIN:361-62).

Ved Vyas’s claim regarding history is that, “there is no end”, because the history we are talking about is only a part of a great history, which has neither beginning nor end. This assumption of Ved Vyas challenges historical authority, which claims historical integrity. Every history is part of a larger history, a story without end. The narrative criticizes that, due to the influence of Western historiographers, we tend to look at history as a stage play:

we tend, Ganapathi; to look back on history as if it were a stage play, with scene building upon scene, our hero moving from one action to the next in his remorseless stride to the climax (GIN:109).
History is not a staged play, a theatre played out on the passive stage called 'India', as imperial history might contend, but it is also a story without end. “This strikes at the very heart of the teleological perspective of imperial history because the end of such history is the perception of the civilizing process”. (Ashcroft, 2001:112) According to the narrator, the story of life has no end, only pauses. The historians' claim of an end is only, “the arbitrary invention of the teller ... Today's end is, after all, only tomorrow's beginnings” (GIN:163). Because according to the narrator, everything in this world is undergoing a constant state of evolution, the unending process of birth and rebirth keeps on happening. “India has been born and reborn scores of times, and it will be reborn again, India is for ever; and India is forever being made” (GIN:245). The fictionality of history is constantly emphasized, by implicating the readers in the fiction-making process, through Ganapathi. As M.F. Salat observes:

The recognition of the fictive/fictional nature of history and historiography by the readers through this meta-fictional device enables them, on the one hand, to make their own evaluation of what they are told and, on the other, compel them to re-think the distinction that is traditionally made between history and fiction. Ved Vyas's fictional history is self-consciously emphasizing and asserting the porousness of genres and blurring the boundaries between history and fiction. (1993:130)
In order to emphasise the thin lining between history and fiction and to deny the claims made by Western historians on their authenticity, the novelist takes liberty with history at many places. The Game of Dice is placed at the end of the story. Gandhari, who is supposed to give birth to hundred sons, instead gives birth to one daughter Priya Duryodhani (Mrs. Indira Gandhi). At many places, the author jumbles up chronology deliberately. Bhim is compared to the English Cricketer Ian Botham. Similarly, Gandhi’s campaign against the Salt-Tax is converted into a campaign against Mango-Tax. Jayaprakash Drona is the name given to the teacher of Pandava brothers. Krishna appears towards the later part of the novel as a Malayalee dancer cum politician. Similarly, in order to expose her elegance and pride, Kunti is shown as smoking Turkish Cigarette and using an ebony holder.

By fictionalizing history, The Great Indian Novel is able to speak for an India of multiple realities and is also able to give multiple interpretations of Indian reality. Throughout the novel the author has acknowledged the multiplicity of truth, and this conscious acknowledgement has helped the novelist to give shape and substance to the idea of India.

If there is a message in the book, it is two fold. First, there is the need to re-examine all received wisdom about India, to question the certitudes, to acknowledge the imperfections and face them; Second, there is a reassertion of dharma, defined not just as religion
but as the whole complex of values and standards—some derived from
myth and tradition, some derived from our history—by which India and
Indians must live. “In this, I hope I have been faithful to the spirit of
The Mahabharata despite all the other liberties I have taken with it.”
(Tharoor, 1990:8)

Having re-examined the received wisdom about India and
acknowledged that imperfections are innumerable, the author Tharoor
does not provide any alternative in the novel. The ultimate judgement
is left to the readers themselves as Yudhishtir observes, “Derive your
standards from the world around you and not from a heritage whose
relevance must be constantly tested” (GlN:418). Therefore, Ved Vyas
does not want to end his story and decides to begin again, as he tells
the amanuensis Ganapathi, “stories never end, they just continue
somewhere else” (GIN:418) Ved Vyas/Tharoor “I did not begin the
story in order to end it; the essence of the tale lay in the telling”
(GIN:162). He must re-tell his story/history of India because the story
of India cannot end. It has to be told again and again, each re-telling
opening out new possibilities of meaning. And this, in post-colonial
nations, is a necessary condition to contradict the misperceptions and
misrepresentations perpetuated in colonial discursive practices.

A reading of the novel clearly reveals that the novelist is not
happy with the present political system. By retelling and rewriting the
history of India, again and again, Tharoor anxiously looks for a viable
democratic alternative to emerge. That is why at many places, the
novelist attacks the colonial policies followed in India even after fifty years of independence and the wrong economic and educational policies adopted by successive governments after independence. The dark days of Emergency, the Janata government which failed to provide an alternative, to the millions of people of India who were unable to elect a better leader, and looked back to Mrs. Gandhi as the only alternative, all these failures come in for attack through the narrative. As attempts are made to reduce the unique secular complexity of India through narrow religious principles and fundamentalism, the novelist, at the end pleads for a reinterpretation and rediscovery of India on the basis of dharma. The dharma is based on the fact that India is a land of pluralistic truth and experiences where there is no absolute truth.

MOTIHARI AGITATION AND GANDHI’S INTRODUCTION TO FREEDOM MOVEMENT

Gangaji’s (Gandhi) first encounter with the British, according to the novelist, takes place in Motihari; when he comes to know of the exploitation of the indigo farmers in the hands of the British planters. “Three tenths of every man’s land had to be consecrated to indigo, since the British needed cash-crops more than they needed wheat.” (GIN:50) Apart from this the Indigo farmers had to sell their Indigo “to British planters at a fixed price-fixed that is by the buyers” (GIN:50)
Having understood the issue, Gangaji (Gandhi) reaches Motihari but he is ordered by the authorities to leave the district. However to the surprise of all, Gangaji (Gandhi) refuses and prefers to take the punishment for his defiance of the law. To offer passive resistance or civil disobedience to an unjust order was indeed a novel idea. The Government of India, not willing to make an issue of it and not yet used to treating Gandhiji as a rebel, orders the local authorities to retreat and allow Gandhiji to proceed with his enquiry. A victorious Gangaji (Gandhi) embarked on his investigation of the peasants' grievances.

The Motihari Agitation is the first official history which is rewritten from a post-colonial perspective. According to official history, this is the story of Champaran, which was visited by Gandhi in the year 1908 to take up the issue of the indigo farmers with the authorities. Due to Gandhi's inquiry and report, the planters left the district altogether within a decade and the exploitation of the indigo planters came to an end.

By preferring a non-violent struggle, Gandhi, was able to awaken the public consciousness, and brought the ordinary men and women into the mainstream of the freedom struggle. The second aspect of the non-violent struggle was that, Gandhi was able to push the British to the corner and force them to see his point of view. Gandhi's non-violent struggle became a timely and effective method to fight the British. "Ganga took the issue of freedom to the people as
one of simple right and wrong-law versus conscience-and gave them a method to which the British had no response” (GIN:55).

Gandhi’s entered into the Indian political scene when the British had consolidated their colonialism into a tyrannical system. Having undergone the colonial oppression, the people of India were, waiting for a real leader to lead them, and in Gandhi, they found the leader, and the emotional involvement, which is lacking in any political movement today is narrated by Tharoor:

You can’t know, you with your ration-cards and your black markets and the cynical materialism of your generation, what it was like in those days, what it felt like to discover a cause, to belong to a crusade, to believe (GIN:52)

By consolidating the mass opinion Gandhi was able to inculcate a sense of confidence in them, which grew into a great hope and dream of the Indians.

**JALLIANWALA BAGH MASSACRE/HASTINAPUR MASSACRE**

According to Tharoor:

I chose the “Bibigarh Gardens” for my fictional evocation of the Jallianwallah Bagh Massacre. Paul Scott, whose *Raj Quartet* I otherwise greatly admire, used the name of the Bibigarh, with all its connotations of 1857, for the site of the rape of an English Woman by a number of Indians in
The Jewel in the Crown, I am hardly the first to suggest that, if rape must be a metaphor for the British experience in India, the Indians have a better claim to be considered the victims of it. (1990:8)

The description of the Jallianwallah Bagh Massacre, which is called as Bibigarh massacre to mock at the likes of Paul Scott is described with irony and matches the spirit of its description in Rushdie’s Midnight’s Children:

“They have fired a total of one thousand six hundred and fifty rounds into the unarmed crowd. Of these, one thousand five hundred and sixteen have found their mark, killing or wounding some person. ‘Good shooting’, Dyer tells his men, ‘We have done a jolly good thing’” (MC:36). The same is described in Tharoor’s novel:

The soldiers fired just 1600 bullets that day, Ganapathi. It was so mechanical, so precise; they used up only the rounds they were allocated, nothing was thrown away, (...) ten minutes later, 379 people lay dead, Ganapathi, and 1137 lay injured, many grotesquely maimed. When Rudyard was given the figures later he expressed satisfaction with his men. ‘Only 84 bullets wasted,’ he said. ‘Not bad’. (GIN:81)

Though official figures were provided on the number of people who died, according to independent sources, the actual numbers were considerably higher. Hence the official number of the dead provided
by the authorities (British), the press and the Official Commission of Inquiry was false. Though historians are not able to understand, as to what prompted General Dyer to fire on the innocent civilians, without giving any warning, the novelist tries to probe into the causes. Tharoor, is of the view that, Colonel Rudyard (General Dyer) was under the assumption that the people had been already ordered not to assemble and so those who had assembled were 'defiant trouble makers'. The other cause, which the novel provides, is the logic of colonialism, which prompted Colonel Rudyard (Dyer), "under which the rules of humanity applied only to the rulers, for the rulers were people and the people were objects." (GIN:80) The author also objects to the historians for calling the tragic event as a massacre: "How labels lie. A massacre connotes the heat and fire of slaughter, the butchery by bloodthirsty fighters of an outgunned opposition" (GIN:80). According to Tharoor, it is not Rudyard who is to be condemned but the system: "It was not Rudyard who had to be condemned, not even his action, but the system that permitted his action to occur" (GIN:82).

The reaction to the tragedy by the British authorities was disgusting. Instead of trying Colonel Rudyard (Dyer) in a court of Law for genocide, he was portrayed as a hero. Dyer was prematurely retired with full pension and various British organizations collected 250,000 pounds (sterling), and the same converted into Indian money in the 1920's was forty lakhs of rupees, which worked out to 160 sterling per Indian killed. From history books we understand that
the House of Lords had in fact voted in favour of General Dyer’s action, and the British Public had demonstrated its support by helping the *Morning Post* collect 30,000 pounds for General Dyer.

In the process of fictionalizing the official history, the past is captured more realistically in the novel. In his description of the Jallianwala Bagh massacre as Hasthinapur massacre, though the author fictionalizes the circumstances which lead to the massacre, the description of the massacre is realistic and with a free hand the novelist intervenes into the historical truth. The novelist also mentions the return of the Knighthood by the Nobel Laureate Tagore in protest.

**THE GREAT MANGO MARCH/DANDI MARCH**

In the process of re-writing history through fiction, many important historical events from colonial history are allegorized. One such important historical event is the Dandi March against the salt tax, which is allegorized as The Great Mango March.

When Gangaji decided to take up the issue of Mango tax against the British authorities, members of the Kaurava party felt that, with his energy and moral stature, by raising a petty and ridiculous issue, Gangaji was going to become the laughing stock of the nation. But Gangaji (Gandhi) had a master plan in his mind. The Mango March is an example of Gandhi as a master politician who knew how to play the game: “(...) we were not led by a saint with his head in the clouds, but by a master tactician with his feet on the ground”
From the narrative, we understand the ways Gangaji executed his plans very carefully. Having decided to violate the Mango Tax as the last option, Gangaji writes an elaborate letter to the Viceroy highlighting the injustice of the British government for imposing tax on mango, which happens to be a common man’s fruit. When his demand is rejected by the British authorities, Gangaji decides to violate the law.

He instructs Sarah Behen to make public, all his correspondence with the viceroy relating to mango tax, by giving it to the press. Instead of going to the nearest mango grove, Gangaji decides to walk 288 miles i.e. twelve miles a day. Having drawn the attention of the national and international media to his ashram, Gangaji begins his famous Mango March (Dandi March). With both the national and international attention drawn towards him, Gangaji kept predicting to the reporters that he would be arrested any day. But Gandhi knew that, he couldn’t be arrested: “for he had as yet broken no law” (GIN:123). Finally, Gangaji (Gandhi) violates the law, by plucking the mango, and throughout India, volunteers of Kaurava Party (Congress Party) follow suit. Gangaji along with his thousands of followers are arrested, “for offences even Western journalist found absurd” (GIN:124).

The Mango March, which parallels the Dandi March, is narrated in such a comic strain, with irony and satire, that one cannot blame the British for taking it lightly. Even in history, it is most unlikely
that anybody barring Gandhiji had the confidence that something as inconsequential as salt would possess such grandiose dimensions.

**ALIENATION OF KARNA (JINNAH)/BIRTH OF MUSLIM LEAGUE**

The narrative points out two important causes for Mohamed Ali Kama (Jinnah) for demanding partition. One was Jinnah’s own ego, because he, “would rather be king of an island than courtier, or even minister in a good empire” (GIN:142). The other important cause for Jinnah to quit the Kaurava (Congress) was religion. “Kama was not much of a Muslim but he found Gangaji too much of a Hindu (...)” (GIN:142). Gandhi’s involvement in religion and his consistent use of Hindu religion in order to gain the support of the people against the British had always made leaders of other communities a worried lot. The narrative does not mention at any place that Gandhi caused disaffection among the Muslims, but it makes clear that Gandhi’s love for Hinduism caused the alienation of political leaders like Jinnah. This eventually sharpened the sources of conflict between the Hindus and Muslims which led to the division of the country. Several historians have pointed their uneasiness over Gandhi’s overt involvement with Hinduism. Hector Bolitho in his book *Jinnah: Creator of Pakistan* points out that, Jinnah wanted to see India as one nation and this dream was destroyed because of Gandhi’s influence on Hindus and further Jinnah considered Gandhi a “Hindu revivalist”, and a leader meant only for the Hindus. (1954:82) Similarly in one of his essays Ainslee T. Embree points out that
Jinnah disapproved of Gandhi for using religious vocabulary and demonstrating that the Congress was a Hindu organization. (1989:171) It is an irony that Gandhi, who fought all his life and died for Hindu-Muslim unity is held responsible for encouraging Muslim separatism, but this is implicit in Tharoor's understanding of Gandhi and of several historians too.

The novelist points out how the Muslim group of Nawabs and Zamindars which served as a forum for the landed Muslims, became a political party and Kama (Jinnah) got himself elected as the President of the party and claimed that, their party was the true representative of the Muslims in India. The new group considered "nationalism to be divisible", "Independence without Hindu domination" was Kama's new slogan. According to Tharoor, the new Muslim group enjoyed the favour of the rulers, "the Muslim Group, richly endowed, favourably looked upon by the rulers, decisively led" (GIN:148). Hence, Tharoor is of the view that if only had the Congress leaders, been more accommodative Jinnah would not have left Congress and returned with the Muslim League to demand partition. In fact this point is acknowledged by Dhritarashtra (Nehru) himself when he is informed of Karna's death: "I wonder sometimes: if we had given him his due in the Kaurava Party, might he not today be remembered as one of the finest Indians of us all?" (GIN:278).
EFFECTS OF BRITISH ON INDIAN ECONOMY AND EDUCATION

According to the Tharoor, all that the British learnt in India was to steal and tax the people, after having “successfully stolen everything they needed for centuries, from the jewelled inlays of the Taj Mahal to the Kohinoor on their queen’s crown” (GIN:116). The British who had taken the Hindustani word loot into their dictionaries instead of their habits, preferred to achieve the same results in more bureaucratic ways. Every product sold and brought was taxed by the British. “They taxed property, and income, and harvest; they taxed our petrol, our patience and even our passing to the next world (through their gracelessly named ‘death duties’)” (GIN:116). Having nothing more to tax finally, they taxed salt. From the novel, we understand that major portion of their bill was settled through the taxes collected from India. While the rulers were taxing the common man, their historians and writers were claiming credit for introducing civilization to Indians, through their education, railways and telecommunications.

The way the British exploited the rural economy in order to help their industries grow, comes in for attack by the novelist. According to the novelist, the British exploited and killed the Indian artisans to protect their industries, created landless labourers to maintain social peace. Further, he blames the British for the poverty and unemployment in India. It was they who ruined the rural economy of India. These exploitations have been suppressed by the
colonial and Western historians, who have portrayed a grim picture of India, showing to the world, the slums, poverty, the unclad women and children, without tracing the people who caused this poverty. Tharoor also criticises the French filmmakers, for selling India’s poverty and slums to the international audience. For him it was the British who invented and imposed poverty on a rich country with strong rural industries and economy.

Not of the Indian weavers whose thumbs the British had cut off in order to protect the machines of Lancashire; not of the Indian peasants whose lands had been signed over to Zamindars who would guarantee the colonists the social peace they needed to run the country; (...) the British killed the Indian artisan, they created the Indian ‘landless labourer’, they exported our full employment and they invented our poverty (GIN:95).

This fact has not been acknowledged by any colonial or Western historians, who in turn have always been distorting facts to exhibit to the world, that the cause for poverty in India is over population, illiteracy and as if the country is full of snakes and snake charmers. In order to substantiate his arguments the author poses some fundamental questions: If India had been a poor country, then why did the British come to India? For Tharoor it was the British who turned India into a poor country.
No, (...) they came to an India that was fabulously rich and prosperous, they came in search of wealth and profit, and they took what they could take, leaving Indians to wallow in their leavings. (GIN:95).

The present Western style of educational system followed in India comes in for attack by the author. He expresses his anger and anguish for having failed to relate the teachings of Gandhi to our lives. Our school children have forgotten Mahatma Gandhi, as the father of our nation. According to Tharoor, the cause is the “bastard educational institutions the British sired on us” (GIN:47). Even after fifty years of independence, we Indians are unable to discard the colonial educational system.

DIVIDE AND RULE POLICY

The political gamble the British were playing with the Congress Party in India, through various missions, meetings and conferences also comes in for attack by the novelist. The Round Table Conference held in England was always looked upon with great hope and expectations. Every conference, meeting and mission only favoured the British, because they knew how to manipulate the divisions among the Indians in their favour, in order to achieve their narrow political gains.

According to the narrator, the title for the conference to discuss the future of India was chosen as “Round Table Conference” for two
reasons. The unmentioned first reason was, “to hark back to the hosts glorious chivalric past under the legendary King Arthur” (GIN:114) whom the author calls “a superstitious cuckold”. The second important reason, which was made public at the ‘background briefing of the press’ was to inform the Kauravas that, the Kauravas (Congress) were not the only true representatives of the Indian people, as they (the Kauravas) were speculating. The British invited as many representatives, with different ideologies and policies, because they knew for certain that, these representatives, would at no point of time agree on any proposal put forth by them (the British). Finally the British can always throw the blame on the Indian political parties and announce to the world: “You see these Indians can never agree amongst themselves, we really have no choice but to continue ruling them indefinitely for their own good” (GIN:115). The entire blame for the current communal divide in India is laid at the door of the British rulers. According to the author, it was the British who communally divided the people for their own well-being. “Until politics intervened Indians simply accepted that people were all sorts of different things” (GIN:133). In order to substantiate his claim, the author, traces the histories of the Maharajas and Sultans, under whom people of different faiths lived happily. In fact they had employed ministers and generals with little interest about their religion. Aurangzeb, the most Islamic of the Mugal rulers, employed Rajput Commanders, to keep rival Muslim kings under check. In 1857 when the Indian soldiers revolted against the British, it was a joint revolt by the Hindus and
Muslim soldiers against the alien oppressor. The narrator points out, how the imperial historian titled it as “Sepoy Mutiny”, but actually it was the ‘first freedom struggle’.” “As soon as the national revolt—carefully disparaged by imperial historians as the Sepoy Mutiny (...)” (GIN:135). All that the British did in India was to divide the people on religious lines, whenever they came across an opportunity. For example, under the name of reforms, the British introduced elections and through elections, they created “‘separate electorates’ for Muslims to vote for Muslim candidates” (GIN:135). They also encouraged separate political parties with religious names. Thus, it was the British, according at the novelist, who divided people on religious lines. “religion had never had much to do with our national politics. It was the British civil serpent who made our people collectively bite the apple of discord” (GIN:134).

**JINNAH’S DEMAND FOR A SEPARATE NATION**

With the official announcement of Independence, “the Independence stakes were a two-horse race, with the two horses aiming for two different finishing-posts” (GIN:210). The narrator feels that if the British had been politically strong and really sincere in their efforts, partition could have been avoided. Karna (Jinnah) who understood the political and economic conditions of the British, which would not allow them to rule India for a longer time, became vociferous in his demand for a separate state:
By this stage, Ganapathi, the vultures had scented the dying emanations and were already beating their wings for pieces of the corpse. Karna made it clear he had no desire to content himself with a few provincial satrapies. He wanted a country: he wanted Karnistan (GIN:211)

From the narrator Ved Vyasa, we understand that various compromise proposals were put forward to Karna (Jinnah) like autonomy with guarantee on minority rights and communal representation. At one point of time, Gangaji (Gandhi) even offered the post of Prime Minister to Karna (Jinnah). “So central was Karna’s personal ambition to his political stand that it might even have worked” (GIN:221). But this compromise formula was rejected by Dhritarashtra (Nehru). When the Kauravas (Congress) and the British prolonged their decision on the question of Partition, the Muslim League unleashed a terror tactic called “Direct Action”. Through Direct Action, the Muslim League was able to send a clear message to the British authorities and Kauravas (Congress) that, failing to fulfil their demand for a separate nation, they could wreak havoc.

Several thousand cadavers, burning vehicles, gutted homes, looted shops and rivulets of blood later, everyone except the Mahaguru began thinking about the unthinkable” the division of the motherland (GIN:211).
While mentioning about the Direct Action Day staged in Calcutta, Dominique Lapierre and Larry Collins in their book *Freedom at Midnight* observe that even Mountbatten who was not supporting the idea of Jinnah was disturbed: “Mountbatten was haunted by the spectre of Direct Action Day staged in Calcutta in July 1946 by the Moslem League in which 26,000 Hindus were killed in 72 hours.” (1997-XVIII)

Many in Kauravas (Congress) realized that, it is time for them to take a decision regarding partition. The strongest opposition for partition was from two quarters. Muslim members like Mohamed Rafi (Moulana Abul Kalam Azad) felt that if partition was agreed to, those Muslim members of the Kauravas would be isolated from the party, and the community. The other important person who was against the idea of partition was Gangaji (Gandhi), who warned the Kauravas that: “If you agree to break the country, you will break my heart” (GIN:203). So, for the first time in the history of the Kauravas (Congress) the Working Committee of the party took an important decision without the blessings and support of Gangaji (Gandhi). The party resolved in principle, the partition of the country.

**QUIT INDIA CALL**

According to Tharoor, the “Quit India” call given by Gangaji (Gandhi) was only to regain the ‘Political limelight’. Further, the novelist states that the “Quit India” call was not an “entirely well-thought-out bid” though the new slogan caught the imagination of the
people, very soon it lost its charm. According to nationalist historians, "the common people of the country demonstrated an unparalleled heroism and militancy. Moreover, the repression that they faced was the most brutal that had ever been used against the national movement." (Chandra, 1989:457) Though Indian historians claim that, Quit India movement was a great success, the narrator is of the opinion that, with the arrest of the principal leaders and the lower-level organizers who actually organized the movement, the authorities were able to control the movement.

It lasted twenty-four hours. Oh, there may have been sporadic resistance in some places for a little longer, but the organized movement to get the British to Quit India was snuffed out within a day of its proclamation. (GIN:206)

Thus, by re-writing a different version of the Quit India Movement, the novelist has not only challenged the Indian historian’s claim, but has also problematised their versions.

PARTITION

The contradictory nature of the reality of 15 August 1947 continues to intrigue historians and novelists, on both sides of the border to this date. The hard-earned, prized freedom was won after long, glorious years of struggle, but a bloody, tragic Partition rent asunder the fabric of the emerging free nation. Shashi Tharoor’s narration which is imbedded with irony, parody and satire, becomes
serious while narrating partition. In spite of the events narrated, relating to the facts he does not give an elaborate description of partition, the few lines and phrases are enough to crystallize the horrifying effect of partition. “Fat little Nicholas drew his lines (...) the lines of stumbling fleeing bleeding crying screaming dying refugees” (GIN:225). According to the novelist, it was the indecent haste of a few politicians which led to partition. Many historians believe that it was the lust for quick and easy power by Nehru and Patel which led them to accept partition in spite of Gandhi’s counsels that finally betrayed the people and Gandhi.

Gandhiji’s counsels are believed to have been ignored and it is argued that he felt betrayed by his disciples and even wished to end his life, but heroically fought communal frenzy single-handedly- a one man boundary force’, as Mountbatten called him. (Chandra, 1988:500)

At the same time, the majority of the Indian historians believe that the adamant attitude of Jinnah left Indian leaders with no other alternative than accepting Partition. The way the actual partition was implemented on the ground exposes the inexperience, careless attitude of the British bureaucrats. Tharoor’s narration gives a realistic picture of the actual partition carried out by Mr. Nicholas, the political geographer appointed by the British, who partitioned the two nations with his pencil and map: “Field Visits are out of question.
Simply not feasible in the circumstances. We have no choice but to work from maps” (GIN:225).

The biggest irony was that, here was a man who had never, “in his life set foot on any of the territories he was to award either to India or to the new state of Karnistan” (GIN:224). Without any experience of the topography of the place he is going to divide, Nicholas traced, “in a shaky hand, a sharp slim line on the map” (GIN:224). According to Tharoor, the international border between India and Pakistan was drawn in such a way that, for example they crossed the market, while the house was in Pakistan the backyards was in India, the fields were in Pakistan, while the warehouse was in India. Thus the lines of Nicholas and the indecent haste of the politicians led to the darkest chapter in our nation’s history.

The riots which followed the Partition disturbed every peace loving person which is reflected in the volumes of novels written on Partition. Novelists like Tharoor and many others have questioned the very existence of love and brotherhood which has been the social fabric weaving communities together for years in spite of the multi-cultural and multi-religious practices.

The killing, the violence, the carnage, the sheer mindlessness of the destruction, burned out something within me. I could not understand, Ganapathi, what makes a man strike with a cleaver at the head of someone he has
never seen, a son and husband and father whose sole crime is that he worships a different God (GIN:226).

If we look back at the history of any riot, one important aspect revealed is that, the worst affected are the women and children who become the helpless victims, of the rioters. “Ganapathi (I will not add the obligatory ‘and Women’ because for the most part they did not perpetrate the madness, they were caught up in it, they were the victims of it)” (GIN:227). The novelist attempting a psychological study of the perpetrators and victims is of the view that, the partition pulled out the contacts one had with his world, earth, his roots, friendships and memories, and in turn left him with a dangerous instability of identity. So the people who were deprived of their social identity and security, “are prompted by their anxiety and bitterness into the roles of either perpetrators or victims” (GIN:227).

Tharoor also attempts to imagine something which could not have and would not have happened. “If only – if only we had said no to Drewpad” (GIN:227). Probably if the Congress had agreed to Gandhi’s suggestion, things would have been different. Another important aspect of the partition was that, neither the British nor the Congress anticipated a carnage at the time of partition. All of them believed that, in fact the partition would put an end to the communal misunderstandings.
In the interview to Dominique Lapieree and Larry Collins, Mountbatten had admitted that, nobody foresaw the events, which followed partition:

What went wrong, ‘Mountbatten admitted to us,’ was this sheer, simultaneous reaction which nobody foresaw. No one predicted millions of people would pull up stakes and change sides. No one? (1997:XVII)

Ved Vyas, the authorial voice, feels that they could have gone in for an unresolved Independence settlement. “even the chaos of an unresolved Independence settlement, might have been preferable to what actually happened.” (GIN:224).

ANNEXATION OF PRINCELY STATES – KASHMIR

Immediately after independence, the most important task facing the political leadership was the unification of the princely states under one administration. In colonial India, nearly 40 percent of the territory was occupied by fifty-six small and large states ruled by the princes who enjoyed varying degrees of autonomy under the system of paramountcy. British power protected them from their own people and also from external aggression so long as they did British bidding. When the British decided to leave India, they made it clear to the nawabs and Maharajas that they could either join India or Pakistan:

Most made their choice according to the dictates of geography and common sense, but one or two of the bigger
states dragged their constitutional feet in the hope that they might be able to hold out for their own independence. (GIN:246)

The state of Manimir (Kashmir) bordered on both India and Karnistan (Pakistan). Its ruler Mr. Z. (Hari Singh) was a Hindu, while nearly 75 percent of the population was Muslim. Mr. Z, who wanted to continue to wield power as an Independent ruler, did not accede either to India or to Pakistan. The popular political forces led by Sheik Azharuddin (Sheik Abdullah) however wanted to join India. With great skill and masterful diplomacy, using both persuasion and pressure, Vidur (Patel) was able integrate many states into the Indian union. With regard to Manimir (Kashmir), the government was not in favour of any threat or pressure in view of the population and its location. From the narrative, we understand that, Muslim leaders like Mohamed Rafi (Moulana Abul Kalam Azad) were putting pressure on Nehru to act immediately, as they were worried about the future of Indian Muslims.

The future of India as a secular nation depended on its ability to integrate a Muslim-majority state successfully, to nail Karna’s lie that India’s Muslims needed a country of their own in order to breathe free and flourish (GIN:247).
According to the novelist, when the Kashmir ruler tried to prolong his decision, the government of India was planning to encourage an internal uprising under the leadership of Sheik:

an internal uprising, led for instance by Sheik Azharuddin, which might overthrow the Maharaja and proclaim adherence to India (...) we could seek to finance, supply and even organize an uprising (GIN:248).

Suddenly on October 22, 1947 the Pathan Tribesmen, led unofficially by Pakistani army officers, began to descend on Kashmir and started to move towards Srinagar. In panic, on 24 October, the Maharaja appealed to India for military assistance and on 26 October the Maharaja acceded to India and the Indian army began to airlift its men and weapons to Srinagar.

Official history claims that, troops were despatched to Kashmir only after the Maharaja agreed to integrate with India. However, denying the official history the novelist claims that Indian troops were ordered to sneak into Manimir (Kashmir) even before the accession of Kashmir with India. The government despatched Vidur (V.P. Menon) the Principal Secretary for integration to Manimir (Kashmir) to get the Maharaja to agree for accession. Even if Vidur had failed in his mission.

The orders that go out now will not be rescinded, Dhritarashtra announced firmly. ‘Our troops will march in
any way. If you do your job quickly enough, the invasion will be legal. If not (...) (GIN:250).

According to the novelist, the biggest mistake committed by Dhritarashtra after the first Indo-Pak War was to take the issue of Manimir (Kashmir) to the United Nation. “My blind and visionary son had decided to appeal to the UN (...) many of us who never forgave him for that decision found all sorts of indefensible impulses behind it” (GIN:260). The snowy highlands, which had been the most favoured tourist destination internationally, became a disputed territory along with other disputed territories of the world.

To this day it is scarred by tank-tracks, amputated by ceasefire lines, exploited by rhetoricians and fanatics on both sides of the frontier who prostitute its name for their own meretricious purposes (GIN:260).

DEATH OF GANDHI

Gangaji (Gandhi) who as a master tactician, confronted the British on one side and played one politician against the other on the other side, was able to achieve nothing on the question of Partition. Tharoor criticizes Gangaji (Gandhi) for loosening his grip over the Kaurava Party (Congress) and its leaders, during the time of partition, when it was needed most. He also finds fault with Gangaji (Gandhi), for allowing his Lieutenants like Nehru and Patel to decide the question of Partition, hence the scene of Gangaji (Gandhi’s) death is
important. According to Ved Vyas though it was Amba/Skikhandin responsible for killing, Gangaji, every Indian is also equally responsible. “Was not India collectively that ended Gangaji’s life by tearing itself apart” (GIN:234). Or was it not Gangaji himself who chose his own time and assassin to die. When he understood that his teachings and life did not stop the violence and partitions, he decided to die. “a desire buried deep in the urge that had led him, all those years earlier, to create and nurture his own executioner” (GIN:234).

His own executioner Amba/Skikhandin berates him for not carrying out his duty and also for neglecting the issue of leadership of the party. Skikhandin openly declares, that he (Gandhi) was a failure.

You make me sick, Bhishma. Your life has been a waste, unproductive, barren. You are nothing but an impotent old walrus sucking other reptiles’ eggs, an infertile old fool (...) a man who is less than a woman. The tragedy of this country springs from you (...) (GIN:232).

Though these are harsh words, one cannot dismiss them lightly. This is further reinforced by the words, which Tharoor puts in the mouth of the dying leader Gangaji (Gandhi). Instead of uttering his usual phrase “Hey Ram”, he says “I ... have ... failed”. The novelist has re-written some of the actual phrases and sentences by various world leaders and statesmen on the death of Gandhi. “Such a one as this ever in flesh and blood walked the earth” – Einstein. “the noblest
Roman of them all" – Sir Richard. “a great loss to the Hindu Community” – Mohamed Ali Karna.

Though the novelist traces several causes for the death of Gandhi, and he also implicates the country and politicians, finally we understand from the novel that, Gandhi died as a defeated and disappointed man.

**NEHRU'S POLICIES- INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL**

Dhritarashtra, the blind king, is a parody of Nehru with his Fabian intellectual preoccupation. The first Prime Minister of India remains blind to the harsher realities of life and politics. Tharoor criticises Nehru for his failings and the policies he adopted in India and abroad. Nehru's industrial policy comes in for attack by Tharoor who argues that by setting up big industries, the rural economies were ignored and in fact destroyed. Nehru's policy had lead to the unpleasant reality that eighty percent people are without the basic amenities such as drinking water, shelter and electricity. “(...) On the way to becoming the seventh largest industrial power in the world (...) 80 per cent of her people continued to lack electricity and clean drinking water” (GIN:293).

Nehru’s policy of giving more importance to higher education and ignoring primary education is also criticized, because these higher institutions of learning have only helped the international market, and Nehru’s policy has ignored the huge forest of illiteracy. “Within a
short while we would have the world’s second largest pool of scientifically trained manpower, side by side with its largest lake of educated unemployed” (GIN:293). Further, the author criticizes Nehru’s government for adopting the British system of education, which was tailor-made to serve the British interest.

The British had neglected village education in their efforts to produce a limited literate class of petty clerks to turn the lower wheels of their bureaucracy, so we too neglected the villages in our efforts to widen that literate class for their new places at the top (GIN:293).

It is already becoming clear that the Nehruvian model of economic development is proving ineffective.

Nehru’s International policy also comes in for attack, particularly Nehru’s concept of ‘non-alignment’ during the middle of the cold war. The narrator criticizes Nehru for ignoring the needs of the country and instead he directed his energies on the international front. Nehru worked towards ‘non-alignment’, without taking into account India’s credibility at the international level. Nehru’s policies at the international front were a failure, and this is most conspicuous in India’s humiliating defeat at the hands of China.

Both - Dhritarashtra (Nehru) for idealistic reasons, Kanika for ideological ones-believed in the non-alignment they preached, but neither could control the convictions or even
the conduct of those who were to implement their policies (GIN:295).

**CHINESE AGGRESSION**

The biggest ever-military humiliation suffered by India was at the hands of China. This humiliation broke the heart of Nehru and this caused his death. From the novel, we understand that, "India is was even the first government to accord the communist regime the honour of formal diplomatic recognition" (GIN:300). In fact, India was demanding China’s admission into various International forums and speaking of “Peaceful co-existence” with China. Why did Chakra (Chinese) attack India?" According to the author, it was India’s support to the Tibets and the border drawn by Mr. Mac Donald. The Chinese army was so swift in their attack, that, “By the time our panic, - striken response could be organized the war was over;” (GIN:304). According to the author, the main reason for the humiliating defeat India suffered was, because the Indian Army was ill clad and did not possess the proper equipments and dress to fight the Chinese on the Himalayas. The Chinese were able to capture enough territory and were also able to expose to the world, “the shallowness of our international pretensions” (GIN:304). This humiliating defeat left Nehru shattered. “his self-esteem; it broke his heart” (GIN:305) and his health was badly affected and Nehru died very soon.
BANGLADESH WAR/GELABI DESH WAR

The Bangladesh War is allegorized as Gelabi Desh War. The narrator traces the causes, which led to India's military action against Karnistan (Pakistan) and declaring Gelabi Desh (Bangladesh) independent. After Pakistan (West and East) was cut off from India's shoulders, the people of East Karnistan were neglected and exploited for nearly two and a half decades.

They had seen the profits of their jute exports pay for luxury car factories in the Western half of their country, the bulk of their taxes swell the coffers of Western provincial governments. (GIN:353)

At this point of time, general elections are announced by the military dictator Jarasandha Khan (Yahya Khan). The Gelabin People's Party (Awami League) under the popular leadership of Sheik Mujibur Rahman won more than 99 percent of the seats in East Karnistan and an overall majority in Karnistan Parliament (Pakistan Assembly). Instead of calling the Gelabin People's Party to form the government, politicians like Zaleel Shah Jhoota (Zulfigar Ali Bhutto) “persuaded Jarasandha Khan to declare the election results null and void, declare martial law in the East” (GIN:354). With the declaration of martial law, thousands of intellectuals, political leaders, Bengali police and army officials were indiscriminately eliminated. For over six months, the army committed rape, torture, arson, and
brutal killings. "The few who escaped incarceration promptly reacted by declaring the secession of Gelabi Desh from Karnistan" (GIN:354). India had to get directly involved because, India was faced with the biggest refugee problem the world has ever known.

Tharoor appreciates the way Priya Duryodhani (Mrs. Gandhi) reacted to the crisis. Instead of taking hasty decisions, Mrs. Gandhi gained the international support, and gave enough time for the Indian Army to consolidate its troops before attacking. "one of only two wars in this century of carnage that can be morally justified" (GIN:355). From the novel, we understand that within seventeen days the Indian Army was able to capture East Pakistan and declare its independence.

With the successful launching of the Gelabidesh war there was a brief moment of personal glory for Priya Duryodhani (Mrs. Gandhi). "She was not just deified, she was maternalized" and "became known as ‘Ma Duryodhani’ and ‘Duroyodhani Amma’’. The people began to see in her ‘the female principle of Shakti, the power and the strength of a national Mother Goddess.” (GIN:355). In Indian parlance, ‘Shakthi’ symbolizes the energetic functioning of a woman. The incredulous achievement coupled with charisma turned Priya Duryodhani (Mrs. Gandhi) into a cult figure. In India and abroad, her boldness in wielding power against inimical forces at the opportune time fetched her laurels and appreciations.
DECLARATION OF EMERGENCY (SIEGE)

According to the narrator the Siege (Emergency) was the idea given by the famous Bengali lawyer Shakuni Shankar Dey. Mrs. Indira Gandhi the Prime Minister by declaring Emergency, suspended some of the fundamental rights like freedom of speech and assembly, and also censorship was imposed on the press. A good number of opposition party members were thrown behind the bars. Even the power of the judiciary was restricted. Her henchmen came out with slogans like “India is Indira and Indira is India”.

It is significant to note that the imposition of Emergency is considered as the most traumatic event in the post-Independence India by many novelists. Nayantra Saghal, Rohinton Mistry and Salman Rushdie have dramatized the horrors of the Emergency in their novels. Tharoor’s view of Emergency is in sharp contrast to the view taken by the novelists. While they are critical of Mrs Gandhi for imposing the Emergency, Tharoor tries to understand the imposition of the Emergency, from its immediate context, when it was declared by Mrs. Gandhi, in spite of the fact that, he is critical of Mrs. Gandhi, and concedes that the imposition of censorship on press and other repressive measures were “primarily cynical and self-serving”. He is also of the view that, it was the opposition, especially Jayaprakash Narayan and his movement, which cornered her to take this extreme step,
I still believed that the political chaos in the country, fuelled by Drona’s idealistic but confused uprising which a variety of political opportunists had joined and exploited, could have led the country nowhere but to anarchy (369).

In his book on the Emergency, Sachchinanda Sinha writes about Jayaprakash Narayan, which is very close to the views of Tharoor, that he:

had no mass organization nor had he any concrete programme beyond a proclamation of noble intentions. The chief support to his movement came from the educated youth. There was no doubt about their enthusiasm. But lacking any perception of the problems the nation faced and their solutions, the youth movement could prove merely froth on the surface. (1977:48)

**IMPACT OF EMERGENCY**

While narrating the impact of the siege (Emergency) the narrative places before the readers both the positive and negative aspects of the Siege. The positive effect of the Siege was that, the government declared a twenty-point socio economic programme and implemented it in full earnest. Strikes and demonstrations were banned and habitual absentees in offices began to report for duty on time. The author satirically observes that, “in some government offices they suddenly discovered a shortage of chairs, so long had it
been since they were last all occupied" (GIN:369). The abolition of bonded labour and the implementation of land reforms are appreciated by the author, who is of the view that, more number of people would have benefited from these reforms, than those who suffered due to censorship of the press. The narrator also observes that the public were happy with the Siege, because there was an end to agitations and demonstrations, which became a public nuisance, and this was welcomed with a sigh of relief: “The declaration of the Siege, the arrest of the agitators, the silence in the streets, had been accepted by non-political India without a murmur” (GIN:370).

Further we understand from the narrator that the Western media, particularly American media welcomed the Siege at the initial stages, because there was, “industrial discipline, more opening for US business, and decisive action on the population front” (GIN:385). However, very soon common people and intelligentsia began to realize that the basic foundation of the Indian democracy and freedom came to be threatened. The authorial voice Ved Vyas (Tharoor) who supported the siege (Emergency) realized how: “Duryodhani and her minions had been stripping the nation of the values and institutions we had been right to cherish” (GIN:383).

The narrative makes a list of the atrocities committed during the Siege (Emergency). The Emergency became a licence for the police to do as they pleased. Young men and women were picked up from village teashops to perform arbitrary sterilization, in order to fulfil
their (officials) respective quotas. In the name of slum-clearance and urban renewal, people were displaced from their homes. Even the law courts, on which people had great faith, were not able to come to the rescue of the people, as ‘habeas corpus’ was not a fundamental right. With the help of her parties parliamentary members, Mrs. Duryodhani (Mrs. Gandhi) made a mockery of the parliamentary democracy. According to the narrator Ved Vyas, “It is not Parliament that is supreme, but the people: the importance of Parliament arises simply from the fact that it embodies the supremacy of the people” (GIN:384). That is why Priya Duryodhani’s parliamentary tyranny was no better than the military dictatorships of neighbouring Karnistan.

The novelist gives due recognition to Drona (Jayaprakash Narayan) who fought against Duryodhani (Mrs. Gandhi). He was the second Gandhi, who was far away from the taint of power and made strenuous efforts for raising the consciousness of the people by educating them on their rights and duties. The much-needed moral support was provided by Drona (Jayaprakash Narayan) to the four institutions of the Indian democracy. In spite of the praise showered on him after his death, in which he is compared with Gandhi, the novelist concludes that the revolution aimed by Drona (Jayaprakash Narayan) fell into the hands of men who were unworthy of his ideals.

(...) he was a flawed Mahaguru, a man whose goodness was not balanced by the shrewdness of the original...and so let
the revolution he had wrought fall into the hands of lesser men who were unworthy of his ideals (GIN:409).

It is a sad state of affair, that in a country like India, the people were unable to choose or recognize a leader after the fall of people's government (Janatha Government). In spite of all her tyrannical and autocratic methods during the dark days of Emergency, the nation and her party had no other choice, than to look to her to lead the nation.

**POST-EMERGENCY INDIA**

During the 80's there was a great output of novels, based on the freedom movement with special focus on the post-independence India. Many of these writers were disturbed to see, the way Indian democracy was exploited by the politicians, and these novels are the result of the frustrations and anger experienced by these writers.

According to the novel, the freedom movement was a struggle not only for freedom and independence, but also a demand on behalf of the common man, for participation in the parliamentary democracy. Gangaji's (Gandhi) achievement, was to get the common man, involved in the day-to-day politics. The novelist appreciates Dhritarashtra (Nehru) who, "constantly reaffirmed and encouraged the institution of parliamentary democracy in the country" (GIN:370). After Nehru, the parliamentary democracy failed because, it was not constantly
responsive to the needs of the people, because politics became a profession instead of service:

Today most people are simply aware of their own irrelevance to the process. They see themselves standing hopelessly on the margins while the professional politicians and the unprofessional parliamentarians combine to run the country to the ground (GIN:371).

We Indians are always good at being resigned to our lot and have learnt, to accept the world as it is ordained to be. The author traces two reasons for the non-involvement of Indians in politics. According to the Hindu tradition of Arthashastra, the political power is a remote authority, with which the common man has nothing to do. The second important cause is the two hundred years rule of the British Raj, which alienated the ordinary Indians from the power centre. Unlike his counterparts in other countries, the strength of the Indian mind is that: “it knows some problems cannot be resolved, and it learns to make the best of them. That is the Indian answer to the insuperable difficulty” (GIN:372).

**DRAUPATI MOKRASI/D MOKRASI/DEMOCRACY**

The birth of Draupadi Mokrasi, her growth, her marriage and her disrobing is a significant allegory of the Indian democracy since Independence. According to Bill Ascroft, “In this novel the
transparency of The Mahabharata gives way directly to allegory at the moment of historical crisis: the break-up of India itself". (2001:110)

Draupadi Mokrasi (D mokrasi) who is a parody of Indian democracy is the daughter of Dhritarashtra (Nehru representing Congress) and the Vicerine (Edwina Mountbatten representing the colonial power) and Draupadi (Indian democracy) came into being, because of their unholy alliance. "And what of the offspring of India’s blind leader and Britain’s all-seeing Vicerine, the infant Draupadi Mokrasi?” (GIN:261). The weak looking girl, who symbolizes the institution of democracy, very soon overcomes the handicaps of her premature birth, to become, “the flame of a brass lamp in a sacred temple of the people” (GIN:309).

Under the discrete eyes of the new government, Draupadi Mokrasi or D Mokrasi grows into an extraordinary beautiful woman to emerge as the true daughter of India. Subsequently she, grows to become the world’s largest democracy. In spite of the fact that her appearance and performance has been encouraging, she always possessed a great sense of energy and ability to muddle through the complicated Indian political system: “She might not always perform brilliantly she knows, but she could always muddle through” (GIN:267).

In the process of allegorizing Draupadi as Indian Democracy, the narrator keeps track of her health, physical growth, economic development, strength and weakness from time to time. For example,
when the nation undergoes a crisis situation the narrative describes as: “And Draupadi Mokrasi, running a fever, took to bed, complaining of alternating hot flushes and chills” (GIN:343).

Having grown up into a young and beautiful girl, Draupadi or Democracy is to be married. According to Bill Ascroft, “Her (Draupadi’s) marriage is the allegory of India’s future.” (2001:110) And the narrator Ved Vyas decides on Arjun (Voice of the people i.e. Press) as a suitable bridegroom for Draupadi. The modern Arjuna is a journalist, a representative of the powers and weakness of the Indian Press. “I thought of Arjuna”, says Ved Vyas, as a suitable husband to Draupadi, “With his paradoxical mixture of attributes, as the spirit of the Indian people, to which he so ably gave voice as a journalist” (GIN:320).

But Arjun has five brothers and their loyalty to their mother Kunthi is such that, they obey every word of their mother without any objection. When they call their mother and inform her about the surprise gift (Draupadi) they are about to bring her, her impatient response is asking the brothers to “share it among themselves”. This seems to be a dismaying calamity for Draupadi and Arjun, but this is precisely, the kind of arbitrary historical moment by which India enters the ambivalent realm of modernity, by sharing her life with five great institutions (Press, Legislature, Bureaucracy, Armed forces and Foreign affairs). Draupadi, post-colonial India, is to be wed to democracy and all its entails, for she must marry all the brothers:
"She stood erect (...), and hers embraced his brothers too" (GIN:315). In spite of the fact that India’s future is only between the union of Draupadi and Arjun, without the support of the great institutions, the survival and growth of Draupadi (democracy) becomes difficult.

The eldest is Yudhishtir, the inheritor of the political legacy of Hastinapur. Yudhishtir represents politics, and the novelist probably has understood the fact that, in today’s politics it is an irony that there is no politician like Yudhishtir. “Secure in his integrity and righteousness, he was impervious to the corruption and injustice around him; he sought to be right rather than to do right” (GIN:320). Draupadi, is also married to Bhim who represents Army, the Indian Army, one of the best armies of the world is the pride of the nation. Unlike the Karnisthan’s (Pakistan) army, the Indian army has not involved in the politics of the nation. This aspect has been satirically pointed out by the author: “But he was as thick-skinned and unimaginative, as incapable of original initiative, as the strongest ox in a fertile field” (GIN:320). Nakul and Sahadev represent the twin pillars of India’s governance: the administrative and the diplomatic services. While Nakul enters the administrative services, Sahadev takes up the diplomatic service. The author makes a dig at the diplomatic services: “Nakul was made, Yudhishtir drily said, for diplomacy, since he could speak a lot without saying anything” (GIN:320). Thus the five brothers, who share Draupadi Mokrasi (D Mokrasi or Democracy) gave her “sustenance and protection”, and
their unity was guaranteed through a rigid rule, “that punished any intrusion with a year's banishment” (GIN:321).

After a period of happy married life that is during the tenure of Prime Minister Nehru the health of Draupadi, (Democracy) shows an upward trend. The narrative records how, during the short spell of Shishu Pal as Prime Minister and after Mrs. Gandhi becomes the Prime Minister, Draupadi’s health keeps changing frequently, which is reported in the novel through brief bulletins. As soon as siege (Emergency) is imposed throughout the nation, Draupadi (Democracy) is plagued by frequent bouts of ill health and is finally abused even at home, by the four pillars of democracy who had solemnly sworn to support her.

The most effective use of the mythic setting, however, is to be found in the novelist’s creative use of the episode, of the disrobing of Draupadi, as an allegory of Mrs. Priya Duryodhani’s (Mrs. Gandhi) misrule of the nation, and the way she overthrew democracy and abrogated the constitutional rights during the siege (Emergency). For Tharoor “Draupadi, thus, became emblematic of Indian democracy, her attempted disrobing a symbol of what was sought to be done to democracy not so long ago.” (1990:7). In the novel disrobing of Draupadi is symbolic of denuding Indian people of their dignity and freedom.

Finally Arjuna who, “is forced to travel around India, and eventually meets up with Krishna, continues the allegorical
transparency by which the novel reads contemporary Indian history.” (Ashcroft, 2001:110) Like the mythical Arjuna, the modern Arjuna (Press) with the help of Krishna (the people) has to play the role of saviour and rescue the nation from the political tyranny and oppression. The Pashupat Astra that he receives from Shiva is a symbol of the power of press in a democracy, which is the ‘ultimate weapon’, to be used with utmost care and discretion. The disrobing of Draupadi (democracy) exposes Priya Duryodani (Mrs Gandhi) who, “turned into a menacingly arrogant person, and threatened the very fabric of the democratic structure of the country” (Dhar, 1999:225). According to Bill Ascroft, Draupadi:

is also a character in the novel, a character in the history. History itself in a place such as India is both allegorical and ‘real’: this is, in a sense, the function of ‘positive transparency’, to represent the ‘allegorical real’. (2001:110)

In fact, the author blames the four pillars of democracy. Except for the press, which was silenced by law, the other three pillars of democracy were mute spectators during the period of Emergency. It is a tragedy that none of them where bold enough to point out to Mrs. Gandhi that she was wrong.

**CHALLENGES TO DHARMA/CONCLUSION**

Tharoor the novelist/historian has reinterpreted and re-presented the divisions and conflicts that constitute the history of
India from the remotest past to the current present. By re-writing and re-visioning the nation's history, Tharoor, like many writers of his generation is of the opinion that, the greatest tragedy of Modern India is the failure of Independence. Like other colonised nations, India also overestimated the emancipatory potential of independence. Tharoor is of the opinion that, in spite of Nehru/Dhritarashtra promoting India as an industrialised nation, he was "blind" to many realities around him.

According to the novelist, the greatest post-independence betrayal came in the form of Emergency declared by Indira Gandhi/Priya Duryodhoni. For Tharoor, the subsequent struggle for the restoration of democracy, is the battle of Kurukshetra or the great Bharata war. In spite of Mrs. Gandhi being defeated in the 1977 parliamentary elections, Tharoor is disappointed that, she got re-elected within three years because the opposition collapsed.

In terms of human suffering, the partition of the subcontinent remains the most tragic event in modern Indian history, and the scars of that separation still remains on both sides of the divide. According to Tharoor, the failure of independence continues to haunt us in different forms like communal violence, unemployment, fall in ethical and moral values, corruption, criminalisation of politics etc. For Tharoor:

The struggle between Dharma and adharma is a struggle our nation, and each one in it, engages in on every single day of
our existence. That struggle, that battle, took place before this election; it will continue after it. (GIN:391)

How to face this struggle and battle every single day? Tharoor answers in his concluding chapter of the novel titled, **The Path to Salvation**, which narrates the journey of the Pandavas to heaven and Dharma (upholding truth and law) advocating the renunciation of the classical verities: “No more certitudes”, he recommends, “Accept doubt and diversity (...) Admit that there is more than one Truth, more than one Right, more than one dharma” (GIN:418). According to the narrator, the one great principle, which has been handed down the ages, something, which is of paramount importance is “dharma”. “Life itself is worthless without dharma. Only dharma is eternal” (GIN:417). According to the novelist, the labyrinth created by the conflicting interpretations of dharma in this country has made the life of the nation a perpetual Kurukshetra.

(... the land where truth and honour and valour and dharma were worshipped as the cardinal principles of existence, is now a nation of weak-willed compromisers, of leaders unable to lead, of rampant corruption and endemic faithlessness (GIN:411).

The land of Dharma has become a land where integrity and self-respect are sold to the highest bidder, where brides are burnt for dowry, where people are killed in the name of religion and where
regionalists, autonomists, separatists and secessionists are trying to tear the social fabric of the country. Amassing wealth through dishonesty and bribery has become a great art and skill. Political issues are not fought on principles but on parochialism. The narrator feels sorry, that the seven-hundred million people were unable to produce a better leader and it was a tragedy that, Priya Duryodhani (Mrs. Gandhi) got re-elected as Prime Minister in spite of her greatest failure during Emergency. The narrative also mentions how Mrs Gandhi was killed by her own security guards, because of the alienation of the Sikh people, when Mrs. Gandhi ordered army into their sacred Golden Temple in Amristar. “the alienation of some of the country’s most loyal citizens to the point where two of them consider it a greater duty to kill her than protect her, as they were employed to do” (GIN:412). The novelist also finds fault with Krishna (the voice of the people) and other democratic institutions, for not upholding Dharma, by not performing their duty at the appropriate time. The narrator finds fault with Krishna. “He could have prevented all this, but he chose not to act (...) His brilliance burned itself out without illuminating the country” (GIN:414). Commenting on Democracy, the novelist observes that: “Democracy always falters first, She can only be sustained by the strength of her husbands” (GIN:414).

The final point the author wants to convey is that, the battle of Kurukshetra is never over. “Life is Kurukshetra,” “History is Kurukshetra,” asserts modern Ved Vyasa, the narrator of the story.
He elaborates that the struggle between dharma and adharma is a struggle of our nation, and each one of us is, engaged in one single day of our existence. Finally, Ved Vyas admits to Ganapathi the suggestions of Yudhistir: “I have thought about it, Ganapathi, and I realize I have no choice, I must retell it” (GIN:418). The novel ends with the beginning of the story to be written from a different perspective. The ending echoes Saleem Sinai’s remark. “The process of revision should be constant and endless: don’t think I’m satisfied with what I’ve done!” (MC:460).